

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND WAGE THEFT IN AUSTRALIA

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

Wage theft is endemic among temporary migrants in a number of industries in Australia. These include international students who are entitled to work up to 40 hours per fortnight on their student visa. This report responds to the need for empirical data on international students' responses to underpayment and other problems they encounter at work and potential effective interventions. It analyses findings from a nationwide survey of over 5,000 international students undertaken in 2019, as part of the Information for Impact project funded by StudyNSW.

The report examines survey findings on international students' rates of participation in the labour market and their wages in their lowest paid job, considering how these vary among different student cohorts. It also considers the prevalence of other forms of underpayment and record-keeping failures, dismissal after complaint to their employer, accidents and injuries, sexual harassment and overwork. After examining information- and help-seeking among international students who experienced problems at work, the report identifies key reasons why most international students did not seek information or help. Finally, it evaluates international students' knowledge of their work rights and the prevalence of common misperceptions that may contribute to their acceptance or acquiescence to underpaid work.

Since the survey was undertaken, in 2020 social distancing measures related to COVID-19 caused many international students to lose their casual jobs. Excluded from government assistance, many were left with no income and unable to pay rent and meet their basic living expenses. When the economy reopens, many international students will be more vulnerable to exploitation due to their highly precarious financial status and desperation for work in a more tightly constrained labour market. This will likely lead many to accept even poorer working conditions, and will intensify the factors that deter international students from seeking help or taking action when problems arise. The report lays the foundation for education providers and government to develop more targeted interventions to address exploitation, that are evidence-based and directly respond to international students' lived experiences captured through the survey.

## Overview of the survey and participants

In 2018, UNSW Sydney and UTS established a sector-wide consortium to better understand the problems international students encounter in work and housing, and empirically identify key interventions that would have the greatest impact.<sup>1</sup> The Information for Impact project undertaken by the consortium included a nationwide survey of 5,968 international students between 9 April and 30 May 2019.

This report focuses on survey findings on international students' experiences of underpayment and other problems at work. It is based on survey responses from 2,472 participants, aged 17 and over, who received survey questions related to their experience at work. The overwhelming majority of respondents were reporting on recent experiences (78% arrived since 2017 with 58% having arrived within a year of the survey). The overwhelming majority (87%) were 20 years or older with a median age of 23. Respondents were nationals of 103 countries, with a quarter from China, followed by 14% from India. They were students at universities (60%), vocational and English language colleges (30%) and university foundation courses (10%). Seventy per cent were located in NSW, with 97% in major Australian cities. For the vast majority, their planned stay was not brief: 69% planned to stay for more than two years.

An earlier report on the survey, *Living Precariously: Understanding International Students' Housing Experiences*

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<sup>1</sup> The *Information for Impact: Enabling education providers to address exploitation of international students in accommodation and at work* consortium included the Fair Work Ombudsman, English Australia, Redfern Legal Centre, International Student Education Agent Association, ISANA NSW, and Council of International Students Australia, as well as project advisors, Australian Taxation Office and the Commonwealth Department of Education.



in *Australia*,<sup>2</sup> published in 2019, addresses international students' housing decisions and experiences in Australia, based on responses of participants who received questions related to their experience with housing. In late 2020, survey findings will be published on interventions that can effectively guide students' decision-making including provision of information and services to address problems in housing and work.

## Labour market participation of international students

Almost two thirds of respondents (65%) had worked in a paid job in Australia, among those who had been in the country at least 3 months.

## Underpayment of international students

**Underpayment of international students was systemic and widespread.**<sup>3</sup> Among those aged 20 and above at the time of their lowest paid job,

- A half (49%) were paid below the basic statutory minimum wage.<sup>4</sup>
- Over three quarters (77%) were paid below the minimum casual hourly wage.<sup>5</sup>

**The proportion of international students reporting egregious levels of wage theft has not improved since the National Temporary Migrant Work Survey (NTMW Survey) in 2016.** Over a quarter (26%) of all respondents earned \$12 or less per hour in their lowest paid job (approximately half of the minimum wage for a casual employee). This figure has remained unchanged since the 2016 NTMW Survey, in which 25% of the 2,392 international student participants earned \$12 or less in their lowest paid job.<sup>6</sup> This figure has remained static despite increases in the statutory minimum wages since 2016,<sup>7</sup> the introduction of legislative protections for vulnerable workers,<sup>8</sup> and an increased focus on international students by the Fair Work Ombudsman.<sup>9</sup>

**Underpayment was reported by a greater proportion of those with self-reported poor or fair English but was not confined to this cohort.** Even among respondents who reported that they spoke good or very good English, over two thirds (68%) earned less than the statutory minimum hourly wage for a casual worker in their lowest paid job in Australia. However, those with self-reported fair or poor English fared even worse, especially at the most egregiously low wage rates: double the proportion of these respondents earned \$12 per hour or less (39%, compared with 20% of those with good or very good English).

**Underpayment was not linked to international students' level of education or program of study.** Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents in every program of study were paid less than the minimum wage for a casual worker, and almost a half (47%) were paid less than the statutory minimum wage (excluding PhD students). Students in

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2 Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum, *Living Precariously: Understanding International Students' Housing Experiences in Australia* (Report, December 2019).

3 This cohort constituted 82% of all respondents.

4 These respondents were paid \$17 or less per hour. At the time of the survey, the statutory minimum wage rate for employees in permanent positions was \$18.49 per hour for 20 year olds and \$18.93 per hour for 21 year olds.

5 These respondents were paid \$22 or less per hour. At the time of the survey, the statutory minimum wage rate for employees in casual positions was \$23.11 per hour for 20 year olds and \$23.66 per hour for 21 year olds.

6 Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum, *Wage Theft in Australia: Findings from the National Temporary Migrant Work Survey* (Report, November 2017) 27 (*'Wage Theft in Australia'*).

7 The statutory minimum wage rate for employees aged 21 years or above in permanent positions from July 2016 was \$17.70 while the minimum wage for such employees from July 2018 was \$18.93.

8 *Fair Work Amendment (Protecting Vulnerable Workers) Act 2017* (Cth).

9 *The Fair Work Ombudsman and Registered Organisations Commission Entity Annual Report 2016-2017* (Report, 2017) 18-19; *The Fair Work Ombudsman and Registered Organisations Commission Entity Annual Report 2017-2018* (Report, 2018) 18.



Bachelor's degree programs fared substantially worse than others at the most egregious levels of underpayment: a third (32%) were paid \$12 per hour or less -- the highest proportion of any student cohort.

***Underpayment was experienced by international students across a range of nationalities.*** Among respondents of each of the top eight nationalities in the survey, at least two thirds of respondents (65%) were paid less than the minimum wage for a casual worker (\$22+ per hour), and over a third (35%) of respondents were paid less than the statutory minimum wage (\$18+ per hour).

One stark outlier was Chinese students who fared far worse than others at the most egregious levels of underpayment. Well over half (54%) were paid \$12 per hour or less. Approximately one in ten were paid less than \$10 per hour. Over four fifths (83%) earned less than the statutory casual minimum wage, and almost three quarters (71%) earned less than the statutory minimum wage.

International students experienced other wage issues at work in Australia. These included receiving wages in cash and not receiving a payslip, not being paid at all for a period, and being forced by an employer to pay wages back in cash. They also experienced sexual harassment, accidents and injuries, being required to work very long hours, and termination of employment because the student complained to their employer.

## **Why international students suffer in silence, and how to overcome barriers to seeking help**

Among those who experienced any problem at work in Australia, almost two thirds (62%) suffered in silence and did not try to access help or even seek information to address the problem. They were asked to select the reasons why this was the case.

### **Fear of job loss and inability to effect change**

By far the most common reason why international students did not seek information or help for problems was that they feared they would lose their job (selected by 48% of respondents). This fear appears well-founded, since 7% of respondents in this survey reported that they had indeed lost their job because they complained. While this proportion may at first glance seem small, that is not in fact the case. The cohort who complained to their employer about a problem would have been relatively small because only 55% of respondents experienced a problem at work, and only a small portion of these would have complained about the problem. The fact that 7% of all participants in the survey reported that they lost their job because they complained strongly suggests that many of those who complained to their employer did in fact lose their job. This finding underscores the importance of international students receiving expert representation and/or assistance, rather than being encouraged to approach an employer directly about a problem. It also suggests the importance of workers addressing problems collectively rather than individually to mitigate the risk of job loss if an international student seeks to assert her rights directly with her employer.

The risk of job loss far outweighs any potential benefit of taking action for many international students who perceive that there is nothing they can do to change their situation. Almost four in ten respondents (37%) reported that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they 'didn't think having information or help would change anything'. This suggests a perception of endemic non-compliance in international students' saturated labour market, where power resides almost entirely with the employer absent opportunities for collective or individual redress and effective government enforcement. This perception can only be mitigated through systemic reforms that empower international students (and other workers) to report non-compliance and obtain redress, including through the establishment of a new forum which expedites wage recovery and resourcing of legal services to advise and assist international students to pursue claims, including on campus. It also demands more effective government investigation and enforcement on the part of the Fair Work Ombudsman and other regulators.

## Visa concerns

Almost four in ten students (38%) reported that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they did not want 'problems that might affect my visa'. This suggests the limited impact of the assurance protocol established between the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) in 2017. This may be partly because this protocol affirmatively requires the FWO to pass on the worker's information to the DHA to obtain protection from visa cancellation. It may also partly stem from the fact that, for many, fear of visa loss extends beyond their current visa to a fear of jeopardising their prospect of obtaining a future visa including permanent residency for which the protocol provides no protection. The most effective way to address this concern is to remove the 40 hour fortnightly work condition on student visas that gives rise to their vulnerability and related fear of visa cancellation. So long as this visa condition remains in place, the Australian government should establish an absolute firewall between the FWO and DHA that provides workers with the necessary assurance that if they seek help from the FWO for exploitation at work their information will not be shared with DHA.

## Perceptions of culpability

International students' acute fear of jeopardising their visa has generally been discussed in connection with breach of the 40 hour fortnightly work condition that can result in visa cancellation. However, international students have a further set of work-related concerns that drive their fear of visa loss, based on a misperception of noncompliance. The authors sought to test a new hypothesis: international students may be reluctant to seek help for problems at work because they believe they may have broken the law by agreeing to wages less than the legal minimum.<sup>10</sup> This was indeed the case for four in five respondents. Almost two thirds (62%) affirmatively held the misconception that a worker who agrees to be underpaid has themselves broken the law. A further 19% did not know whether this was the case or not. It is entirely rational that this overwhelming majority of international students who believe (or suspect) they have broken the law would not seek help or draw attention to their situation.

The survey also tested a further new hypothesis, that international students may be reluctant to seek help or report underpayment because they believe they are complicit in breaking the law when they accept payment of their wages in cash.<sup>11</sup> This misperception was indeed commonly held by respondents. Half (51%) were affirmatively under the misconception that a worker has broken the law if he or she is paid in cash. A further 18% did not know whether this was the case or not. Fewer than a third (31%) knew that it is not illegal to be paid in cash. Again, it is rational for these international students who believe (or suspect) they have broken the law to not seek help or draw attention to their situation.

These findings underscore the need for clear information to be delivered to international students to address both of these misconceptions. It is also important that government agencies and others exercise caution to frame their communications to avoid an impression that students are considered complicit if they accept underpayment.

## Knowledge of entitlements

It is sometimes assumed that international students accept underpayment because they are unaware of the minimum wage in Australia. This was not the case. Only a small minority (16%) of respondents aged 20 and over did not know that the legal minimum hourly wage for an adult is at least \$18 per hour.

However, by contrast, three quarters of respondents (75%) did not know that the legal minimum hourly wage for an adult in a casual position is at least \$23 per hour. Given that many international students are casual employees,

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10 Responsibility lies with an employer to pay their employee correctly; an employee is not in breach of employment law if they agree to underpayment.

11 It is not illegal to accept wages in cash provided they comply with taxation obligations. Nor is it illegal for an employer to pay wages in cash, provided they comply with payslip and taxation obligations.

and 77% of respondents who worked were paid less than the casual minimum wage, a very large proportion would not have known that they were being underpaid. This suggests that information campaigns for international students should focus on increasing awareness of casual loadings, penalty rates and other entitlements, not on the statutory minimum wage.

Another reason why international students may accept underpayment is that they are not aware that most international students who are in Australia for the full financial year are entitled to the tax free threshold (i.e. no tax is payable on the first \$20,570 of annual income). Because they assume they must pay tax on all wages, they mistakenly believe that being underpaid in cash and not declaring their income leaves them in a similar position as if they were paid correctly and complied with their taxation responsibilities. The majority of respondents (56%) did indeed hold the misconception that all international students must pay tax on all wages they earn, likely perceiving themselves no worse off earning illegally low wages in cash. This suggests the importance of educating international students about their tax responsibilities and entitlements, including eligibility for the tax free threshold, and providing them with advice and/or assistance to lodge a tax return.

A further potential explanation for international students' acceptance of underpayment is that they see themselves as operating in a separate labour market in which Australian labour laws do not apply. This was the case for close to one third of respondents (31%), who either believed international students were not entitled to the same wage rates as Australians or did not know whether this was the case. However, over two thirds (69%) knew they were entitled to the same wage as Australians and still did not seek information or help.

### **Social factors and attitudes**

Four in ten students (40%) indicated that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because many people around them had the same problems and they were not doing anything about it. Some participants may have wished to avoid the impression that they believed they were entitled to better working conditions than their peers. Others may have taken the cue from their peers that inaction was socially appropriate, or assumed that because their peers were not seeking information or help for problems there were good reasons for not doing so. Some may have concluded from others' inaction that taking action was futile or not worth the risks and costs. This could be addressed through supporting collective action by international students and other workers in a workplace, and through messaging that promotes help-seeking and provides examples where other international students have successfully done so. However, the findings on prevalence of job loss suggests that the risks of taking action are real, and caution should be exercised before encouraging students to approach their employer on the basis of examples where other international students achieved their desired outcome.

A quarter of students (26%) stated that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they 'did not want to make trouble' for their employer. Some may feel personal loyalty to their employer that overrides other factors. However, others may feel less strongly about protecting their employer if they were made aware of the extent of underpayment or other non-compliance or if co-workers were taking action. This reinforces the importance of targeted education and support for collective action.

### **Practical barriers**

A third of students (34%) reported that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they did not 'know where to go for information or help'. Education level did not appear to affect the proportion of participants who selected this reason. Although there is a pressing need for dedicated legal assistance services for international students, especially on university campuses, this finding indicates that it is also important to raise awareness among international students of the services that exist.

## Where international students sought information or help

Among those who experienced a problem at work in Australia, only 38% indicated that they tried to access help or seek information to address the problem. However, a large proportion of those sought information or help from their friends (23% of all who experienced a problem at work).

The next most common place that respondents sought information or help was searching online, though this was reported by only 17% of respondents who experienced a problem at work. Only one in ten sought information from an Australian government agency or website. Students with self-rated fair or poor English were half as likely to seek information from a government agency or website than those with good or very good English.

These findings suggest the importance of transmitting targeted information through peer networks, especially for those with poorer English language skills. They also indicate the importance of government and education providers investing resources not only in developing written materials online, but also in proactively delivering timely information and assistance to international students in other forms and forums.

While most universities have employment legal services on campus that are available to students, only 3 university students and 1 college student sought help from a legal service on campus for employment-related problems. Overall, only 5% of respondents sought information or assistance from staff or organised student groups at their education provider. This included 3% of college and university students who sought help from a student support officer at their institution, and 3% of university students who sought help or information from a student group. Clearly, there is an unrealised opportunity for education providers to provide far greater support to international students to avoid and address problems at work.

## Conclusion

Findings from the Information for Impact survey confirm that the proportion of international students who are egregiously underpaid has remained essentially unchanged since 2016, with one in four still receiving less than half the minimum casual wage in their lowest paid job, even as the national minimum wage has increased. This is despite efforts from the Fair Work Ombudsman during this period and legislative changes including increased penalties. In the absence of effective interventions, this situation will likely worsen when international students return to work as COVID-19-related social distancing restrictions ease. This will have serious consequences for these workers and the labour market more broadly.

The findings in this report suggest a number of key interventions that government and other stakeholders should implement to reduce exploitation and enable more effective reporting and responses. These include an effective wage recovery mechanism, more effective government investigation and enforcement, removal of the 40 hour fortnightly work limitation on student visas, introduction of an absolute firewall between the FWO and DHA, greater access to legal assistance including through education providers, and better facilitation of collective action by international students and other workers.

The financial loss sustained by the international education sector during the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of international students to the Australian economy, and that the government will neglect international students' wellbeing to its peril. Australia has moral and human rights responsibilities to international students and can no longer treat them and their labour as a utilitarian commodity, despite the status of international education as Australia's fourth largest export industry. With Australia's reputation damaged as a result of its exclusion of international students from government financial support, it is more critical than ever that the government's commitment to addressing the Migrant Worker Taskforce recommendations be maintained and that it develop robust evidence-based interventions to prevent and address exploitation of international students.

## Section 1: Introduction

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In recent years it has become clear that wage theft is endemic in a number of industries in Australia. Many of the workers in these industries are temporary migrants, including international students who are entitled to work up to 40 hours per fortnight on their student visa. As the scale of the problem has become clearer, government, service providers, unions and education institutions have sought to better understand international students' experiences at work with a view to developing appropriate responses. This report responds to the need for empirical data on international students' responses to the problems they encounter and potential effective interventions. It analyses findings from a nationwide survey of international students' experiences of underpayment and other problems at work.

This survey builds on findings from an earlier survey on wage theft among temporary migrants in Australia, which the authors conducted in 2016, including a substantial cohort of international students in casual work. That survey established that underpayment among international students was pervasive and, in many cases, severe,<sup>12</sup> and the vast majority suffer wage theft in silence.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, UNSW Sydney and UTS established a sector-wide consortium to better understand the problems international students encounter at work (and in housing), evaluate whether interventions were reducing the incidence of wage theft, and empirically identify key interventions that could have the greatest impact.

The consortium received funding from StudyNSW to undertake the Information for Impact Study, including a survey of over 5,000 international students in Australia in 2019. The background to the Study is discussed in detail in the next section. This report focuses on survey findings on international students' experiences of underpayment and other problems at work. It examines international students' rates of participation in the labour market, and their wages in their lowest paid job, considering how these vary among different student cohorts. It also considers the prevalence of other forms of underpayment and record-keeping failures, dismissal after complaint to their employer, accidents and injuries, sexual harassment and overwork. After considering information- and help-seeking among international students who experienced problems at work, the report identifies key reasons why most international students did not seek information or help. Finally, it evaluates international students' knowledge of their work rights and the prevalence of common misperceptions that may contribute to their acceptance of, or acquiescence to, underpaid work.

Since the survey was undertaken, in 2020 social distancing measures in connection with COVID-19 have fundamentally changed the labour market landscape for international students. Many lost their casual jobs as the operation of large parts of the hospitality sector and other key industries were temporarily suspended across Australia, especially in NSW and Victoria. International students, like most other temporary visa holders, were ineligible for social support through the federal government JobKeeper and JobSeeker schemes that were established to provide a safety net for workers in businesses that sustained significant economic loss due to social distancing measures.<sup>14</sup> Many international students were left with no income and struggled to pay rent and meet their basic living expenses, with many no longer able to rely on family at home who were also experiencing pandemic-related financial hardship. Many come from countries whose borders were closed and therefore could not return home, and others faced practical challenges to returning with flights either unaffordable or unavailable. Others chose not to return home because they had made a considerable financial investment in their studies that they could not afford to jeopardise amid uncertainty around whether or when they could return to Australia, and

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12 Berg & Farbenblum, *Wage Theft in Australia* (n 6) 48.

13 Bassina Farbenblum and Laurie Berg, *Wage Theft in Silence: Why Migrant Workers Do Not Recover Their Unpaid Wages in Australia* (Report, October 2018) 42 (*Wage Theft in Silence*).

14 'Fact sheet: Jobkeeper Payment - Information for employees', The Treasury, Australian Government (Web page) <[https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/Fact\\_sheet\\_\\_JobKeeper\\_Info\\_for\\_Employees.pdf](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/Fact_sheet__JobKeeper_Info_for_Employees.pdf)>; 'Fact sheet: Income support for individuals', The Treasury, Australian Government (Web page) <[https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Fact\\_sheet-Income\\_Support\\_for\\_Individuals.pdf](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Fact_sheet-Income_Support_for_Individuals.pdf)>.

more limited opportunities in their home country.

At the time of writing, the contours of international students' return to part-time work during their studies remain unclear. However, whatever the number who return to previous jobs or find new casual work as social distancing measures ease, it is clear that international students will be no less vulnerable to exploitation. Indeed, many will be more vulnerable due to their highly precarious financial status and desperation for work in a more tightly constrained labour market. This will likely lead many to accept even poorer working conditions offered by employers who themselves face far greater financial pressures. It will also likely intensify the factors that deter international students from seeking help or taking action when problems arise.

As the hospitality industry and other sectors reopen as social distancing restrictions ease, Commonwealth and State governments, education providers and legal service providers must consider how to address the endemic wage theft among international students that this report reveals. The report identifies opportunities for reducing barriers to reporting and addressing exploitation, including targeting misconceptions that many international students hold regarding their own culpability in their exploitation. It lays the foundation for education providers and government to develop more targeted interventions that directly respond to international students' lived experiences captured through the survey.

## Section 2: Background to the Information for Impact Study

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In recent years, stakeholders across the international education sector have become increasingly concerned about the mistreatment of international students in housing and at work. International students are already provided with an array of information from various sources, including from their education providers and government, and it is clear that these are not yet generally preventing problems or assisting large numbers of international students to resolve problems and seek redress. Education providers, peak bodies and the government are now seeking to understand the drivers of these problems, and to identify effective interventions.

In 2018, UNSW Sydney and UTS established a sector-wide consortium to better understand the problems international students encounter in accommodation and at work, and empirically identify key interventions that would have the greatest impact. The consortium included the Fair Work Ombudsman, English Australia, Redfern Legal Centre, International Student Education Agent Association, ISANA NSW, and Council of International Students Australia, as well as project advisors, Australian Taxation Office and the Commonwealth Department of Education.

Through StudyNSW's Partner Project Scheme, the consortium established *Information for Impact: Enabling education providers to address exploitation of international students in accommodation and at work* – an empirical research project involving four elements: a mapping of information provided to international students on work and accommodation rights; consultations with experts across the sector and among service providers; focus groups with international students in NSW and the ACT; and a large-scale national survey of international students (Australia-wide, but primarily focused on New South Wales). The information mapping, expert consultations, and focus groups were used to inform the design of the survey and analysis of its data.

The Information for Impact survey was conducted between March and May 2019. It was undertaken by over 5,000 international students who were nationals of more than 100 countries, across all states and territories. Participants were randomly allocated to either a set of questions on their experiences in relation to housing or a set of questions relating to their experiences at work. Both groups were then asked detailed questions in order to identify what information and services they would want to receive in each area, including identifying gaps in knowledge of rights, as well as when and how information and services should be delivered for maximum utility.

This report focuses on international students' experiences of underpayment and other problems at work. It is based on survey responses of 2,472 international students who received the set of survey questions on work. An earlier report, published in 2019, provided findings on international students' housing experiences and decisions.<sup>15</sup> In late 2020, survey findings will be published on interventions that can effectively guide students' decision-making and address problems in housing and work.

Exploitation will not be ameliorated without effective empowerment of international students. The survey was driven by this objective in two key ways. First, rather than merely gathering information about participants, it improved international students' understanding of employment protections and entitlements by providing correct explanations to questions about work rights after participants provided their responses. Second, the survey sought to place the experiences and views of international students at the centre of policy development and services affecting them, gathering large scale data to replace assumptions about them as a cohort with their direct and differentiated voices.

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<sup>15</sup> Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum, *Living Precariously: Understanding International Students' Housing Experiences in Australia* (Report, December 2019).



## Section 3: Methodology

The Information for Impact survey was an online survey conducted by Laurie Berg (UTS), Bassina Farbenblum (UNSW) and independent consultant Sonja Duncan between 9 April and 31 May 2019. The survey was anonymous and was open to any international student in Australia who was 17 years or older at the time of the survey. It was hosted on the Migrant Worker Justice Initiative website ([www.mwji.org](http://www.mwji.org)). The survey could be completed on a mobile device or a computer.

Before commencing the survey, participants were provided with information about the survey and how their data would be used, to which they could consent through their participation in the survey.<sup>16</sup> After completing the survey, participants were invited to enter a separate prize draw to win a \$500 voucher or one of ten \$100 vouchers from Coles Myer. They were asked for their phone number for the purpose of advising winners of the prizes. There was no way to connect the phone number provided in the prize survey with answers provided to the temporary work survey which remained strictly anonymous.

The survey was available in four languages: English, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish. Each translation was checked by a different native speaker of that language.

### Survey content and structure

The survey contained 45 multiple choice questions, in addition to a number of follow-up questions. A small number of questions allowed open answers, mostly where respondents selected 'Other' among multiple choice options. The survey instrument is available at <https://www.mwji.org/information4impact>.

Participants were randomly allocated to *either* a 'Work version' or a 'Housing version' of the survey. Similar sets of questions across both versions addressed participants' personal characteristics, responses to problems, and views on the information and service needs of international students. Table 1 sets out the structure of the survey.

*Table 1. Structure of survey questions*

Housing version	Work version
Personal characteristics, year of arrival in Australia, geographic location, education provider, course of study, and whether worked in Australia	
First housing in Australia	
Problems with first and later housing	Problems with work
Whether participants sought information/help for problems	
Information and services that would help international students avoid problems at work/housing	
Knowledge of tenancy rights	Knowledge of work rights

<sup>16</sup> Ethics approval for this research was obtained from UNSW Human Research Ethics and Compliance (HC15861) which was ratified by UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (ETH16-0368).

Findings will be published in late 2020 on participants' responses to problems and where they went for help, as well as questions on the type of information and services that would assist international students to avoid these problems in the future.

This report is based on a sub-set of 6 sections within the survey, for respondents who received the 'Work version':

1. **Participants' personal characteristics** including nationality, type of education provider, course of study, location and year of arrival.
2. **Wage rates in participants' lowest paid job in Australia**, and age at time of job.
3. **Participants' experience of other problems in any job in Australia.**
4. **Where participants sought information or assistance** in relation to problems at work, if anywhere.
5. **Reasons why participants did not seek information or help** for problems at work.
6. **Participants' knowledge of rights, entitlements and responsibilities** in relation to work and taxation.

## Survey dissemination

Participants were recruited through various channels including emails, social media, websites and flyers/posters at various locations and events. These included:

1. **Social media.** The survey was regularly posted on 115 travel, cultural and international student-based Facebook groups, as well as a dedicated Facebook page for the survey. It was also promoted via Instagram, LinkedIn and WeChat. Where possible, posts were made in the relevant languages for each group. Close to 23,000 people were reached through two Facebook advertisements across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia.
2. **Email.** A MailChimp campaign containing a link to the survey was distributed to over 900 contacts across the international education sector. A link to the survey was distributed by email to international students by several education providers.
3. **Flyers/posters at various international student events.** These included the City of Sydney Lord Mayor Welcome for International Students, an event for International Student Ambassadors and an event for the international education sector hosted by the Insider Guides.
4. The survey also received **coverage, with a link, in a number of news outlets**, including the Chinese-language outlet, *Sydney Today*, and SBS radio.

Several Project Partner organisations assisted with distribution of the survey through their networks. StudyNSW disseminated information about the survey through their communications with international students and stakeholder community.

An International Student Participant Recruitment Committee was also established to assist with dissemination of the survey through student groups, direct emails and social media outlets including WeChat. Members of the Committee included international students from China, Nepal, India and the Philippines, who were remunerated.

## Survey participants

There were 5,968 individuals who entered responses across the Housing version and Work version of the survey. Of these, 843 responses were removed due to completion of less than 10% of the survey. A further 61 respondents were removed who took fewer than 11 minutes to complete the survey, leaving 5,064 valid responses. This included 152 respondents whose first education provider in Australia was a high school. Given the low number in this cohort, and their potentially different concerns, the decision was made to exclude them from the analysis, leaving 4,912 respondents in the overall sample. Within this sample, 2,472 respondents received the Work version of

the survey. It is this sample that forms the basis of this report.

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.

## 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 from different devices (it was not possible to complete it more than once from the same device). 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. Those participants motivated to complete the survey quickly may also have been especially influenced by the order of possible responses (reading or selecting those at the top). These risks were mitigated in two ways. First, the order of responses was randomised where relevant. Second, participants who completed the survey in under 11 minutes, and those who completed less than 10% of the survey, were excluded from the analysis. 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 only a small number of participants. 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.

Overall, these risks appear to have been largely mitigated, as evidenced by the broad consistency of demographic profiles and attitudes expressed in response to questions that were common to the Housing version and Work version of the survey, to which participants were randomly allocated.

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 *Sydney Today* may have contributed to overrepresentation of international students who regularly use these platforms. This risk was somewhat mitigated by distribution through other channels including events attended by international students, online media (including SBS), StudyNSW and other newsletters, and education provider emails to international students (see Survey Dissemination above for further detail). Concerns about weak English-language skills were mitigated by translating the survey into Mandarin, Spanish and Portuguese. However, the survey was not available in all languages spoken by international students in Australia, and the survey may not have been accessible to some native speakers of other languages whose English is very poor. It is also possible that certain words or phrases in translated versions may have been understood differently in different languages, or may not have had a culturally-understood equivalent.

It is possible that participation was higher among international students who were more motivated to share information on poor workplace or housing experiences, or to assist other international students to avoid problems. 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 international students 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, UNSW Global, UTS and UTS Insearch. 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 international students in Australia, the authors determined that the survey and selected distribution methods remained an effective way to access large numbers of diverse international students, especially those studying at smaller education providers who have historically been difficult to reach.

## Section 4: Demographics

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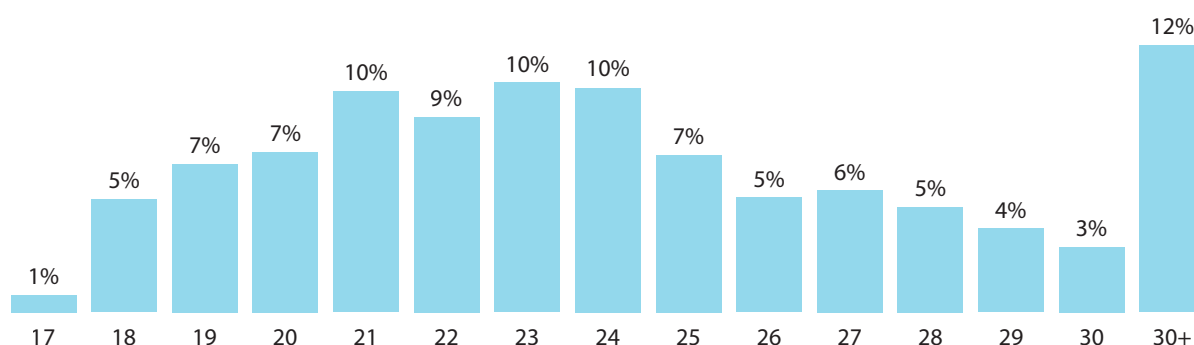
This section sets out the personal characteristics of the 2,472 respondents who participated in the Work version of the survey.

### Age at time of survey

All survey participants were required to be 17 years or older at the time of the survey. The median age of respondents was 23. Over half of respondents (53%) were aged between 20 and 25 years old. A third (35%) were older than 25. Only 13% were younger than 20 years old.

Figure 1. Respondents' age at time of survey (n=2,472)

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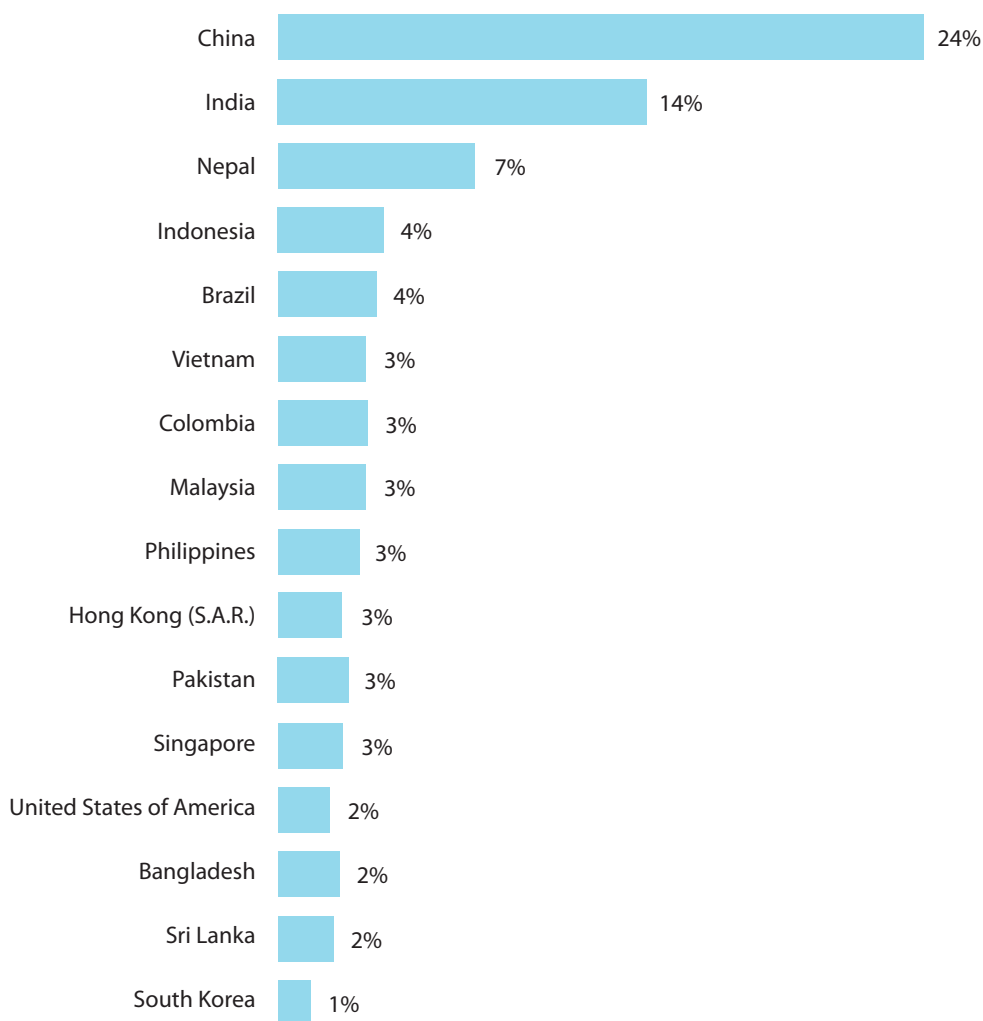
### Nationality

Respondents were nationals of 103 countries. A quarter (24%) of all respondents were from China,<sup>17</sup> followed by 14% from India, and 7% from Nepal. The 16 largest nationality groups also included students from Latin America (Brazil (4%) and Colombia (3%)), South East Asia (Indonesia (4%), Vietnam (3%), Malaysia (3%), Philippines (3%), Singapore (3%)), South Asia (Pakistan (3%), Bangladesh (2%), Sri Lanka (2%)), East Asia (Hong Kong (3%), South Korea (1%)) and North America (United States of America (2%)).

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<sup>17</sup> 'China' may include some Taiwanese students. In the initial stages of the survey there was an inadvertent mechanical omission of a separate category for Taiwan, however this error was corrected during the survey.

Figure 2. Respondents' nationality, showing 16 nationality groups with the most respondents (n=2,472)



## Other demographics

A larger proportion of respondents was female (57%). Five respondents specified their gender as 'other'.

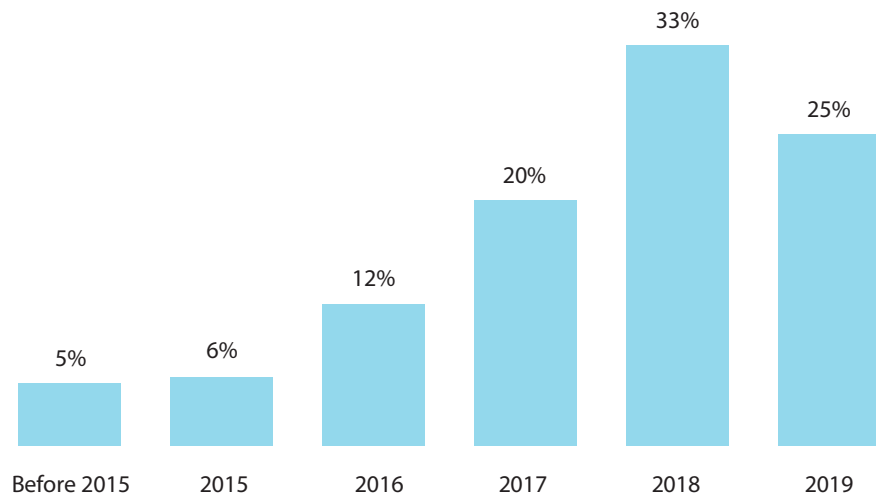
The overwhelming majority (97%) held a student visa as their first visa. Two percent held a Working Holiday or Work and Holiday visa.

Respondents were asked to rate their English language ability. Three quarters (74%) rated it as very good or good; 24% indicated that it was fair; 3% rated it as poor or very poor.

## Year of arrival and planned length of stay

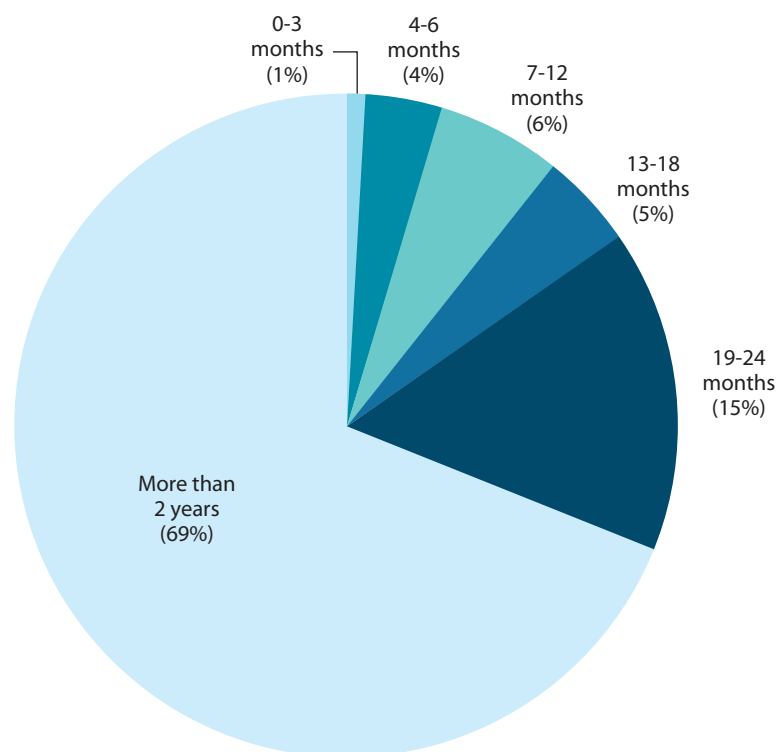
The overwhelming majority of respondents were reporting on recent experiences. Over three quarters (78%) had arrived in Australia since 2017, with 58% having arrived within a year of the survey and 25% having arrived within 4 months of the survey.

Figure 3. Respondents' year of arrival (n=2,472)



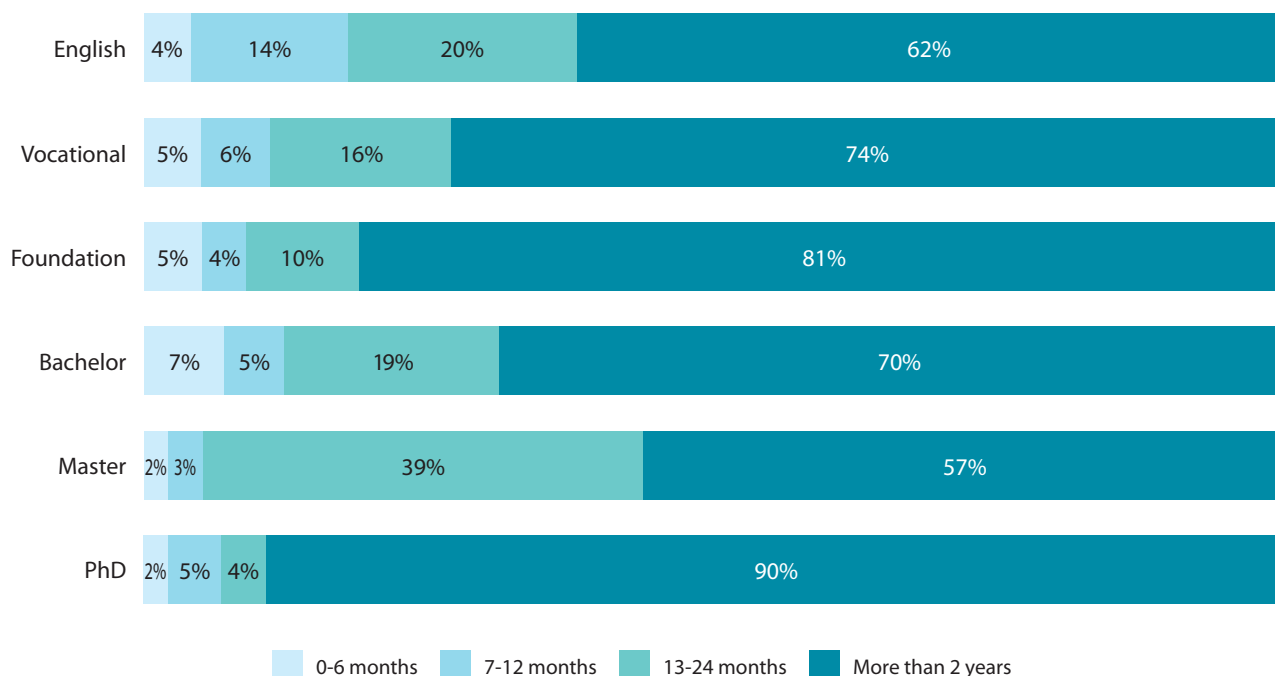
For the vast majority of respondents, their planned time in Australia was not a brief stay. Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) planned to stay in Australia for more than two years, with a further 15% planning to stay between 19 and 24 months. Only 16% of respondents were planning to stay for 18 months or fewer.

Figure 4. Respondents' total planned length of stay in Australia (n=2,472)



Well over 80% of students in all programs of study (including English language and vocational courses) planned to stay in Australia for longer than a year, and the large majority of students in all programs planned to stay more than 2 years.

Figure 5. Respondents' total planned length of stay in Australia by course of study (n=2,466)



## Respondents' first education provider and first program of study in Australia

### Type of first education provider

For almost a third of respondents (30%; 736 participants), their first education provider was a private college (for the most part, offering vocational or English-language courses). This is the largest sample of data on work experiences from this student cohort which is notoriously difficult to reach. With the exception of the authors' previous study on wage theft among temporary migrants, previous large-scale studies on working conditions of international students in Australia have included only university students.<sup>18</sup>

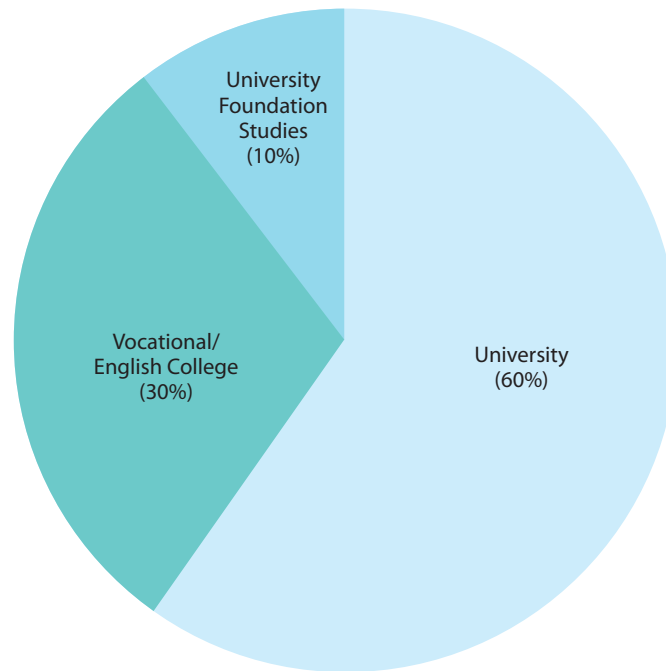
For a further 10% (245 participants), their first education provider was a university foundation studies (pathways) provider.

The remaining 60% of participants (1,472 students) first studied at a university.

18 Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum, *Wage Theft in Australia: Findings from the National Temporary Migrant Work Survey* (2017); cf Chris Nyland, Helen Forbes Mewett, Simon Marginson, Gaby Ramia, Erlenawati Sawir and Sharon Smight, 'International Student-Workers in Australia: A New Vulnerable Workforce' (2009) 22(1) *Journal of Education and Work* 1; Stephen Clibborn, '7-Eleven: Amnesty Must Apply to All Exploited Workers' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 Stephen 2015.



Figure 6. Respondents' first education provider (n=2,453)

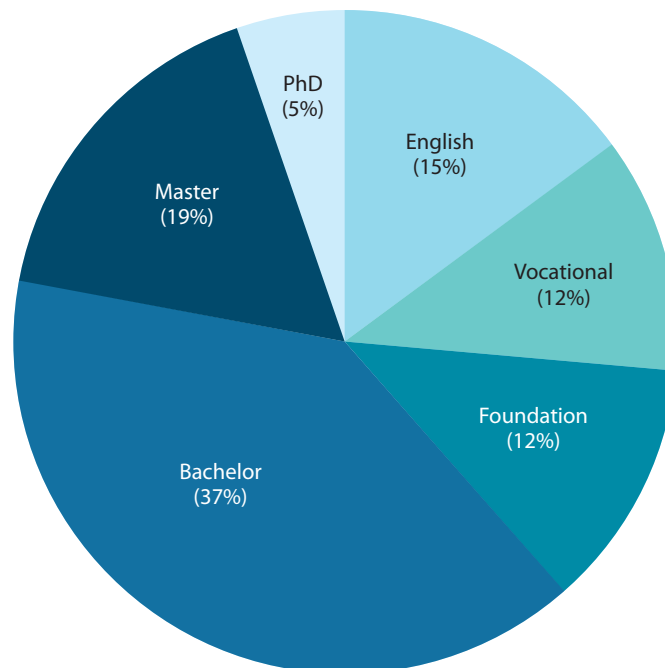


### First program of study

The largest cohort of respondents (37%) were first enrolled in a Bachelor's degree program. Nearly a quarter of all participants had already completed an undergraduate degree overseas and were first enrolled in either a Master's program (19%) or PhD program (5%).

Two-fifths of respondents were first enrolled in non-degree programs including 15% in English language courses, 12% in vocational courses, and 12% in Foundation studies.

Figure 7. Respondents' program of study (n=2,466)



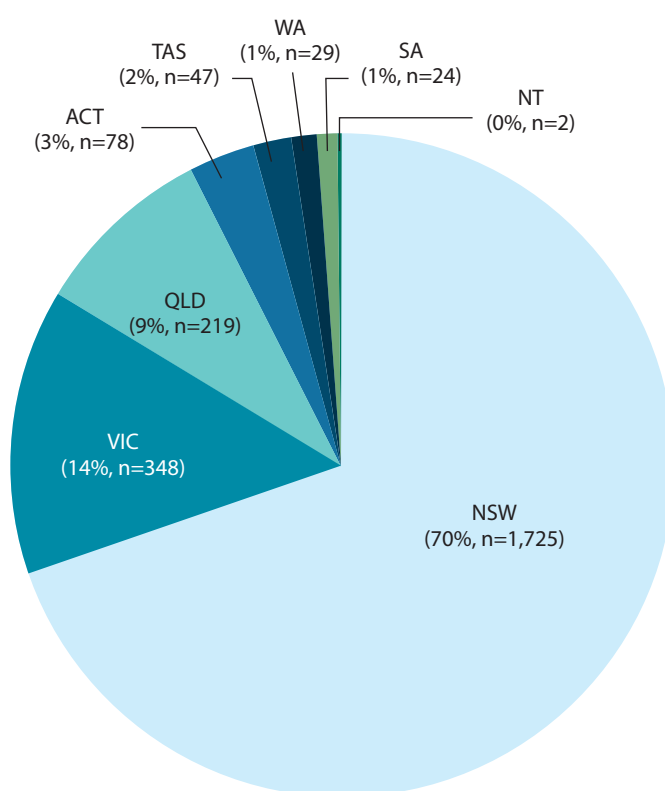
## Geographic location

As the study was funded by StudyNSW, survey dissemination activities focused primarily on NSW. However, the survey was open to any international student in Australia.

Respondents were asked where they lived in their first accommodation in Australia. More than two thirds (70%) were located in NSW, followed by 14% in Victoria, 9% in Queensland and the remaining 7% across the other states and territories.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) were located in a major city. This included 65% in Greater Sydney, 14% in Greater Melbourne and 7% in Greater Brisbane. Greater Hobart, Perth, and Adelaide were home to 4% of respondents. Fewer than 4% were located in 'inner regional Australia' (3%).

Figure 8. Respondents' state/territory of first residence (n=2,472)



## Section 5: International student participation in the labour market in Australia

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Participants were asked whether they had worked in a paid job in Australia. Among those who had been in Australia for at least 3 months, 65% reported that they had worked. The findings discussed in the following subsections relate to respondents who had been in Australia for at least 3 months at the time of the survey.

### Program of study

More than half of respondents in every program of study had worked in a paid job in Australia, although the exact proportions varied. Over three quarters of those studying in vocational programs had worked (78%), as had over two thirds of those in English language courses (68%). Among students in Foundation courses, just over half (53%) had worked.

Among university students, 59% of students in Bachelor's degree programs and 56% of students in PhD programs had worked. A far higher proportion of students in Master's programs had worked (79%).

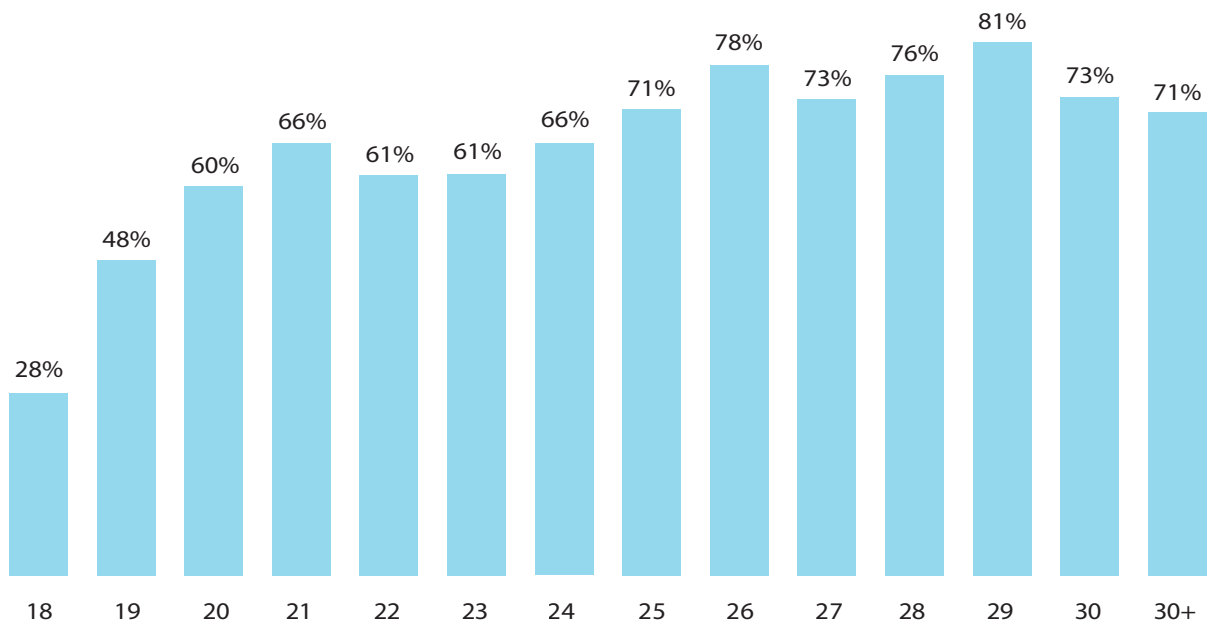
*Figure 9. Respondents who had worked, according to their program of study (among those who had been in Australia for at least 3 months) (n=1,811)*



### Age

The proportion of respondents who had worked rose steadily with age from almost half of those aged 19 (48%) to over three quarters of those aged 29 (81%).

Figure 10. Respondents who had worked, according to their age at time of survey (among those who had been in Australia for at least 3 months) (n=1,809)



## Gender

A slightly higher proportion of women had worked (67%) compared with men (64%).

## Section 6: Wage rates in lowest paid job in Australia

Participants were asked how much they were paid per hour in their lowest paid job in Australia. In contrast to the authors' previous study on wage theft among temporary migrants, this study did not ask participants for the location or industry in which they earned unlawfully low wage rates.

### Overall breakdown of wage rates

Over a quarter (26%) of respondents earned \$12 or less per hour in their lowest paid job. This figure has remained unchanged since the National Temporary Migrant Work Survey conducted in late 2016, in which 25% of the 2,392 international student participants earned \$12 or less in their lowest paid job.<sup>19</sup> This figure has remained static despite increases in the statutory minimum wages since 2016,<sup>20</sup> the introduction of legislative protections for vulnerable workers,<sup>21</sup> and an increased focus on international students by the Fair Work Ombudsman.<sup>22</sup> Few respondents would have been reporting on underpayment that occurred prior to the 2016 survey because 78% of respondents arrived in Australia after that survey was conducted.

### Wages below statutory minimum wage rate by age

#### Calculation of underpayment

In this report, underpayment is calculated based on statutory minimum wages from July 2018 to June 2019.<sup>23</sup> This includes both the absolute statutory minimum for full-time or part-time employees in ongoing employment or a fixed-term contract (\$18.93 per hour for workers aged 21 and over), as well as for casual employees who are entitled to a 25% loading on the hourly rate, in lieu of regular hours, paid leave and other entitlements (\$23.66 per hour for workers aged 21 and over). When calculating whether underpayment had occurred among respondents aged 17 to 20, lower youth wage rates were used.

For many, use of the statutory minimum wage to determine whether underpayment occurred can result in substantial underestimates of underpayment. This is because the minimum wage does not take into account further additional wages to which many workers are entitled such as penalty rates for working on evenings or the weekend, or allowances under relevant Awards or enterprise agreements. Examples of these are set out in the table below, which indicates standard hourly rates as well as Saturday penalty rates at the time of the survey, for a casual worker who is 21 years old working during the day in fast food or cleaning - jobs in which international students commonly work.

19 Berg and Farbenblum, *Wage Theft in Australia* (n 6) 27. The National Temporary Migrant Work Survey did not differentiate between wage rates of international students who were aged 21 and over and the wages of those entitled to lower youth wages (under 21). However, results from the present survey demonstrate that differentiation between these age groups made little difference. Among participants in this survey aged 20 years and above, a quarter (24%) earned \$12 or less per hour in their lowest paid job -- half the minimum hourly wage for casual workers -- compared with the average figure of 26% among all participants in this survey.

20 The statutory minimum wage rate for employees aged 21 years or above in permanent positions from July 2016 was \$17.70 while the minimum wage for such employees from July 2018 was \$18.93.

21 *Fair Work Amendment (Protecting Vulnerable Workers) Act 2017* (Cth).

22 See e.g. FWO International Students' Strategy discussed in '02: FWO performance report/Proactive activities/Vulnerable and migrant workers': FWO, Annual Report (2017-18).

23 The use of 2018 minimum wages rates could result in an over-counting of the proportion of respondents below the statutory minimum because some respondents may have worked in their lowest paid job prior to 2018 when slightly lower minimum rates would have applied. However, any over-counting would likely have been offset by three factors. First, the number who earned this wage prior to 2018 would have been relatively small because 58% of respondents had arrived since 2018, and 78% had arrived since 2017. Second, respondents' hourly wage rates were rounded up to the full dollar figure and the statutory minimum wage rates were rounded down. For example, 21 year olds were entitled to \$18.93 per hour and underpayment was calculated as any wage \$17 or below per hour. Third, as discussed in the box above, this calculation does not take into account penalty rates or allowances.

**Sample 2018-19 minimum hourly wage rates for a casual worker who is 21 years or over at time of survey**

<b>Job</b>	<b>Relevant Award</b>	<b>Standard casual hourly rate</b>	<b>Saturday casual penalty rate</b>
Fast food employee (Level 1)	Fast Food Industry Award 2010	\$25.99	\$31.19
Office cleaner working for a contract cleaning business (CSE Level 1)	Cleaning Services Award 2010	\$25.26	\$35.37

At the time of the survey, a 21 year old international student who was a casual fast food server earning \$12 per hour for six months, working 8 hours one weekday and 8 hours on a Saturday, would have been underpaid more than \$6,900.

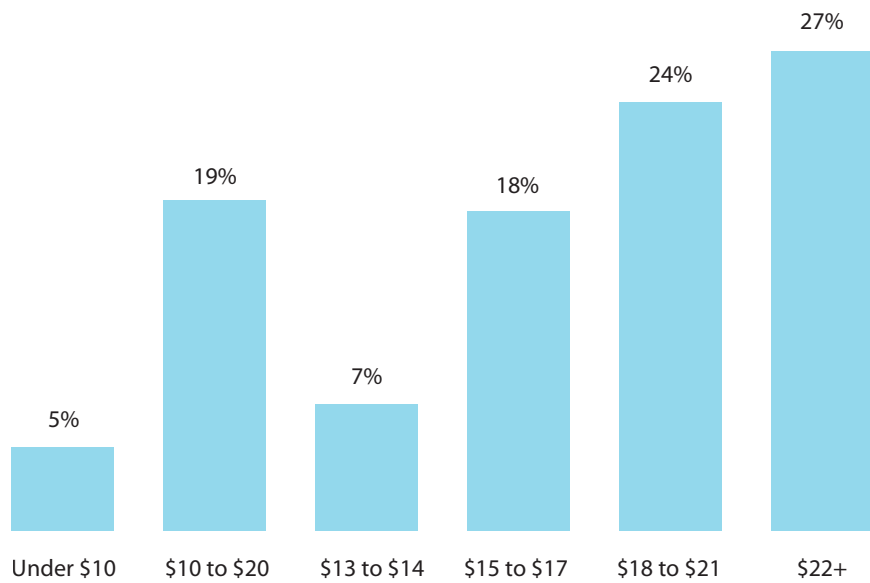
Among survey respondents who had worked, the vast majority were entitled to the adult minimum wage or very close to it (82% were aged 20 and above at the time of their lowest paid job).

Figure 11 shows wage rates reported by respondents aged 20 and above at the time of their lowest paid job:

- Half (49%) were paid below the basic statutory minimum wage (\$18.49 for 20 year olds; \$18.93 for 21 year olds (i.e. they were paid \$17 or less per hour)).
- Over three quarters (77%) were paid below the minimum casual hourly wage (\$23.11 for 20 year olds; \$23.66 for 21 year olds (i.e. they were paid \$22 or less per hour)).
- A quarter (24%) earned \$12 or less per hour in their lowest paid job -- half the minimum hourly wage for casual workers.

Even for those entitled to lower youth wages, a substantial proportion were still paid below minimum wage. Among 18 year olds, a third (32%) were paid less than the basic statutory minimum wage of \$12.93 per hour (i.e. \$11 or less per hour), and almost two thirds (64%) were paid less than the minimum casual hourly wage of \$16.17 (i.e. \$15 or less per hour). Among 19 year olds, close to half (46%) were paid less than the basic statutory minimum wage of \$15.61 per hour (i.e. \$14 or less per hour), and over two thirds (68%) were paid less than the minimum casual hourly wage of \$19.51 (i.e. \$18 or less per hour).

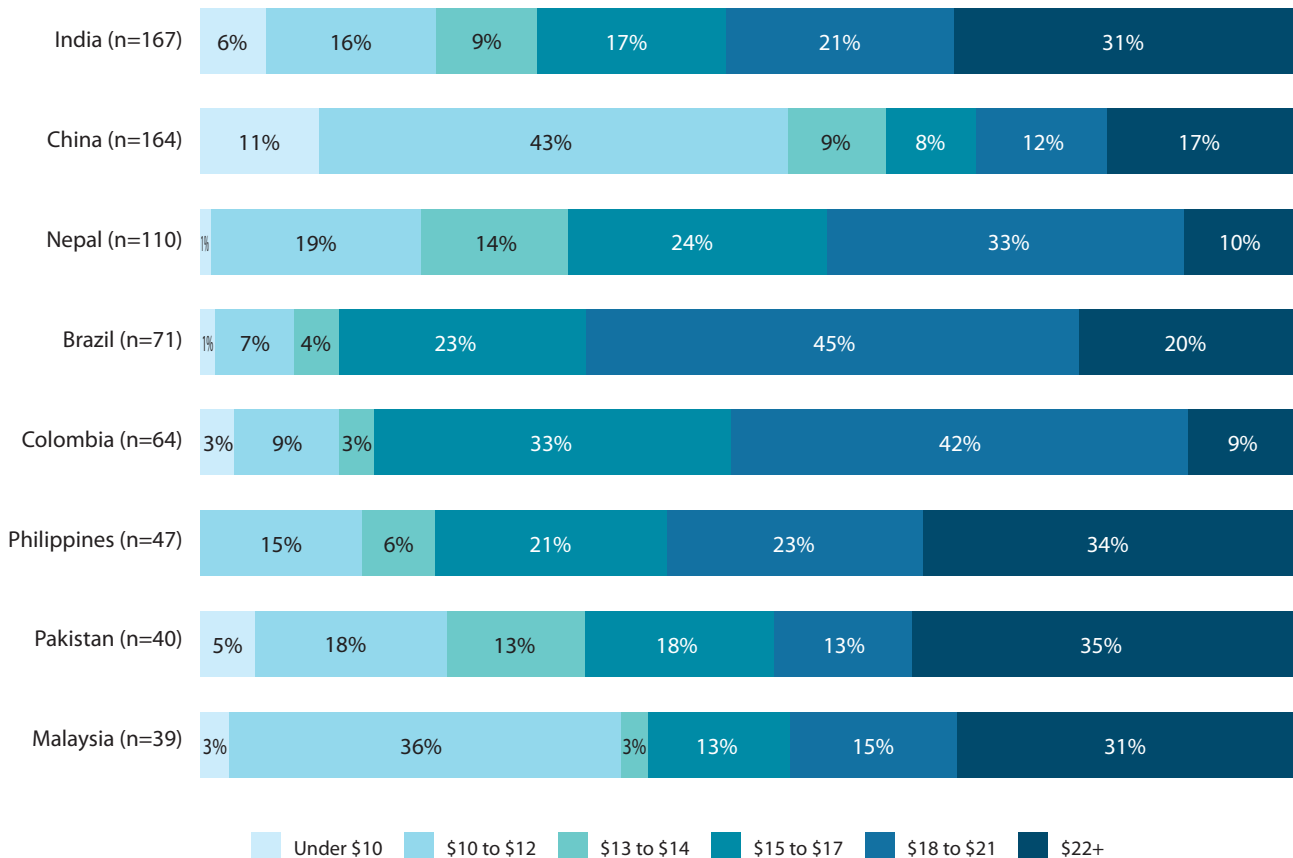
Figure 11. Wage rates of respondents aged 20+ in lowest paid job (n=1,066)



### Underpayment by nationality

In order to compare wage rates by nationality, the following analysis is restricted to respondents aged 20 years and above, who in 2018-2019 were entitled to at least \$18.49 per hour in a permanent part-time position or at least \$23.11 in a casual position.

Figure 12. Wage rates of respondents aged 20+ in lowest paid job, comparing largest 8 nationalities





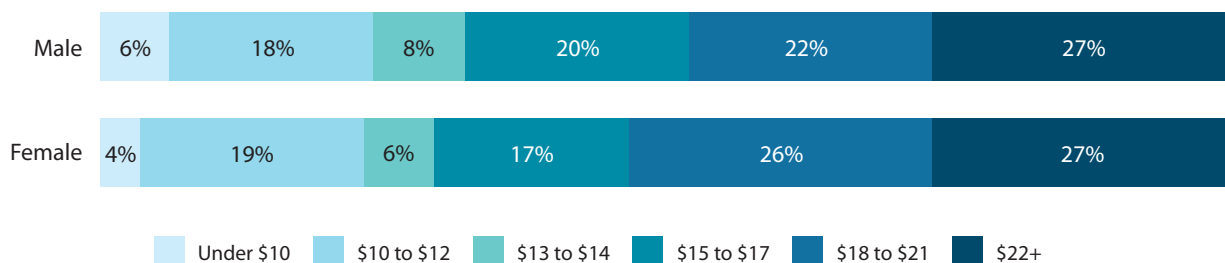
Among respondents of each of the top eight nationalities, at least two thirds of respondents (65%) were paid less than the minimum wage for a casual worker (\$22+ per hour), and over a third (35%) of respondents were paid less than the statutory minimum wage (\$18+ per hour).

Chinese students fared far worse than others at the most egregious levels of underpayment. Well over half (54%) were paid \$12 per hour or less - approximately half the statutory minimum wage for a casual worker. Approximately one in ten were paid less than \$10 per hour. Over four fifths (83%) earned less than the statutory casual minimum wage, and almost three quarters (71%) earned less than the statutory minimum wage.

## Wage rates by gender

The proportion of respondents at the very low end of wage rates (\$12 per hour or less) in their lowest paid job was similar among women (23%) and men (24%), as was the proportion earning above the statutory casual minimum wage rate of around \$22 per hour (27% each). However, a greater proportion of women than men earned above the base statutory minimum rate of around \$18 per hour (53% vs 49%).

Figure 13. Wage rates of respondents aged 20+ in lowest paid job, comparing men and women (n=1,063)

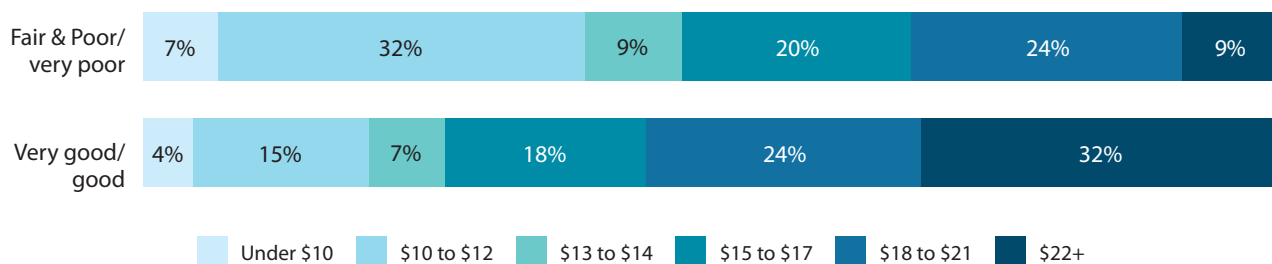


## Wage rates by self-reported English language ability

Underpayment was not confined to those with poorer English language ability although poor English language ability was a factor that coincided with underpayment. Even among respondents who reported that they spoke good or very good English, over two thirds (68%) earned less than the statutory minimum hourly wage for a casual worker (around \$22) in their lowest paid job in Australia. Close to half (44%) earned less than the minimum statutory hourly wage (around \$18) and one in five (20%) earned half the minimum casual rate or less (\$12 per hour).

Those with self-reported fair or poor English fared even worse. Over nine in ten respondents (91%) earned less than the statutory minimum hourly wage for a casual worker (around \$22) in their lowest paid job in Australia. Two thirds (67%) earned less than the base statutory minimum hourly wage (around \$18). Almost two in five (39%) earned half or less than the statutory minimum wage for a casual worker (\$12 per hour) -- double the proportion of those with good or very good English.

**Figure 14.** Wage rates of respondents aged 20+ in lowest paid job, comparing respondents with different self-described English language ability (n=1,066)



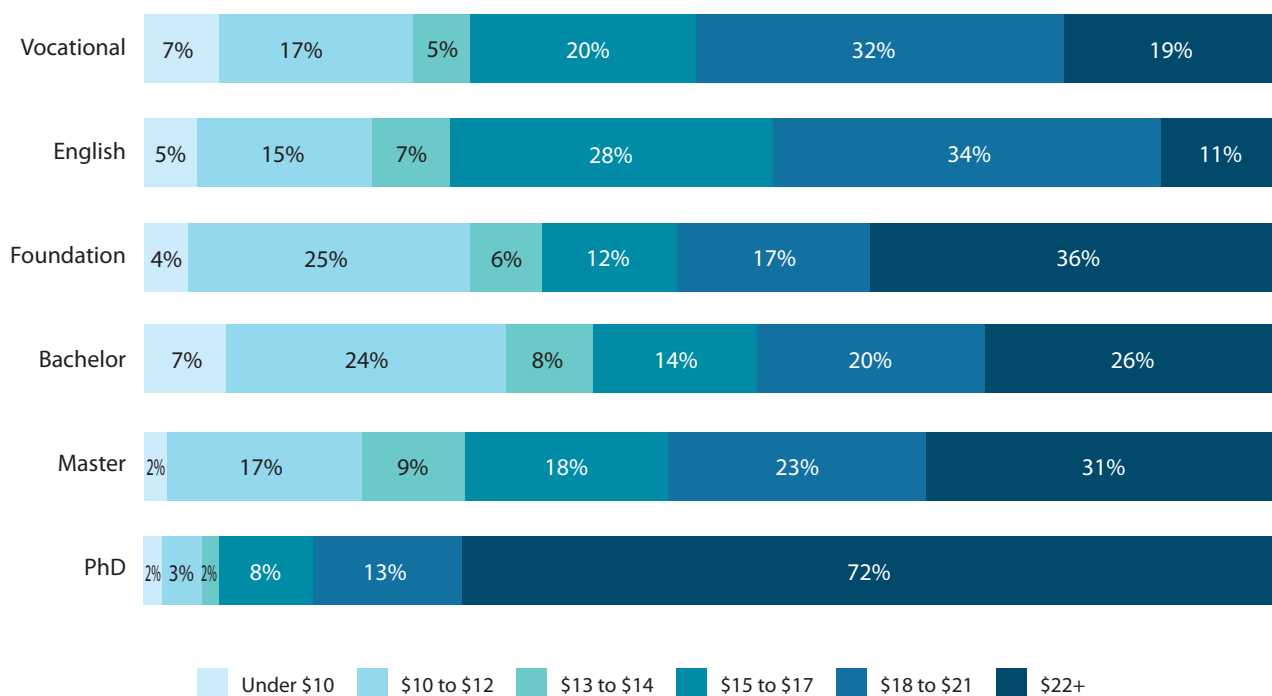
### Wage rates by program of study

Surprisingly, levels of underpayment were not linked with international students' level of education. Similar proportions of respondents in Master's programs earned less than \$15 per hour to the proportion of those in English or Vocational programs (the same was true for those earning \$12 per hour or less).

Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents in every program of study were paid less than the minimum wage for a casual worker (\$22+ per hour), and almost a half (47%) of respondents were paid less than the statutory minimum wage (\$18+ per hour). At least 19% were paid half or less than the minimum casual wage (\$12 or less per hour). The one exception to these findings was PhD students.

Students in Bachelor's degree programs fared substantially worse than others at the most egregious levels of underpayment: a third (31%) were paid half the minimum casual wage (\$12 or less per hour) -- the highest proportion of any student cohort.

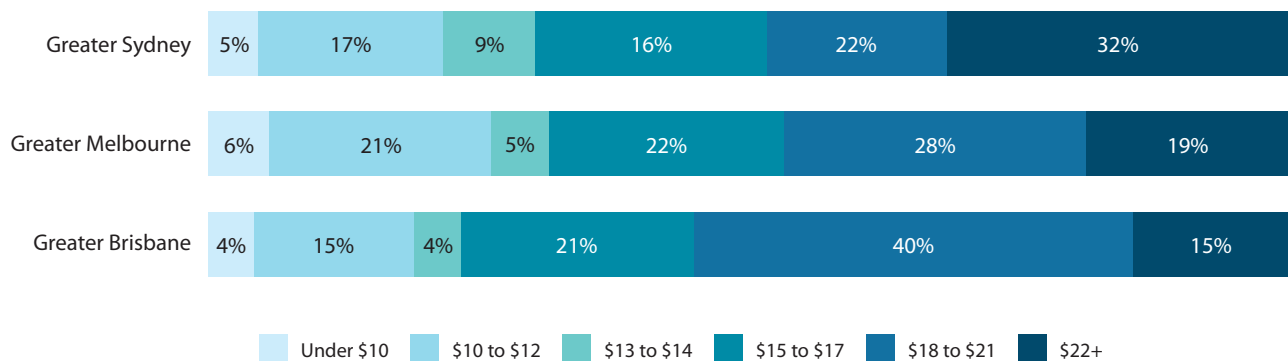
**Figure 15.** Wage rates of respondents in lowest paid job, comparing respondents' programs of study (among those aged 20 years or above) (n=1,063)



## Wage rates by city

Poor wage rates were experienced by international students across each of the three major national cities in the eastern seaboard. However, wage rates appeared worse in Greater Melbourne where 27% earned \$12 per hour or less (compared with 22% in Greater Sydney and 19% in Greater Brisbane). More than half (53%) earned less than the basic statutory minimum wage compared with 46% of those in Greater Sydney and 45% of those in Greater Brisbane. Respondents in Greater Sydney had the highest proportion of students earning above the statutory casual minimum wage rate (32%) compared with those in Greater Melbourne (19%) and those in Greater Brisbane (15%).

Figure 16. Wage rates of respondents aged 20+ in lowest paid job in different cities (n=889)



## Section 7: Other problems at work in Australia

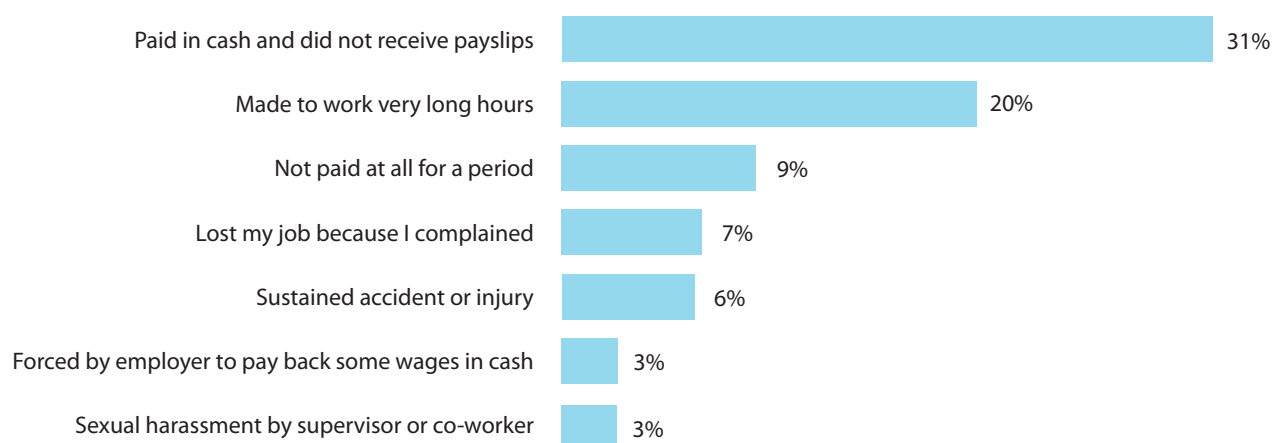
Participants who had worked in Australia were asked whether they had experienced certain problems in any job in Australia. These problems were identified through focus groups and interviews in an earlier phase of this research project and the authors' earlier research.

Close to a third of respondents (31%) indicated that in at least one job they had been paid in cash and did not receive payslips. One in five (20%) reported being required to work very long hours. One in ten (9%) had not been paid at all for a period.

Eighty seven individuals (7%) were dismissed from their job when they complained to their employer. Eighty three (6%) had an accident or injury at work. Thirty five respondents (3%) were sexually harassed by a supervisor or co-worker, and the same number were forced by their employer to pay some of their wages back in cash.

The following sections explore the prevalence of these problems among different cohorts of international students. Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix provide a breakdown of the prevalence of these experiences among students of different national groupings, and in different programs of study.

Figure 17. Problems experienced in any job in Australia (n=1,300)



### Other forms of underpayment and record-keeping failures

Almost a third of respondents overall (31%) were **paid in cash and did not receive a payslip**. This included over half of nationals from China (56%) and Vietnam (53%), and over a third of students from Malaysia (37%), Indonesia (37%) and Brazil (34%). A far greater proportion of respondents with self-reported fair or poor English language ability reported these record-keeping failures (42%), compared with those with self-reported good or very good English (28%). Similarly, more than a third of those in English language courses (36%) reported payment in cash and lack of a payslip, though this was not substantially greater than those studying a Bachelor's degree (34%), vocational program (30%) or even a Master's degree (27%).

35 international students (3%) reported that their employer had **forced them to pay part of their wages back in cash**. This proportion was higher among Chinese respondents (5%) than all other nationalities. It was also reported by more men (4% compared to 2% of women) and more students with self-reported fair or poor English (4% compared to 2% of those with good or very good English). This was reported by similar proportions of respondents studying vocational courses, English language courses and Bachelor's degree programs (3-4% of each).

One in ten respondents (9%) were **not paid at all for a period**. This experience was especially common among nationals of Brazil (14%) and was also reported by one in ten respondents from China, India, Pakistan, Nepal

(all 10%). Non-payment of wages was reported by a greater proportion of men than women (12% and 7% respectively). It was reported by similar proportions of respondents across each of the programs of study other than PhD degrees (9-11% of respondents in English, vocational and Foundation programs, and Bachelor's and Master's degrees).

## Dismissal after complaint to employer

Eighty seven international students (7%) reported having lost a job because they complained to their employer. This was especially common among students from Pakistan (17%) and Vietnam (11%), as well as those from China (9%) and Nepal (8%). A greater proportion of men reported losing their job because they complained (10%, compared to 5% of women).

## Accidents and injuries

Eighty three international students (6%) experienced at least one accident or injury at work. Accidents and injuries were most common among students from Vietnam and Indonesia, among whom more than one in six (17%) reported this experience. Among students in vocational courses and English language courses, one in ten experienced at least one accident or injury at work (9% and 10% respectively). This was double the prevalence of workplace accidents and injuries among Bachelor's and Master's students (5%). International students with self-reported poor or fair English (8%) also more commonly experienced accidents and injuries than those with good or very good English (6%).

## Sexual harassment

Thirty five international students (3%) reported experiencing at least one incident of sexual harassment by a supervisor or co-worker while working in Australia. It is likely that this figure is an underestimate of the prevalence of sexual harassment of international students in the workplace, since it may have been underreported by participants who either did not recognise particular conduct as sexual harassment, or were uncomfortable acknowledging sexual harassment even in an anonymous survey.<sup>24</sup> Sexual harassment was reported by one in ten Brazilians (9%), and by a greater proportion of students enrolled in vocational (5%), English-language (4%) and Foundation (4%) courses, compared with 2% of Master's and Bachelor's students. A far greater proportion of women experienced sexual harassment (4%, compared to 1% of men).

## Overwork

One in five respondents (20%) indicated that they had been 'made to work very long hours'. This was reported by one in three international students from Vietnam (32%) and one in four students from Pakistan, China and Malaysia (26% each). This experience was reported similarly by students across programs of study, including those in Bachelor's (23%) and Master's (18%) programs, as well as in English-language (21%) and vocational (19%) courses. A greater proportion of men reported that they were made to work long hours (22%, compared with 18% of women). This experience was somewhat more common among respondents with poor or fair English (22%) than good or very good English (19%).

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24 Andrea Durbach and Kirsten Keith, *On Safe Ground: Strengthening Australian University Responses to Sexual Assault and Harassment* (Report, August 2017), 102.

## Section 8: Information-seeking among international students experiencing problems at work

Among those who experienced any problem at work in Australia, almost two thirds (62%) did not try to access information or help anywhere, even from their friends.

Those who experienced a problem were asked where they went for information or help (if anywhere). As shown in Table 2, the largest number of respondents sought information or help from their friends (23%), followed by those who searched for information online (17%). The cohort who searched online included a substantially greater proportion of those with good or very good English (19%) compared with those with fair or poor English (11%).

One in ten students sought information from an Australian government agency or website. This group included a large cohort of Chinese international students. Students with self-rated fair or poor English were half as likely to seek information from an Australian government agency or website as those with good or very good English (5% vs 11%).

One in twenty (5%) sought information or help from a legal service provider. A similar proportion sought help from their education agent (4%), and 8% sought information from their employer.

Only 5% of students sought information or assistance from staff or organised student groups at their education provider. Among both private college and university students, only 3% sought help from a student support officer at their institution. More university students sought help or information from a student group (3%, compared with a single college student). Only 3 university students and 1 college student sought help from a legal service on campus.

For a breakdown of where respondents of different nationalities sought information or help, see Table 5 in the Appendix.

**Table 2.** Where respondents went for information or assistance, as a proportion of respondents who experienced any problem at work in Australia (n=644)

Source of information or help	Proportion of respondents
Friends	23%
Searching online	17%
An Australian government agency or website	10%
Social media	9%
My employer	8%
A student group	6%
A legal service	5%
My education agent	4%
A student support officer at my education provider	3%
A student group at my education provider	2%
A community or religious group	2%
Legal service at my education provider	1%
Other	1%
My consulate	0%

## Comparing students at different types of education providers

A greater proportion of college students sought information on an Australian government website (12%, compared with 9% of university students). Similarly, a greater proportion of college students sought information or help from friends (25%, compared with 22% of university students), searching online (19%, compared with 17% of university students), social media (12% compared with 7% of university students) or an education agent (6% compared with 3% of university students).



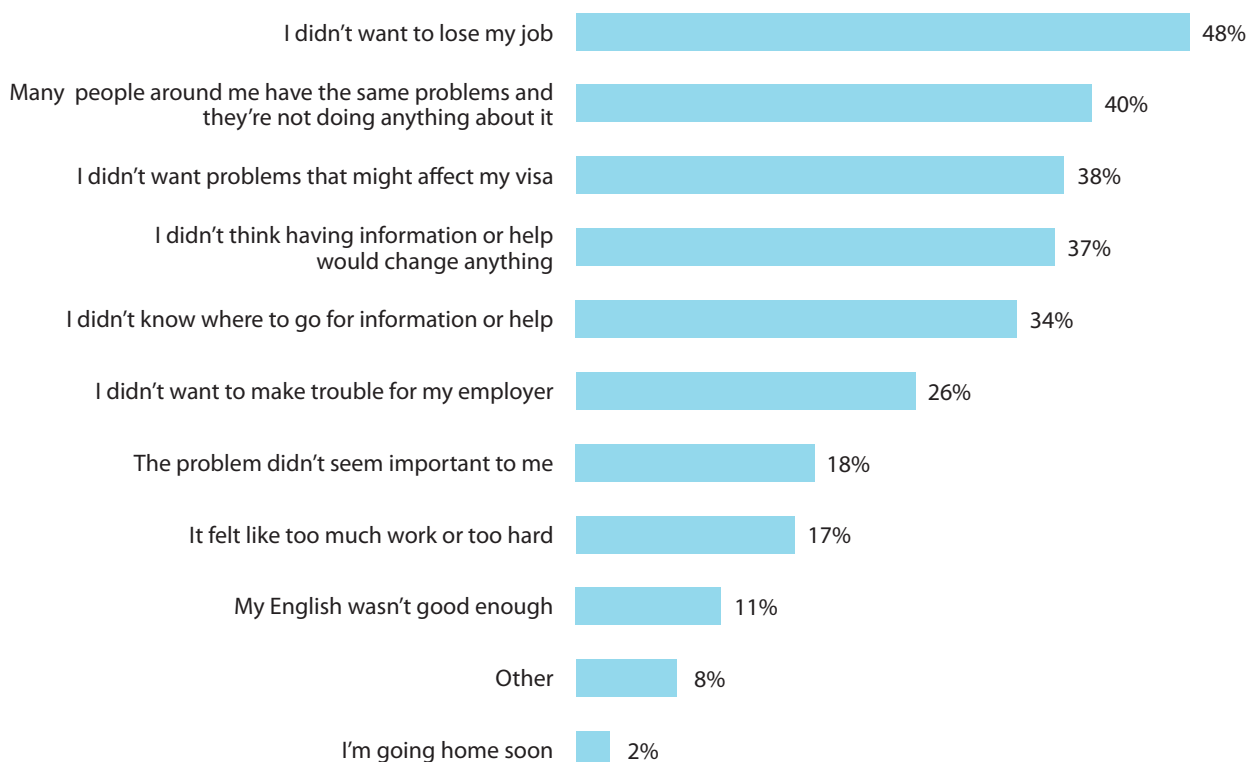
## Section 9: Reasons why international students did not seek information or assistance for problems experienced at work

Respondents who indicated that they had not sought information or help for any problem were then asked why this was the case (Figure 18). Respondents were able to select multiple reasons which were presented in randomised order. These reasons were drawn from focus groups and previous research on attitudes of international students towards complaints and information-seeking.

In the National Temporary Migrant Work Survey, underpaid participants were asked whether they had, or planned to, take action to recover unpaid wages. Those who had not taken action, or did not plan to do so, were asked why that was the case. Their responses were reported in *Wage Theft in Silence*.<sup>25</sup> The question asked in the Information for Impact survey was different to the question asked in the previous survey in several ways. First, here, international students were asked why they had not sought *information* or help from any source, rather than why they had not sought to recover unpaid wages. Second, here, students were asked about barriers to seeking information or help for *any problem* at work in Australia, whereas the earlier survey focussed on barriers to taking action to recover unpaid wages alone.

This section examines the responses given by international students as to the reasons they had not sought information or help, including variations across different cohorts.

Figure 18. Why participants did not seek information or help in relation to problems at work (n=404)



25 Farbenblum and Berg, *Wage Theft in Silence* (n 13) 35.

## Fear of job loss

Almost half of respondents (48%) who experienced a problem at work indicated that they did not even seek information because they feared they would lose their job. This reflects international students' perception of the precariousness of their employment in a saturated labour market in which the supply of international students and other workers looking for casual, low-skilled jobs exceeds employers' demand for their labour. It is also borne of a related (likely accurate) perception that their employment can be easily terminated if they complain. As noted above, 7% of respondents in this survey reported that they had in fact lost their job because they complained. While this proportion may not at first seem high, in fact it may indicate that a substantial proportion of those who complained to their employer lost their job. Considering that only 55% of respondents experienced a problem at work, and only a small portion of these would have complained to their employer, the fact that 7% of all respondents were fired after complaining to an employer suggests that this was a common outcome among those who complained.

Fear of job loss has a powerful silencing effect because many international students have acute dependence on employment income to meet the high costs of living and studying in Australia and are pessimistic about the prospects of easily finding alternative employment for a range of reasons. These include their lack of English language ability, work experience and local connections, in addition to being restricted to working only 40 hours per fortnight.

Fear of job loss was especially acute among Master's students. Two thirds (66%) selected this as a reason they did not seek information or help for a problem at work, and this was by far the most commonly selected reason among this cohort (over 50% higher than the next most common reason selected).

Fear of job loss was also especially common among international students from India (69%) and Nepal (61%). This contrasts with only 34% of Chinese students who selected this reason. A substantially greater proportion of men (55%) gave fear of job loss as a reason for not seeking information or help for a problem at work than women (43%). This may reflect a more common perception among these cohorts that their employer would fire them if they complained, or it could reflect greater dependence on their employment than among other cohorts (whether for income or work experience), where the consequences of job loss would be more acutely felt.

## Perceptions of others' acquiescence

Four in ten students (40%) indicated that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because many people around them had the same problems and they were not doing anything about it.

This may reflect a number of concerns. Some participants may have been reluctant to give the impression that they believed they were entitled to better working conditions than their peers. Others may have taken the cue from their peers that inaction was socially appropriate, or assumed that because their peers were not seeking information or help for problems there were good reasons for not doing so. Some may have concluded from others' inaction that taking action was futile or not worth the risks and costs.

Similar proportions of men (41%) and women (39%) indicated that others' acquiescence was a reason why they did not seek information or help for a problem at work. This reason was especially common among Vietnamese students (70%), and by notably fewer students from Colombia (19%) and Brazil (23%).

## Fear of immigration consequences

Almost four in ten students (38%) reported that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they did not want 'problems that might affect my visa'.

Fear of visa loss may be a product of both specific and general concerns. International students are permitted to work no more than 40 hours per fortnight while their course is in session. Reporting problems that occurred while

working in excess of that limitation would expose the student to potential cancellation of their student visa and removal from Australia midway through their studies.

For many, fear of visa loss extends beyond their current visa to a fear of jeopardising their prospect of obtaining a future visa including permanent residency.

Fear of visa loss may also be broader, even where a student has complied with the work limitation. It appears that many international students do not want to draw any negative attention to themselves for fear that this could at some point affect their current or future visa. Some may also be deterred by the possibility that a complaint will trigger the detection of co-workers who may be working in breach of visa conditions.

Visa-related fears were particularly prevalent among students from Brazil and Colombia (57% and 48%) and Vietnam (52%), as well as students from India and Nepal (45% and 43% respectively). They were far less common among students from China (19%). Fear of immigration consequences was reported by a greater proportion of men (42%) than women (35%).

These figures suggest the limited impact of the assurance protocol established between the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) in 2017.<sup>26</sup> The protocol was introduced in an effort to encourage international students and other temporary migrants to report exploitation to the FWO. The protocol states that the DHA will generally not cancel a temporary visa with work rights if the worker reports exploitation to the FWO and assists the regulator, even if the worker has breached the work conditions under the visa. However, the protocol requires the FWO to pass on the worker's information to the DHA to obtain the dispensation, and the protocol provides no assurances in relation to future visas or permanent residence.

## Pessimism about outcome

Almost four in ten students (37%) reported that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they 'didn't think having information or help would change anything'. This may partly reflect international students' perception of widespread entrenched noncompliance with minimum labour standards in the occupations and industries in which they work, and/or a perception of the ineffectiveness of workplace enforcement systems, or their inability to effectively engage with those systems.

## Other reasons

A third of students (34%) reported that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they **did not 'know where to go for information or help'**. Education level did not appear to affect the proportion of participants who selected this reason. Indeed, this reason was selected by an identical proportion (34%) of students in Master's programs, vocational programs and English language courses, as well as by 30% of Bachelor's students. This reported barrier to seeking information or assistance was particularly prevalent among students from Vietnam (52%) and Brazil (47%).

A quarter of students (26%) stated that they did not seek information or help for a problem at work because they **'did not want to make trouble' for their employer**. This reason was especially common among students from Brazil and Colombia (33% and 32% respectively).

One in five students (18%) stated that they did not seek information or help because the **problem was not important enough to them**. One in six students (17%) did not do so because **it felt like too much work or too hard**.

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26 See 'Visa-holders and migrants', *Fair Work Ombudsman, Australian Government* (Web page, accessed 3 February 2020) <<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/find-help-for/visa-holders-and-migrants>>.

One in ten students (11%) did not seek information or help for a problem at work because **their 'English was not good enough'**. This included a far higher proportion of students from Colombia (39%) and Brazil (33%), and was more common among women (13%) than men (9%).

Very few students (2%) indicated that they did not seek help because **they were going home soon**. This does not necessarily indicate that other participants had confidence that they could pursue a claim from outside Australia. Rather it may reflect the fact that most participants were not going home soon, or that other concerns created such substantial barriers they did not consider this factor.

## Section 10: Knowledge of work rights and tax obligations

Participants were asked a series of questions testing their knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities as workers. After they selected their response they were provided with the correct answer and an explanation. This was an important aspect of the survey methodology as it ensured that participants benefited from their survey participation by acquiring new knowledge and correcting misperceptions (rather than simply information-gathering from them).<sup>27</sup>

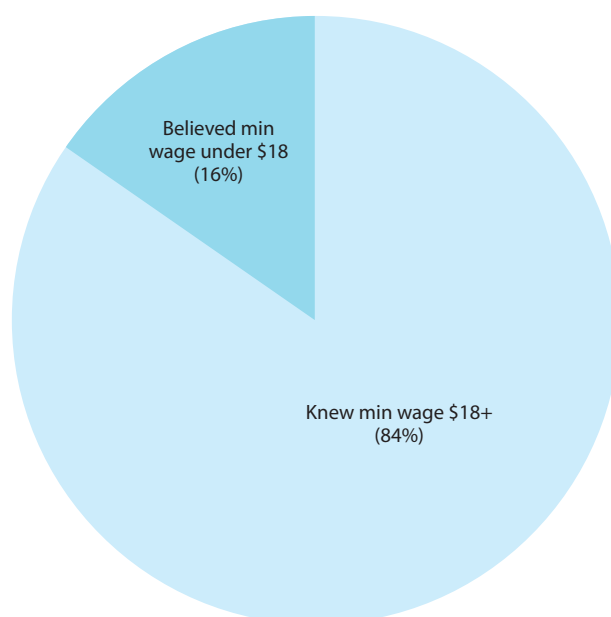
These questions were designed to test hypotheses about potential common misconceptions among international students that partially explain why international students accept low wages or do not seek help to address problems. They were formulated based on the authors' preliminary findings from focus groups and previous studies, as well as discussions with a range of service providers and other stakeholders.

### Knowledge of minimum wage rate

It is sometimes assumed that international students accept underpayment because they are unaware of the minimum wage in Australia. In order to test this hypothesis, participants were asked to identify the legal minimum hourly wage for employment in Australia. The overwhelming majority (84%) of respondents aged 20 and over knew that the legal minimum hourly wage for an adult is at least \$18 per hour.<sup>28</sup> Over 83% of respondents in each of the nine largest nationality cohorts knew this. In other words, fewer than one in six students were unaware of the minimum wage.

Even among respondents who earned less than the minimum wage in their lowest paid job,<sup>29</sup> 83% knew that the minimum wage was higher. Knowledge of minimum wage was very high among students in English (92%), Master's (86%) and vocational (84%) programs, and slightly lower among Bachelor's students (78%).

**Figure 19.** Knowledge of respondents aged 20+ that statutory minimum hourly wage for work in Australia was at least \$18 per hour (n=1,146)



27 The authors received numerous emails from survey participants indicating that they had learned important information and found it useful to participate in the survey for this reason.

28 Since the statutory minimum wage in Australia varies according to youth rates (see Section 6 above), this section examines the responses of participants who were aged 20 years or older at the time of the survey, who constituted 87% of all participants.

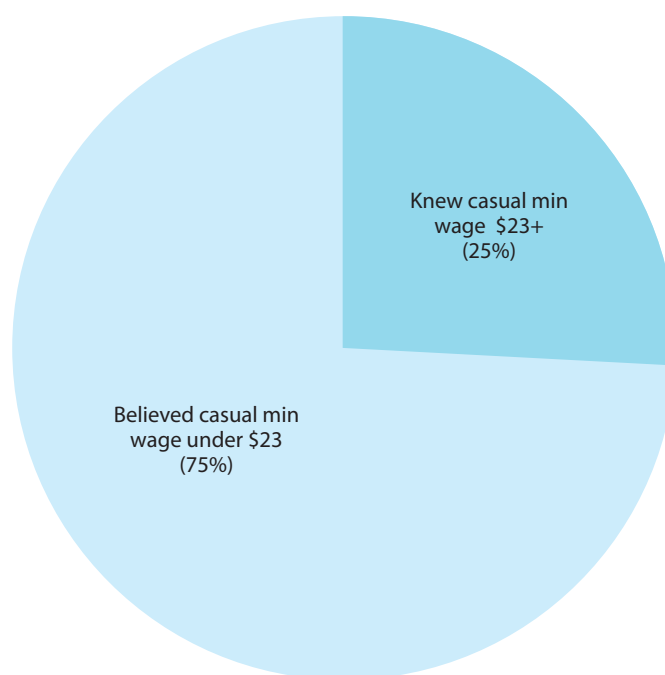
29 This was based on the cohort who earned \$17 per hour or less while aged 20 years or over in their lowest paid job in Australia. It is possible that some of these participants gained awareness of the minimum wage after leaving that job.

## Knowledge of minimum casual wage rate

Another possible explanation for acceptance of underpayment is that although international students may know the statutory minimum wage, they are unaware of the minimum wage for a casual employee, which is the employment classification of most international students. Participants were therefore asked to identify the legal minimum hourly wage for a casual employee in Australia. In stark contrast to widespread knowledge of the basic statutory minimum, only a quarter of respondents (25%) aged 20 and over knew that the legal minimum hourly wage for an adult in a casual position is at least \$23 per hour. Awareness of casual wage rates was especially low among Chinese students (14%), and was below 35% for all of the top 10 nationalities other than Nepal (48%) and Vietnam (42%).

Knowledge of casual wage rates was similarly low regardless of whether respondents were paid above or below the basic statutory minimum wage in their lowest paid job. Knowledge of minimum casual wage rates was low among students across all programs of study, including Bachelor's (23%), English (24%), Master's (27%) and vocational (29%) programs.

*Figure 20. Knowledge of respondents aged 20+ that statutory minimum hourly wage for casual work in Australia was at least \$23 per hour (n=1,143)*



## Knowledge that international students are entitled to the same minimum wage rates as Australian workers

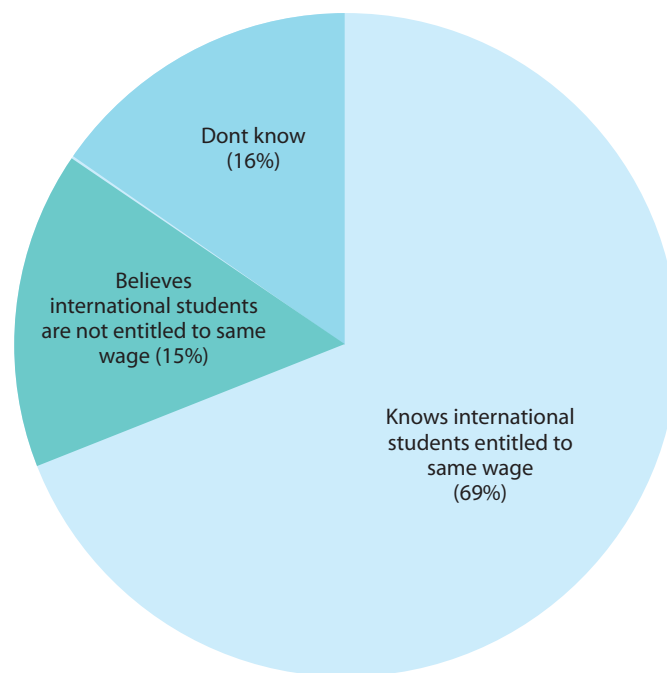
It is often believed that international students accept underpayment because they see themselves as operating in a separate labour market in which Australian labour laws do not apply. To test this hypothesis, participants were asked whether international students are entitled to the same wage rates as Australian workers. The majority knew that the same wage rates apply to all workers in Australia regardless of immigration status. However, close to one third of respondents (31%) either believed international students were not entitled to the same wage rates as Australians or did not know whether this was the case. This misperception was especially common among respondents aged 18 to 20 years (44%). It was also particularly common among those in Foundation studies courses (43%) and English language courses (40%).

The misperception was notably lower among those earning approximately the minimum wage for a casual worker<sup>30</sup> (21%) compared with those in lower wage brackets (including 32% of those earning \$18 to \$21 per hour).

Chinese students demonstrated better knowledge that international students are entitled to the same minimum wage as Australians, with only 26% who either believed international students were not entitled to the same wage rates as Australians or did not know whether this was the case. In contrast, as many as 46% of Nepalese students, 45% of Malaysians and 40% of Colombians lacked knowledge of this basic principle of Australian labour law.

Prevalence of this misperception varied among respondents who experienced problems and sought information or help from different sources. Among those who sought information on an Australian government website, only 18% did not know that international students are entitled to the same minimum wage as Australians. Similarly, this was the case for only 23% of those who sought information or help from a legal service. In contrast, among those who approached a student group for information, 31% did not know international students are entitled to the same wage. This was the case for 35% of those who sought information from friends, and 39% of those who sought information from social media or their education agent.

**Figure 21.** Are international students always entitled to the same legal minimum wage that applies to Australians? (n=1,236)



### **Belief that a worker breaks the law by agreeing to be underpaid**

The authors' research has suggested that international students may be reluctant to seek help or report underpayment because they believe they are complicit in breaking the law when they agree to wages less than their lawful entitlement. In fact, responsibility lies with an employer to pay their employee correctly; a worker is not in breach of employment law if they accept underpayment.

Almost two thirds of respondents (62%) held the misconception that a worker who agrees to be underpaid has themselves broken the law. A further 19% did not know whether this was the case or not.

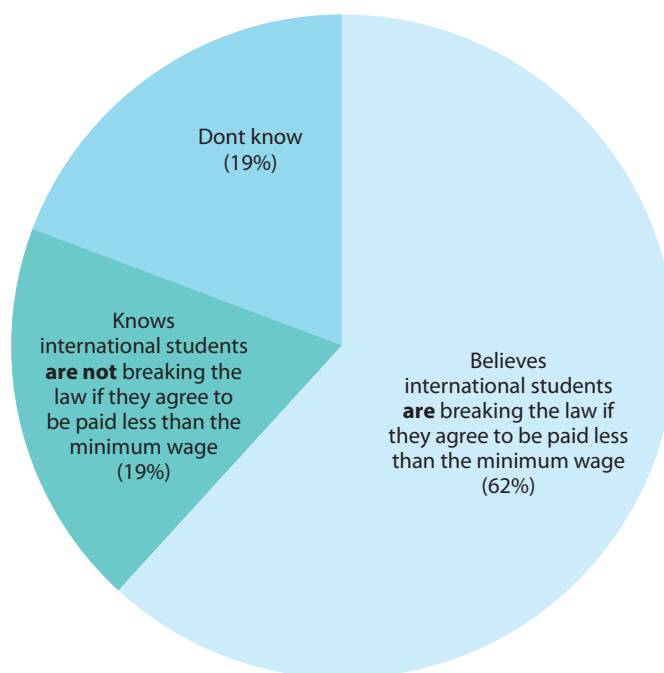
Overall, fewer than one in five respondents knew that accepting underpayment was not in breach of the law. Knowledge was especially low among students from China (17%), India (11%), Brazil (19%), Colombia (14%) and

30 Defined as respondents earning \$22 or more per hour in their lowest paid job who were aged 20+ at the time.

Indonesia (13%). Indeed, over three quarters (77%) of students from India wrongly believed that international students were breaking the law if they agreed to be underpaid. This misconception was held by well over half of students from all other large nationality groups.

Prevalence of this misconception did not substantially vary across respondents' programs of study, and persisted despite international students seeking information or help for problems (though they presumably did not seek information specifically on this issue). For example, only 20% of students who sought information from a government agency or website knew that agreeing to be underpaid is not unlawful. This was the case for only 14% who went to a legal service, 18% who approached someone at their university and 19% who approached an education agent, and 23% of those who sought information or help from their friends.

**Figure 22.** *Is a worker breaking the law if they agree to be paid less than the minimum wage? (n=1,232)*



### **Belief that a worker breaks the law by accepting wages in cash**

The authors' research has also suggested that international students may be reluctant to seek help or report underpayment because they believe they are complicit in breaking the law when they accept payment of their wages in cash. It is not illegal to accept wages in cash provided a worker complies with taxation obligations. Nor is it illegal for an employer to pay wages in cash, provided the employer complies with payslip and taxation obligations.

This misperception was very common among international students, although somewhat less widely held than the misperception that a worker breaks the law by accepting underpayment. Half of all respondents (51%) were under the misconception that a worker has broken the law if he or she is paid in cash. A further 18% did not know whether this was the case or not. Fewer than a third (31%) knew that it is not illegal to be paid in cash.

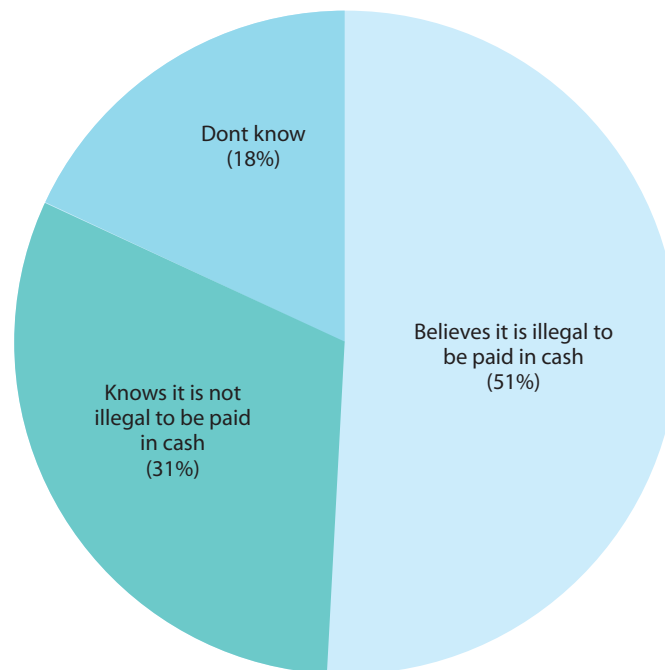
Only around one in five students from Nepal (18%) and India (22%) and 28% of students from China knew that a worker has not broken the law if they agreed to be paid in cash. In fact, two thirds of students from Nepal (66%) and India (65%) were under the misconception that international students who agree to be paid in cash have broken Australian law.

Prevalence of this misconception did not substantially vary across respondents' programs of study, and was similar



across rates of pay in participants' lowest paid job. The misconception also persisted despite international students seeking information or help for problems. For example, only 37% of students who sought information from a government agency or website knew that accepting wages in cash is not unlawful. This was the case for 46% who went to a legal service, 29% of those who sought information or help from their friends, and 26% who approached someone at their education provider.

**Figure 23.** *Is it illegal to be paid in cash? (n=1,222)*



### Understanding of tax liability

A final under-explored hypothesis for international students' willingness to accept underpayment is that they believe that receiving low wages in cash and not lodging a tax return leaves them in approximately the same financial position as if they were paid correctly and complied with their taxation responsibilities. This view flows from a lack of awareness of their full entitlements (such as casual loadings and penalty rates), concerns about the complexity of filing a tax return, and/or from a misunderstanding of the amount of tax they would be required to pay. This misunderstanding is sometimes promoted by employers to encourage students to accept low wages.

In reality, most international students who were in Australia for the full financial year would not have to pay tax at all on the first \$20,570 they earned in that financial year (under various concessions which include the 'tax free threshold').<sup>31</sup> This duration of residence would apply to most international students: as noted above, 89% of survey respondents were planning to stay in Australia for more than a year. Though these international students would be required to lodge a tax return, they would keep their full earnings under that amount with no tax payable. This would apply to minimum wages earned by an international student working as a casual employee during ordinary business hours for up to 16 hours per week for a year.

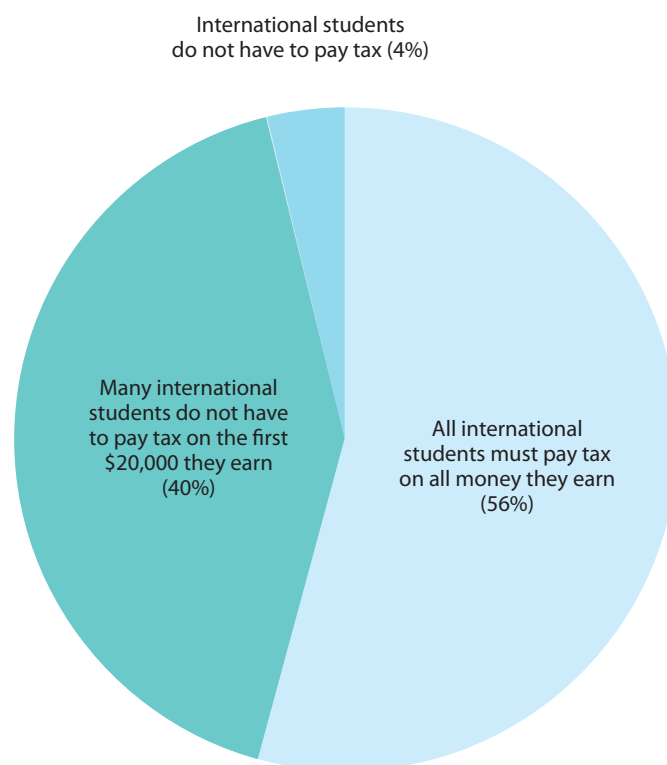
Survey findings confirmed that the majority of respondents (56%) were under the misconception that all international students must pay tax on all wages they earn. Prevalence of this misconception was similar across all of the larger nationality groups and was especially high among students from Brazil (67%), Pakistan (65%), Colombia (64%), Nepal (61%) and China (60%).

<sup>31</sup> Conversely, a student who resides in Australia for 6 months or less will likely have a tax liability of 32.5% of their income. Students in Australia between 6 and 12 months may have to pay some tax and should seek advice on their tax liability.

This misconception was similarly prevalent among respondents across different programs of study, including 55% of Bachelor's students, 57% of Master's students and 51% of PhD students. Misconceptions about international students' tax liability prevailed even among most of the international students who had sought information or help for problems. At least half of respondents were unaware of an entitlement to the tax free threshold among those who sought information from a legal service (66%), an Australian government agency or website (55%) and searching online (50%).

Even among those earning at least \$22 per hour in their lowest paid job, the majority wrongly believed that international students were required to pay tax on their full earnings. This was also the case for 57% of those who earned \$18 to \$21 per hour, 60% of those who earned \$13 to \$17 per hour, and 57% of those who earned \$12 per hour or less in their lowest paid job. In other words, among this very large cohort of international students earning below \$18 per hour, many may have perceived themselves as better off earning these illegally low wages in cash because they assumed they would otherwise have been required to pay tax.

**Figure 24.** *If international students work in Australia do they have to pay tax? (n=1,226)*



## Section 11: Conclusion

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Findings from the Information for Impact survey confirm that the proportion of international students who are egregiously underpaid has remained essentially unchanged since 2016, with one in four still receiving less than half the minimum casual wage in their lowest paid job, even as the national minimum wage has increased. This is despite efforts from the Fair Work Ombudsman during this period and legislative changes including increased penalties. In the absence of effective interventions, this situation will likely worsen when international students return to work as COVID-19 restrictions ease, with serious consequences for these workers and the labour market more broadly.

The government has committed to implement recommendations made in the 2019 Migrant Workers' Taskforce Report to address exploitation of international students and other temporary migrants.<sup>32</sup> Consistent with those recommendations, the findings in this report indicate a number of key interventions that government and other stakeholders should introduce to reduce exploitation and enable more effective reporting and responses. Foremost among these, an effective wage recovery mechanism must be established and resources must be invested to enable more effective government investigation and enforcement on the part of the Fair Work Ombudsman and other regulators.

In addition, reforms to the *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth) should be introduced to remove the 40 hour fortnightly work condition 8105 on student visas that gives rise to their vulnerability and related fear of visa cancellation, as the government did between 7 March and 1 May 2020 for international students working in supermarkets and indefinitely from 18 March in care industries.<sup>33</sup> So long as this visa condition remains in place, the Australian government should establish an absolute firewall between the FWO and DHA that provides workers with the necessary assurance that if they seek help from the FWO for exploitation at work their information will not be shared with DHA.

Government and education providers must develop and deliver clear information and messaging to international students to address misconceptions that they have broken the law if they agree to be underpaid or if they agree to be paid in cash. Information campaigns for international students should focus on increasing awareness of casual loadings, penalty rates and other entitlements, not on the statutory minimum wage. International students must also be educated about their tax responsibilities and entitlements and receive advice and/or assistance to lodge a tax return. However, the findings on the high prevalence of job loss among those who complained to their employer indicate that the risks of taking action are real, and caution should be exercised before encouraging students to approach their employer to demand improved conditions.

Findings on international students' fear of job loss and frequent experience of actual job loss indicate the importance of enabling collective action by international students and other workers in a workplace to facilitate protected reporting of, and remedy for, exploitation. Unions should redouble efforts to engage with and support temporary migrants and must be granted greater legislated power to play a stronger role in detection and enforcement of labour noncompliance. Equally, there is a pressing need for dedicated legal assistance services to be established for international students, especially on university campuses, as well as a need to raise awareness among international students of the services that exist.

The financial loss sustained by the international education sector during the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of international students to the Australian economy, and that the government will neglect international students' wellbeing at its peril. Australia has moral and human rights responsibilities to international students and can no longer treat them and their labour as a utilitarian commodity, despite the status of

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32 Migrant Workers' Taskforce, *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce* (Final Report, March 2019).

33 Temporary relaxation of working hours for student visa holders, *Department of Home Affairs, Australian Government* (Web Page) <<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/student-500/temporary-relaxation-of-working-hours-for-student-visa-holders>>.

international education as Australia's fourth largest export industry. With Australia's reputation damaged as a result of its exclusion of international students from government financial support, it is more critical than ever that the government's commitment to addressing the Migrant Worker Taskforce recommendations be maintained and that it urgently develop robust evidence-based interventions to prevent and address exploitation of international students.

## Appendix

**Table 3. Problems other than wage theft by nationality**

	Paid in cash and did not receive payslips	Made to work very long hours	Could not take the leave I was owed	Not paid at all for a period	Paid in cash and did not receive payslips	Lost job because I complained	Sexual harassment by supervisor or co-worker	Forced by employer to pay back some of my wages in cash	I have not experienced any of these problems at work	n=
China	56%	26%	15%	10%	9%	6%	2%	5%	29%	229
India	24%	20%	12%	10%	6%	5%	1%	3%	53%	191
Nepal	22%	21%	15%	10%	8%	5%	2%	2%	44%	144
Brazil	34%	24%	3%	14%	5%	5%	9%	1%	43%	76
Colombia	24%	19%	4%	6%	6%	6%	3%	1%	39%	70
Vietnam	53%	32%	17%	6%	11%	17%	0%	2%	19%	47
Pakistan	26%	26%	14%	10%	17%	7%	0%	2%	50%	42
Philippines	20%	12%	2%	8%	4%	4%	2%	2%	55%	49
Malaysia	37%	26%	7%	7%	2%	5%	5%	2%	47%	43
Indonesia	37%	20%	11%	6%	6%	17%	3%	3%	29%	35

**Table 4. Problems other than wage theft by program of study**

	Vocational	English	Foundation	Bachelor	Master	PhD	n=
I was paid in cash and did not receive payslips	30%	36%	30%	34%	28%	11%	401
Made to work very long hours	19%	21%	18%	23%	18%	7%	255
I could not take the leave I was owed	10%	6%	10%	12%	11%	3%	127
Not paid at all for a period	11%	9%	9%	10%	8%	5%	120
Lost my job because I complained	8%	6%	4%	7%	8%	5%	87
Accident or injury	9%	10%	6%	5%	5%	3%	81
Sexual harassment by supervisor or co-worker	5%	4%	4%	2%	2%	0%	35
My employer forced me to pay back some of my wages in cash	4%	3%	1%	3%	2%	0%	34
I have not experienced any of these problems at work	40%	37%	50%	43%	48%	79%	579

**Table 5. Where respondents who had problems went for information or assistance, by nationality (n=358)**

	Friends	Searching online	An Australian government agency or website	Someone at my university or college	My employer	Social media	A student group	A legal service	My education agent	A community or religious group	My consulate	Other
China	24%	18%	14%	8%	10%	11%	9%	6%	8%	1%	2%	0%
India	27%	22%	11%	12%	10%	10%	6%	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%
Nepal	22%	10%	4%	6%	10%	11%	5%	1%	4%	2%	1%	1%
Vietnam	32%	21%	8%	8%	3%	16%	18%	0%	3%	3%	0%	0%
Brazil	23%	16%	5%	7%	7%	16%	7%	5%	7%	0%	0%	0%

**Table 6. Reasons why respondents did not seek information or assistance for problems by nationality (n=248)**

	I didn't want to lose my job	Many people around me have the same problems and they're not doing anything about it	I didn't want problems that might affect my visa	I didn't think having information or help would change anything	I didn't know where to go for information or help	I didn't want to make trouble for my employer	The problem didn't seem important to me	It felt like too much work or too hard	My English wasn't good enough	I'm going home soon
China	34%	44%	19%	39%	24%	16%	19%	21%	16%	2%
India	69%	45%	45%	39%	31%	25%	12%	16%	2%	0%
Nepal	61%	37%	43%	33%	41%	10%	12%	14%	6%	2%
Brazil	37%	23%	57%	37%	47%	33%	23%	23%	33%	0%
Colombia	52%	19%	48%	32%	32%	32%	13%	16%	39%	0%
Vietnam	39%	70%	52%	43%	52%	30%	26%	17%	9%	9%



