

# Feeling The Pinch

How Low Wage Growth and Rising Prices are Impacting  
Private Sector Clerical and Administrative Workers

June 2022



## Executive summary

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**Australian workers are facing the impact of a decade of stagnant wage growth and sharp increases in the cost of living. The COVID-19 pandemic has also reshaped working life, with large numbers of Australians continuing to regularly work from home into 2022.**

This report explores how Australian Service Union (ASU) members working in clerical and administrative roles in the private sector are faring under these conditions. It provides insight into their wages and their satisfaction with their wages; their perceptions around their financial situation and the cost of living; their labour mobility decisions; and some of the impacts of working from home.

May 2022 saw Australia's first interest rate rise in more than a decade and the release of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data showing a significant gap between wage growth and cost of living increases. This gap was a central issue at the 2022 federal election. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's successful campaign included endorsement of a minimum wage increase to keep up with inflation, as well as a suite of other measures to alleviate cost of living pressures, including increased childcare subsidies and policies to address housing affordability.

Wage Price Index data released in the final weeks of the election campaign backed up the everyday financial experience of many Australian households, revealing a distinct decline in real wages. Wages grew by just 2.4 % over the year to March 2022, significantly below the average annual growth rate since 1998 of 3.1%. With a 5.1% inflation rate outstripping wage growth, real wages fell by 2.7%. The gap between income and inflation growth is the biggest it has been since 2013.

Workers in clerical and administrative roles in Australia have a particular set of vulnerabilities in relation to changing wage and work conditions. 74% of these workers are women and they make up 28% of all female workers in Australia. Clerical and administrative workers have become increasingly vulnerable to unemployment, precarious employment and underemployment. These workers are also less likely to have access to the types of wage increases and labour mobility opportunities available to technical and managerial workers.

This report provides evidence from a survey of private sector clerical and administrative workers (n= 255) drawn from the ASU membership to provide a snapshot of how this cohort is experiencing financial pressures and changing working conditions in 2022.

The survey included workers who identified as professional administrators as well as workers who identified as call centre workers. The report additionally reviews ABS data and other existing sources to highlight the current national landscape in relation to wage growth, cost of living and working conditions for clerical and administrative workers in Australia. An online methodology was employed for the survey and participants recruited via the ASU membership database.

This data provides a snapshot of how this group of ASU members are faring under current conditions, and where their key concerns lie. The survey asked participants about their general employment conditions and work hours; their current wages and satisfaction with their income; their financial situation and perceptions of the cost of living; and their experiences of working from home.

Overall, the survey data reveals that this group of workers feel significantly impacted by wage and cost of living pressures. Very few feel they are living comfortably on their current income. The survey reports significant concerns about the affordability of basics like food, fuel and healthcare as well as evidence of constrained consumer spending, with respondents reporting reluctance to spend limited income on leisure and entertainment.

### **KEY FINDINGS:**

- Only 7% of survey respondents feel they are living comfortably on their present income. Nearly half feel that they are just 'coping' and 43% are finding it either 'difficult' or 'very difficult' on their present income.
- 7 out of 10 respondents feel they have become 'much worse off' or 'worse off' financially over the last year.
- 3 in 10 respondents are living paycheque to paycheque, a figure that rises to 48% for call centre workers.
- More than 1 in 10 call centre workers have gone without meals.
- More than 1 in 10 call centre workers have pawned or sold something to make ends meet.
- 3 in 10 respondents have foregone health care because they can't afford it.
- Nearly one-third (31%) indicated that they are likely or extremely likely to change industry or sector over the next 12 months.
- Lastly, nearly two-thirds of workers are working unpaid overtime, with a majority working more than 3 additional hours per week without pay.

# Clerical and administrative workers in Australia

Under the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), workers who fall into the category of *Major Group 5 Clerical and Administrative Workers* provide support to managers, professionals and organisations by organising, storing, manipulating and retrieving information.<sup>1</sup> This category includes sub-major groups of office managers and program administrators; personal assistants and secretaries; general clerical workers; inquiry clerks and receptionists; numerical clerks; clerical and office support workers and other clerical and administrative workers. Call centre workers are included within this category as part of the *Minor Group 541 Call or Contact Centre Information Clerks*.

## UNDERVALUING OF A FEMINISED LABOUR FORCE

Globally, clerical and administrative work has become increasingly undervalued as professional workplaces have become more bureaucratised and the administrative workforce has become dominated by women.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting overall patterns of the gender pay gap, remuneration and rewards are generally lower in clerical and administrative work than in male-dominated occupations. Further, analyses of the future of work also suggest that these workers are highly susceptible to unemployment and increasing disparity over time due to automation.<sup>3</sup>

In Australia, clerical and administrative workers make up about 13.5% of the total working population and comprise 28% of the female workforce.<sup>4</sup> Three-quarters of workers in this occupation category are women, and around 32% work part-time. As a highly feminised segment of the labour force, this group is disproportionately impacted by gendered inequalities both within pay structures and organisational cultures.



Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2021, Table 10.1

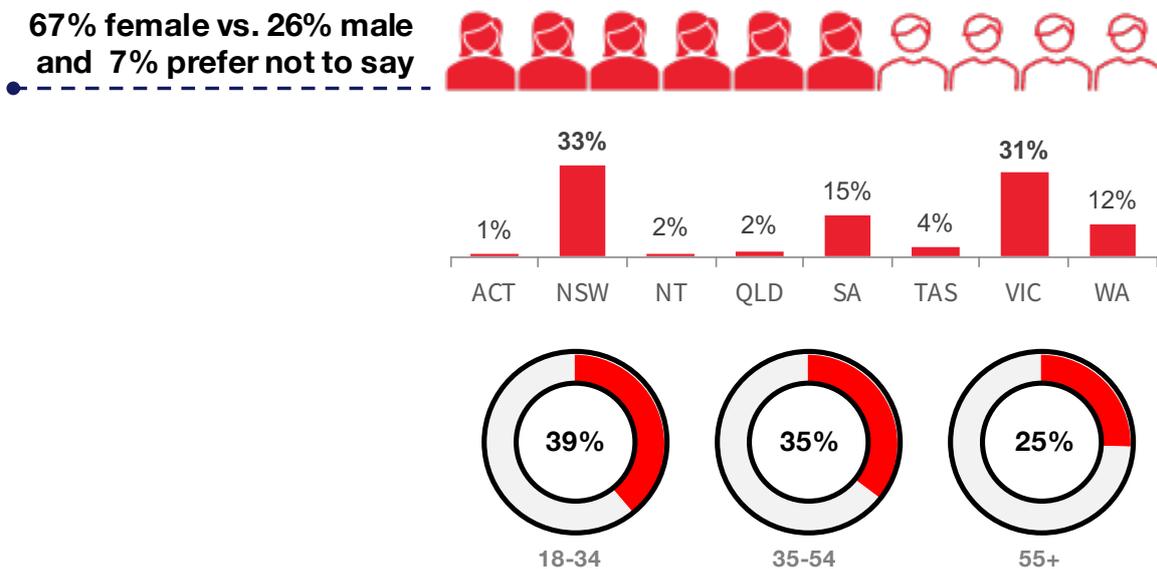
- 1 ABS, ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/anzsco-australian-and-new-zealand-standard-classification-occupations/2021/browse-classification/5>
- 2 Radsma, J., Clerical Workers: Acquiring the Skills to Meet Tacit Process Expectations Within a Context of Work Undervaluation and Job Fragility, Thesis, University of Toronto, <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/24860>
- 3 Durrant-Whyte, H., McCalman, L., O'Callaghan, S., Reid, A. and Steinberg, D. (2015) *The impact of computerisation and automation on future employment* in The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), *Australia's future workforce?*
- 4 ABS, Labour Force, Australia, Table 7, Employed persons by Occupation major group of main job (ANZSCO) and Sex <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release>

The clerical and administrative workforce in Australia has been less likely to structurally benefit from pandemic labour supply shortages than other groups. Retail and hospitality workers, who are in high demand, have experienced some potential wage and labour mobility opportunities after the lifting of pandemic restrictions. Higher income and more specialist professional workers have greater access to labour mobility, individual wage negotiations, and additional income from bonus, commission and promotion structures. Clerical and administrative workers in contrast are increasingly vulnerable to unemployment, precarious employment and underemployment.<sup>5</sup> This was the case even prior to the pandemic. And as private sector workers at the lower end of pay distribution, clerical and administrative workers in the private sector tend to be lower paid than their public sector counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

Our survey sample of workers in clerical and administrative roles broadly reflects wider population patterns, with 67% of respondents identifying as female. Respondents were predominantly younger workers, with 39% aged 18-34 and a further 35% aged 35-54. The majority of those surveyed reside in the major population centres of New South Wales and Victoria.

Throughout this report, where information has not been accessible by ‘occupation’ of main job through ABS data we have used ‘industry’ of main job, administrative and support services, as the most accurate comparator.

Survey respondent profiles



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Respondent profiles, May 2022.

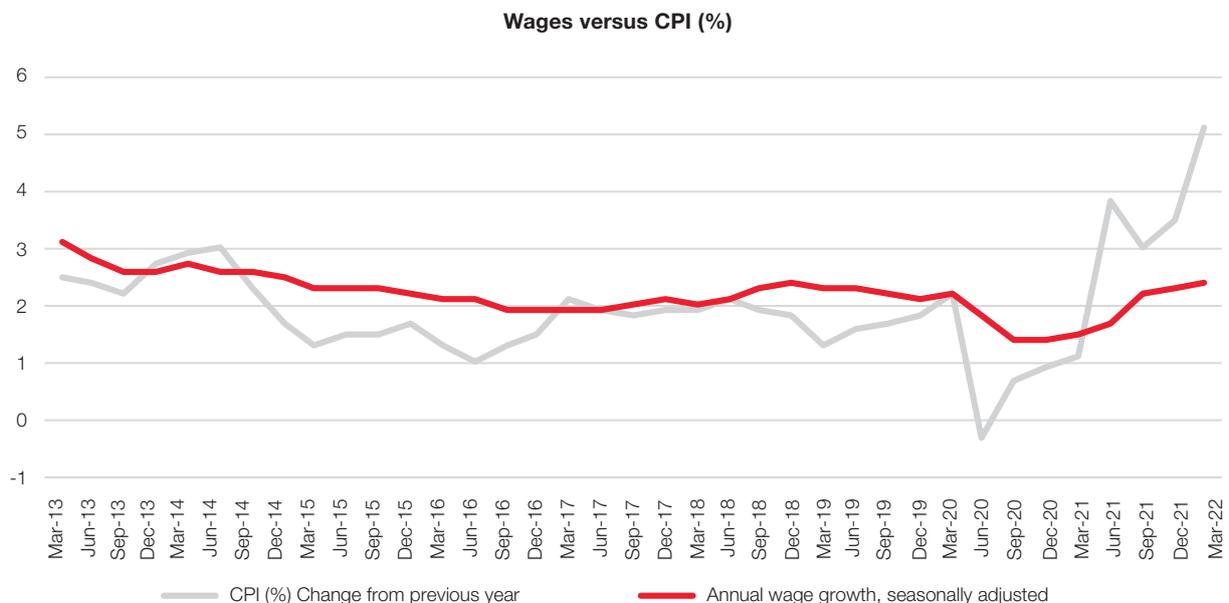
5 Radsma, J., Clerical Workers: Acquiring the Skills to Meet Tacit Process Expectations Within a Context of Work Undervaluation and Job Fragility, 2010, <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/24860>  
 6 Mahuteau, S., Mavromaras, K., Richardson, S. & Zhu, R., Public-Private Sector Wage Differentials in Australia, Volume 93, Issue S1, June 2017, Pages 105-121

## Wage growth and cost of living

Today's rising living costs are connected to unprecedented local and global supply chain issues. Non-discretionary items like fuel and groceries have been particularly affected. However, nominal wage growth in Australia has been declining for the better part of a decade.<sup>7</sup> 2021-22 data paints a particularly troubling picture, with the wage growth trajectory remaining weak despite the labour shortages and falling unemployment rates of the post-lockdown economic environment.

Since June 2021, Australia has been experiencing a sharp climb in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that is not being met by wage growth. Wages, which have flatlined for a decade, remain stuck in the 1.5 - 2.5% range while the annualised CPI has broken through the 5% mark. As the Reserve Bank stated in its May statement on monetary policy:

“Despite low unemployment rates, wages growth has not kept pace with inflation, so real wages have declined – in some cases noticeably.”<sup>8</sup>



Source: ABS, Wage Price Index, Australia March 2022 & ABS, Consumer Price Index, Australia March 2022

<sup>7</sup> Stanford, J., Stewart, A. & Hardy, T. The Wage Crisis Revisited. The Australia Institute. Centre for the Future of Work., 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Reserve Bank of Australia, Statement on Monetary Policy, May 2022.

In real terms there was strong growth in mean and median household disposable incomes over the period between 2001 and 2009. Mean family income rose (in 2019 dollars) from \$73,486 to \$94,050, a change of \$20,564. In contrast, during the following decade to 2019, the growth in mean family income totalled only \$5,714, around a quarter of the previous decade's growth.<sup>9</sup>

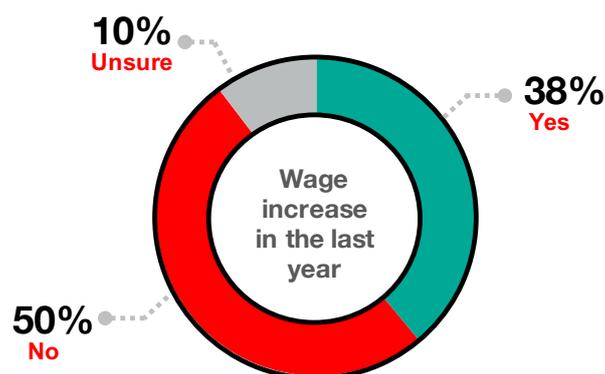
This declining growth was replicated for median family income in the same time frame, but with even more severe decline in comparison to the mean. Median income grew by only \$873 from 2010 to 2019 compared to \$19,850 in the period from 2001 to 2009<sup>10</sup>

This all points to a significant slowdown in income growth and a shift of a greater proportion of income, in relative terms, to higher income households.

Consumer Price Index data shows price growth across all food and non-food grocery products between March 2021 and March 2022, with fruit and vegetables costing, on average, 6.7% more, and meat and seafood 6.2% more.<sup>11</sup>

Wage Price Index figures confirm that Australians are now in a position of having had no effective real wage growth since June 2013. These overall trends of weak wage growth and rising living costs have unequal impacts on different segments of workers and households. The 2.4% wages increase for 2021 was driven by large increases for a minority of 'in-demand' private sector professional and managerial occupations. Lower-income, contract and casual workers have experienced a smaller share of growth. They also rely more heavily than higher-income workers on increasing wages for financial stability, meaning that they bear the brunt of the social risks associated with sluggish income growth.

Survey responses on clerical and administrative workers' experiences with their wages reflected these national trends. When asked about whether their nominal wages had increased in the last year, only 38% of survey respondents indicated that they had. Half said that they had not.



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Wage increases, May 2022

9 Roger Wilkins, Esperanza Vera-Toscano, Ferdi Botha and Sarah C. Dahmann (2021) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 19. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, the University of Melbourne.

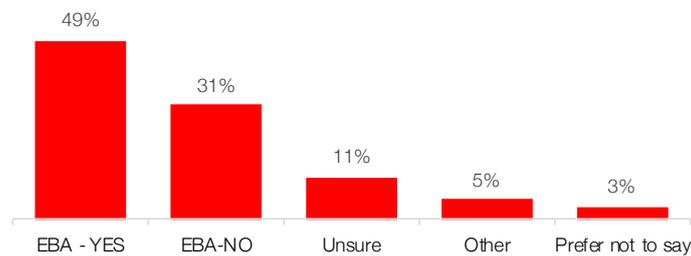
10 Roger Wilkins, Esperanza Vera-Toscano, Ferdi Botha and Sarah C. Dahmann (2021) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 19. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, the University of Melbourne.

11 ABS, Consumer Price Index, Australia, Reference Period March 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/mar-2022#key-statistics>

12 Read, M., Australia's real wages slump (in eight charts), The Australian Financial Review, May 18, 2022, <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/australia-s-real-wage-slump-in-eight-charts-20220517-p5am58>

Reporting a lack of wage increase was more common for call centre workers, where 65% indicated that they had not had a wage increase in the past year.

A factor here is the type of instrument these workers are employed under. Survey respondents were more likely (49% of those surveyed) to report being employed under an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) than the national average. Across all industries nationally, 35.1% of all workers are on an EBA.<sup>13</sup>



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Employment type, May 2022

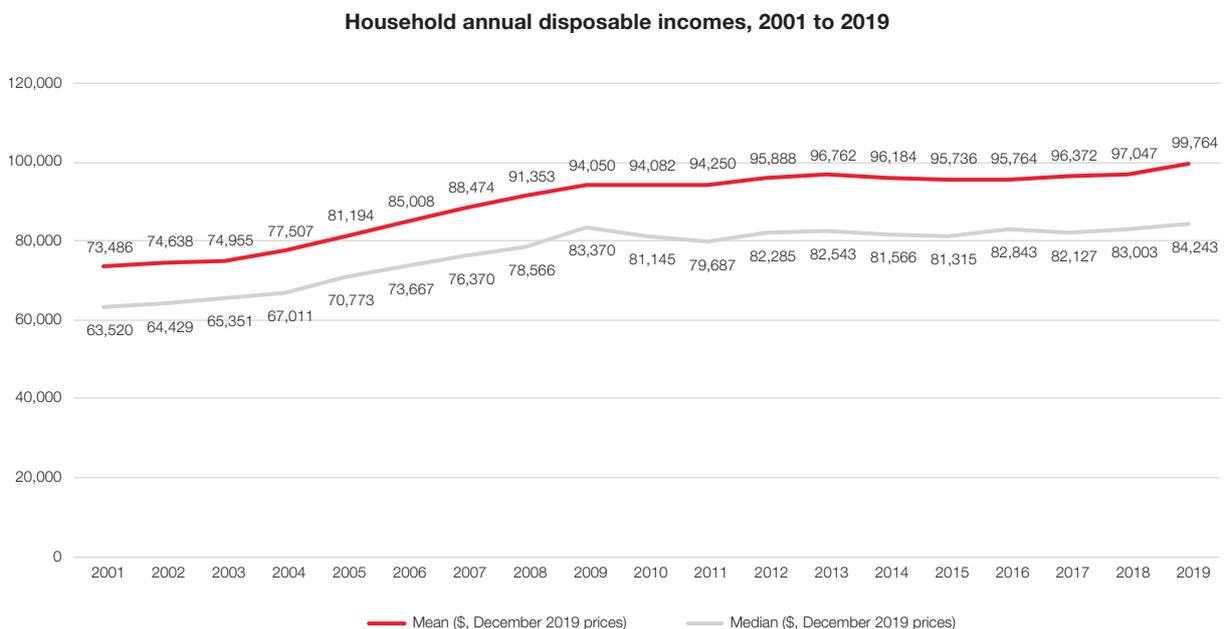
Workers under an EBA have traditionally been on higher wages. However, agreements that have not been renegotiated after their nominal expiry date can compound issues related to wage growth, a situation which is affecting an increasing cohort of workers nationally. The Business Council of Australia quantified that workers under an unexpired EBA received a 2.6% wage increase in the September quarter of 2020, compared to 1.4% economy wide average.<sup>14</sup>

13 Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Trends in Federal Enterprise Bargaining Report December quarter 2021, <https://www.ag.gov.au/system/files/2022-03/trends-in-federal-enterprise-bargaining-december-quarter-2021.pdf>

14 Business Council of Australia, The State of Enterprise Bargaining, February 2021.

# Financial situation and cost of living perceptions

National data clearly shows that household finances are likely to be under strain for many Australian workers in lower income brackets. Annual household disposable income, for example, has seen minimal growth since 2010.



Source: HILDA Statistical Report 2021, Table 3.1

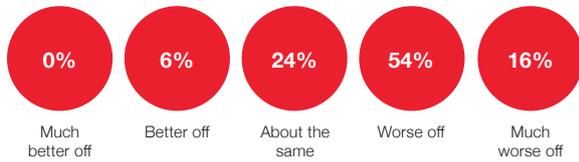
While Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey data only goes up to the 2019 period,<sup>15</sup> financial pressures for households are likely to have sharpened considerably over the last two years. The 6.6% rise in the price of non-discretionary goods and services between March 2021 and March 2022 indicates that, particularly for lower income earners, household finances are likely to be feeling the strain of the fall in real wages.<sup>16</sup>

Our survey, conducted in April 2022, further points to rising costs that are not being met by wages and highlights how this is affecting workers in terms of everyday financial challenges.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Wilkins, Esperanza Vera-Toscano, Ferdi Botha and Sarah C. Dahmann (2021) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 19. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, the University of Melbourne.

<sup>16</sup> Jericho, G, Real wages plummet and will take years to recover, The Australia Institute, Centre for Future Work, published May 19, 2022

**Financial Situation in the last year (all respondents)**



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Financial situation in the last year, May 2022

The survey asked call centre workers and professional administrative staff several questions to indicate how they felt about their current financial situation.

**Call Centre**



**Professional Admin**



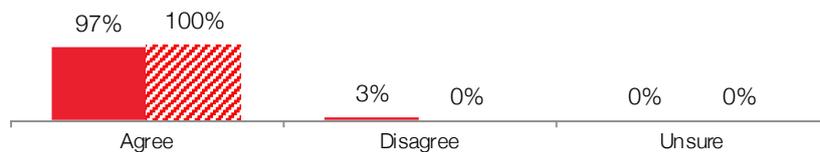
Legend: Much worse off (dark red), Worse off (light red), About the same (grey), Better off (teal), Much better off (green)

Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Financial situation in the last year, May 2022

When asked how they felt about their finances in the past year, no respondents felt that they were much better off than one year ago and less than 10% believed they were better off. 19% of call centre workers and 16% of professional administrators felt that they were much worse off, while 52% and 55% respectively felt they were worse off and 19% and 24% felt things were about the same.

Dramatically, 97% of call centre workers and 100% of professional administrative staff indicated that they agreed the cost of living was growing more quickly than wages.

**The cost of living has grown more quickly than wages have grown**



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Wage growth and cost of living, May 2022

There are clear indications in the survey data that these workers are facing restricted spending in response to increased costs and a lack of wage growth. Most respondents reported that food and fuel were becoming harder to afford in the last 12 months.

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, petrol prices in Australia hit national records in March 2022. When this survey was conducted in April, it was clear that respondents were feeling the effects. With fuel supply forecast to worsen, these effects are likely to be further exacerbated for households across 2022.

Both sub-groups of workers surveyed have significant numbers reporting that they are eating out less (41% and 35%) and putting off seeing health professionals (41% and 30%) due to financial constraints. More than one in ten

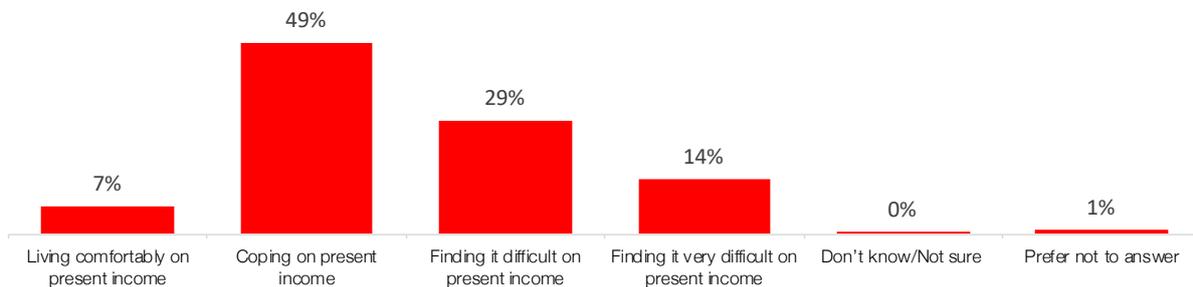
call centre workers, and almost one in ten professional administrative staff indicate that they have gone without meals due to a shortage of money.

48% of call centre workers and 29% of professional administrative staff indicate that they are living paycheque to paycheque, and 30% and 19% respectively indicate that they have difficulty meeting basic living expenses.

	<b>Call Centre</b>	<b>Professional Admin</b>
Food and groceries are getting harder to afford	<b>61%</b>	<b>47%</b>
Fuel is getting harder to afford	<b>57%</b>	<b>47%</b>
The cost of maintaining my car and registration is hard	<b>48%</b>	<b>30%</b>
I live paycheque to paycheque	<b>48%</b>	<b>29%</b>
I eat out less due to my financial situation	<b>41%</b>	<b>35%</b>
I put off seeing a health professional because of the cost	<b>41%</b>	<b>30%</b>
It's getting harder for me to justify fun activities like going to the movies	<b>34%</b>	<b>38%</b>
Rent is getting more expensive	<b>32%</b>	<b>18%</b>
I have had difficulty paying basic living expenses	<b>30%</b>	<b>19%</b>
I have pawned or sold something to make ends meet	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>
I have gone without meals due to a shortage of money	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>

Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Financial situation in last 12 months, May 2022

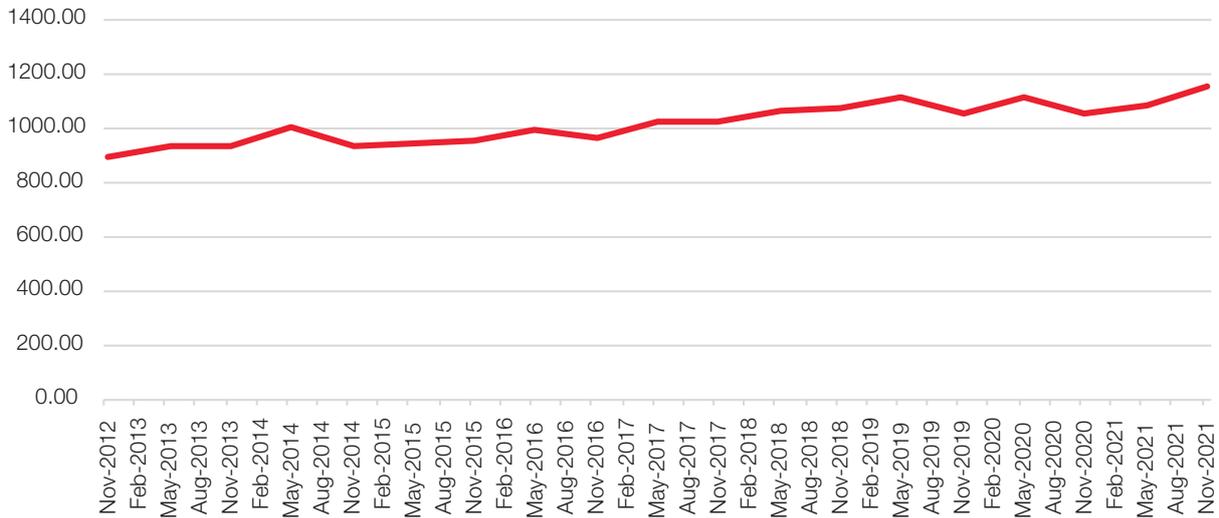
43% of surveyed workers were finding it difficult or very difficult to survive on their household income. 49% were 'coping' while only 7% felt that they were 'living comfortably'.



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Household income attitudes, May 2022

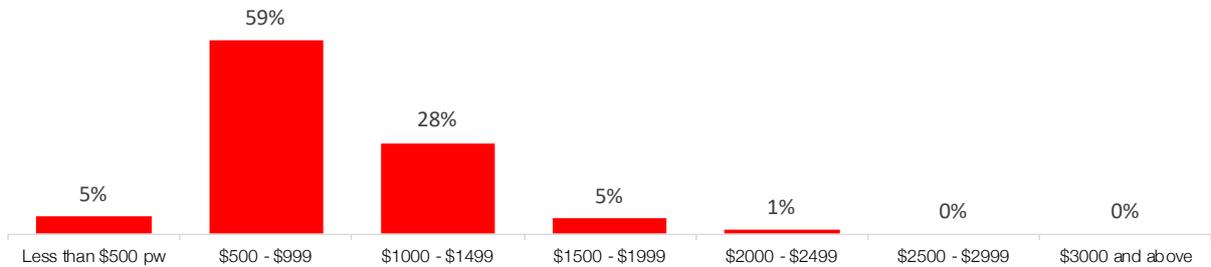
These survey responses reflect the broader national context of falling real wages for administrative and support staff.

**Total earnings. Administrative and Support Services**



Source: ABS, Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2021

Total earnings for administrative and support staff have barely shifted in the last decade. Administrative and support workers are paid less today than manufacturing workers were a decade ago.<sup>17</sup>



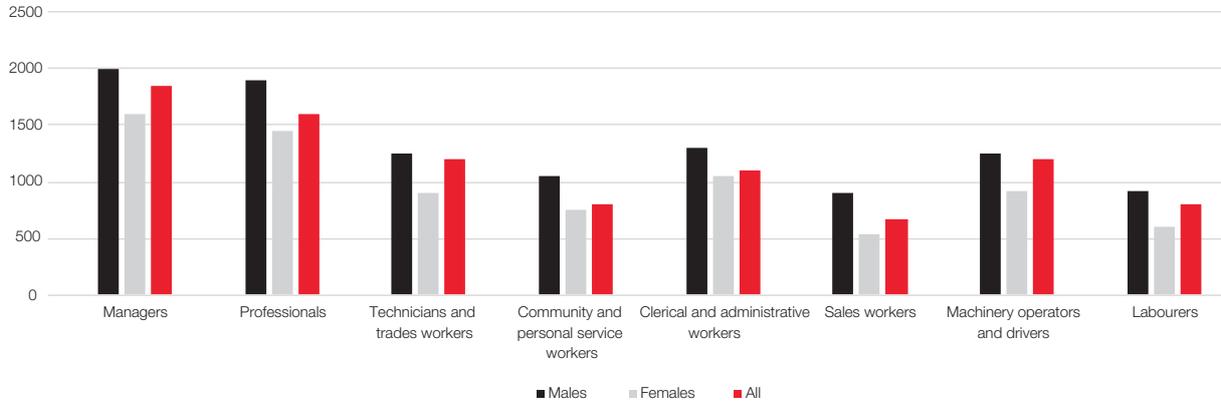
Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Individual weekly wage, May 2022

In terms of reported income, most surveyed workers sat close to average weekly earnings (\$1,105.08) reported to the ABS, with variation related to non-standard employment, such as part-time, contract or casual work. Workers in non-standard work experience lower wage growth in comparison to those employed permanent full-time.<sup>18</sup> The clear majority of workers surveyed (87%) were earning between \$500 and \$1,499 per week. Only 6% were earning above that.

<sup>17</sup> ABS, Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/latest-release>

<sup>18</sup> Alexander, O., Borland, J., Charlton, A., and Singh, A., The Labour Market for Uber Drivers in Australia, Australian Economic Review, 10.1111/1467-8462.12454, (2022).

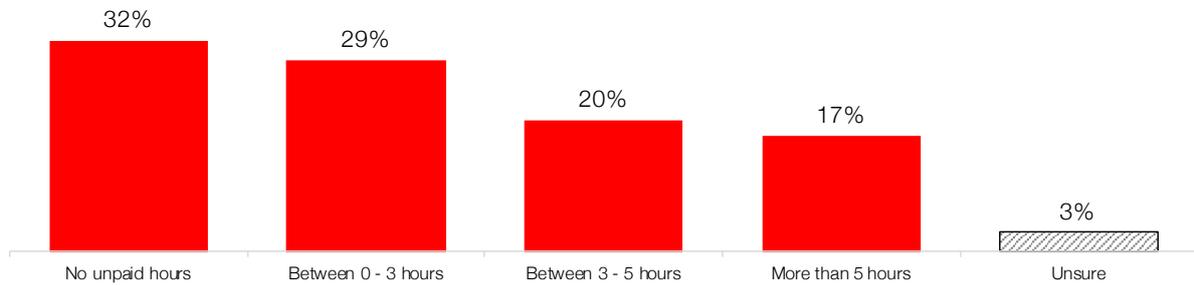
**Median weekly earnings in main job**



Source: ABS, Characteristics of Employment, Australia, December 2021

**UNPAID OVERTIME COMPOUNDS THE WAGES PINCH**

The income squeeze felt by the workers surveyed was compounded by a significant number reporting that they worked unpaid overtime. The table below sets out the number of hours of unpaid overtime that respondents undertook in the last seven days.



Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Unpaid work in last seven days, May 2022

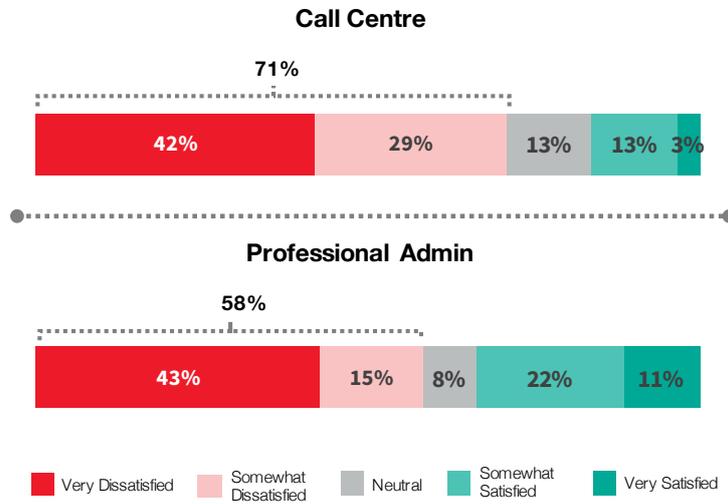
17% of surveyed workers indicated that they undertook more than 5 hours of unpaid work during the last seven days. 49% undertook 5 hours or less. Around a third (32%) of workers indicated that they undertook no extra unpaid hours.

Existing reports confirm these trends at a national scale. Unpaid overtime was estimated to cost Australian workers almost \$100 billion in unpaid wages in 2020, with workers on average undertaking 5.3 hours of unpaid work in the last seven days. This is equivalent to an individual worker working seven weeks unpaid across the course of a year.<sup>19</sup> Other sources of survey data have indicated that overtime rates increased during COVID-19, with 70% of workers surveyed undertaking unpaid work, with an average 7.3 unpaid hours per week.<sup>20</sup>

Given the financial difficulties respondents reported facing, it was unsurprising that the results found high levels of dissatisfaction with wages.

19 Nahum, D., Work and Life in a Pandemic: An Update on Hours of Work and Unpaid Overtime Under COVID-19, The Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute November 2020, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/GHODT-2020-WEB.pdf>

20 Elms, M., Overworked and underpaid? Your boss might be breaking the law, The New Daily, published 13 September, 2021, <https://thenewdaily.com.au/finance/finance-news/2021/09/13/unpaid-overtime-law-australia/#:~:text=HR%20platform%20ADP%20says%20the,billion%20across%20the%20Australian%20workforce.>

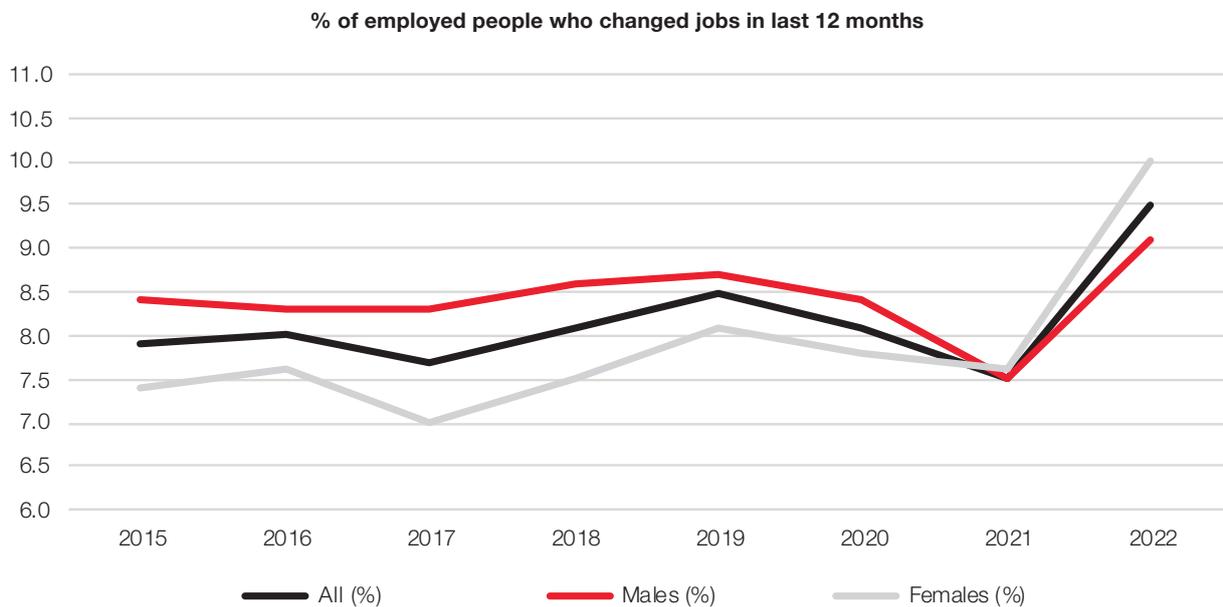


Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Wage satisfaction, May 2022

71% of call centre workers were very or somewhat dissatisfied with their wages, with 58% of professional administrative staff feeling the same.

# Changing jobs and labour mobility

Labour mobility in Australia suffered a sharp decline in the first two years of the pandemic. It is currently on the increase, and at levels not seen for a decade. At the same time, retrenchments are at the lowest rate recorded rate (1.5%) since reporting began in 1972.<sup>21</sup>

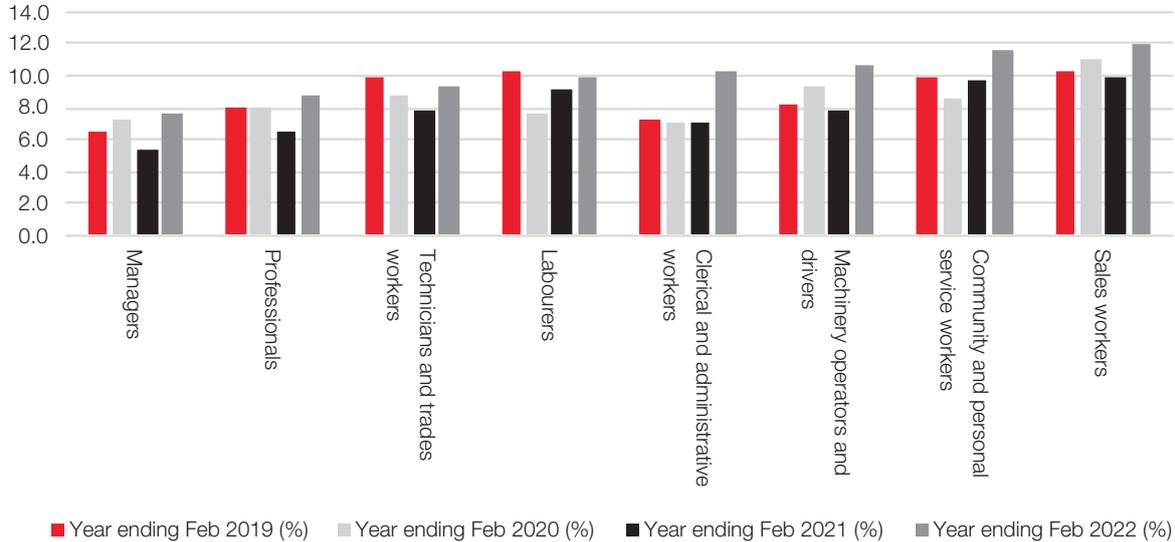


Source: ABS, Participation, Job Search and Mobility Data, Australia, May 2022

The spike over the last 12 months has been led by women, with 10% changing jobs in the last 12 months, a full percent higher than men. This flips prior trends, where women were generally less likely to change jobs when compared to men.

21 ABS, Job Mobility, released May 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release#job-mobility>

**Job mobility by occupation that was left**

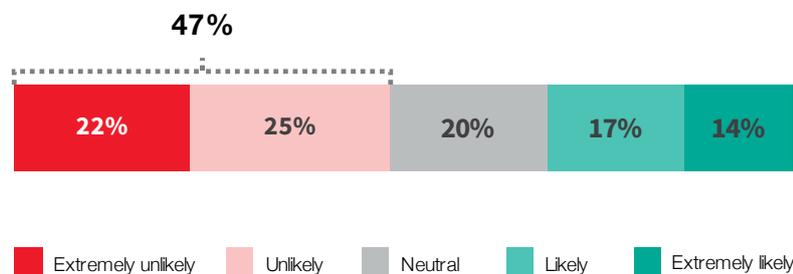


Source: ABS, Participation, Job Search and Mobility Data, Australia, May 2022

Clerical and administrative workers nationally are also showing particularly strong increases within job search and mobility data when compared to other occupation categories. 10.3% of clerical and administrative staff left their occupation in the last 12 months, up from 7.0% previously. This was the largest increase for any of the major occupation groups and follows a period of consistently low levels of change.

ABS data further indicates that for the last 12 months, of those who changed work within the clerical and administrative sector, 29% changed industry, and 71% changed their job, but remained in the industry.<sup>22</sup>

Our survey indicates that there is likely to be continued job movement for clerical and administrative staff. While nearly half (47%) reported that they were unlikely or extremely unlikely to change industry or sector over the next 12 months, 31% of respondents indicated that they were likely or extremely likely to change. This indicates a potential challenge for employers in the next 12 months, especially in a labour market that is seeing an overall spike in employees seeking to find new jobs.

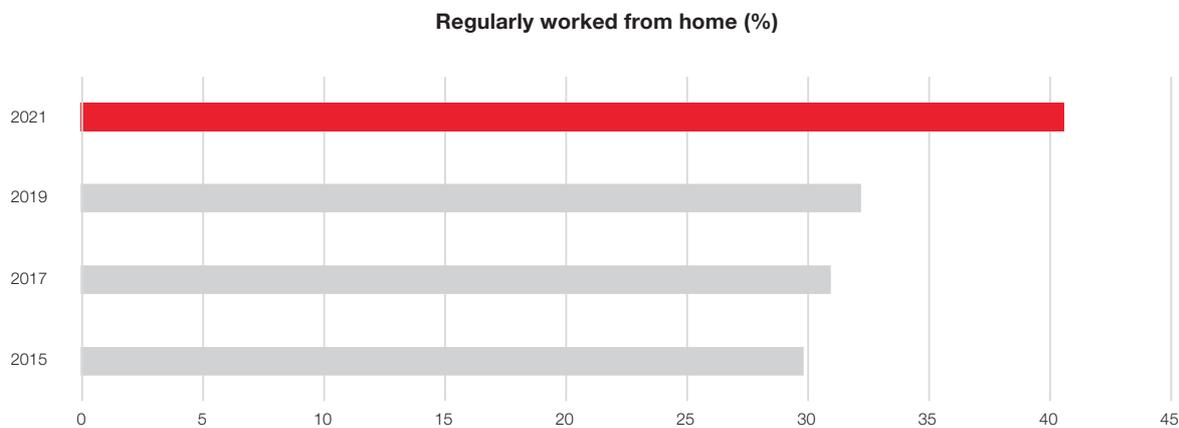


Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Industry or sector change in next 12 months, May 2022

22 ABS, Job mobility, released May 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release#job-mobility>

# Working from home

Beyond wages and finances, Australian workers have also been impacted by changes to the workplace and to work arrangements because of the pandemic. While increases to working from home have provided flexibility for many workers, there is also mounting evidence that those who work from home are more likely to work unpaid overtime.<sup>23</sup> And, although lower income workers who work from home report many benefits to these working arrangements, they are also likely to experience financial stress from the additional household costs that can come with working from home.<sup>24</sup>



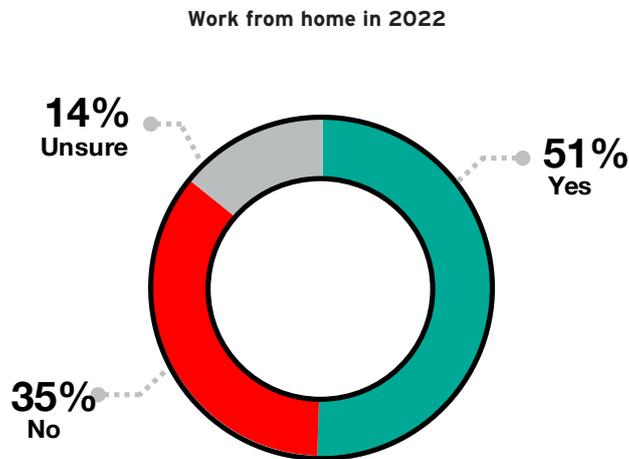
Source: ABS, Working Arrangements, Australia, December 2021

The number of workers in Australia working from home increased gradually between 2015 and 2019, and then dramatically over the two years to 2021. 41% of employed people now work from home regularly. This is the highest level ever recorded. The most common stated reason for working from home has changed since the pandemic. ‘Catching up on work’ was the most common reason selected previously in ABS data, now the most common reason is ‘other’. This is due to pandemic related reasons not being explicitly measured in this data.

One of the most significant recorded outcomes of working from home for workers is an increase in extra hours or overtime. According to August 2021 ABS data on working arrangements, of employed people in Australia, 34% usually worked extra hours or overtime. However, this was unevenly split between those who worked from home and those who did not. Those who undertook paid or unpaid overtime increased to 47% for people who worked from home, compared to 25% for workers who did not work from home.<sup>25</sup>

Of the ASU members surveyed for this report, nearly 7 in 10 (69%) had worked from home in the last 12 months, and more than half (51%) expected to work from home in 2022. Another 14% were unsure of their future working arrangements. Not unexpectedly, call centre workers were more likely to work out of the home, with 44% expecting that they would not work from home in 2022.

23 ABS, Working arrangements, Released Dec 2021 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/working-arrangements/latest-release#:~:text=Data%20downloads-,Key%20statistics,from%2032%25%20in%20Aug%202019>  
 24 Phillips, A. & Lasko-Skinner, R., Inside Jobs: The Experience of Low-paid Homeworkers in Britain Today, DEMOS, Dec 2021, <https://www.stonewater.org/media/5769/inside-jobs-dec-2021.pdf>  
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Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Working from home expectations, May 2022

### NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF WORKING FROM HOME

While the benefits of working from home have been well documented, particularly in terms of flexibility for workers, survey respondents reported some significant negative impacts. Increased household expenses (27%), mental health issues (21%) and problems achieving a healthy separation between work and home life (20%) all affected one in five respondents or more.

Mental health issues, such as stress or anxiety	21%
Increased household expenses	27%
Problems achieving a healthy separation between work and home life	20%
Concern about contracting COVID-19 or passing it to another person	19%
Working in isolation	18%
Lack of support from colleagues/managers	17%
Lack of a suitable workstation and/or other equipment/resources	14%
Increased workload	14%
Longer hours of work	12%
Financial stress due to reduced income	10%
Changed duties	9%
Juggling increased caring responsibilities	7%
Trying to balance home schooling or childcare with working from home	3%
Exposure to online bullying or harassment	1%
Exposure to family or domestic violence at home	1%

Source: ASU Clerical and Administrative Workers Survey, Working from home impact, May 2022

## Conclusion

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The ASU supports a 5.5% wage increase at the Fair Work Commission's 2022 Annual Wage Review. National data on stagnant wages and rising costs clearly support the argument for ensuring, through the Wage Review and other policy mechanisms, that real wages are boosted, particularly for lower income workers.

The survey results in this report shed light on how a specific group of workers – ASU members in the clerical and administrative workforce in the private sector – are experiencing wage and cost of living pressures, as well as changing working conditions, in their daily lives. The analysis of these results provides

evidence that, for the group of workers surveyed, poor wage growth and cost of living pressures create significant stress on household budgets, and that wages are being further eroded by unpaid overtime.

Declines in real wages and their subsequent impacts on household finances have implications for economic growth on the national scale. Household financial stress reduces consumer spending as well as tax revenue flows to government. The current situation represents not only a risk to the social and financial wellbeing of Australian workers and their families, but also to national economic recovery and growth.

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