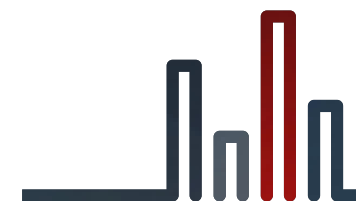




ECONOMICS FACT SHEET

Casual employment in Australia in 2021



2.5 million people – 19.2% of Australia’s workforce – were employed on a ‘casual’ basis in Feb 2021. 37% of casual employees work in hospitality and retail. Over 80% work in small to medium businesses.

Long-term trends. 2,503,400 people (19.2% of the total workforce* and 23.1% of employees) were ‘casual’ employees in February 2021 (an ‘employee with no leave entitlements’ in the ABS data). The incidence of casual work has been stable at around 20% of Australia’s workforce since at least 1998. The number of casual employees increased from around 1.7 million workers in 1998 to 2.5 million in 2021, in line with general Australian population and workforce growth (chart 1). Around 67% of casual employees usually work part-time (under 35 hours per week), compared to 20% of permanent employees, 31% of self-employed owner-managers and 31% of the total workforce.

The COVID-19 recession in 2020. Casual employment fell faster than permanent employment or self-employment during the COVID-19 recession in 2020 (chart 2) and so casual employment fell as a share of the total workforce, just as it did during the GFC crisis of 2007-08 (chart 1). As of February 2021, casual employment was still 5% lower than in February 2020 but had recovered 75% of the jobs lost in Q2 of 2020 (down by 21% in the three months to May of 2020). As of February 2021, 202,900 casual employees had a job but worked zero work hours in the survey week (8% of all casu- als, down from 11% in May) and 381,900 worked 1-9 hours (15% of all casu- als, down from 18% in May). This indicates that more casual employees are slowly regaining their work hours as well as a job in 2021.

Industry. Casual employees are employed in all industries in Australia, but they are most prevalent in hospitality (food & accommodation services), agriculture, retail trade and art and recreation (chart 3 and table 1). Healthcare, education and construction also employ relatively large numbers of casu- als, but the very large size of these industries means that casual workers comprise a much smaller proportion of their employees or total workforce.

State. The industries in which casual workers are employed largely explains the variation in casual work rates across Australia’s states and territories. ABS data indicates that casual work ranged from a high of 27% of employees in Tasmania to a low of 19% in the ACT, as of August 2020 (latest available). Tasmania has a higher proportion of its workforce employed in hospitality, retail and health than other states, while the ACT has the highest proportion of workers in public administration. South Australia has the highest proportion working in healthcare.

Business size. Over 80% of casual employees worked in small to medium businesses in 2015 (latest available data). This reflects the industries that employ casual workers, with high numbers of small and medium businesses operating in hospitality, retail trade and arts and recreation. This pattern is probably unchanged since 2015.

Chart 1: Casual employees, number and % of workforce, 1998 to 2021

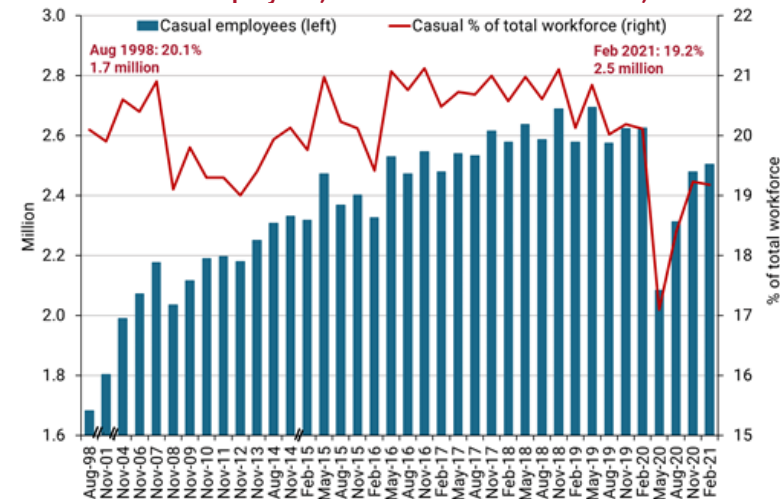


Chart 2: Employment changes by status, Feb 2020 to Feb 2021



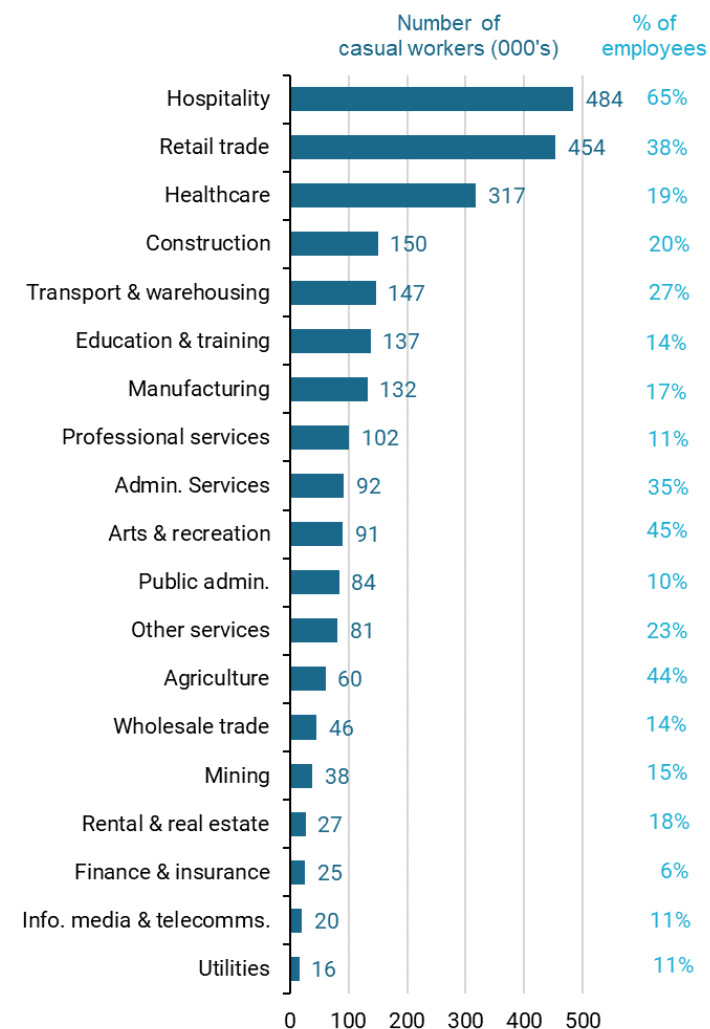
Table 1: All workers, employees and casual employees, by industry and state, 2021 and 2020

Industry, Feb 2021	Total workforce*	Employees*	Casual employees*	
	'000	'000	'000	% of industry employees
Agriculture	338.9	136.1	60.4	44.4
Mining	249.6	246.9	37.9	15.3
Manufacturing	891.0	761.1	132.2	17.4
Utilities	153.0	144.5	16.1	11.1
Construction	1,152.3	749.7	149.9	20.0
Wholesale trade	387.0	332.3	46.0	13.8
Retail trade	1,331.7	1,193.7	453.9	38.0
Hospitality	845.9	746.2	483.8	64.8
Transport and warehousing	691.1	549.4	146.5	26.7
IT, Media & Telecomms	202.2	175.3	19.9	11.4
Financial and insurance	479.7	432.2	25.4	5.9
Rental and real estate services	209.1	145.6	26.9	18.4
Professional services	1,231.6	927.5	101.5	10.9
Administrative services	395.4	264.1	92.4	35.0
Public administration	859.6	850.1	84.2	9.9
Education and training	1,062.2	1,000.7	137.4	13.7
Health care	1,817.6	1,644.1	317.3	19.3
Arts and recreation services	245.8	201.5	90.5	44.9
Other services	510.0	353.2	81.3	23.0
All industries, Feb 2021	13,053.9	10,637.1	2,503.4	23.5
State, August 2020				
New South Wales	4,025.8	3,350.9	716.2	21.4
Victoria**	3,225.5	2,694.2	505.6	18.8
Queensland	2,505.3	2,009.2	486.0	24.2
South Australia	839.0	702.7	177.8	25.3
Western Australia	1,347.0	1,141.0	277.4	24.3
Tasmania	254.5	210.7	56.2	26.7
Northern Territory	131.5	105.1	22.7	21.6
Australian Capital Territory	237.8	214.1	39.7	18.6

* The ABS definition of 'total workforce' (based on status in employment) includes employees with leave entitlements (permanent employees); employees without leave entitlements (casual employees); owner-managers without employees (self-employed sole operators and contract workers); owner-managers with employees (self-employed business employers); and family workers (unpaid family members employed in a family-owned enterprise). These definitions relate to the status of work and not the number of hours usually or actually worked by each worker.

** Victoria was the only state with a strict COVID-19 lockdown in August 2020. This affected all employment at the time.

Chart 3: Casual employees by industry, February 2021



Data Sources: ABS, *Labour force quarterly detail*, Feb 2021; ABS, *Characteristics of Employment*, August 2020; ABS, *Australian Labour Markets*, 6105.0 and HILDA 2015, cited in Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, *Characteristics and Use of Casual Employment in Australia*, Jan 2018.