

Officers appointed to engage with multicultural communities on workplace rights, obligations

13 August 2015

The Fair Work Ombudsman has launched a program to foster new relationships with international student bodies and multicultural communities.

The aim is to ensure migrant workers, overseas workers, international students and employers are aware of their workplace rights and responsibilities.

Community Engagement Officers have been appointed to establish meaningful, ongoing relationships and have been trained to ensure they can work sensitively and productively with multicultural groups.

“We have been participating in discussion groups, meetings and community events to gain a better understanding of the needs of these communities,” says Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James.

The Community Engagement Officers are in addition to the Agency’s specialist Overseas Worker’s Team established in July, 2012.

They have been working with existing multicultural networks and other government agencies, councils, community legal and migrant resource centres, ethnic community networks and international student organisations to determine how to best assist migrant and international student groups.

Ms James says the officers have also been working to establish and develop long-term relationships with leaders within multicultural communities. “By engaging with intermediaries and networks that these communities already use and trust, we hope to increase their awareness about their workplace rights and responsibilities,” she says.

There has been a significant increase in the number of hits on the languages page of the Fair Work Ombudsman website since the program was initiated.

“This would suggest that we’re making inroads into these communities, as we educate people about the role and function of the Fair Work Ombudsman,” Ms James says. “Working with these groups is also helping us to improve our in-language advice and inform the development of new resources.”

Visa-holders now account for 11 per cent of all requests for assistance received by the Fair Work Ombudsman. Last financial year, the Fair Work Ombudsman recovered \$1.6 million in underpaid wages and entitlements for visa-holders – up from \$1.1 million in 2013-14.

In June, the Fair Work Ombudsman joined with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) to form Taskforce Cadena to jointly combat the incidence of fraud and exploitation involving foreign workers in Australia.

Taskforce Cadena has been established to achieve the following objectives:

- To reduce visa fraud, illegal work and the exploitation of foreign workers in Australia;
- To utilise intelligence from a range of sources to identify and investigate major targets of interest, and
- To influence Australian businesses in order to enhance compliance with Australian workplace laws and regulations in relation to foreign worker rights and obligations.

Taskforce Cadena will ensure government bodies join together and work more closely on intelligence gathering, disruption, enforcement and litigation, and include collaboration with other agencies such as the AFP, ASIC, the ATO, as well as State and Territory Agencies.

Ms James says the Fair Work Ombudsman has been active in this area for many years and understands that visa holders can face a number of barriers to understanding and enforcing their workplace rights. “Youth, language and cultural differences, concerns about their visa status all contribute to these barriers and can also make them more vulnerable to exploitation,” she said.

The Fair Work Ombudsman is currently running two programs aimed at protecting the rights of overseas workers.

“Our three-year Harvest Trail initiative involves reviewing compliance within the fruit and vegetable growing industry across Australia, while simultaneously our Overseas Workers’ Team has been conducting a review of the wages and conditions of overseas workers

in Australia on 417 working holiday visas,” Ms James said.

“We are particularly concerned about the treatment of visa-holders by labour-hire contractors operating in the horticulture and poultry processing sectors. We are also conscious that exploitation of visa-holders is a persistent issue in Australia in industries known to employ high numbers of overseas workers, such as hospitality, cleaning, convenience stores and trolley collectors.”

An advertising campaign aimed at alerting backpackers to their workplace rights whilst on working holidays in Australia is about to commence at regional airports in areas known to attract large numbers of 417 visa-holders.

These include Mildura, Rockhampton, Mackay, Ballina, Bundaberg and Cairns. This follows a recent social media campaign using Facebook and Twitter to send messages in language of origin to international students.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has a range of free innovative and interactive tools and resources on its website that can assist overseas workers and employers, including:

- an [online learning centre \(www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/online-training/default\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/online-training/default) that has interactive courses to teach businesses and workers skills and strategies to help them at work,
- [fact sheets \(www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/fact-sheets/default\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/fact-sheets/default) about the minimum rights and obligations of businesses and workers, including information on the National Employment Standards, record-keeping and pay slips,
- [best practice guides \(www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates---guides/best-practice-guides/default\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates---guides/best-practice-guides/default) to help small to medium-sized businesses with implementing best practice workplace policies and procedures,
- [templates \(www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates---guides/templates-and-guides\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates---guides/templates-and-guides) that simplify keeping employment records,
- [Calculators \(http://calculate.fairwork.gov.au\)](http://calculate.fairwork.gov.au) to help work out:
 - * award pay rates
 - * annual and personal leave
 - * calculate payment based on hours entered into a shift calculator
 - * entitlements when ending employment, and
- [My Account \(www.fairwork.gov.au/global/register\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/global/register) which allows information and resources to be saved for future use.

Information to assist both employers and employees from non-English speaking backgrounds has been translated into 27 languages on the Fair Work Ombudsman website at www.fairwork.gov.au/languages (www.fairwork.gov.au/languages) .

The Fair Work Ombudsman also has fact sheets tailored to overseas workers and international students on its website and has produced videos in 14 different languages and are available on YouTube. Overseas workers or employers seeking assistance can call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. A free interpreter service is also available on 13 14 50.

Follow Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James on Twitter [@NatJamesFWO](https://twitter.com/NatJamesFWO) (http://twitter.com/NatJamesFWO) , the Fair Work Ombudsman [@fairwork_gov_au](https://twitter.com/fairwork_gov_au) (http://twitter.com/fairwork_gov_au) or find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/fairwork.gov.au (http://www.facebook.com/fairwork.gov.au) .

Sign up to receive the Fair Work Ombudsman’s media releases direct to your email inbox at www.fairwork.gov.au/mediareleases (www.fairwork.gov.au/mediareleases) .

Media inquiries:

Lara O’Toole, Media Adviser

Mobile: 0439 835 855

lara.o'toole@fwo.gov.au (mailto:lara.o'toole@fwo.gov.au)

Contact us

Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

The Fair Work Ombudsman is committed to providing advice that you can rely on. The information contained on this website is general in nature. If you are unsure about how it applies to your situation you can call our Infoline on 13 13 94 or speak with a union, industry association or workplace relations professional. Visitors are warned that this site may inadvertently contain names or pictures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently died.