

AS IF WE WEREN'T HUMANS

*The abandonment of temporary migrants
in Australia during COVID-19*

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With Yuxiang Huang, Diana Lee, Sara Saleh, Amrekha Sharma, and Angela Kintominas



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Executive Summary

Overview

In order to contain the spread of COVID-19, in March 2020 the Australian Government enforced nationwide lockdown policies to enforce social distancing and restrict the movement of all non-essential workers. As public-facing businesses closed their doors to customers, many temporary visa holders lost their jobs in heavily casualised industries such as hospitality and retail. Australia is home to over 1 million temporary visa holders, most of whom have work rights. The widespread job loss had a devastating financial impact on these temporary migrants, including international students, backpackers, graduates, sponsored workers and refugees, among others. At the same time, many international students who were financially reliant on family found themselves with less or no support due to the financial impact of the pandemic in their home countries.

As a result, reports quickly emerged that very large numbers of international students and other temporary migrants could not meet their basic living needs such as food and rent.

Nevertheless, the Australian government excluded temporary migrants from the JobKeeper and JobSeeker support packages introduced in late March. This was at odds with responses of other countries such as the United Kingdom,¹ New Zealand,² Canada³ and Ireland⁴ which have all extended wage subsidies to temporary migrants. Instead, on 3 April, Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated that, for international students and anyone else visiting Australia who cannot support themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic, “it is time to make [their] way home”.⁵ However, recent government data confirms that in mid-June, 80% of student visa holders were still in Australia.⁶

Limited efforts have been made by the government to assess the humanitarian impact of COVID-19 on the hundreds of thousands of temporary migrants who remain in Australia. In July 2020 we conducted a survey of over 6,100 temporary visa holders in order to provide a platform for temporary migrants to voice their experiences and establish current large-scale first-hand empirical data to inform government decision-making. Respondents included approximately 5,000 international students, as well as a further thousand temporary visa holders including Working Holiday Makers, Temporary Graduate visa holders, Temporary Skill Shortage (‘TSS’) visa holders, refugees and people seeking asylum. The survey was anonymous, online, and disseminated via social media, education providers, service providers and community networks.

Survey findings

Respondents have not left Australia because it was not possible, or they could not risk losing investment in studies and life in Australia

Participants were asked why they had not made “their way home”. Many faced substantial, and often insurmountable, practical barriers to returning to their home country:

- One in five (20%) reported that flights were unavailable;
- One in five (19%) could not return because their country’s borders were closed, or key transit countries’ borders were closed, or they could not reach their home town due to domestic travel restrictions in their home country;
- One in four (27%) reported that flights were unaffordable to them.

But for the majority, leaving Australia was not an option because of the great investment they had made in their studies (57%), work and/or their future in Australia -- at the encouragement of the Australian government and business and education sectors. With borders remaining closed, 50% of those who chose not to leave did so because they might not be able to return to Australia soon, or at all, and this was a risk they could not take.

Most temporary migrants suffered critical loss of income from loss of work and/or diminished family support

- 70% of those respondents who were working lost their job or most of their hours or shifts since 1 March (54% lost their job and a further 16% lost most hours/shifts). A further 13% of respondents lost some of their hours or shifts.
- Though many international students had been relying on families at home for support, 32% indicated that they were now unable to pay for essential needs because since COVID-19 their family could no longer send the same amount of money.

Many temporary migrants cannot meet basic living needs

The survey findings confirm the ongoing acute deprivation of basic needs caused by the financial impact of COVID-related restrictions among many temporary migrants.



Close to half of respondents (42%) indicated that at some point since 1 March they had been afraid they would be homeless.

One in seven international students (14%) had in fact been homeless for a period since 1 March (sleeping on campus, on a friend's couch, in a car or on the streets). Temporary migrants are not eligible for admission to most homeless shelters.



Well over a quarter of respondents (28%) had been unable to pay for meals or food for some period since 1 March (30% of international students).



18% of respondents could not pay for heating or electricity (18% of international students).



One in ten respondents (10%) were unable to pay for essential medicine and 15% could not pay to see a doctor (9% and 14% of international students).

Temporary migrants' financial crisis will substantially worsen in the second half of 2020

- Well over half of respondents (57%) believed that their financial situation will be somewhat or much worse in the second half of 2020 (58% of international students).
- Though many have been running down their savings, 35% of international students believed that they would run out of funds by October 2020 (among 4,069 who answered the question).
- Many international students also raised serious concerns about their impending inability to pay course fees resulting in discontinuation of studies.

Current sources of financial support are deeply inadequate to meet need

- Since the first lockdown in March, a third (33%) of all respondents indicated they had sought emergency support to meet their essential needs (37% of international students).
- Charities and others provided food, one-off cash payments and other forms of emergency relief, but education providers were the source of the overwhelming majority of support received.
- Education provider support was limited to one-off payments, mostly to university students, among whom a quarter (26%) received support. Only one in ten students (11%) at private colleges received support. The overwhelming majority of those who received support got a one-off payment of under \$1000.
- The Red Cross provided support to 2% of respondents. Two thirds of these were international students, among whom 68% received a one-off payment of \$500 or less.
- State governments provided support to 4% of respondents, almost all of whom were international students.

- Close to a third (29%) indicated they did not seek emergency support because they were worried it might affect their visa. Visa concerns were a more common barrier among college students (33%) than university students (27%), and even more common for graduates (38%). Surprisingly, visa concerns were also identified by considerable proportions of TSS visa holders (26%).

Temporary migrants' wellbeing has been compromised at home and at work

Abuse and violence at home increased during COVID-19

438 respondents (9%) indicated that they had experienced verbal abuse or harassment in their home since March, and 90 respondents indicated that they had experienced physical abuse or violence. For over 82%, this started or became worse during COVID-19.

Many temporary migrants are encountering exploitative work during COVID-19

One in seven (15%) respondents reported that since 1 March they had performed work in return for food and housing rather than wages. While this was predictably far more common among backpackers (29%), it was also reported by 14% of students, 12% of Temporary Graduate visa holders and 10% of TSS or 457 visa holders.

Respondents who were working on 1 March reported that while they held their job they experienced more exploitative conditions during COVID-19:

- One in five (21%) reported a reduced hourly wage.
- One in ten (11%) did unpaid work.
- One in seven (13%) was forced to do new tasks they did not want to do or were not comfortable with.

Experiences of racism were widespread during COVID-19

A substantial proportion of survey respondents indicated that they had experienced racism in Australia during the pandemic:

- Almost a quarter (23%) indicated that they had experienced racism in the form of verbal abuse. This included 25% of international students and 26% of graduates.
- A quarter (25%) indicated that they had experienced racism in the form of people avoiding them because of their appearance.
- More than half of Chinese respondents (52%) reported that since 1 March they had experienced racism in the form of verbal abuse and/or people avoiding them because of their appearance. More than a third (35%) of Chinese respondents had been verbally abused - a substantially higher proportion than other nationalities.
- Nationals of other East Asian and South East Asian countries reported the next highest incidence of racism since 1 March, with over 40% having experienced verbal abuse and/or people avoiding them because of their appearance.

In open responses, participants shared over 1,600 personal experiences of racist verbal harassment, physical abuse, or being shunned in public spaces, workplaces and housing. These included accounts of targeted derogatory and xenophobic slurs, being treated as though they were personally infected with COVID-19 by virtue of their foreign appearance, and being targets of harassment because they chose to wear a face mask as a public health precaution. In addition to these cases of verbal abuse, many respondents recounted alarming experiences of physical assaults, some of which were particularly serious, which included being punched, hit, kicked, shoved, and being deliberately spat at or coughed on by passers-by. Many respondents of a range of nationalities reported being regularly told to go home and "get out of Australia".

Reputational damage to higher education and tourism markets

The cumulative financial, physical and psychological impact of their experiences during the pandemic has clearly soured temporary migrants on Australia.

- Among international students, graduates and Working Holiday Makers, 59% indicated that following their experience during COVID-19, they were less likely or much less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study or have a working holiday.
- This included important international education markets such as Chinese students (of whom 76% were now less likely to recommend Australia for study) and Nepalese students (69% were less likely to recommend Australia).
- The longer international students had been in Australia the more likely they were to have soured on their impression of Australia following their experience during COVID-19. For example, among the 1,623 international students who arrived between 2015 and 2018, 62% were now less likely or much less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study.

Thousands of respondents provided open responses expressing a sense of abandonment connected to Australia's response to the pandemic. Hundreds of respondents tied a sense of long-lasting distress, anger and dehumanisation to the Prime Minister's instruction "to make your way home". The determination to exclude temporary migrants from government support packages contributed to feelings of abandonment, humiliation and worthlessness: "they don't see us. They can't hear us", "like we do not exist", "like I didn't matter". A large number of participants used stark, dehumanising language to describe this: "some aliens who don't belong here", "inanimate objects", "discarded, unimportant and expendable", "trash", "garbage", "dirt", "I don't belong here".

A very large number expressed a sense of injustice and being callously used only for their economic contribution to Australia after having invested substantially in the Australian economy and community through working, paying taxes and high student fees. Many respondents characterised Australia's lack of support for temporary migrants during the pandemic as "unAustralian", "selfish", "greedy", "money oriented" and "all about money", a "blatant money grab" or "solely a money-making scheme". A striking number used words such as "cash cows", "money-making plants", "I see myself as merely a money printing machine", "ATMs of the Australian government", "walking moneybags", "just money, otherwise we are not worth anything", and "hung dry for cash".

Many respondents expressed frustration that the Australian government wrongly assumed that international students did not need support, and/or that it was possible for temporary migrants to simply go home. Many others explained that the expectation that temporary migrants should pack up and leave seemed to ignore the enormous investments many had made in setting up a life in Australia. As one French Temporary Graduate visa holder put it: "Some of us have been here for years and consider Australia like our home now, quitting everything we have done and been through is just unimaginable".

Many respondents felt that these experiences of discrimination, exclusion and inequality during the pandemic changed the way they felt about Australia overall and made them less likely to recommend Australia to friends and family. Some described how the ideal image of Australia as a "multicultural nation" that is "built by immigrants" and "famous for welcoming internationals" was "not the promised land as they pictured anymore". They noted the hypocrisy in government messaging during COVID-19: "It's appalling to see the PM consoling the citizens saying that we are all in this together but at the same time telling migrants to go back home in a pandemic". Some specifically noted the significance of perceived anti-immigrant sentiment coming from the Prime Minister. As a Bhutanese Masters student put it: "If a person at the highest position makes us feel unwelcome, you can imagine the feelings of most Aussie people towards international students. I am scared it will start xenophobia". Many contrasted Australia's approach with the approach taken in Canada, New Zealand and elsewhere.

Despite these many sobering accounts of frustration and hurt in response to their treatment by the federal government, some respondents nonetheless spoke gratefully about how ordinary Australians, their university, community and charity groups or their state/local government stepped in to provide emergency help.

Conclusion

United Nations experts have stated that “no one should be left behind in this global fight against the pandemic. Governments must adopt measures ensuring that every individual ... regardless of their migration status, is included”.⁷ The ongoing failure to provide essential support to temporary migrants breaches Australia’s international human rights obligations which require the Australian government to ensure every person within its jurisdiction has a safe and secure place to live, adequate food, and can meet their basic health and living needs. Advising temporary visa holders to go home does not diminish these obligations. Nor does it absolve Australia of its moral obligations to these members of the Australian community whom it encouraged to greatly invest in studying and working here.

Australia’s abandonment of international students is causing grave damage to its reputation in the international education market, as well as among Working Holiday Makers. Australia’s education sector will likely suffer the economic consequences of these policies for years or decades to come. Australia may also suffer longer term geopolitical harm as many of those suffering in Australia now will return home to become leaders in business and politics and hold other roles of social influence around the region and globally. Their experiences during this period will not be quickly forgotten as they look to other countries, such as the UK and Ireland, that recognised international students and other temporary migrants as valued members of their community and included them in national support measures such as unemployment payments, wage subsidies and housing support during this difficult time.⁸

The Australian government should heed the observations of one respondent that are emblematic of the sentiments expressed by thousands of survey participants in their open responses: “Australia showed its true colors when it came to international students. They call us friends but then abandon us in our time of need. I think Australia will struggle to attract international students after the disgraceful treatment and lack of compassion shown during COVID”.

Introduction

Australia is home to over one million temporary visa holders. This includes international students, Temporary Graduate visa holders, employer-sponsored workers, Working Holiday Makers (backpackers), seasonal workers, refugees and people seeking asylum. Many have been in Australia for extended periods on one or more multi-year temporary visas, and have integrated into the Australian community and workforce.

Like temporary migrants globally,⁹ many of these individuals were already in vulnerable situations before the pandemic struck. Many worked in insecure jobs in which they were systemically underpaid and encountered dangerous work practices.¹⁰ This was particularly the case for visa holders with precarious immigration status who are more vulnerable to exploitative practices, but unlikely to report any mistreatment in their workplace.¹¹ Many also lived in insecure housing situations characterised by overcrowding, exploitative treatment and overcharging by unscrupulous head-tenants and landlords.¹²

In the first days of the COVID-19 lockdown in March, many visa holders working in heavily casualised industries, such as hospitality and retail, lost their jobs, with devastating financial impact. At the same time, many international students who were financially reliant on family found themselves with less or no support due to the economic impact of COVID in their home countries.

Nevertheless, the Australian government excluded international students and other temporary migrants from the JobKeeper and JobSeeker support packages for those who had lost work as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions. This was at odds with responses of other countries such as the United Kingdom,¹³ New Zealand,¹⁴ Canada¹⁵ and Ireland¹⁶ which extended wage subsidies and other forms of support to temporary migrants in their country. Instead, on 3 April, Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated that, for international students and anyone else visiting Australia who cannot support themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic, “it is time to make [their] way home”.¹⁷

Recent government data confirms most international students, and many other temporary migrants, did not leave Australia. In mid-June, 80% of student visa holders were inside Australia.¹⁸

Reports quickly emerged that very large numbers of international students and other temporary migrants could not meet their basic living needs such as food and rent. In early April, 43 leading academic experts across Australia warned of the severe humanitarian impact that exclusion from social support would have on visa holders who stayed in Australia.¹⁹ Broad national coalitions of unions, service providers and migrant communities raised the alarm in May, and again in July, about the worsening humanitarian crisis.²⁰

In July 2020, we conducted a survey of over 6,100 temporary visa holders in Australia in order to establish large-scale empirical evidence of the impact of government restrictions and lack of financial support on this group during COVID-19, and to better understand their experiences and views during this time. The survey was anonymous, online, and disseminated via social media, education providers, service providers and community networks.

Part 1 of this report provides an overview of the main cohorts of temporary visa holders in Australia. Part 2 sets out the legal and policy context of temporary migrants’ experiences in Australia during COVID-19, including Australia’s relevant international human rights obligations. Part 3 provides a discussion of key findings of the survey, including why respondents stayed in Australia, their experiences in relation to work, and the impact of government restrictions and other factors on their financial situation including housing and inability to pay for essential needs, as well as their access to emergency support. It also presents findings on their experiences of racism, workplace exploitation, and unsafe living conditions. Finally, the report considers survey findings on respondents’ financial outlook for the next 3 to 6 months, and their attitudes towards Australia and observations on their overall experience during COVID-19.

Over the coming months Australia is going to remain home to hundreds of thousands of international students and other longer-term temporary visa holders. It is our hope that this report enables federal and state governments to better understand and meet temporary visa holders' acute humanitarian needs which appear to be rapidly deteriorating. The report sets out clear moral, legal and economic imperatives for doing so, and identifies serious imminent and long-term consequences for the Australian economy and community of government failure to act.

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I have been shocked by the words of the Prime Minister encouraging foreign nationals to go home if they couldn't afford to survive on their own. I am lucky to have been able to save money before and keep affording to pay my rent, utility bills and food, but if it wasn't the case like so many other people, it would be a very distressful and mentally awful situation to deal with. Some of us have been here for years and consider Australia like our home now, quitting everything we have done and been through is just unimaginable. We did not ask for all the money but just some consideration and help to support us, after we had paid so much money on visas, studies fees, health insurance fees, and, taxes.

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French woman on a Temporary Graduate visa

Cohorts of temporary visa holders in Australia during COVID-19

Australia offers a range of short-term and long-term temporary visas. Many “temporary” migrants spend extended periods in Australia transitioning between different temporary visas, and become part of the Australian community. Aside from New Zealand nationals, the largest cohorts of temporary visa holders in Australia include international students, temporary graduates, employer-sponsored temporary workers, Working Holiday Makers (backpackers), refugees and people seeking asylum, and individuals who have overstayed a visa (undocumented workers).

International Students: As of 3 May 2020, there were 485,932 international students in Australia, with a further 121,766 who remained offshore.²¹ International students and their dependents are permitted to stay in Australia for the duration of their course of study and may work a maximum of 40 hours per fortnight while their course is in session.²² During COVID-19, the limitation on work hours was relaxed for those working in essential services such as supermarkets and aged care.²³ Some international students come to Australia with their partner (who receives a student visa with similar conditions) and dependent children.²⁴

Temporary graduates (485 visa): As of 31 March 2020, there were 96,819 people on a Temporary Graduate visa (of whom some were offshore).²⁵ These are international students who have recently graduated with a degree from an Australia institution. A temporary graduate visa is normally 2 years with unlimited rights to study, live and work in Australia.²⁶ Post-study work rights for international students were introduced in 2008 to make Australia competitive in the global international education market and have become a drawcard for international students.²⁷ The visa is seen by some as a pathway to permanent residency through skilled migration.²⁸ However, during COVID-19, temporary graduates faced challenges finding and maintaining work,²⁹ which has prevented them from accruing the work experience or relationship with a potential employer sponsor necessary to pursue this path.

Working Holiday Makers: This program includes the Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa and the Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa.³⁰ At the end of May 2020, there were 92,000 Working Holiday Makers in Australia, with a third having left Australia since the end of 2019.³¹ The Working Holiday program allows young adults from certain countries to have a 12 month holiday in Australia, during which they may undertake short-term study or work (usually no more than 6 months with a single employer).³² Working Holiday Makers are eligible for a second year visa if they spend 88 days (3 months) working in a specified industry in regional Australia, and can apply for a third year-long visa if they work a further 6 months in that industry.³³ Travel and business restrictions imposed during COVID-19 have made fulfilment of these visa conditions difficult, leaving some unable to apply to extend their stay in Australia. The decreased number of Working Holiday Makers in Australia may be creating a substantial labour shortage in the horticulture sector.³⁴



Australia showed its true colors when it came to international students. They call us friends but then abandon us in our time of need. I think Australia will struggle to attract international students after the disgraceful treatment and lack of compassion shown during COVID.



29 year old Master's student from the United States

Employer-sponsored skilled workers (482/457 visa): As of 31 March, there were 139,331 people holding Temporary Skill Shortage visas ('TSS', or previously, 457 visa).³⁵ These visas allow individuals to work for a sponsoring employer in an approved industry.³⁶ The visa only permits work for the approved sponsor in the approved occupation, and workers on this visa who lose their job must leave Australia within 60 days unless they find an alternative sponsoring employer.³⁷ During the pandemic, the government introduced a policy to allow visa holders to maintain their visa if they are stood down but continue to be employed by the sponsor.³⁸ However many of those who lose their job with the sponsoring employer during the economic downturn will likely need to leave Australia with limited prospects of securing a new sponsoring employer within 60 days.³⁹

Temporary Protection visa and Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders (refugees): People seek protection in Australia because they fear persecution or other serious human rights violations in their home country. Under the *Refugee Convention* and other international treaties, Australia may not remove refugees and others entitled to protection on human rights grounds. Under Australian law, only those who arrive in Australia with authorisation (i.e. on a valid visa) are eligible to apply for a permanent Protection visa. Those who came to Australia without a visa (e.g. by boat) may only apply for one a temporary protection visa, of which there are two types: the Temporary Protection visa (TPV), which is valid for 3 years; and the Safe Haven Enterprise visa (SHEV), which is valid for 5 years. Both visas include a right to work. As of March 2020, there were 17,223 refugees on either a TPV or SHEV.⁴⁰ There is also a substantial number of people on a Bridging Visa E (BVE) who arrived in Australia with authorisation by boat, have sought asylum but have not been granted refugee status. As of 31 March 2020, there were 12,742 BVE holders in the Australian community.⁴¹ This visa permits them to remain in Australia lawfully until their application for a protection visa has been determined. However, many do not have a right to work during this time.

Bridging visa holders: Individuals who apply for certain substantive visas may be granted a transitory Bridging visa which permits them to remain in Australia lawfully until the substantive visa application is determined and any related judicial review is completed. As of 31 March, there were 281,179 individuals on a range of Bridging visas in Australia.⁴² For example, if a visitor applies for a Student visa onshore, she/he may have a Bridging Visa A (BVA) after submitting the visa application. Bridging visa conditions depend on the previous substantive visa. In this case, the BVA holders are not permitted to work consistent with their visitor visa. For those without work rights, the right to work may be granted if the visa holder can demonstrate financial hardship.

Undocumented workers: The term "undocumented workers" refers to workers in Australia without authorisation. This includes individuals who have overstayed their visa or whose visa has been cancelled. Pre-COVID-19, there were an estimated 60,000 people in Australia who overstayed their visa.⁴³ Undocumented workers also include individuals working in Australia who hold a valid visa which does not include a right to work (such as tourists on a Visitor visa) or those working in breach of visa conditions which provide restricted work rights. Immigration authorities have the discretion to cancel any visa for non-compliance with a visa condition.⁴⁴ Where detected by immigration authorities, anyone in Australia after the expiry or cancellation of a visa will be placed in immigration detention and removed from Australia.⁴⁵



We felt abandoned, I can speak from me and my friends. We are here paying all taxes as if we were citizens, we are every day contributing with our work, skills and hard work to help Australia, and we didn't get to have anything back.



Female Brazilian student in a vocational program

Legal and policy context

Australia's International Human Rights Obligations regarding Temporary Migrants

Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties.⁴⁶ Under these treaties, Australia has voluntarily accepted binding legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfill a core set of basic human rights for everyone in its territory. This includes individuals in Australia on temporary visas and, in many respects, individuals who are not on a valid visa. These obligations apply for as long as a person remains in Australia, and are not diminished by the government's suggestion that they leave. Specific obligations include:

Right to adequate food: Australia must ensure that every person has physical and economic access at all times to sufficient food, or the means to procure it.⁴⁷ Food must be available, physically accessible, affordable, and adequate to satisfy a person's dietary needs. The right to adequate food is inextricably linked with the right to health.⁴⁸

Right to adequate housing: The government must ensure adequate, safe and secure housing for all, making equitable and effective use of its maximum available resources.⁴⁹ This right includes access to clean drinking water, energy for cooking, lighting and heating, sanitation and food storage.⁵⁰ The Australian government should ensure that temporary migrants have legal protection against forced evictions, unreasonable rent levels, harassment and other threats.⁵¹ Even in times of severe economic downturn, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights advises governments to adopt low-cost targeted programs to ensure that people in vulnerable situations have a safe and secure place to live.⁵²

Right to health: Everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.⁵³ At a minimum, the Australian government must ensure that all persons, irrespective of their nationality, residency or immigration status, have access to primary and emergency medical care.⁵⁴ In the COVID-19 pandemic, preventing and slowing the spread of disease requires outreach to all, and the government must undertake a range of actions to ensure that everyone in Australia has access to life-saving interventions⁵⁵ and emergency mental health and psychosocial support.⁵⁶ Australia should also establish a "firewall" between immigration enforcement and public services so that all migrants, including those who have overstayed a visa, can access health care without fear of immigration consequences.⁵⁷

Right to safe, healthy, just and favourable conditions at work: Everyone has the right to safe, healthy, just and favourable conditions at work, including fair wages, equal remuneration⁵⁸ and freedom from discrimination.⁵⁹ Australia must ensure fulfilment of these rights for non-nationals regardless of visa status, including migrant workers.⁶⁰

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If you are suffering in this country go home, go home even if the borders are closed, go home we don't care about your visa and how hard you were studying, we just care how much money you can give to the country. I sincerely got amazed about this."

//

28 year old female Master's student from Ecuador

Right to social security: Australia must provide access to social protections to not only its own nationals, but also to non-national migrant workers,⁶¹ and especially people who have inadequate social protections to meet their basic needs.⁶² This means that Australia is obliged to ensure that all people in its territory, including non-nationals, enjoy their right to access benefits (such as unemployment benefits and wage subsidies) without discrimination in order to secure social protection from circumstances such as lack of work-related income by unemployment, illness, or inability to afford healthcare.⁶³ The right to social security is key to guaranteeing dignity for all persons when they are faced with circumstances that deprive them of their capacity to secure their basic rights.⁶⁴

Right to be free from racial discrimination:⁶⁵ Australia is obliged to ensure that every person enjoys freedom from racial discrimination.⁶⁶ The government must implement measures to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms so that everyone can enjoy their other rights, including the right to security of person and protection against violence or bodily harm by any individual, group or institution, the right to housing, to medical care and to social security.⁶⁷

Rights of children: Australia must ensure all children within its territory have a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.⁶⁸ This obligation applies to every child in Australia, regardless of the child's or parents' immigration status.⁶⁹ This means that Australia must take measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to provide material assistance to ensure nutrition and housing.⁷⁰ It also includes ensuring primary education is available⁷¹ and accessible to all.⁷²

Rights of refugees and people seeking asylum: Australia has special legal obligations to refugees and people seeking asylum who come to Australia,⁷³ as they do not have the protection of their home countries and are in particularly vulnerable situations. Refugees and people seeking asylum have the right not to be expelled from Australia.⁷⁴ They have rights to engage in paid employment,⁷⁵ to housing,⁷⁶ to primary education,⁷⁷ and the same right to public relief and assistance as accorded to nationals.⁷⁸

United Nations' instructions to States regarding temporary migrants during COVID-19

In June 2020, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, "No country can fight the pandemic or manage migration alone. But together, we can contain the spread of the virus, buffer its impact on the most vulnerable and recover better for the benefit of all".⁷⁹ UN bodies have recognised the valuable contributions of migrants on the frontlines of COVID-19 responses, and have recognised the important measures that countries have taken to protect migrant workers and their families.⁸⁰ They have instructed States to bring migrant workers under the umbrella of national COVID-19 response and recovery plans, so that migrants and their families can access social services in this time of financial insecurity, and to protect their health at work.⁸¹ The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has also recognised that migrants face obstacles to accessing health care, goods and services they need during the pandemic, and in its guidance to States recommends that countries make social protection measures available and accessible to migrant workers.⁸²

It is also important for Australia's public health and economic recovery goals that policy responses are non-discriminatory, and allow access to social support services for all people in vulnerable situations including temporary migrants.⁸³ This is important for protecting public health in Australia as a whole, for ensuring social inclusion and the prevention of xenophobia.⁸⁴



Unfair and inhumane. Government only nice to us when they need money



Filipina student in a Bachelor's degree program

Australian government policies in relation to temporary migrants during COVID-19

In March 2020, the government enforced nationwide lockdown policies to enforce social distancing and restrict the movement of all non-essential workers. Alongside these measures, the government introduced a COVID-19 social support package, including the JobKeeper and JobSeeker assistance schemes, to support workers, businesses and the broader community affected by the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn.⁸⁵ However, the government explicitly excluded temporary migrants who had lost their jobs or been stood down from these support programs.

According to an International Organisation for Migration report on the economic impacts of COVID-19 on temporary migrants in Australia, businesses preferred to retain furloughed local workers over temporary migrants because they did not receive subsidies for the wages of workers on temporary visas.⁸⁶ This left many temporary migrants suddenly without employment income and facing severe difficulties in finding new employment.

Also in March, highlighting the value of international student labour to certain essential industries, the federal government temporarily relaxed the 40-hour per fortnight work limit for international students in certain workplaces including supermarkets, aged care providers, disability support services and healthcare.⁸⁷

At the end of April, one month after the national lockdown began, the Australian government allocated \$7 million over a six month period to the Australian Red Cross to deliver emergency relief and counselling support to the most vulnerable temporary migrants.⁸⁸ This emergency relief payment was intended to help people meet urgent needs like food, medicine and crisis accommodation costs. However, these payments were one-off, and the Australian Red Cross itself acknowledged they were likely insufficient to meet the needs of this vulnerable group.⁸⁹

One of the only forms of support offered to temporary migrants was the ability to access their superannuation.⁹⁰ However, many international students are paid in cash and their employers would not have made the required contributions.⁹¹ Indeed, some temporary migrants paid through electronic systems also discovered that their superannuation entitlements had never been paid by their employers. Some of these employers later entered liquidation due to the financial fallout of the pandemic and their employees could not cover the payments at all.⁹²

Others who had been planning to access their superannuation after 1 July were locked out when the government, without warning, reversed its policy and denied temporary migrants access to their superannuation, although access continued for Australian residents.⁹³

The various state governments recognised the desperation of temporary visa holders excluded from Commonwealth government support, and gradually established limited relief packages for different groups of temporary migrants in their state. The Victorian Government for example offered a \$1,100 one-off hardship payment for temporary visa holders in April.⁹⁴ (See Government Timeline below for additional state government policies.) Some universities also offered international students financial assistance, including limited housing support, living and study expenses, fee extensions and/or one-off payments to cover basic needs such as food. Others put in place limited support that covered university costs such as fees, laptops, and stationery. Recognising that these payments were falling far short of addressing the depth of need, international student groups and sector bodies such as Universities Australia have urged the government to provide further ongoing support to address the critical unmet need.⁹⁵



The government speech of “go home you shouldn’t stay here if you can’t sustain yourself” make me feel sad and excluded. Moreover, for many people there is just no options as there is no flights (or they are too expensive) and the borders might be closed.



29 year old male Brazilian doctoral student

Timeline of Key Commonwealth and State COVID-19 Policies

Commonwealth policies

CTH
7/3: Temporary removal of student visa 40 hour work limit for students working in supermarkets.

CTH
22/3: \$189 billion economic support package, including coronavirus supplement, stimulus payments and early release of superannuation. Temporary migrants not eligible.
25/3: JobKeeper and JobSeeker announced. Temporary migrants not eligible.

CTH
30/3: Six-month moratorium on evictions announced, to be implemented by states.

CTH
4/4: Most temporary visa-holders including international students allowed to access superannuation.
5/4: Child Care Subsidy instituted. Temporary migrants such as those on Temporary Protection visas and Partner Provisional visas may be eligible.

MARCH

APRIL

20/3

Non-essential mass gatherings banned for groups of more than 500 people outdoors or more than 100 people indoors.

30/3

Public gatherings reduced to maximum of 2 people. Facilities such as pubs, clubs and hotels, gyms, cinemas, beauty salons and places of worship to be closed.

TAS

3/4: Freeze on rent evictions instituted.

VIC

8/4: \$500 million fund announced for 'Working for Victoria' Initiative, aimed at helping people who have lost their jobs and have the right to legally work in Victoria to find new employment. Temporary migrants eligible.

NSW

15/4: 6 months freeze on evictions instituted.

TAS

22/4: Freeze on rent increases until at least 30 June. \$3 million package announced for financial hardship due to COVID-19 for temporary visa holders, consisting of emergency cash payments, travel assistance and support for employers to retain their workers.

29/4: \$4.3 million package announced for housing and homelessness support.

VIC

23/4: Freeze on evictions, rental increases for 6 months and land tax relief instituted.

29/4: 'International Student Emergency Relief Fund' created to provide one-off payments to international students, capped at \$1,100.

30/4: \$11.3 million package announced for supporting multicultural communities, including \$2.2 million to provide basic needs assistance to asylum seekers.

State policies



CTH
5/8: \$1500 Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment available for people living in Victoria who are unable to earn income because they must self-isolate and do not have other support such as JobKeeper and sick leave entitlements. Temporary migrants may apply.

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUG

8 – 18/5

National three step plan to relax coronavirus restrictions announced. States begin to implement policies allowing outdoor gathering of 10 people, up to 10 seated patrons at cafes and restaurants, 5 visitors to households.

1/6

States begin to allow pubs, clubs, cafes and restaurants to have up to 50 customers, beauty and nail salons allowed to reopen. Students begin to return to school.

**21/6
VIC**

COVID outbreaks emerge. Number of home visitors reduced to 5, outdoor gatherings reduced to 10. Patrons to restaurants, pubs and other businesses limited to 20 people.

**4 – 9/7
VIC**

Postcode lockdowns begin in Victoria, until all of Metropolitan Melbourne, Mitchell Shire and Flemington is locked down. Other states and territories close borders to Victoria.

NSW

Outbreaks begin in South Western Sydney. Outbreak areas in NSW declared hotspots in other states.

**24/7
NSW**

Group bookings in restaurants limited to maximum of 10 people.

NSW

15/5: \$20 million funding for up to 20 weeks of free accommodation for international students “in genuine need” and increased support for international student legal services announced.

TAS

19/5: ‘COVID-19 Rental Relief’ announced. Temporary visa holders are eligible to apply to receive up to \$2000 or four weeks’ worth of rent if they suffer from extreme hardship.

NSW

3/6: ‘Multicultural NSW COVID-19 Support Grants Program’ announced. Includes \$6 million to agencies assisting people on temporary visas, including \$1.5 million for emergency food, medicine and housing .

14/7: \$4 million additional funding for temporary visa holders announced, including for emergency food, medical support, essential housing, as well as for organisations providing services to temporary visa workers, such as casework and translation services. Excludes support for asylum seekers and international students.

VIC

19/7: One-off payments of \$300 and \$1,500 for people in self-quarantine or awaiting COVID test results respectively announced. Eligibility criterion include having been in continuous employment and not receiving JobKeeper payments. Temporary visa-holders able to apply.

Comparison of Australia's policies to other similar countries

Australia's exclusion of temporary migrants from wage support programs and other support is at odds with the policies of similar countries, as set out in the Appendix.

For example, in the United Kingdom,⁹⁶ the Republic of Ireland⁹⁷ and Canada,⁹⁸ temporary migrants are eligible for unemployment payments. In Canada, temporary migrants with a valid Social Insurance number may receive \$2,000 for a 4-week period for up to 16 weeks if they have stopped working for reasons related to COVID-19.⁹⁹ In Ireland, temporary migrants are eligible to receive up to €350 per week if they become unemployed due to COVID-19.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, Australia has entirely excluded temporary migrants from JobSeeker unemployment benefits for those who have lost work as a result of COVID-19, instead restricting payments to permanent residents, citizens and Protected Special Category Visa holders (New Zealand passport holders).¹⁰¹

New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada have also allowed temporary migrants to access wage subsidy payments. In contrast, Australia's JobKeeper allowance is only available to permanent residents, citizens and Protected Special Category Visa holders.¹⁰² In New Zealand, temporary migrants are able to access the federal 'Wage Subsidy Scheme' so long as their employer applies to the scheme, allowing recipients to be paid a flat rate of \$585.40 per week for people previously working 20 hours or more per week, or \$350 per week for those working less than 20 hours.¹⁰³ The wage subsidy schemes introduced by United Kingdom,¹⁰⁴ Ireland¹⁰⁵ and Canada¹⁰⁶ allow temporary migrants to receive between 75% and 85% of their weekly average pay if their employers apply to the scheme. Indeed, the Canadian government has also provided \$3 billion worth of funding to provinces and states to increase the wage of low-income essential workers temporarily, such as workers in nursing homes and the food supply sector, a large proportion of whom are temporary migrants.¹⁰⁷

United Kingdom¹⁰⁸ and Ireland¹⁰⁹ also allow temporary migrant workers to receive sick pay if they are required to self-isolate and cannot work. In Australia, the exclusion of temporary migrants (other than Skilled Work Regional and Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional visa holders¹¹⁰) from the Sickness Allowance, has meant that temporary migrants may be compelled to continue going to work despite having symptoms of COVID-19 because they cannot afford the loss of income.

Australia's healthcare policies pertaining to migrants are also out of step with its counterparts, particularly in relation to undocumented workers who have overstayed a visa and acutely fear detection and deportation by immigration authorities. New Zealand,¹¹¹ the United Kingdom¹¹² and Ireland guarantee the confidentiality of all patients, including temporary migrants, when they test or are treated for COVID-19. In Ireland, a firewall was created between government immigration offices and the hospital system to ensure that patients' identity and immigration status is undetected.¹¹³ In contrast, Australia does not provide any assurance to temporary migrants that information they provide when seeking medical care or COVID-19 testing will not be shared with immigration authorities. This has deterred undocumented workers from being tested for COVID-19, putting the migrants and the community at risk.¹¹⁴

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Felt like the government cares only about how much money I spend in Australia. So I felt that Australians are not hospitable and that they are money oriented specially after getting to know how my home country (which is not as wealthy as Australia) treated the stranded foreigners.

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19 year old Nepalese Bachelor's student

In terms of housing, Australia announced in March a six month moratorium on evictions; subsequently some states implemented bans on rent increases.¹¹⁵ However, as tenancy is a state-based issue, the details of this moratorium were complex and implementation differed from state to state. For example, the moratorium did not appear to prevent landlords evicting tenants for a range of 'other reasons'.¹¹⁶ Other countries have provided greater support for temporary migrants unable to pay rent. For example, in Ireland, temporary migrants who are considered "habitually resident" in Ireland may receive a Rent Supplement of up to €350 per week.¹¹⁷

Notably, some less wealthy States have included temporary migrants in critical social support measures during COVID-19. For instance, at the beginning of the pandemic, Portugal temporarily granted permanent resident status to all migrants with pending immigration applications until at least 1 July 2020, allowing them to have access to government support available to Portuguese citizens.¹¹⁸ This includes access to welfare benefits, the national health service, bank accounts and work and rental contracts. This highlights the ability of States with far smaller economies than Australia to guarantee temporary migrants' access to crucial support.

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This is horrible what he said: Time To Go Home. We will be going home but we would like to see how he can recruit new students to come to Australia with such attitude. COVID 19 is something no one could planned and we international students were the most vulnerable in this country. Australians were offered support, jobkeeper, jobseeker and etc. But what about us? We paid taxes. We did all dirty work Australians don't want to do and what about us? Why we were not eligible for a fair treatment. This is just shows the lack of respect for the what international students bring into this community and the country. It is nice to have invisible cheap workers that will be silently committing to work when you and your family can stay at home or work from home and get government support and don't lose any money. Morrison's comments were insensitive rude and stupid. I won't recommend my friends to come here because we are used and never have anything in returns.

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Female Russian Master's student

Survey findings

Research methodology

Survey design

The survey contained 83 multiple choice questions, though participants received subsets of these depending on their responses. A small number of questions allowed open answers. The survey was available on the Qualtrics platform in English and Simplified Chinese.

Participants were asked about their experiences during and after COVID-related restrictions were introduced in Australia. Social distancing restrictions were first imposed on 20 March. In order to be able to compare participants' experiences during COVID-19 to participants' lives in Australia before social distancing restrictions were imposed, a number of questions asked participants about their experiences or circumstances on 1 March or after that date.

Survey dissemination

Almost half (45%) of respondents were notified about the survey by their education provider. Close to a third (29%) heard about the survey from an organisation, by email, newsletter or in-person and a further 22% found out about the survey through a community group or organisation on social media. Twelve percent heard about the survey through family and friends, including 9% through social media and 3% through other means. Ninety four people (2% of respondents) heard about the survey from a union.

Survey participants

There were 8,077 individuals who entered responses to the survey. Of these, 1,432 responses were removed because the respondents were not temporary migrants, 4 were under 17 years old, 437 completed less than 14% of the survey, and 29 were flagged by Qualtrics as multiple entries of the same person (using a Cookies approach) leaving 6,105 valid responses.

Participants were free to stop the survey at any time. As some participants exited the survey at different points before the end, the number of respondents varied between questions. In addition, some follow-up questions were only shown to participants who selected particular responses.

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Scott Morrison told international students to go home. He worsened the racism issue in Australia, particularly targeting Asians, and denies all our contributions for Australia in terms of money and efforts. That's the cruelest thing ever to say and do. I was and still am very disappointed. I loved Australia but now I'm questioning my decision of choosing this country to invest in.

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25 year old Vietnamese Master's student

Methodological limitations

The survey has a number of methodological limitations. Because the survey was anonymous it is not possible to know whether any participants completed the survey more than once. It is also not possible to verify the accuracy of information provided by participants, and it would have been possible for participants to choose random answers because they wanted to complete the survey quickly in order to enter the prize draw. There were no strong incentives for other participants to provide inaccurate information or to repeat the survey multiple times. If this occurred it is likely to have involved a very small number of participants and, as mentioned above, we removed 29 responses which Qualtrics flagged as multiple entries of the same person (using a Cookies approach). Indeed, the main reason to complete the survey more than once would have been the incentive of winning a prize and there were only 20 duplicate phone numbers in the prize draw survey (which may also have included people in a household using the same phone number). There was also a further risk that participants may have been afraid to disclose true information. This risk was mitigated by making the survey entirely anonymous.

A further limitation may have arisen from a key method of distribution of the survey. Reliance on primary promotion through Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, LinkedIn and the Chinese-language internet site, Sydney Today, may have contributed to overrepresentation of respondents who regularly use these platforms. This risk was somewhat mitigated by distribution through other channels including community and service provider emails and newsletters (see Survey dissemination above for further detail). Concerns about weak English-language skills were mitigated by translating the survey into Simplified Chinese for the largest cohort of international students in Australia. However, the survey was not available in all languages spoken by international students in Australia, and the survey was likely not accessible to native speakers of other languages whose English is very poor. It is also possible that certain words or phrases in the translated Chinese version may have been understood differently, or may not have had a culturally-understood equivalent. This was mitigated by having several Mandarin speakers review the translation.

It is possible that participation was higher among temporary migrants who were more motivated to share information on poor experiences. The authors sought to limit this possibility by offering a number of substantial prizes to create a different incentive for participation among a broader group. At the same time, it is possible that temporary migrants experiencing financial stress were more likely than others to be motivated to complete the survey by the possibility of receiving prizes. Finally, there was an over-representation among participants of international students at UNSW and UTS. This is likely to be a result of particularly effective institutional survey dissemination and potentially greater participant trust in, or identification with, the authors because of their affiliation with those institutions.

Taking these considerations into account, and considering the impracticability of random sampling among temporary migrants in Australia, the authors determined that the survey and selected distribution methods remained an effective way to access large numbers of diverse international students and other temporary migrants.

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Absolutely disgusting. While we understand that the government is responsible for its citizens first, in a global crisis like this, it's absolutely horrifying that our situation is not only neglected but also downplayed. It's completely hypocritical that we're important for tax purposes, and in the sense that we contribute billions of dollars to the economy as university fees but are treated as some breed of untouchables.

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23 year old male student from India

Demographics of survey respondents

Visa

The large majority of respondents held a student visa, either as primary or secondary visa-holders (5,047 respondents). The next largest cohorts of substantive visa holders were Working Holiday Makers (251 respondents) (including the Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa and the Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa), Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visa holders (212 respondents) and employer-sponsored visa-holders on the Temporary Skills Shortage (subclass 482) visa (TSS) or the Temporary Work Skilled (subclass 457) visa) (187 respondents). There were 11 respondents who were refugees on Temporary Protection (subclass 785) visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise (subclass 790) visa (SHEV) and 33 respondents on a Bridging visa E, many of whom may have been asylum seekers or refugees.

Table 1. Respondents' visa at time of survey

Visa subclass	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Student Visa (primary or secondary)	5,047	83
Working Holiday Visa or Work and Holiday Visa	251	4
Temporary Graduate Visa	212	4
Temporary Skills Shortage visa or Temporary Work (Skilled) Visa	187	3
Bridging Visa A	177	3
Visitor Visa	39	0.6
Provisional Partner Visa	34	0.6
Temporary Skilled Resident Visa 489 or 491	34	0.6
Bridging Visa E	33	0.5
Temporary Protection Visa or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)	11	0.2
Visa has expired	10	0.2
Temporary Work (International Relations) Visa (for Seasonal Work Program)	7	0.1
Training Visa	5	0.1
Temporary Activity Visa (COVID 408 visa)	3	0.0
Other	35	0.6



Seen what they call themselves like the best country in the world facing COVID. As migrant I can see it but only if you are Australian. If you are not, you are very alone but still you pay more taxes than Australians here

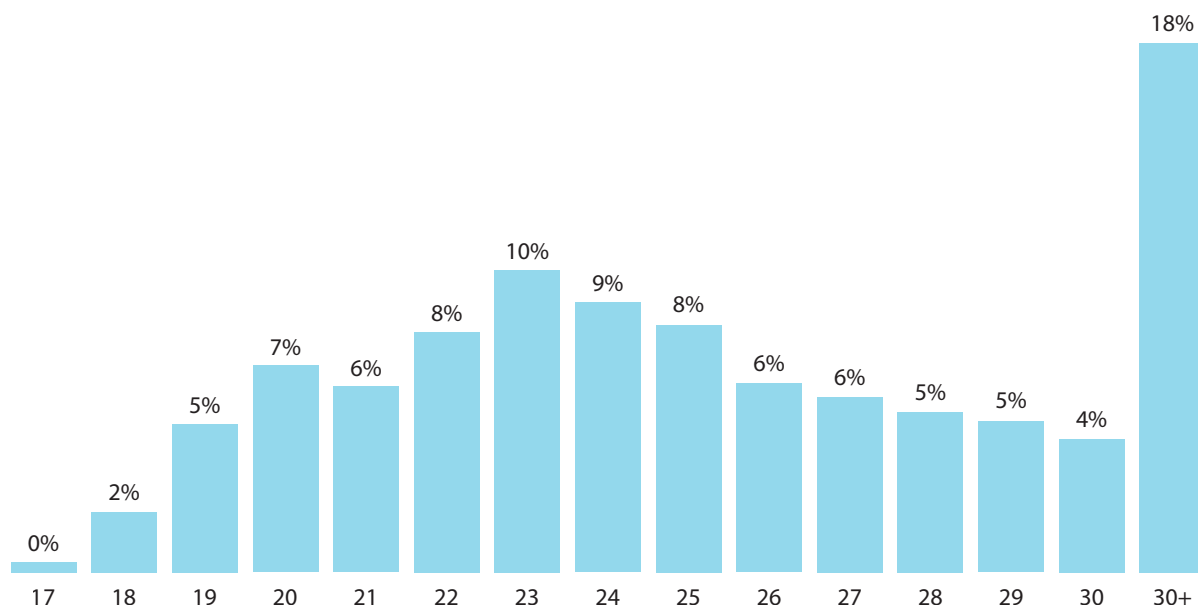


29 year old Working Holiday Maker from Chile

Age at time of survey

All survey participants were required to be 17 years or older in order to participate in the survey. The median age of respondents was 25. A third (32%) were aged 28 years old or older. Only 7% were younger than 20 years old.

Figure 1. Respondents' age at time of survey (n=6,105)



Living with children in Australia

Five percent of respondents were living with their children in Australia. However among the 1,021 respondents aged over 30, one in five (21%) were living in Australia with their children. Among the 661 international students who were aged over 30, 18% were living with their children.

Nationality

Respondents were nationals of 120 countries. A fifth of participants were from China (20%), and another fifth (19%) were from India. The 16 largest nationality groups also included smaller cohorts from Latin America, South East Asia, South Asia, East Asia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.



They were trying to send us home when, in my country, the borders were closed. Since the day, the Prime Minister said to temporary visas and students 'it is time to go home,' he permitted his own people to treat us without respect. I felt that I am just an investor, that even the world gets on fire I must be a constant money provider.



Female Ecuadorian student in Master's program

Figure 2. Respondents' nationality, showing 16 nationality groups with the most respondents (n=6,105)

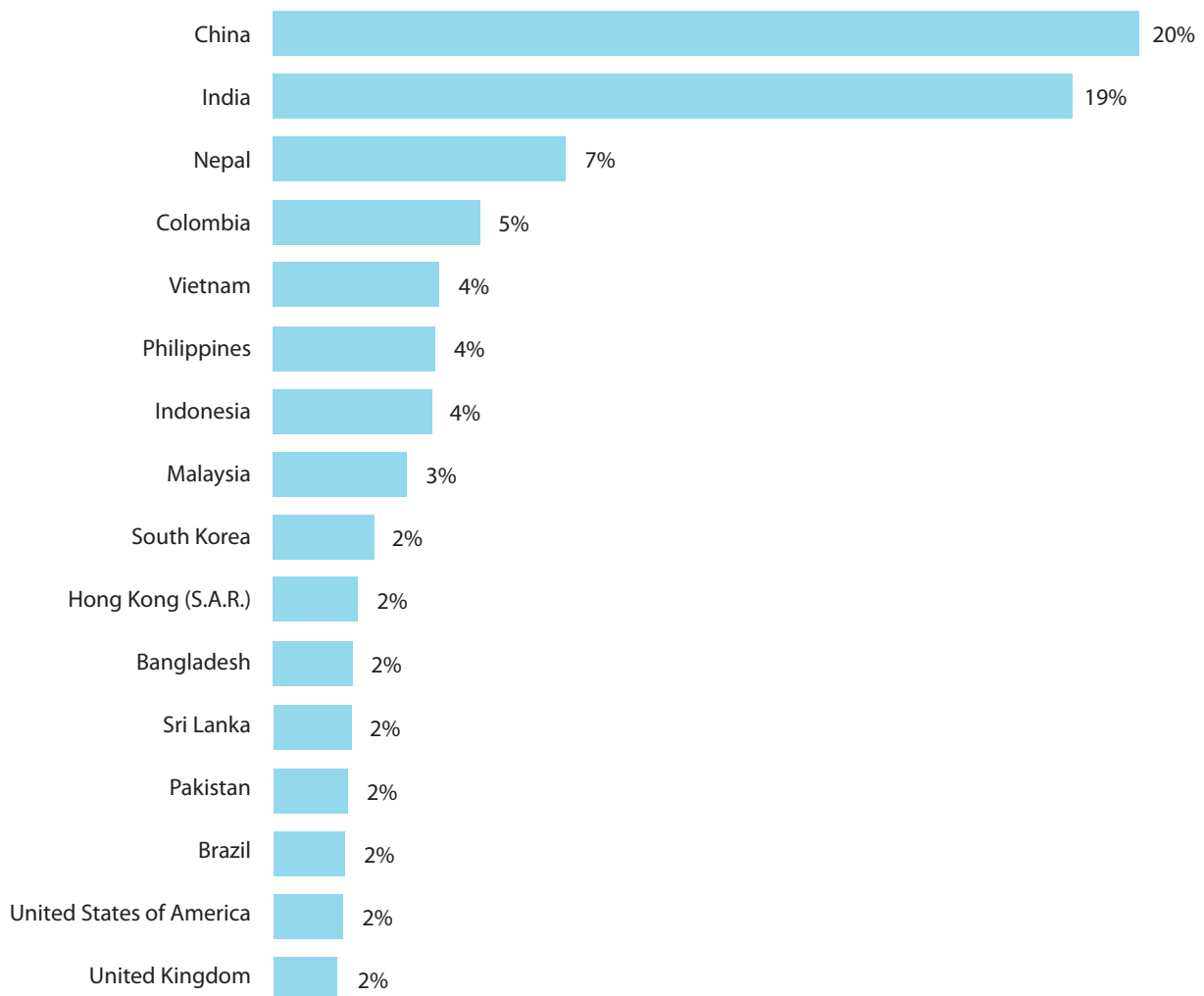


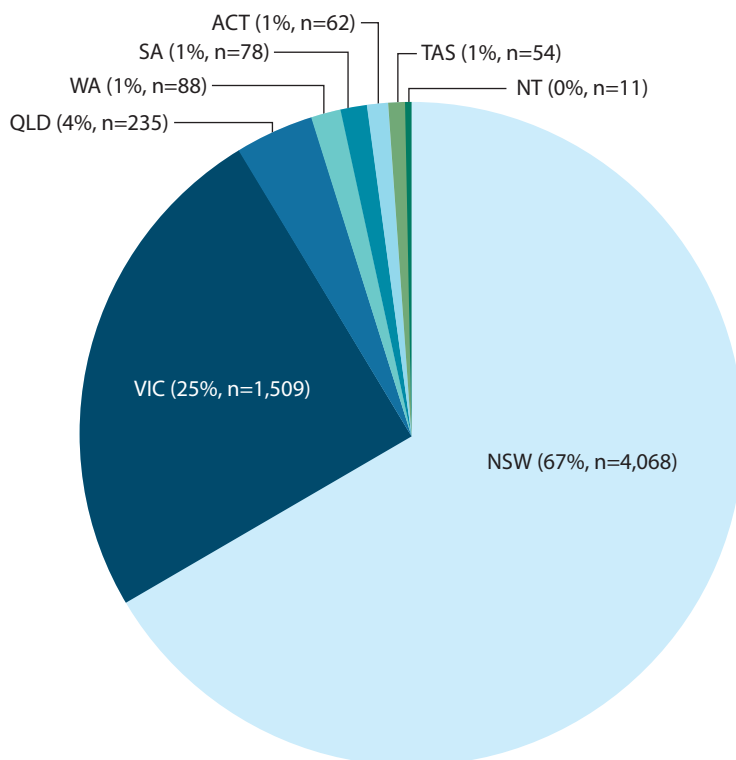
Table 2. Largest six nationality groups for different visa cohorts

International students (n= 5047)	Working Holiday Makers (n= 251)	Temporary Graduate visa holders (n= 212)	Sponsored TSS and 457 visa holders (n= 187)
China (23%)	United Kingdom (16%)	India (32%)	Philippines (25%)
India (19%)	South Korea (10%)	China (9%)	India (17%)
Nepal (7%)	Canada (8%)	Nepal (9%)	Ireland (5%)
Colombia (5%)	United States of America (8%)	Colombia (7%)	United Kingdom (5%)
Indonesia (4%)	France (6%)	Malaysia (6%)	France (4%)
Philippines (3%)	Germany (6%)	South Korea (4%) Vietnam (4%)	Brazil (4%)

Geographic location

Respondents were asked where they lived on 1 March. Two thirds (67%) were in NSW, a quarter (25%) were in Victoria, and 4% were in Queensland. Approximately 1% were in each of the other states and territories other than the Northern Territory (0.2%).

Figure 3. Respondents' state/territory on 1 March (n=6,105)



The overwhelming majority (88%) lived in a capital city. Eight percent lived in or near another city, 4% lived in or near a small town, and 1.4% lived in a remote area.

Gender

A larger proportion of respondents was female (54%). Eleven respondents specified their gender as non-binary.

Year of arrival

A third of respondents (30%) had been living in Australia for approximately 2.5 years or more, since 2017 or earlier (Figure 4). Half (51%) had been in Australia for at least 18 months at the time of the survey. Among international students, close to half (46%) had been here for at least 18 months and a quarter (25%) for approximately 2.5 years or more (since 2018).

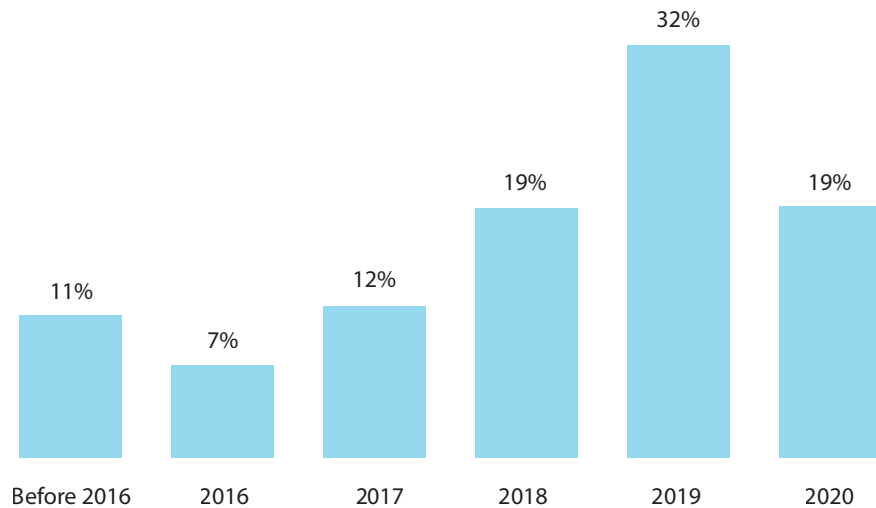


I thought the Australian government treated people with working holiday visas with consumables. And if I go back to my country, I will never come to Australia again. I don't recommend my friends to travel to Australia.



28 year old Korean woman on a Working Holiday visa

Figure 4. Respondents' year of arrival (n=6,105)

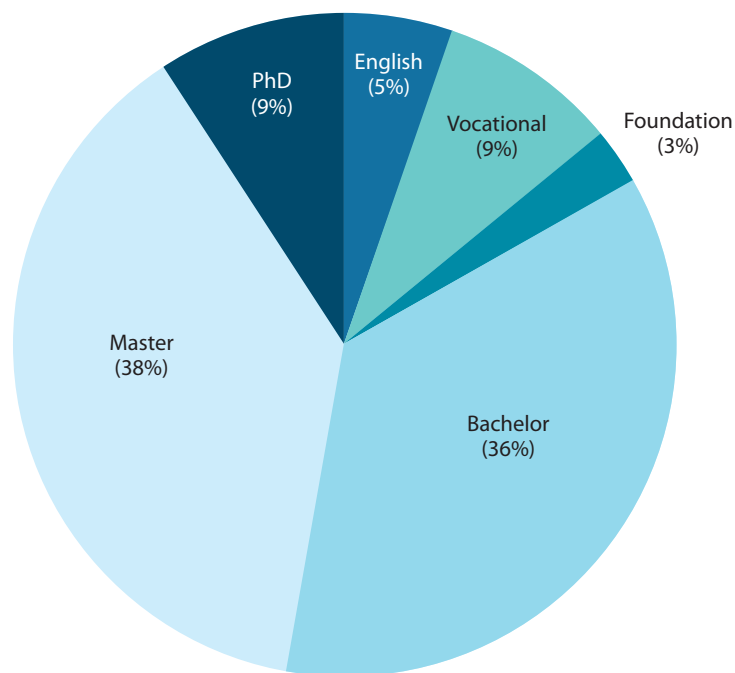


International students' education provider and program of study

International students were asked for the name of their current education institution. A large majority (82%; 4,069 respondents) identified a university and 18% (898 respondents) identified another education provider such as a private college.

International students were also asked the program of study in which they were most recently enrolled. The largest cohort were those studying in Master degree programs (38%) followed by Bachelor degree students (36%) and doctoral students (9%). Fourteen percent of students were enrolled in an English language program or vocational or training program.

Figure 5. International students' program of study at time of survey (n=5,040)



Why respondents stayed in Australia

The survey was open to anyone who had been in Australia on 1 March, 2020. On 3 April, Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated that visitor visa-holders and international students who cannot support themselves in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic should “make [their] way home”.¹¹⁹ At the time of the survey, in July, 92% of respondents were still in Australia. Those who were still in Australia were asked why they stayed (Figure 6).

Practical barriers to leaving Australia and travelling to home city

One in five survey participants (19%) indicated they could not return home because **their country’s border was closed**. Some countries completely barred all individuals, including citizens, from entering the country. For example, Colombia closed its borders to all individuals, including its nationals, from 23 March,¹²⁰ with all international flights suspended until at least 31 August.¹²¹ All Ecuadorean nationals were barred from returning to Ecuador from 16 March.¹²² The impossibility of returning home also arose through the closure of internal regional borders in many countries, leaving many migrants unable to travel to their hometown.

One in five (20%) indicated they could not return home because **there were no flights to their home country**. In some cases, countries suspended incoming international flights altogether. For example, India suspended all international flights from 22 March and, from 7 May, Indian nationals abroad were only able to apply for limited repatriation flights on compelling grounds at their own cost.¹²³ International flights to Nepal were suspended from 22 March until at least September.¹²⁴ Beyond border closers, flight availability for temporary migrants seeking to leave Australia was dramatically reduced in several respects:

- The number of flights out of Australia dropped dramatically, leaving many migrants unable to secure a seat on a flight to their home country. For example, from March, Qantas and Jetstar had cut 90% of international flights.¹²⁵
- It became impossible to fly from Australia to key transit airports such as Hong Kong, Dubai and Singapore.¹²⁶
- Even if flights to a home country were available, many temporary migrants would then be confronted by a lack of flights from the capital to their home town due to suspensions of domestic flights in these countries.
- From March to May, Australian domestic flights to key international airports, such as Sydney, were almost completely suspended, preventing temporary migrants outside major Australian cities from reaching an international departure airport. For example, Jetstar had no flights scheduled from Perth to Sydney until at least June. Virgin suspended all domestic flights except for flights between Sydney and Melbourne, with other routes also just beginning to operate in June.¹²⁷
- Closure of internal Australian state borders also prevented overland access to international departure airports.



Completely left behind. Temporary visa holders in Canada that worked in Canada were offered the same financial support as citizens and residents. I find it appalling in contrast that the Australian government willingly left people like myself behind, despite the fact I had been in my job over 2 years and would have qualified for job keeper.



29 year old male Bachelor’s student from Canada

One in four respondents (26%) indicated they could not return home because they **could not afford the high cost of flights** due to steep price rises during the pandemic. For example, a flight from Sydney to Shanghai on 25 March cost \$7,990.¹²⁸ Flights to India in April cost up to \$3,000¹²⁹ and to Colombia, \$4,500.¹³⁰ A flight to the United Kingdom in April cost \$15,000.¹³¹ This does not include additional costs of travelling to an international airport in Australia, or from the international airport in the migrant's home country to their hometown. For example, one Indonesian migrant worker observed that she could not afford to support herself for the month it would take to travel from Jakarta to her hometown, even if she managed to gather the money to pay for a flight to Jakarta.¹³² In addition to flight costs, some jurisdictions (e.g. India¹³³ and certain cities in China¹³⁴) required incoming travellers to be in quarantine at government facilities for one or two weeks at the traveller's own expense, an insurmountable cost for many temporary visa holders who had exhausted savings.

Over a quarter (28%) stayed in Australia because they perceived it was **unsafe to return home, because of the risk they would contract COVID-19 on the flight or in their home country**. Many temporary migrants in Australia were nationals of some of the worst affected countries during the pandemic, including China, UK, US, India and Brazil. These temporary migrants faced the high risk of COVID-19 infection in their home city, or on the journey home including multiple airports, flights and ground transport.

Inability to risk losing their investment in studies or life in Australia

Most participants stayed in Australia because they could not risk losing their investment in studying or staying in Australia, whether for the duration of their visa or in the longer term.

Among international students, 61% stayed in Australia because they **did not want to suspend their studies** (56% of respondents overall). Many colleges and smaller universities do not offer an option of continuing studies remotely. Having made significant financial and personal investments in their studies in Australia, many international students are unwilling to forfeit their fees paid or risk having to discontinue or prolong their studies by returning to their home countries, not knowing when they can return.¹³⁵ While online courses have been made available for some university courses, students face great difficulties undertaking these courses while overseas, for instance due to the internet firewall in China,¹³⁶ poor internet connectivity and time-zone differences.¹³⁷

International students and other temporary migrants were acutely aware that if they left Australia they would be indefinitely prohibited from returning. Indeed, half of respondents (50%) indicated that they stayed in Australia because they were afraid that **if they left Australia they may not be able to return soon, or at all**. Many temporary visa holders have lived in Australia for many years and integrated into, and extensively contributed to, the Australian community. Many have studied in Australia, worked in Australia, built social communities, and in some cases established a relationship with an Australian partner (8% of survey respondents indicated they stayed in Australia because their partner is here). It is not feasible for many of these longer-term temporary migrants to separate from partners and communities indefinitely, without knowing when they will be able to return to Australia.



I feel the Australian government has been very unaustralian in the way they have treated temporary migrants, like they are not important and disposable. It's understandable they would prioritize Australians, but they could have been more helpful towards migrants like other countries, such as Canada or New Zealand, have done.



30 year old Dutch woman on a Working Holiday visa

Refugees could not return home

Among survey respondents, 63 people (1%) indicated they could not leave Australia because they were a refugee and could not return to their home countries due to a fear of persecution, torture, or death upon return.

Figure 6. Why respondents stayed in Australia during COVID-19 (n=5,638)



Respondents' work in Australia during COVID-19

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their work in Australia on 1 March, 2020 and subsequently.

Respondents' work in Australia on 1 March 2020

On 1 March, 50% of respondents were working in Australia. This included 90% of respondents on employer-sponsored TSS or 457 visas, 79% of Temporary Graduate visa holders, 72% of Working Holiday Makers and 56% of refugees and people seeking asylum on Bridging Visa E, TPV or SHEV. It also included 46% of international students. However, because 21% of international student respondents (1,061 respondents) had only arrived in Australia in 2020, there would also likely be a substantial further proportion of students who were looking for work or had intended (and needed) to find work imminently. A separate recent study by the authors found that among international students who had been in Australia for more than 3 months, 65% had worked in a paid job.¹³⁸

By far the most common jobs held by respondents on 1 March were in hospitality, including as waiters, kitchen hands, food servers or chefs. Almost a third (30%) of all respondents were working in these jobs, including 29% of international students, 26% of graduates, 37% of Working Holiday Makers and 37% of TSS/457 visa holders.

//

Absolutely discarded and left to fend with no help. Thank you, I paid you, I worked for you, I paid taxes and this is how you treat me?

//

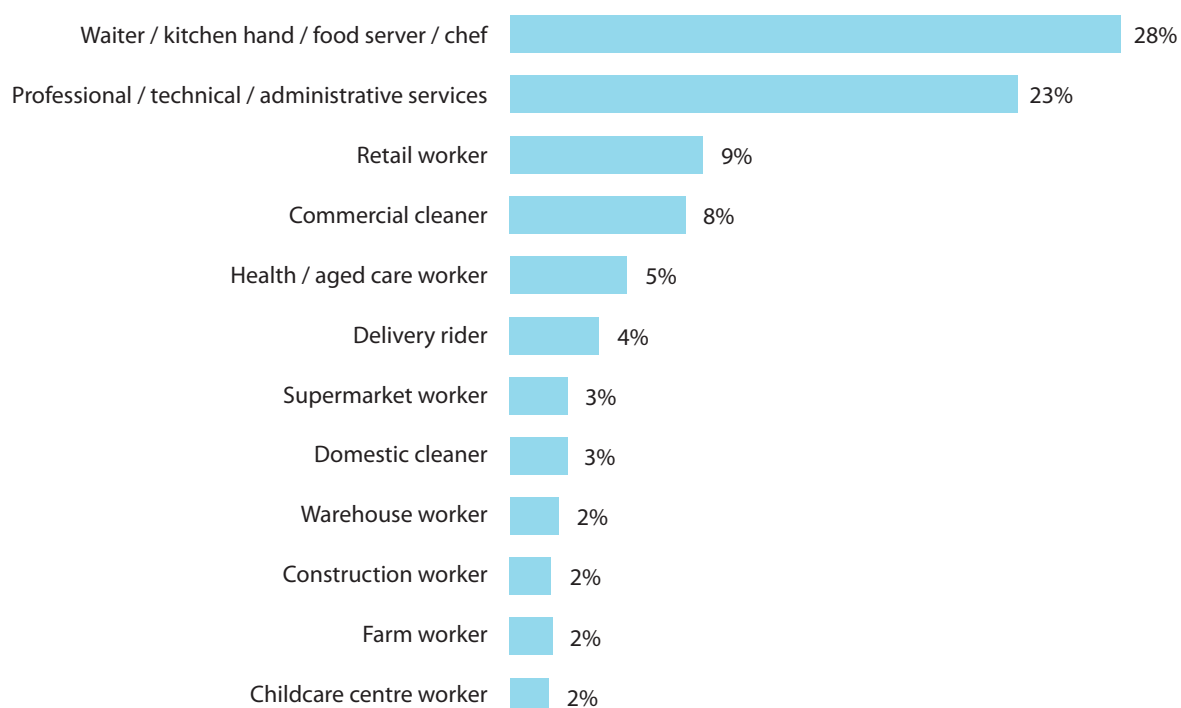
25 year old Indian man on a student visa

A fifth of respondents (22%) held administrative roles or jobs in professional and technical services. This included 38% of graduates and 44% of TSS/457 visa holders.

Nine percent held jobs in retail, including notable cohorts of international students (10%), graduates (6%) and Working Holiday Makers (5%). Eight percent held jobs in commercial cleaning, including notable cohorts of international students (9%) and graduates (7%). Five percent worked in healthcare or aged care jobs, including notable cohorts of international students (6%), graduates (5%), and TSS/457 visa holders (4%). Four percent worked as delivery riders, including notable cohorts of international students (5%) and Working Holiday Makers (2%).

While only 2% of all respondents worked in agriculture or horticulture on 1 March, this comprised a quarter of Working Holiday Makers.

Figure 7. Jobs held by respondents on 1 March, for jobs selected by more than 50 respondents (n=2,862)



Job loss, or loss of hours or shifts, during COVID-19 restrictions

Seventy percent of respondents either lost their job or most of their hours or shifts after 1 March (54% lost their job and a further 16% lost most hours/shifts). A further 13% of respondents lost some of their hours or shifts.

Almost a third (31%) of respondents working in Australia on 1 March had held their job for 12 months or more -- the threshold for eligibility for Jobkeeper for casual employees. Nearly two thirds (63%) of this cohort of long-term employees lost their job or most of their hours or shifts.

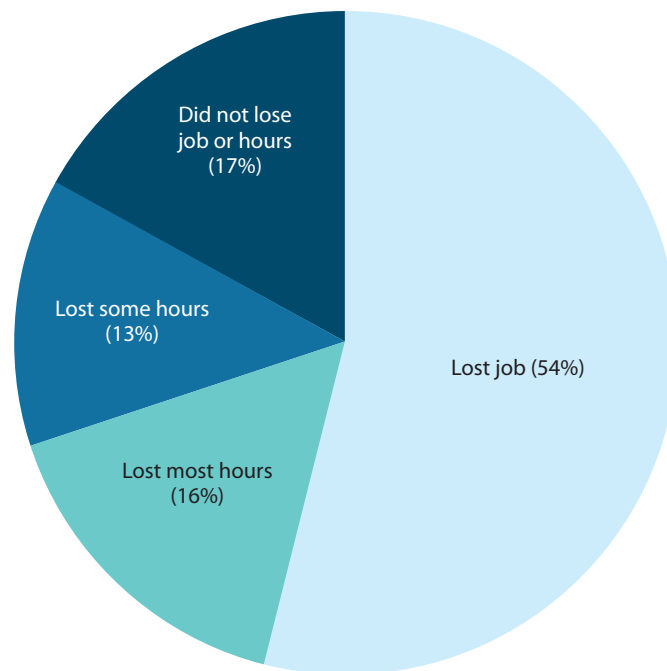


Really bad. When the PM said on national TV that we had to go back home I felt sad, angry and betrayed. I felt unprotected and completely vulnerable. My country it's so far and its border are still closed for nationals, in my home country the unemployment rate is above 25%.



Colombian English language student

Figure 8. Loss of job or hours/shifts after 1 March for all respondents who were working on 1 March (n=2,782)

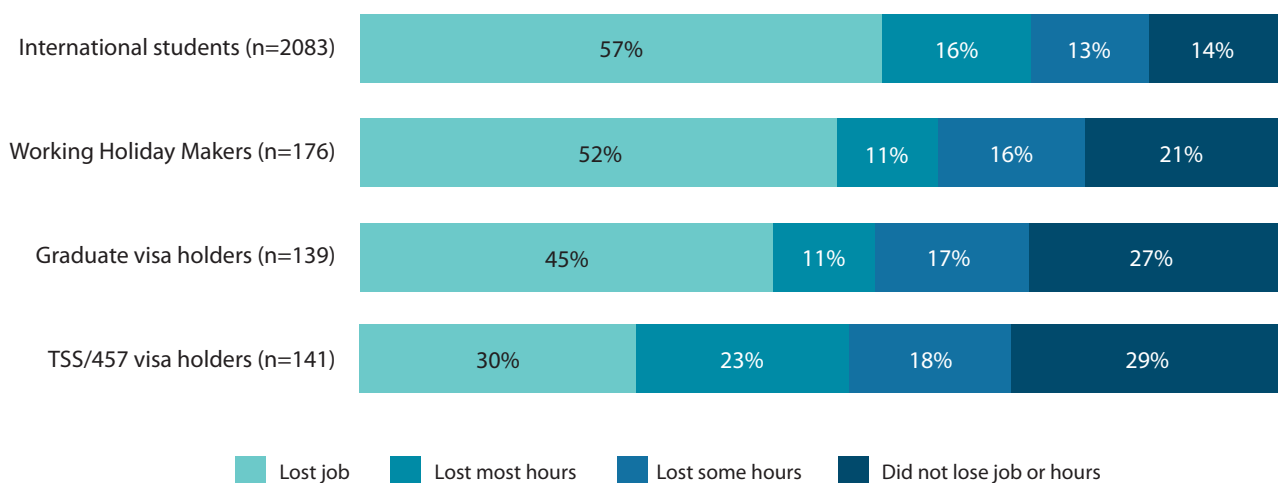


Job loss for different visa cohorts

International students were the worst affected by loss of work. Among the 2,083 international students who were working on 1 March, almost three quarters (73%) either lost their job or most of their hours or shifts (57% lost their job and a further 16% lost most of their hours/shifts). Only 14% retained their job without any reduction of hours.

By contrast, international students who were members of a union fared strikingly better in relation to loss of work. Of the 93 international students who were union members and who were working on 1 March, only 38% lost their job and a further 23% reported losing most of their hours. However, 24% reported that they kept their job and did not lose any hours.

Figure 9. Loss of job or hours/shifts after 1 March for different visa holders



Job loss by industry

Job loss was particularly severe among the 804 respondents working as waiters, kitchen hands, food servers and chefs. The overwhelming majority (85%) lost their job or most of their hours/shifts (67% lost their job and a further 18% lost most of their hours). Only 4% indicated that they kept their job and did not lose any hours/shifts.

Commercial cleaners (213 respondents) were also severely affected, with three quarters (75%) losing their job or most of their hours/shifts (63% lost their job and a further 12% lost most of their hours). Fifteen percent kept their job and did not lose any hours/shifts.

Job loss by nationality

Among the large nationality cohorts, loss of work was especially severe among temporary migrants from certain countries. Overall, including those who were not working on 1 March to begin with, 33% of all respondents either lost their job or most of their hours after 1 March. By contrast, three quarters (75%) of all Nepalese respondents either lost their job or most of their hours, and more than half (52%) of all Indian respondents either lost their job or most of their hours. This is explained in part by the fact that these nationalities included larger proportions of respondents who were working on 1 March, and in part by the jobs these nationals held.

Exploitative and unsafe working conditions

Prior to COVID-19, workplace exploitation was already widespread among temporary migrants in Australia with systemic underpayment and exposure to dangerous work practices well documented.¹³⁹ Their willingness to remain in dangerous or exploitative workplaces may have increased during COVID-19 as they faced acute financial need with fewer jobs available and no financial safety net in case of job loss. For employer-sponsored visa holders, loss of employment would lead to visa cancellation if they could not quickly find another job, rendering them even more vulnerable to exploitation.¹⁴⁰

Survey respondents who were working in Australia on 1 March reported the following changed conditions in their job at some point after 1 March:

- One in five (21%) reported a reduced hourly wage;
- One in ten (11%) did unpaid work;
- One in seven (13%) were forced to do new tasks they didn't want to do or weren't comfortable with.

One in seven (15%) of all respondents reported that since 1 March they had performed work in return for food and housing rather than wages. This included the 50% who were not working on 1 March. While this was predictably far more common among backpackers (29%), working for food/housing was also reported by 14% of students, 12% of graduate visa holders and 10% of TSS or 457 visa holders.

Many international students and other temporary migrants work in jobs that are dangerous with poor workplace health and safety practices. A substantial proportion of respondents who were working during the pandemic reported a range of risks to their own health as well as broader public health risks. Among respondents who continued working after 1 March :

//

As a taxpayer for over five years I feel as though I am more or less disposable to this country and government and am seriously considering leaving.

//

British woman on a TSS visa

24%

were not able to observe social distancing in their workplace;

37%

of those in workplaces in which there was a risk of contracting COVID-19 were not provided with proper protective equipment (PPE);

14%

indicated they could access paid leave if they had to self-isolate or felt unwell. For those with acute financial insecurity, this provided a strong disincentive to staying home if they were unwell.¹⁴¹

Survey respondents' inability to pay for essential needs

Many temporary migrants quickly fell into serious financial distress as a result of lack of work and, for students, diminished family support from home. Indeed, a Unions NSW report on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions during the first weeks of lockdown revealed immediately high levels of financial insecurity with large numbers already skipping meals on a regular basis.¹⁴²

Impact of COVID-19 on respondents' financial resources

Three quarters (74%) of all respondents indicated that they need to work in Australia to support their basic living needs such as food and rent. This included 74% of international students, 90% of Working Holiday Makers, 91% of graduates, and 96% of TSS/457 visa holders.

Among respondents who indicated they could not pay for essential needs (discussed below), 37% indicated that this was because they had lost their job or worked fewer shifts or hours. A third (32%) stated that they could not pay for essential needs because they could not get a job.

Among international students, a third (32%) indicated that they were unable to pay for these expenses because their family could no longer send them the same amount of money as they had been sending before COVID-19.

Inability to meet basic needs

With no salary or government income support, diminished family support from home, and diminishing or exhausted savings, many temporary visa holders were left unable to meet basic living expenses. Recent research indicates that paying rent was a major worry for many international students even before the pandemic.¹⁴³ News reports have documented 'some students ... eating once a day and were just trying to survive'.¹⁴⁴ Key service providers have noted that refugees and individuals seeking asylum are now particularly at risk of going homeless and hungry.¹⁴⁵

Survey respondents were asked whether, since March, they were unable to pay for a range of essential items. Almost two thirds (63%) of all respondents indicated they were unable to pay for at least one of these. This included high proportions of international students, and particularly high proportions of people seeking asylum and refugees (though this was a smaller cohort of 32 respondents who answered this question):

//

They didn't consider us as human. We're just some aliens who don't belong here. No rent help, no food help, not even a single penny. I have been surviving with my superannuation money till now. Thank god they at least decided to give it.

//

20 year old male Nepalese Bachelor's student



Almost half of all respondents (48%) were unable to pay for rent, including 48% of international students, 54% of graduates and 63% of people seeking asylum and refugees;



28% were unable to pay for meals/food, including 30% of international students and 53% of people seeking asylum and refugees;



A quarter (25%) were unable to pay for phone credit/data or internet, including 25% of international students, 29% of graduates and 59% of people seeking asylum and refugees;



One in five (21%) were unable to pay for transport, including 22% of international students, 23% of graduates and 44% of people seeking asylum and refugees;



18% were unable to pay for heating or electricity, including 18% of international students, 25% of graduates and 44% of people seeking asylum and refugees;



15% were unable to pay to see a doctor, including 14% of international students, 23% of graduates and 38% of people seeking asylum and refugees; and



One in ten (10%) were unable to pay for essential medicine, including 9% of international students, 15% of graduates and 47% of people seeking asylum and refugees

Respondents' housing and homelessness in Australia during COVID-19

Temporary visa holders in share houses and other private accommodation were suddenly at risk of homelessness if they were unable to pay rent, with many reporting early in the lockdown that they feared imminent homelessness.¹⁴⁶ Some international students who lived on campus also suddenly found themselves with nowhere to go when colleges and dorms suddenly shut down.¹⁴⁷ People seeking asylum and refugees also faced insecure housing situations.¹⁴⁸ The Jesuit Refugee Service feared the situation, if unchanged, would be 'catastrophic' for the 3000 women, children, and men it serves.¹⁴⁹ Undocumented workers continued to work and live in crowded and cramped conditions, which exposed them to heightened risks of contracting COVID-19 and prevented appropriate social distancing.¹⁵⁰

Leaving housing

As noted above, 48% of international students indicated that at some point since 1 March, they have been unable to pay for rent. A quarter (23%) indicated that they had changed housing since 1 March. Although the large majority (77%) have so far been able to remain in their housing, this may change as students exhaust savings and loans from friends and family and/or moratoriums on evictions expire. Indeed, 12% indicated that they already had to leave their housing because they were evicted or unable to pay their rent, including because they could no longer cover the rent of a flatmate who was no longer in Australia.



I find it sad how the PM wants internationals to go home and does not give any financial support even though many have been working here for years and paid taxes as any other Australian. We are all in this together and everyone is doing their part to stop spreading the virus, not only Australians. I feel like the government does not acknowledge that and neglects all kinds of foreigners.



23 year old German Master's student

Homelessness

For a substantial proportion of international students, their living situation became extremely precarious. One in seven international students (14%) indicated that for some period of time since 1 March they had been effectively homeless. Among 4,009 international student respondents:

- 419 students (10%) had slept on a couch or the floor in someone's house
- 100 students (2%) had slept in a car
- 95 students (2%) had slept in a building on campus
- 47 students (1%) had slept at work
- 41 students (1%) were homeless in other circumstances
- 24 students (1%) were on the streets for one or more nights
- 21 students (1%) had slept in a homeless shelter.

Other temporary visa holders had also experienced homelessness during this period, including 12% of the 144 respondents who were on Temporary Graduate visas.

Among all respondents, close to half (42%) indicated that at some point since 1 March they had been afraid they would be homeless:

- 55% of 29 people seeking asylum and refugees feared they would be homeless;
- 48% of 144 Temporary Graduate visa holders feared they would be homeless;
- 43% of 4,009 international students feared they would be homeless;
- 43% of 208 Working Holiday Makers feared they would be homeless.

Access to rent reductions

Although the Australian government announced a six month moratorium on evictions, and some states banned rent increases, the processes to access this relief were often unclear. Some found it difficult to know their rights as renters.¹⁵¹ Others did not seek any rental relief at all for fear of landlords' evicting them for simply asking.

Among the 1,931 international students who indicated they had not been able to pay their rent at some point since 1 March, just under a quarter (23%) received a rent reduction from their landlord. A much larger proportion (41%) indicated they had requested, and were refused, a rent reduction. Just over a third indicated they did not ask their landlord for a rent reduction because they were afraid of losing their housing (20%) or for other reasons (16%).

Abuse and violence at home during COVID-19

The lockdown placed many women in the community at greater risk of family violence. Temporary visa-holders have limited access to temporary emergency accommodation and often few other options to relocate. According to a survey conducted by Domestic Violence NSW, since the pandemic began, 45 percent of workers looking after women on temporary visas reported their clients had experienced more violence.¹⁵² Sixty four percent observed that clients had less access to income, food and essentials.¹⁵³

//

Hopeless, lonely, wronged and without any support after 5 years paying my taxes and been part of the community.

//

Brazilian man studying in a vocational program

Temporary migrants were also at greater risk of harassment or violence when confined with others in share houses. Share houses are by far the most common living situation for international students in Australia.¹⁵⁴ The majority of survey respondents were living in share houses when restrictions on movement were imposed, forcing them to remain at home with housemates and limited personal space or other places they could go if they felt unsafe. This included 57% of international students, 49% of Working Holiday Makers and 50% of graduates. In addition, close to one in five (18%) of those living in share houses reported their accommodation had become more crowded since 1 March.

Overall, 438 respondents (9%) indicated that they had experienced verbal abuse or harassment in their home. Among these respondents, 88% reported that this abuse started during COVID-19 or got worse during COVID-19 (52% and 36% respectively).

In addition, 90 respondents indicated that they had experienced physical abuse or violence in their home, among whom a third (34%) were living in Australia with their spouse. Within these 90 respondents, 82% indicated that this started during COVID-19 or got worse during COVID-19 (46% and 36% respectively).

Though these incidences are likely under-reported for a range of reasons,¹⁵⁵ it is clear that for the overwhelming majority of those who did report violence or harassment, this started or was exacerbated during COVID-19.

Access to emergency support

Lacking funds for food, housing and other essential expenses, and without financial support from the federal government, many temporary visa holders sought other ways to meet their basic survival needs. Organisations that provide assistance with work or other issues were now regularly approached by temporary migrants for other kinds of help such as food.¹⁵⁶ Community organisations and charities supporting people seeking asylum, in particular, reported “dramatic increases in demand on their welfare services for food, housing, and essential healthcare.”¹⁵⁷ Some people seeking asylum were forced to sell their belongings to provide food for their families.¹⁵⁸ According to Foodbank Australia, by May 2020, demand for emergency food has risen about 50% compared with February, an increase substantially driven by need among temporary migrants, including international students.¹⁵⁹ Community organisations were providing care packages including emergency food and winter clothing to international students since late March.

Survey respondents who indicated they were unable to pay for at least one essential need were asked whether they sought emergency support since March, from where and with what outcomes. Those who did not seek support were asked the reasons why this was the case.

Respondents indicated that charities and other organisations provided food and other forms of emergency relief. However, education providers (and especially universities) were the source of the overwhelming majority of support received.

Since March, a third (33%) of all respondents indicated they had sought emergency support to meet their essential needs.¹⁶⁰ This included 23% of graduates (n=149), 24% of TSS/457 visa holders (n=135) and 29% of Working Holiday Makers (n=209). Among international students this figure was higher, with 37% of 4,133 international students having sought emergency support.

Among international students, 80% received no emergency cash support. Among the 20% who received



I was treated as a cash cow, the gov only wanted us to pay the full tuition and pay the high tax and they won't provide any help or support to us.



23 year old Chinese woman in a Master's program

cash support from any source, 40% received under \$500 and a further 29% received \$501- \$1000. Only 6% of international students overall received emergency support of more than \$1000.

One in six (16%) international students had received emergency food support. Smaller proportions received emergency assistance to pay bills (8%) or emergency housing (2%).

The most common source from which international students sought support was their education provider (23%). However, this varied depending on where the student was studying. Among 3,319 international students at universities, 26% received support from their education provider. Among the 511 who indicated the amount of support, 39% received \$500 or less, 30% received \$501-\$1000 and 31% received over \$1000.

Among 752 international students at other education institutions such as VET and English-language colleges, 11% received assistance from their education provider. Among the 51 students who indicated the amount of support, 51% received \$500 or less, 24% received \$501-\$1000 and 25% received over \$1000.

Close to one in seven (13%) sought emergency support from family and friends -- sources which may become less available to them in the longer term.

Table 3 . Proportions of respondents who sought assistance from different organisations (n=4,133) (respondents could select more than one, or none)

Source of support	Proportion of all respondents (n=4,928)	Number of respondents	Proportion of international students (n=4,133)	Number of international students
Education provider	20%	983	23%	960
Friend/family in Australia	13%	626	13%	543
Food bank	5%	227	4%	183
State government	4%	188	4%	171
Australian charity, church, community group	3%	164	3%	123
My ethnic, cultural, religious community	2%	119	2%	95
Red Cross	2%	114	2%	76
Local council	1%	34	1%	32
I don't know	1%	37	1%	31
Other	3%	133	2%	97



Completely forgotten. They don't care about us. We're just cash cows waiting to be 'milked'



27 year old Argentinian Working Holiday Maker

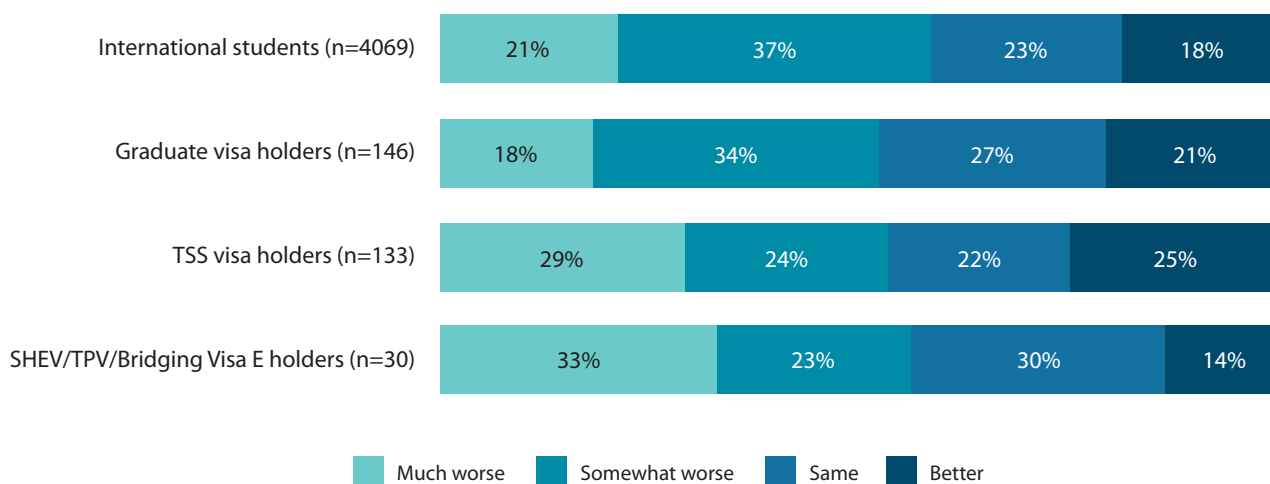
Respondents who indicated they were unable to pay for at least one essential need and who did not seek emergency support from anyone were asked to indicate the reasons they did not ask for support. Among all respondents who answered this question, a substantial majority (71%) indicated that they did not know where to go or it was too hard, 21% said they felt embarrassed to ask, 11% stated it wasn't a significant problem.

Close to a third (29%) indicated they did not seek emergency support because they were worried it might affect their visa. Visa concerns were a more common barrier among college students (33%) than university students (27%), and even more common for graduates (38%). Surprisingly, visa concerns were also identified by considerable proportions of TSS visa holders (26%) and Working Holiday Makers (24%).

Financial outlook: the next 6 months

Participants were asked what their financial situation will look like in 6 months, with their responses revealing that for many temporary migrants, their financial crisis is both immediate and rapidly worsening. The vast majority of respondents (80%) believed their financial situation will not improve over the next 6 months. Well over half (57%) believed their situation will be somewhat or much worse in 6 months.

Figure 10. Respondents' beliefs as to whether their financial situation would improve in 6 months



Perceptions of financial outlook varied somewhat between nationality groups, and was particularly bleak for some. For example, the proportion of international students who believe their financial situation will be worse in 6 months rose to three quarters (74%) of Chinese students, Korean students (76%) and Taiwanese students (74%), and two thirds (66%) of Nepalese students. This included 33% of Nepalese students and 41% of Korean students who believe their situation will be much worse. Only 7% of Chinese students, 10% of Korean students, 2% of Taiwanese students and 11% of Vietnamese students believe their financial situation will improve.

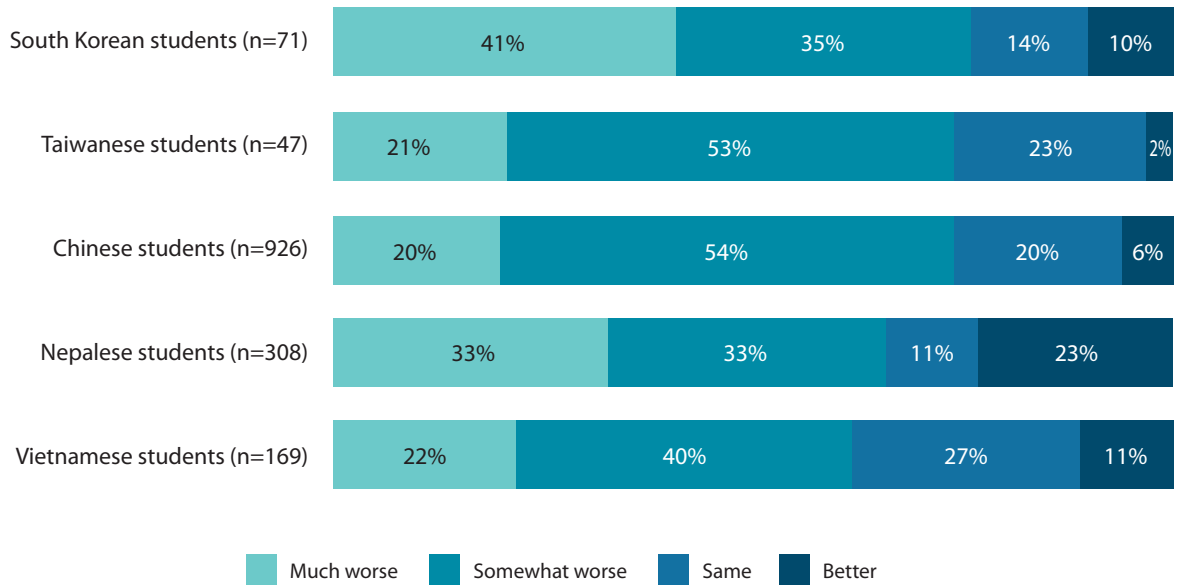


Morrison doesn't care about international students, what he cares about is the money of international students. International students are just ATMs of the Australian government.



Female Bachelor's student from China

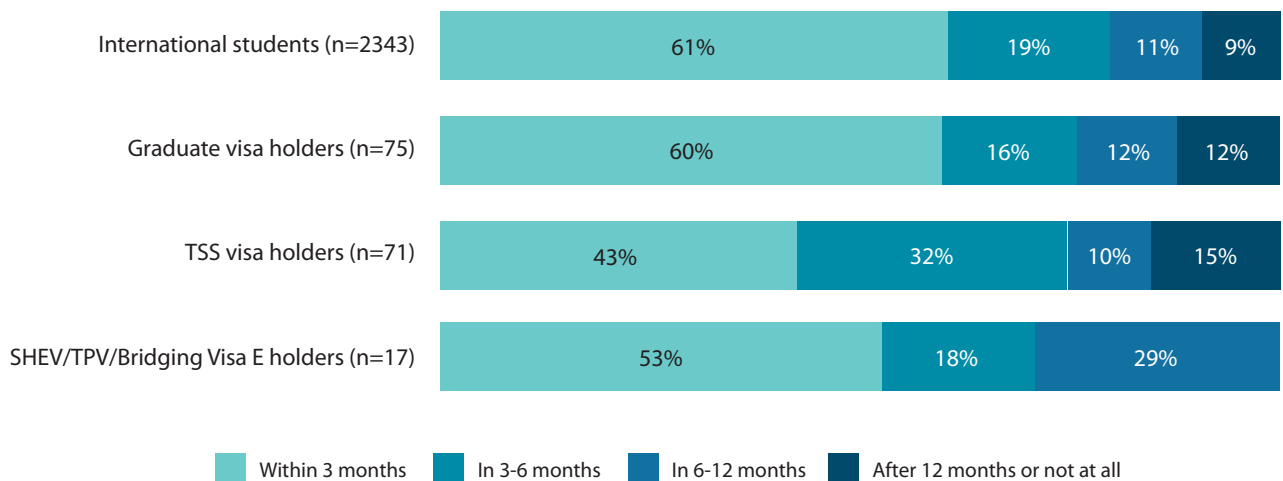
Figure 11. Examples of nationalities with a substantial number of international student respondents, among whom particularly large cohorts perceive their financial situation will worsen in 6 months



Respondents who believe their situation will be worse or much worse were then asked when they believe they will run out of funds (through wages, savings or family support) to pay for rent, food or other essentials. Among those who believed their financial situation would worsen, well over half (59%) indicated they would run out of funds in 3 months. Over three quarters (78%) indicated they would run out of funds in 6 months.

As a proportion of all international students, over a third (35%) believed that they will run out of funds in 3 months.

Figure 12. When respondents believe they will run out of funds, among those who believe their financial situation will worsen in 6 months



//
I feel like we're just simply being hung dry for cash.
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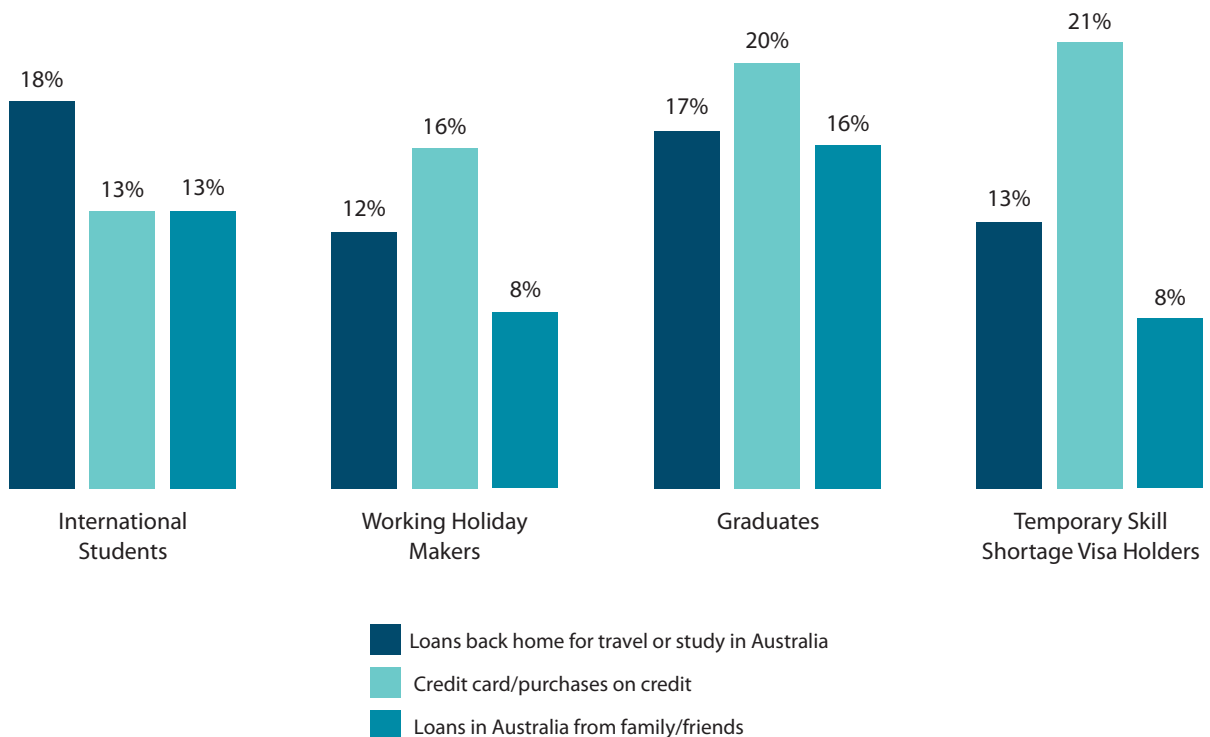
20 year old Indonesian Bachelor's student

Debt

Many temporary visa holders took on debt to cover basic costs, while others found themselves no longer able to repay pre-existing debts due to loss of employment income or decreased financial support from family in their home country. International students in particular had already paid visa costs and non-refundable university tuition fees. Some temporary migrants were locked into annual rental contracts.

Half of survey participants (51%) indicated that they now have debt that they cannot repay. This included 51% of international students, 41% of Working Holiday Makers, 55% of graduates and 49% of TSS/457 visa holders. The three most common forms of debt for the largest visa cohorts are indicated in Figure 13 below. As temporary migrants' financial situation worsens (see above), those already in debt will likely fall further into arrears, and greater numbers of temporary migrants will likely take on new debt. Some of those who have borrowed from family and friends in the first few months of the crisis may not be able to continue to do so. In addition, some international students in the short term may have drawn from money set aside for future tuition, and may soon need to take on debt to continue their studies or discontinue their course.

Figure 13. Four most common forms of debt for different visa cohorts (n=4,540)



Inability to pay student course fees

Some international students were unable to pay their university fees altogether and faced the prospect of not completing their studies.¹⁶¹ This placed their student visa at risk of cancellation, and exposed them to the possibility of immigration detention.¹⁶²

//

The message from your PM was very clear. You are welcome once you have money, otherwise, go to your country!

//

Iranian male international student

Racism

Reports have indicated a spike in repeated and public incidents of racism linked to COVID-19, particularly against members of the Asian-Australian community.¹⁶³ According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, dozens of people from across the country reported having witnessed or been involved in racially charged incidents in supermarkets, on the streets and in their cars during the initial lockdown period.¹⁶⁴ Some said they had been targeted by derogatory or racially abusive comments, and others had been coughed on, bumped into, and insulted in public places.¹⁶⁵ One in four people who lodged racial discrimination complaints to the Commission in the two months to April reported being targeted as a result of COVID-19.¹⁶⁶ Many reported being harassed and racially abused in their places of work because of their 'Asian appearance'.¹⁶⁷

Incidence of experiences of racism among respondents

Survey participants were asked whether they had experienced racism or discrimination in Australia since 1 March which took the form of: "**harassment/verbal abuse**"; "**people avoiding me or staring at me because of my appearance**"; or "**other forms of racism or discrimination**".

A substantial proportion of respondents indicated that they had experienced racism since 1 March in Australia:

- Almost a quarter (23%) indicated that they had experienced racism in the form of verbal abuse. This included 25% of international students and 26% of Temporary Graduate visa holders.
- A quarter (25%) indicated that they had experienced racism in the form of people avoiding them because of their appearance.

More than half of Chinese respondents (52%) reported that since 1 March they had experienced racist verbal abuse and/or people avoiding them because of their appearance. More than a third (35%) of Chinese respondents had been verbally abused - a substantially higher proportion than other nationalities.

Nationals of other East Asian and South East Asian countries (Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia and Hong Kong) reported the next highest incidence of racism since 1 March, with over 40% having experienced verbal abuse and/or people avoiding them because of their appearance. At least a third of nationals from each of these countries reported that people had avoided them and approximately a quarter reported verbal abuse.

Nationals of South Asian countries reported the next highest incidence of racism with approximately 20% of those from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka reporting that people had avoided them because of their appearance and between 14 and 22% reporting that they had experienced verbal abuse.

//

The PM said international students should just leave or something. Since then every person who has contacted me for advice on Postgrad details I have said don't choose Australia. My boyfriend studies in NZ the treatment there was amazing. Everyone was looked after and no such statements were said. After Covid NZ has become a more respected study destination for Indian students as compared to AU

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25 year old female Master's student from India

Table 4. Proportion of respondents who reported experiencing verbal abuse or people avoiding them because of their appearance (for nationalities with more than 75 respondents)

Nationality	“Harassment/ verbal abuse”	“People avoided or stared at me because of my appearance”	Proportion who experienced at least one of these	Number of respondents who answered question
China	35%	34%	52%	963
Malaysia	25%	41%	52%	161
South Korea	12%	38%	45%	98
Taiwan	26%	33%	45%	78
Vietnam	23%	39%	44%	186
Indonesia	24%	35%	42%	184
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	21%	35%	41%	95
Nepal	22%	22%	32%	328
Philippines	16%	25%	32%	186
India	17%	19%	27%	855
Bangladesh	16%	20%	27%	81
Pakistan	17%	17%	24%	79
Colombia	19%	8%	22%	243
Sri Lanka	14%	18%	21%	84
Brazil	17%	8%	21%	85

Women were more likely than men to experience racism in the form of people avoiding them (26% of women, 23% of men) whereas men were more likely to experience racism in the form of verbal abuse (25% of men, 22% of women). Among Chinese students, this pattern was more stark with 39% of women reporting racism in the form of people avoiding them compared with 28% of men, and 37% of men reporting verbal abuse compared with 33% of women.



They don't see us. They can't hear us. We are paying taxes, we are one of the foundation of economy but the government can't help us when it comes to crisis. This is why the reason that we can not recommend Australia anymore for the people who wants to study here.



Filipina student in a vocational program

Personal accounts of racism

Survey participants were given an opportunity to provide details of their experiences of racism during COVID-19. Participants shared over 1,600 personal experiences of verbal harassment, physical abuse, or being shunned in public spaces, workplaces and housing.

Many survey respondents recounted being targets of derogatory and xenophobic slurs with the onset of the pandemic such as being told they were “coronavirus”, “fking corona”, “Chinese virus”, “Asian virus”, “Chink virus”, “virus” or “Wuhan” when walking on the street, commuting on public transport, shopping for groceries, driving or at work. One Chinese woman noted that “a stranger shouted in my face that I am the virus in the supermarket”. Others reported being asked “how was Wuhan?” or called “Ching chang chong kind of things” or “f*cking China” or told to “go back to China”. Another international student observed that this kind of harassment “is regular thing for Asian people in Australia”.

Many temporary migrants reported being treated as though they were personally infected with COVID-19 by virtue of their Asian or other foreign appearance. One respondent recalled being told: “Don’t get too close to Asian, they spread the virus”. Another described how “I have seen people shouted, you brought virus to Australia when I walked on the street”. Someone also recounted an experience where their “landlord refused to let me move in because she was afraid I was carrying the virus and could spread to her family”.

Indeed, many respondents spoke about their experiences of racial abuse because they “looked Chinese” or “looked Asian”. As one British visa holder of Asian background described:

I’m Asian but I am not Chinese. Since the virus got countries on lockdown, there have been so many cases where ethnic minorities like Asians have been the target for hate speech. I still live in fear that I am not welcomed here and I would be harmed by people. I was called a lot of Chinese words in mocking voices in Sydney. The sad part is I get surprised if someone (of white origin) speaks to me normally.

A Vietnamese international student likewise recounted:

white people here in Australia often mocks me with Chinese language ‘ching chong’, ‘ni hao’.. My recent internship, one of the people there literally asked me not to use ‘Good day mate’ since it’s not for Asian people!

Hundreds of respondents described being targets of harassment because they chose to wear a face mask as a public health precaution. As survey respondents pointed out, the Australian government was slow to recommend wearing masks in public or make them compulsory as a condition of entry to venues or transport. Countless respondents described experiences of being stared at, being threatened, ridiculed, abused, mocked, shouted at and getting “strange looks” because they wore a mask. As one participant described: “Sometimes people just don’t like to even walk by me. No one has ever said me anything but their actions make me feel uncomfortable sometimes in public places”.

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I felt very upset and confused. I know before coming to Australia I had written that my family will be able to support me but this is a global pandemic that affected every country, every people. The way the prime minister of Australia handle the situation I was very disappointed and regret my decision in coming here.

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19 year old male Bachelor’s student from Nepal

Experiences of racism were not confined to Asian respondents. For example, a Cameroonian woman in Victoria recalled being told “Africans caused the second wave” in that state.

In addition to these cases of verbal abuse, many respondents recounted alarming experiences of physical abuse, some of which were particularly serious. Some respondents described being victims of assaults such as being punched, hit, kicked and shoved. For example, one participant recounted an incident where “[p]eople were saying some racist comments and pushed me, saying that I was the reason for covid and I should go away”. A number of respondents said they had been victims of people throwing eggs, food, rocks, cans or bottles at them. For example, one Chinese respondent described how “I have been harassed by teenagers and throwing eggs on my way home from school”. One respondent recalled: “I had a lady kick my leg asking me not to sit in the tram opposite her. However, when another person came (looked like an Australian resident), she did not react to them. Other bystanders apologised to me on her behalf but this was hurtful”.

A number of temporary migrants described being deliberately spat at or coughed on by passers-by on the street or commuters on public transport. As one respondent described:

I am Asian, one time an old Caucasian lady saw me walking on the street and raised her arms walking past me 'leave me with this distance'. She did not do that to other passengers but only me. When people saw me wear mask they would pretend coughing hard in front of me. And yes there is a lot of staring since COVID situation.

Respondents of a range of nationalities reported being regularly told to “get out of Australia” or “go back to China”. As one Colombian student put it: “I received many comments from Australian[s] telling me leave the country, go back your home, ask you[r] family for money, respect the Australian people.” Others described experiences of “[r]andom people shouting ‘go back home’ to my face” such as “f*ck off back home”. An Indian student recalled being told “to go back to my country by random strangers on the street while working as an uber eats delivery man”.

Other respondents shared broader experiences of racism in their workplace, including those working as a cleaner, supermarket worker, home care worker or food deliverer. Many described enduring “verbal attacks, discrimination, bullying”, “jokes about my accent and my skin colour”, “verbal abuse [from customers] for enforcing the covid safety measures”, being “told to go home, colleagues say I don’t belong here”. One respondent recounted that “people ask me things in a derogatory way just because I was the cleaner or they noticed my latin background”. One Bangladeshi man described racism as a “standard work hazard in retail”. One female international student from Sri Lanka stated:

I was asked to return home because 'I take jobs which are for Australians' and that I don't belong here. I have never felt so lonely and depressed before. I felt so unwelcomed in this country.

Likelihood to recommend Australia following COVID-19 experience

The cumulative financial, physical and psychological impact of their experiences during the pandemic has clearly soured temporary migrants on Australia. Among international students, graduates and Working Holiday Makers, 59% indicated that following their experience during COVID-19, they were less likely or much less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study or have a working holiday (see Figure 14).

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***Not very pleased after hearing what the prime minister said in his speech.
Felt helpless and regret spending heaps of money studying here.***

//

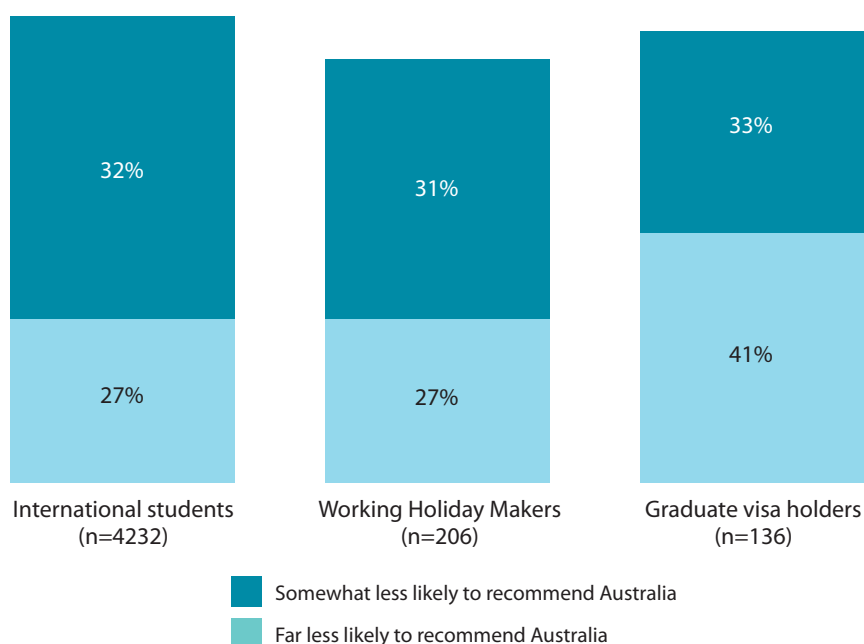
Sri Lankan woman studying in a Master’s program

International students and graduates

In total, 59% of international students were less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study following their experience during COVID-19. This includes 27% who were much less likely to recommend Australia, and 32% who were somewhat less likely to do so.

Even more strikingly, three quarters (74%) of Temporary Graduate visa holders were now less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study, including 41% who were much less likely to recommend Australia, and 33% who were somewhat less likely to do so. This is especially significant, given that the prospect of a Temporary Graduate visa is marketed as a significant drawcard for international students to select Australia over other study destinations.

Figure 14. Proportion of international students, graduates and Working Holiday Makers who were less likely to recommend Australia as a destination for study or a working holiday



Among international students and graduates who experienced racism (either through verbal harassment or more subtle forms such as people staring at or avoiding them), a substantially greater proportion were less likely to recommend Australia following their experience during COVID-19. Among those who did not experience racism, 18% were much less likely to recommend Australia and 30% were somewhat less likely to do so. However, among those who reported an experience of racism, 37% were much less likely to recommend Australia and 34% were somewhat less likely to do so.

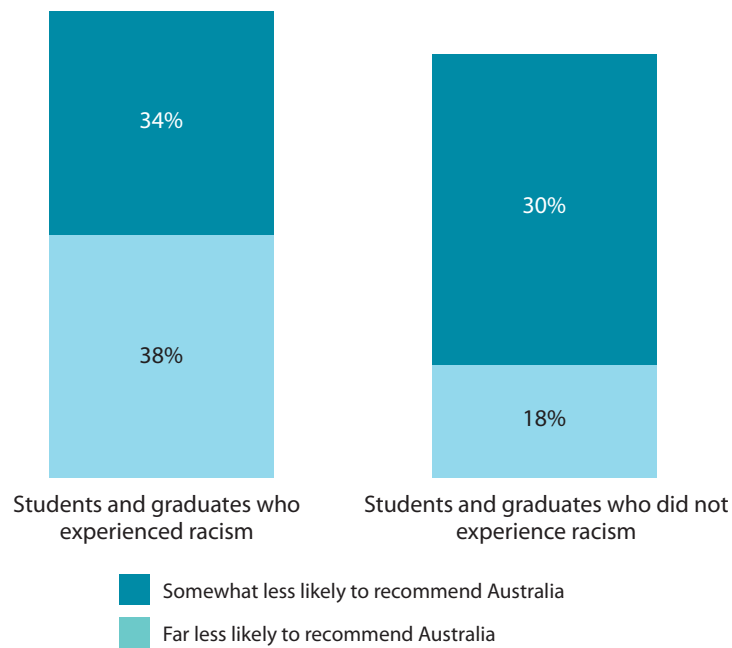
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Students were told to leave if they can't afford to live here. How about them catching COVID on travel, airports being the hubspots for spreading of the virus? We would have preferred to go home during this time and stay with our families but could not afford it or risk our lives!

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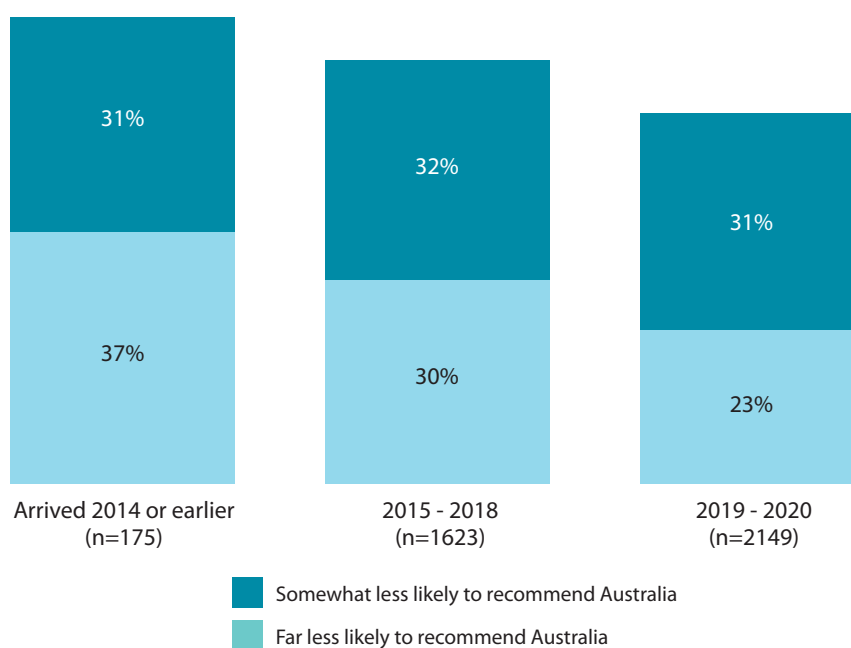
19 year old female Bachelor's student from Pakistan

Figure 15. Proportion of international students and graduates who were less likely to recommend Australia for study, comparing those who experienced racism with those who did not (n=4073)



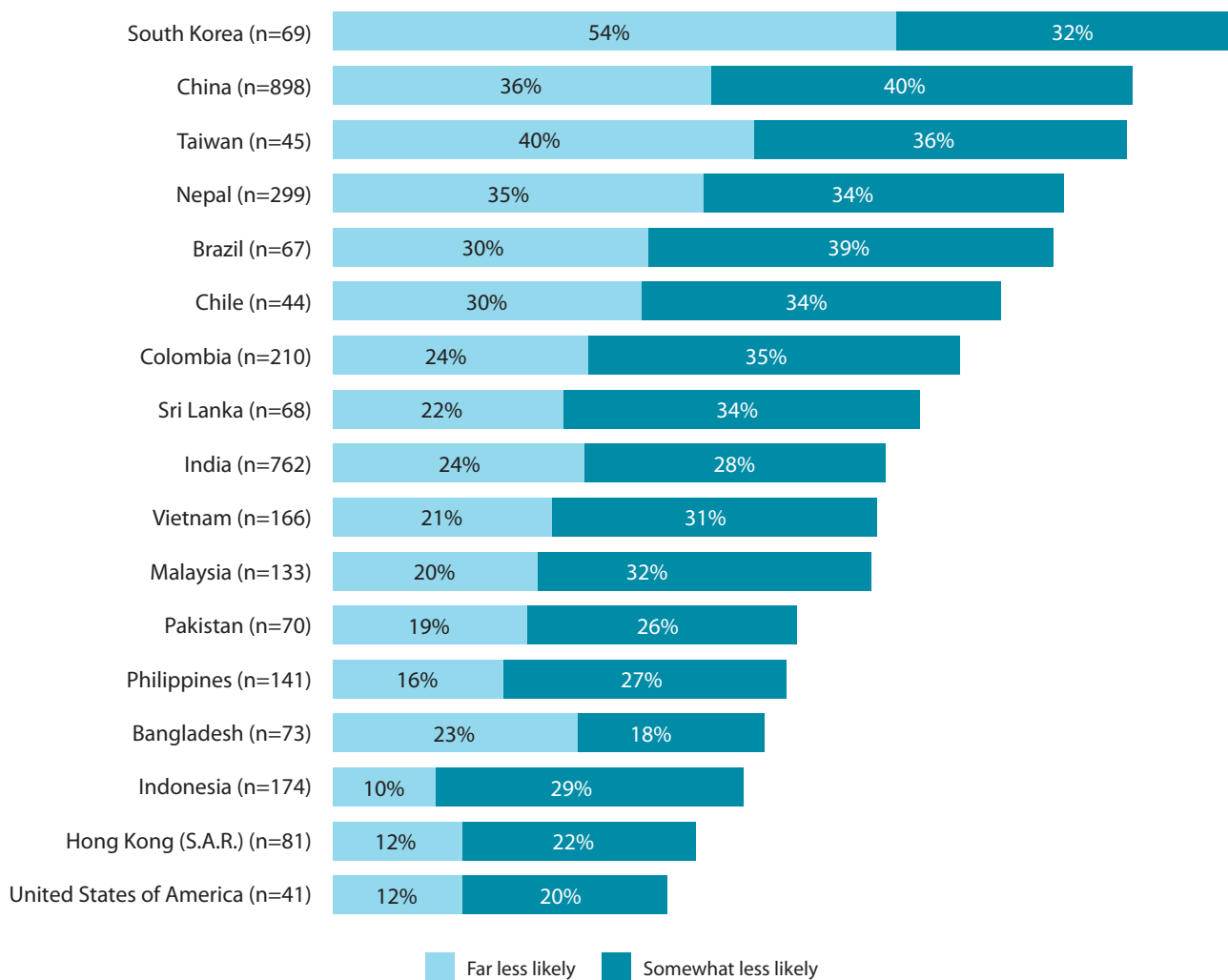
The longer international students had been in Australia, the more likely they were to have soured on their impression of Australia following their experience during COVID-19. Among those in Australia since 2014 or earlier, over two thirds (68%) indicated that following their experience during COVID-19 they would now be less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study, with 37% far less likely to do so and 31% somewhat less likely. This was a greater proportion than those who arrived between 2015 and 2018 (62%) and greater still than those who arrived since 2019 (54%).

Figure 16. Proportion of international students who were less likely to recommend Australia for study, according to year of arrival in Australia (n=3,947)



Some nationalities of international students felt particularly negative about their experiences in Australia during COVID-19. These included important international education markets such as Chinese students (of whom 76% were now less likely to recommend Australia for study) and Nepalese students (69% were less likely to recommend Australia). Well over a third of students from both countries were now far less likely to recommend Australia as a study destination.

Figure 17. Proportions of international students who were now less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study, for nationalities with more than 40 respondents



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I have felt irrelevant and rejected. I contribute to the economy, pay my taxes and am a good citizen, and yet my contributions have been disregarded with such cavalier. The Prime Minister's dismissal of international students, saying that we should return to our home countries if we are unable to sustain ourselves financially in Australia, was tactless at best.

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Female Nigerian international student

The proportions of international students less likely to recommend Australia now were virtually identical for those at universities and those at other education providers.

Working Holiday Makers

Fifty eight percent of Working Holiday Makers are less likely to recommend Australia for a working holiday following their experience during COVID-19 (see Figure 14 above). This includes 27% who are much less likely to recommend Australia, and 31% who are somewhat less likely to do so.

Temporary migrants' observations on their overall experience in Australia during COVID-19

The final question of the survey asked participants: *"How do you feel about your treatment by the Australian government during COVID?"*. Participants were given an opportunity to provide an open response. Over 3,000 participants elected to do so. While it is not possible to capture all responses, this section sets out key themes.

Long-lasting distress, anger and sense of dehumanisation caused by instruction "to make your way home"

In describing how they felt about their treatment by the Australian government, hundreds of respondents raised "the famous speech" in April 2020 when Scott Morrison announced that "if you are a visitor in this country, it is time ... to make your way home". Some conveyed the deep and long-lasting distress in migrant communities following these comments. One Indian woman, for example, explained that even some months afterwards, she "still recollect[ed] listening to that media announcement and feeling so let down". Others observed that the Prime Minister's announcement "lacked compassion", was "offensive and unthoughtful", "utterly distasteful", "chilling" and "frustrating". Many were distraught, describing how they "felt used", "sad, angry and betrayed ... unprotected and completely vulnerable", "distressed", "more anxious", "sad and excluded", "abandoned", "absolutely discarded and left to fend with no help", "absolutely disheartened", "used and disrespected". One 29 year old student put it bleakly: "I just lost all my hope after that".

The determination to exclude temporary migrants from government support packages contributed to feelings of abandonment, discrimination, humiliation and worthlessness: "they don't see us. They can't hear us", "like we do not exist", "like I didn't matter". A large number of participants used stark, dehumanising language to describe this: "some aliens who don't belong here", "inanimate objects", "discarded, unimportant and expendable", "trash", "garbage", "dirt", "I'm a shit and I don't belong here". Many explained that especially given the exceptional nature of the global pandemic the government should have done more to transcend distinctions between citizens and non-citizens, rather than perpetuate them. As one German female student explained: "We are all in this together and everyone is doing their part to stop spreading the virus, not only Australians".

//

I think it is shameful that the government relies so heavily on foreign labour and temporary visa holders for the economy to function, to pick their fruits and veg, etc. but the moment these people present an economic burden rather than benefit, absolutely no support is made available. It feels tremendously exploitative, especially as those on temporary visas are more likely to be taken advantage of by employers as it is.

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25 year old Canadian Working Holiday Maker

Sense of injustice and being callously used only for economic contribution to Australia

A very large number of temporary migrants stressed that in light of their contributions to the Australian community and economy through work and paying taxes, they expected to be treated inclusively by the government during the pandemic. One British woman on a skilled visa stated: "As a taxpayer for over five years I feel as though I am more or less disposable to this country and government, and am seriously considering leaving". A Filipina student asked: "I paid you, I worked for you, I paid taxes and this is how you treat me?". One Chinese woman concluded: "I have been living in this country for more than 6 years and I was treated like unwanted goods".

One German woman studying at TAFE explained:

I feel let down. I love Australia, I pay taxes, support local community through volunteering, spend money which again supports the economy and I spend a lot of money on my education. Just to be told to 'go home' if I can't support myself during this hard time. A 700 dollars a week for an Australian and maybe, if eligible a 500 dollar once off payout.. how does it help? Made me feel so unwelcome, unwanted and I feel resentment towards the country I once adored and highly spoke of.

An American doctoral student outlined their social, economic and community contributions in this way:

I work and pay full price for everything, pay a substantial amount of tax (as does my partner) and we both contribute to the community in ways that the current government can't seem to wrap their heads around. My partner does testing to keep one of the only manufacturing lines producing ventilators in Australia running, while I was invited to the country to complete a fully funded PhD.

Many emphasised the specific contribution of temporary migrants to the labour market, especially as "essential workers". Some stressed that temporary migrants are an "invisible cheap labor force" who "pick their fruits and veg" and help "Australian families get food on their tables". A TSS visa holder from Ireland found it "disgusting" that the Australian government "invite skilled workers over here because they don't have enough people to fill the jobs. But once we need help in a serious disaster even after paying our taxes etc we're told to just leave." A Russian Masters student said:

We paid taxes. We did all dirty work Australians don't want to do and what about us? ... It is nice to have invisible cheap workers that will be silently committing to work when you and your family can stay at home or work from home and get government support and don't lose any money.

Many other international students emphasised their economic contribution through high tuition fees. As one Indian Masters student put it: "we contribute billions of dollars to the economy as university fees but are treated as some breed of untouchables".

For many, the unfair exclusion of temporary migrants from emergency support reflected poorly on the country's values. A significant number of respondents characterised Australia's approach to temporary migrants during the pandemic as "unAustralian", "selfish", "greedy", "money oriented" and "all about money", a "blatant money grab" or "solely a money-making scheme". One Filipina woman concluded that the "Government is only nice to us when

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Let down and forgotten. Australia does not care if you are not Australian citizen!

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UK national on a TSS visa

they need money". A striking number of respondents used words such as "cash cows", "money-making plants""I see myself as merely a money printing machine", "ATMs of the Australian government", "walking moneybags", "just money, otherwise we are not worth anything", and "hung dry for cash".

As an Iranian doctoral student put it: "the message from your PM was very clear. You are welcome once you have money, otherwise, go to your country!". Another respondent described how "the Prime Minister's words made me feel that Australia doesn't care about the safety of international students, only Chinese money is in my eyes". An Indian man said: "The prime minister's speeches made me angry. That came off as saying 'Alright if you don't have any more money to give to our economy you can get the hell out'".

Australia did not understand the practical reality of temporary migrants' circumstances

Many respondents expressed frustration that the Australian government wrongly assumed that international students did not need support, and/or that it was possible for temporary migrants to simply go home.

Many stated they simply could not afford to purchase flights to leave Australia, even if they wanted to. Others explained that due to border closures, flight cancellations and increasingly expensive flights, there was not a clear path for them to "go home". As one Canadian backpacker put it:

A good portion of my workmates are Indian, and were left unable to go home because of a total border lockdown in India and were left with no means of supporting themselves in Australia. The rest of my workmates are Italian, and could not go back due to crisis COVID levels. To have Scott Morrison make a speech saying that there is 'no reason' that temporary visa holders can not make their way back to their home countries was ignorant at best.

International students also explained that "[a]lthough education is a lucrative industry in Australia, most of the international students are not rich" and many "need work-study programs to make ends meet".

Social exclusion when Australia is their home

Many respondents explained that the expectation that temporary migrants should pack up and leave seemed to ignore the enormous investments many had made in setting up a life in Australia. As one French Temporary Graduate visa holder put it: "Some of us have been here for years and consider Australia like our home now, quitting everything we have done and been through is just unimaginable". One Masters student who had lived in Australia for six years explained:

Australia is my 'home' at the moment, going back to Germany would have left me without income, housing and health insurance. I don't think the government fully understands what temporary migrants give up to be here and that 'going home' is not a simple option for many of us.

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I felt used and disrespected as an individual. The government's remarks ushering students to go back to their country was offensive and unthoughtful as my country's borders were closed and it was not that easy to just go home. It felt as though I had become a burden suddenly despite contributing to this beautiful country.

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22 year old Bachelor's student from Mauritius

An Indian student explained that her children were in school in Australia so therefore they could not “just uproot ... in a few days”. Other international students also emphasised their enormous investments in their studies: “If we go home, who knows when we can come back and resume our studies?”

Experiences of xenophobia were far from the multicultural ideal of Australia

Many respondents felt that these experiences of discrimination, exclusion and inequality during the pandemic changed the way they felt they about Australia overall and made them less likely to recommend Australia to friends and family. Some described how the ideal image of Australia as a “multicultural nation” that is “built by immigrants” and “famous for welcoming internationals” was “not the promised land as they pictured anymore”. They noted the hypocrisy in government messaging during COVID-19: “It’s appalling to see the PM consoling the citizens saying that we are all in this together but at the same time telling migrants to go back home in a pandemic”.

Many observed that “hidden racism showed up in the COVID crisis situation”. Some specifically noted the significance of perceived anti-immigrant sentiment coming from the Prime Minister. As a Bhutanese Masters student put it: “If a person at the highest position makes us feel unwelcome, you can imagine the feelings of most Aussie people towards international students. I am scared it will start xenophobia”. A Vietnamese woman said:

Scott Morrison told international students to go home. He worsened the racism issue in Australia, particularly targeting Asians, and denies all our contributions for Australia in terms of money and efforts. That’s the cruellest thing ever to say and do. I was and still am very disappointed. I loved Australia but now I’m questioning my decision of choosing this country to invest in.

Another respondent stated they thought the government “used the pandemic as a front to harass immigrants and blame them for their own issues”. Some explained how their experiences of discrimination and racial profiling were therefore intensified during the pandemic: “so many students are getting discrimination at any time anywhere; particularly those from Asia or Asian decedents as people are holding the wrong view of the ‘China Virus’” (see further in section on racism above). The result, as one international student from Korea explained was that: “Now I can clearly see how this country treats customers for a harsh time. I would never recommend studying in Australia to my friends and families in my home country.”

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I have considerable privileges as a visa holder here due to my language and country of origin, etc, but I have never felt so anxious and financially unstable as I have since the onset of Covid 19. I got ulcers from the stress and uncertainty. The government is relying way too much on charities to fill in the massive gaps in support, and not implementing any comprehensive or inclusive policies. This is extremely harmful, increasing marginalization of refugee and immigrant communities and exacerbating nationalist and xenophobic attitudes.

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American Provisional Partner visa holder

Unfavourable comparisons with other countries

A number of respondents observed that exclusion of temporary migrants from emergency support during the pandemic was “certainly not the stance taken by most ... countries which treated everyone in their country equally”. Many contrasted Australia’s approach with the approach taken in Canada, New Zealand and elsewhere. A Canadian woman on a Provisional Partner visa thought it was:

Appalling to witness how little support we received, how little (basically nothing) I was entitled to as a temporary resident. I have been living in Australia, paying taxes here and working since 2016. While Canada was putting measures in place to support foreign workers and taxpayers, Australia refused to lend a helping hand.

An international student noted that “temporary visa holders in Canada ... were offered the same financial support as citizens and residents. I find it appalling in contrast that the Australian government willingly left people like myself behind, despite the fact I had been in my job over 2 years and would have qualified for job keeper”.

Gratitude to ordinary Australians, their university and others who provided support

Despite these many sobering accounts of frustration and hurt in response to their treatment by the federal government, some respondents nonetheless spoke gratefully about how ordinary Australians, their university, community and charity groups or their state/local government stepped in to provide essential help. Many spoke about how emergency one-off payments, food hampers, or rebates on electricity helped them to survive periods of significant financial distress. In relation to university support, one Indian Masters student at UNSW observed: “If it weren’t for the emergency grant provided by my university, I’m pretty sure I’d have gone homeless or would have been unable to meet my essential needs”. Another Masters student noted:

Personally, I felt taken advantage of during COVID. For 3 years I have worked and studied in Australia, volunteered my time, paid my taxes, donated to Australian charities, done my role to the best of my ability as a member of society. Yet, when times got a little hard, and some assistance from the government could have been beneficial, I was completely ignored. I am so thankful for UTS, who created a loan/financial service fund for international students who had lost their jobs!

Others spoke highly of “real nice and kind people” that made them feel welcome such as charity organizations, religious communities, student associations, migrant organizations and ordinary Australians. As one Colombian Masters student explained, despite feeling “rejected, as if we weren’t humans living and being part of the community. Just an international fee that the government get from us” there was also the opposite, in that “some people made me feel welcome and that I wasn’t alone here”.

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When I work and pay taxes, I’m considered to be a resident. However, when there’s a crisis, I was left behind as if I’m not a part of the community

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22 year old Male Master’s student from Hong Kong

Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of temporary visa holders have remained in Australia. They have lost ongoing employment and, for many international students, their families can no longer support them due to the global financial impact of COVID-19. Our findings confirm that for a substantial cohort of temporary migrants (especially Temporary Graduate visa holders, international students and people seeking asylum), COVID-19 has created an acute ongoing need for financial support that is rapidly worsening. Universities are providing the lion's share of support for international students but do not have capacity to do so on an ongoing basis. Many international students face imminent homelessness and inability to buy food.

The stress and isolation of lockdown periods without family and community support, as well as the protracted uncertainty of not knowing whether they can continue to buy food, pay their rent, and maintain their visa, have all contributed to deteriorating mental health among temporary migrants.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, research has shown that international students were already especially vulnerable to mental health concerns associated with the stress of living away from family and related challenges, with 27 international students in Victoria dying by suicide in that state alone between 2009 and 2015.¹⁶⁹ As their financial outlook worsens, it is very likely that the mental health impacts of the lack of ongoing financial and other support will be more widely, and more acutely, felt among international students and other temporary migrants, with the potential for a secondary mental health crisis alongside humanitarian challenges.

The Prime Minister's recommendation that temporary migrants "make their way home" appears to have exacerbated, for many, their feelings of isolation and exclusion. It is now clear that this instruction failed to take into account the numerous practical and personal barriers that meant precipitously leaving Australia was not a viable option for many. Many temporary migrants could not get home because flights were unavailable or unaffordable, or borders were closed. Others stayed in Australia because they could not risk losing the substantial investment they had made in their studies, work and lives in Australia over years. It is unreasonable to expect international students to simply abandon their studies mid-way, or to expect other migrants to leave Australia when it has become their home, and for years they have paid tax, contributed to our community, and built long-term relationships. Indeed, many of Australia's low-wage industries are reliant on (underpaid) migrant workers, and during the lockdown the government even changed the rules of student visas to permit them to work more hours in the most dangerous jobs in aged care, supermarkets, disability support and health care that Australians would not do.¹⁷⁰

United Nations experts have stated that "no one should be left behind in this global fight against the pandemic. Governments must adopt measures ensuring that every individual ... regardless of their migration status, is included".¹⁷¹ Australia has obligations under international human rights law to ensure every person within its jurisdiction has a safe and secure place to live, adequate food, and can meet their basic health and living needs. Advising temporary visa holders to go home does not diminish these obligations. Nor does it absolve Australia of its moral obligations to these members of our community whom it encouraged to greatly invest in studying, working and living here.

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They invite skilled workers over here because they don't have enough people to fill the jobs. But once we need help in a serious disaster even after paying our taxes etc were told to just leave. It's a country built on immigrants we should all be treated the same!

//

Irish male TSS visa holder

Australia's abandonment of international students is causing grave damage to its reputation in the international education market, as well as among Working Holiday Makers. Australia's education sector will likely suffer the economic consequences of these policies for years or decades to come. Australia may also suffer longer term geopolitical harm as many of those suffering in Australia now will return home to become leaders in business and politics and hold other roles of social influence around the region and globally. Their experiences during this period will not be quickly forgotten as they look to other countries, such as the UK and Ireland, that recognised international students and other temporary migrants as valued members of their community and included them in national support measures such as unemployment payments, wage subsidies and housing support during this difficult time.¹⁷²

The Australian government should heed the observations of one respondent that are emblematic of the sentiments expressed by thousands of survey participants in their open responses: "Australia showed its true colors when it came to international students. They call us friends but then abandon us in our time of need. I think Australia will struggle to attract international students after the disgraceful treatment and lack of compassion shown during COVID".

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When the government advertises asking international students to come to Australia, they portray a beautiful picture. But during such a difficult situation where we have lost our jobs and the borders of our countries are closed, we were completely ignored. We were asked to return home when we didn't have a way to do so. I honestly love Australia and the people. Most of them have been extremely nice. But right now, I am depressed and struggling to survive while paying more than 15000 for the semester and I feel left out. I just wish that the government would understand the struggle we are facing. We might not be citizens but we are still people.

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27 year old Sri Lankan Master's student

Appendix - Other Countries' Support for Temporary Migrants in response to COVID-19

✗ = no support provided to temporary migrants ✓ = some support provided to temporary migrants

Country	Unemployment benefits	Wage subsidies	Confidential and free COVID-19 testing and treatment	Housing
Australia	✗ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only permanent residents, citizens and New Zealand passport holders with a Special Category visa are eligible for JobSeeker payments¹⁷³ 	✗ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only permanent residents, citizens and New Zealand passport holders with Protected Special Category visa¹⁷⁴ are eligible for JobKeeper payments¹⁷⁵ 	✗ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All states and territories, except for Northern Territory,¹⁷⁶ will not charge people without Medicare and insurance for testing and treatment of COVID-19 if they are treated at government hospital facilities, but there is no guarantee that immigration status won't be shared with other agencies 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six month moratorium on evictions implemented in most states. In Tasmania, this is four months. In Northern Territory, instead of a moratorium on evictions, the period to give eviction notice to tenants was extended to 120 days.¹⁷⁷ Ban on rent increases in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria¹⁷⁸
Portugal	✓ Full citizenship rights temporarily granted to all migrants during the pandemic. ¹⁷⁹			
New Zealand	✗ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only permanent residents and citizens eligible for JobSeeker payments¹⁸⁰ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary migrants with the right to work can be paid a government-funded Wage Subsidy by their employer¹⁸¹ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary migrants suspected of having COVID-19 are eligible for free hospital services¹⁸² Information will not be shared with other agencies¹⁸³ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent freezes implemented for six months¹⁸⁴ Tenancies cannot be terminated by landlord between 26 March to 25 June except in very limited circumstances¹⁸⁵ Temporary accommodation provided to any individuals affected by COVID-19 as well as migrants who are "stranded in New Zealand and can't access other welfare support"¹⁸⁶
United Kingdom	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary migrants can access "New Style" Jobseeker's Allowance for up to 182 days if they have the right to work in the UK and paid Class 1 National Insurance contributions¹⁸⁷ Temporary migrants who are self-employed can receive grants under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, as there are no requirements as to immigration status¹⁸⁸ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the Job Retention Scheme, temporary migrants on "all categories of visa" in the UK who have been furloughed due to COVID-19 may be paid a wage subsidy (up to 80% of their wage), if their employer applies to this scheme¹⁸⁹ Temporary migrants that have been ill or self-isolating at home due to vulnerability to COVID-19 can access Statutory Sick Pay (£95.85 per week for up to 28 weeks)¹⁹⁰ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary migrants are eligible for free testing and treatment of COVID-19¹⁹¹ Immigration status won't be checked¹⁹² 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landlords required to give all renters 3 months' notice if they intend to seek possession. This applies until 30 September and to all grounds of eviction¹⁹³ Under the government's "bring everyone in" strategy, local councils were required to provide accommodation to people rough sleeping. As of 19 June 2020, 14,610 people have been accommodated.
Republic of Ireland	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment, temporary migrants are eligible to receive €350 per week if they lost their job or their work hours were affected on or after 6 March 2020¹⁹⁴ All workers are eligible for the Jobseeker's Benefit¹⁹⁵ as long as they pay a certain number of social-insurance contributions Alternatively, all migrants can apply for Jobseeker's Allowance¹⁹⁶ (means-tested) if they are considered "habitually resident" in Ireland¹⁹⁷ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme, temporary migrants can be paid up to 85% of their weekly average pay if their employer applies to the scheme¹⁹⁸ Under the Illness Benefit scheme, temporary migrants who were told to self-isolate by a doctor or diagnosed with COVID-19 are eligible to receive €350 per week if they have paid the required amount of social insurance contributions (cannot receive this at the same time as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment)¹⁹⁹ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary migrants are eligible for free testing²⁰⁰ and treatment²⁰¹ of COVID-19 Firewall set up to prevent government from accessing information about migrants²⁰² 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban on evictions, notices of termination and rent increases from 27 March 2020²⁰³ Temporary migrants may also receive a Rent Supplement of up to €350 per week if they are considered "habitually resident" in Ireland and pass a means test²⁰⁴
Canada	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, temporary migrants with a valid Social Insurance Number who have stopped working for reasons related to COVID-19 are eligible to receive \$2,000 for a 4-week period for up to 16 weeks²⁰⁵ 'Protected persons' (such as individuals recognised as a refugee) who are enrolled in a post-secondary educational program may be eligible for the Canada Emergency Student Benefit if they are unable to work or cannot find work due to COVID-19²⁰⁶ Eligible individuals received \$1,250 for each 4-week period from May to August 2020²⁰⁷ 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy scheme, temporary migrants may be paid 75% of their wages for up to 24 weeks, if their employer applies to the scheme²⁰⁸ \$3 billion worth of federal support was provided to all provinces and states to increase the wages of low-income essential workers temporarily, which include a large proportion of temporary migrants²⁰⁹ 	✗ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary migrants are eligible for free testing and treatment of COVID-19²¹⁰ No official statement that confidentiality will be guaranteed on government websites 	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeowners facing financial hardship may be eligible for a mortgage payment deferral for up to six months²¹¹ Most provinces and territories have introduced measures, such as freezes on rent increases and moratoriums on evictions in response to COVID-19²¹² Under the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance scheme, landlords of small business tenants who are experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 may apply for unsecured, forgivable loans in order to reduce rent and meeting operating expenses of the business. There are no eligibility requirements as to immigration status for the affected commercial tenants²¹³

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