Work overview



For many people, work is their most important source of income, as well as an avenue for engaging with the economy and society.¹ Lack of work can contribute to disadvantage and isolation for individuals and families.²

In the 20 years from 1986 to 2006, the numbers and proportions of people working and looking for work have changed, although these changes have varied in different parts of the country. By 2006, many more people were working and the unemployment rate was lower. Women had joined the work force in large numbers, and working arrangements included more part-time work.³ In addition, the type of work has changed, with growth and decline in particular occupations and industries. In this overview, the impact of these changes on regional areas is examined by looking at Statistical Subdivisions (SSDs) in different parts of Australia (see map, p. 149).

Australia's employment grew faster than the population

According to the 2006 Census, the labour force participation rate for Australia was 65%, up from 61% in 1986. Growth in the participation rate and declining unemployment, along with population growth, resulted in employment growth of 40%, from 6.5 million employed people in June 1986 to 9.1 million in August 2006. This was faster growth than that of the population, which grew by 28% over the same period. Employment growth was particularly strong for women: the number of women employed increased by 64%, from 2.6 million to 4.2 million. Associated with this, part-time employment more than doubled (from 1.2 million to 2.7 million). At the same time, the proportion of people in the labour force looking for work declined-the unemployment rate was 5.2% in 2006, down from 9.2% in 1986, although it was 11.6% in 1991.

Changes in participation in the labour force can come about in a number of ways. The participation rate may increase due to changes in working conditions that make it easier to join the labour force; increases in the cost of From 1986 to 2006 participation in the labour force increased in Australia, particularly for women, and more people worked part-time.

living, prompting more people to enter the labour force; the increased availability of jobs; changes in the rules governing access to government benefits; or an increase in the number of people not in the labour force due to ageing.

More people participating in the labour force

The labour force participation rate was higher in 2006 than in 1986 but this change varied across Australia. Some areas had increases in participation rates higher than Australia as a whole, associated with working people and people looking for work moving into these areas. In some areas, such as Southeast Inner Brisbane (from 60% in 1986 to 72% in 2006), large rises in the participation rate were from a low base. Bathurst-Melville increased from 47% to 59%, partly as a result of tourism and mining operations starting up in the area. Another example is Vasse, in coastal southern Western Australia, which increased from 57% to 68%, along with a large growth in population over the period. Vasse includes Margaret River and Busselton, both of which have received many new 'sea change' residents, and an increase in

Labour force participation rate: the number of people who are either employed or unemployed, as a proportion of all people aged 15 years and over.

Labour Force participation rate

Top 10 Statistical Subdivisions, 1986



Top 10 Statistical Subdivisions, 2006



employment in tourism⁴, construction⁴, grape growing and winemaking⁵. New industries may increase labour force participation by employing people already living in an area, and by attracting employed people to move into an area.

In 2006, the areas with the highest participation rates differed from those in 1986. In 1986, half of the top 10 SSDs were in and near the Australian Capital Territory (including Queanbeyan), a region attracting many people to work in Public administration and defence, and with a young age structure. In 2006, four of the top 5 SSDS were located in rural Western Australia, reflecting growth in Mining and related industries.

Younger people and older people participate less

Involvement in the labour force differs depending on people's age. In 2006, the labour force participation rate for those aged 15–64 years (the main working ages) was 75%. Younger people aged 15–24 had a lower participation rate (67%), as many younger people are engaged in full-time study. For people aged 65 years and over, the participation rate was much lower (9%), as many people in this age group had retired, or in the case of women in this age group, many had never been in paid employment⁶.

Although the participation rate was similar for 15–24 year olds in 1986 (68%) and 2006 (67%), it increased for full-time students in this age group, from 23% to 45%. This was offset by declines in the rates for part-time students and non-students. Several factors may be contributing to increased labour force participation among full-time students: these include the increasing availability of casual and part-time work, the increased cost of living for students and a desire for financial independence. For more information on student employment, see 'Adult education across the generations', p. 123–127.



Labour force participation rate and

education status of people aged 15-24

Many of the areas in Australia with the highest labour force participation rates for young people were in central and western Queensland, including Central West (with a labour force participation rate for 15–24 year olds of 80%), South West, and Mackay City Part A (both 79%). Many young people working in these areas had moved from other parts of Queensland in the previous year, possibly to find seasonal work, and were working in Grain, sheep and beef cattle farming, Other crop growing (which includes Sugar cane growing and Cotton growing), and Services to agriculture (which includes Cotton ginning and Shearing services).

As the population ages and concerns are raised about the prospect of a contracting labour force, participation of older people in the labour force is of growing interest. In 2006, the participation rate for people aged 65 and over was 9.4%, up from 5.9% in 1996.

Some areas had much higher participation rates for people aged 65 and over in 2006; these were all located outside capital cities. They included Lakes in rural Western Australia and East Arnhem in the Northern Territory (37% and 27% respectively). In 2006, Lakes had a very high proportion of farming workers, an industry with a high representation in that age group (see Ageing industries box, p. 145). The Community Development Employment Project in East Arnhem involved a large proportion of employed Indigenous peoples aged 65 and over.⁷ These areas also had very low levels of unemployment overall.

Women's participation increased, men's decreased

One of the most pronounced changes in the composition of the labour force between 1986 and 2006 was the increasing participation of women—from 48% to 58%—much of which comprised women working part-time or looking for part-time work. Over the same period the participation rate for men fell, from 75% to 72%. In particular, the proportion of the men in the labour force who were working full-time or looking for full-time work declined, from 91% in 1986 to 81% in 2006.

Most of the increase in women's participation was among 25–64 year olds, which rose from 54% to 69%. Rates increased at every age as more women entered or re-entered the labour force, and remained in it for longer. Reflecting these trends, the highest increases were among those aged 45 years and over. For younger women (particularly those aged 20–24 years), the participation rate changed little over the 20 years, partly because it was already relatively high (76%) in 1986.

In 1986, labour force participation peaked for women in their late teens and early 20s before declining for women in their early 30s. This decline started at older ages in 2006, consistent with the older ages at which women started families. Further, the decline was less pronounced, as fewer women were having children, women were having fewer children on average and more women were working through their children's early years.



Labour force participation rates of men and women, 1986 to 2006

Labour force participation was very low for older women. However, among older women aged 65 and over, participation rose from 3% in 1986 to 6% in 2006. It also increased for men in that age group (from 9% to 14%). See 'Generations of employment', p. 159–165.

In some areas, women's participation was very high

In 2006, 58% of women aged 15 and over were participating in the labour force, although this varied across the country. Areas with the highest participation rates for women in Australia included Tuggeranong and Belconnen in the Australian Capital Territory, and Queanbeyan, adjacent to the Australian Capital Territory (73%, 69% and 69% respectively). These areas have high levels of employment in Government administration, which has a higher than average level of female employment, possibly due to relatively familyfriendly workplace conditions.8 Lakes, a farming area in rural Western Australia, also had a high female participation rate in 2006 (70%). Many women in Lakes worked on family properties with their partners.

While those areas with the highest female participation rates in 2006 were generally the same as in 1986, regional patterns of labour force participation for men changed over the period. Areas with the largest declines for men included rural areas such as Barkly in the central region of the Northern Territory (from 79% to 60%) and Lyell in south-western Tasmania (from 90% to 72%). Cattle farming has been the most common industry employing men in Barkly, and the number of people working in this industry across Australia halved from 1996 to 2006.⁹ In Lyell, population ageing has resulted in a 22% decline in the number of men aged 15–64 from 1996 to 2006.

On the other hand, many inner-urban areas had increases in male participation between 1986 and 2006. These included Southeast Inner Brisbane (from 73% to 78%) and Central Metropolitan in Perth (from 69% to 73%). This was associated with an increase in the number of men employed in rapidly growing industries in inner metropolitan areas. These included Services to road transport (which includes Parking services), Services to finance and investment, and Building construction.

The Labour Force Survey and the census

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS), which measures employment, unemployment and the participation rate in Australia. There are a number of definitional and methodological differences between information collected in the LFS on these topics and information collected on work in the census. Even so, census data were generally comparable with the Labour Force Survey. For a more detailed comparison, see the article 'Census and the Labour Force Survey' in *Australian Labour Market Statistics*, October 2007 (ABS cat. no. 6105.0).

The LFS provides regular, up-to-date information, whereas the census is only conducted every five years and it takes longer to release results. The LFS provides official estimates of employment and unemployment, the unemployment rate and the labour force participation rate. On the other hand, the census provides information for small geographic areas across the whole of Australia, and can show characteristics of individuals and households that are not available in the LFS. (This overview presents census information.)

	Participation rate	Unemployment rate	Employed part-time	
	%	%	%	
June 1986(a)				
LFS	62.0	7.8	19.0	
Census	61.4	9.2	20.1	
August 2006				
LFS	64.7	4.7	28.6	
Census	64.6	5.2	31.5	
(a) In 1096, the consus was hold on 20 June				

Labour Force Survey comparison with 2006 Census

(a) In 1986, the census was held on 30 June.

Hours worked, 1986 and 2006



Hours worked in week before census

Changes in part-time and full-time employment

In addition to changes in labour force participation, the prevalence of part-time employment is another aspect of working life that has changed in recent decades. Levels of part-time employment may vary due to the availability of jobs with reduced hours; a change in the availability of full-time jobs; increased demand for part-time jobs due to the desire to combine work with child-rearing, study or a transition to retirement; or increases in earnings from employment making part-time work more viable. On the other hand, people may work long hours because of shift work arrangements; the requirement of the job; increases in or availability of paid overtime; or changes in people's lifestyle and expectations.

In the 2006 Census, 2.7 million people reported that they worked part-time hours (between 1 and 34 hours per week in all jobs) in the week prior to the census, more than double the 1.2 million in 1986.

Over the same period, the number of people working full-time grew by only one fifth (from 4.9 million to 5.8 million). As a result, the proportion of part-time workers increased from 20% in 1986 to 32% of all employed people in 2006. However, changes in the proportion of part-time and full-time workers have been affected to a small extent by changes in shift work arrangements. For instance, many mining workers work to a shift or roster system, which may result in varying numbers of hours worked from one week to the next, whereas the census only measured the number of hours worked in the previous week. This means that some people who usually worked full-time would have been counted as part-time workers.

Part-time work has been taken up by parents (especially mothers) combining work and raising young children¹⁰, students combining work and study, and people approaching retirement reducing their hours, either in their current job or in a new job⁶.

Coastal areas located outside capital cities commonly had very high proportions of part-time workers. Areas with the highest proportions were in coastal New South Wales, including the Lower South Coast (42%), and in the north, Clarence (excluding Coffs Harbour) and Richmond-Tweed SD Balance (both 41%). These areas were characterised by high proportions of older part-time workers who had moved to these areas in the previous 5 years, possibly in transition to retirement.

Women more likely to work parttime

Of the total employment growth from 1986 to 2006 where hours were stated (2,438,000 additional people), two fifths was due to additional female part-time employment (971,000). The rapid growth in part-time work has occurred alongside increases in the number of women in the labour force. Women were more likely than men to work part-time. In 2006, nearly half of all female workers were part-time, compared with one fifth of male workers.

At the national level, the number of women working part-time more than doubled between 1986 and 2006. In many areas, growth was even higher. In particular, the number of women working part-time in many coastal areas of Queensland increased by 5 times or more, including Gold Coast West, and Beaudesert Shire Part A in Brisbane. These areas experienced strong population growth over the period, particularly of younger families. For more on population growth across Australia, see 'Where do Australians live?', p. 16–23.

People who were away from work in the week prior to the census: There were 591,600 employed people away from work during the week prior to the 2006 Census so their full-time/part-time status was not recorded.

Hours worked by men and women



Hours worked in week before census

More people worked very long hours, especially men

The number of hours people work has become more diverse, and the traditional 40 hour week less common. In 1986, 24% of people in the week leading up to the census reported having worked 40 hours in the previous week: by 2006, this had fallen to 20%.

In 2006, more people worked very long hours than in 1986: 19% reported that they worked 49 hours or more per week, compared with 15% of all employed people in 1986. In 2006, over half the people working very long hours were aged 35-54 years (55%), slightly higher than in 1986 (51%). Most people working very long hours were men-in 2006, men comprised 77% of all people who worked 49 hours or more per week, although this had decreased from 81% in 1986. Managers, particularly General managers and administrators, Farmers and farm managers and Sales and marketing managers were most likely to work 49 hours or more per week (56%, 56% and 43% respectively in 2006).

In most areas in Australia, a similar proportion of people worked very long hours (19%). However, in some areas this proportion was much higher. Areas with 30% or more of their employed people working very long hours included regional areas of Western Australia, such as Lakes (45%) and Johnston (40%). These areas have large numbers of people employed in Mining and related industries and a high proportion of employed men.

Why do people work long hours?

Working very long hours (that is, more than 49 hours per week) has become more prevalent in Australia over the last 20 years. This is partly due to a desire for higher pay: in the Survey of Employment Arrangements and Superannuation in 2000, 16% of employees working 41 to 50 hours per week and 10% of employees working 51 to 60 hours stated that they wanted to work more hours for more pay.¹¹ However, other reasons, such as the requirement of the job, are also important: in the 2006 Survey of Working Time Arrangements, 48% of people who worked 49 hours or more stated that they worked unpaid overtime on a regular basis.¹⁰

Many young people worked short hours

Working few hours per week is prevalent among women, young people and older workers. In 2006, 12% of all employed people worked between 1 and 15 hours per week. However, a quarter or more of young workers aged 15–24 and older workers aged 65 and over worked few hours (27% and 25% respectively). As well, 17% of all female workers worked few hours, compared with 7% of all male workers.

Across Australia, young workers working few hours comprised 4.5% of all employed people. This group includes many students who have



Hours worked by age

Hours worked in week before census

limited time for work or continue to be supported by their parents. In some areas, young workers working few hours comprised a large proportion of all employed people. These areas were typically in urban areas, either in capital cities or other major centres, near university campuses. Examples are North Canberra (7.4% of all employed people), which includes the Australian National University, and Ballarat City in Victoria (6.9%) with the University of Ballarat. Bathurst, west of Sydney, is a smaller centre, but had the highest proportion (8.1%). A campus of Charles Sturt University is located in Bathurst, and 8% of its population were tertiary students in 2006.

Retail trade still the largest employer

In understanding the way work has changed in Australia it is useful to consider the industries which have grown and declined. The census provides a unique level of detail about the industries in which workers are employed, as well as being a source of the characteristics of employed people in different industries.

In 2006, Retail trade was the industry division which employed the largest proportion of people in Australia—14.7% of all employed people, followed by Manufacturing (11.3%),

Property and business services, and Health and community services (both 11.0%). Mining employed only 1.2%, despite strong economic growth in this industry: in 2006–07, it contributed 7.0% to Gross Domestic Product.¹²

Between 1986 and 2006, the overall picture of employment in industries in Australia changed in several respects. Manufacturing, the largest employer in 1986 (15.6%) dropped to 11.3% in 2006. This made it second in size after Retail trade. Agriculture, forestry and fishing declined as well, from 5.8% to 3.2% of all employed people. On the other hand, Property and business services, and Health and community services both increased their share of employment (from 6.6% to 11.0% and from 8.4% to 11.0% respectively), to approach Manufacturing in their share of employed people. Retail trade also increased slightly, from 13.8% to 14.7%.

More workers in School education

At a more detailed level, School education¹³, Government administration, and Hospitals and nursing homes were the three industries which employed the largest numbers of employed people in 2006 (413,600 or 4.6% of all employed people, 410,200 or 4.6% and 360,200 or 4.0% respectively). Since 1996, the number of people employed in these industries



Employment by industry division, 1986 and 2006



Industries with largest growth, employment in 1996(a) and 2006

(a) Comparable detailed information on employment by industry is not available for 1986.

increased by 104,900, 130,000, and 48,800 respectively. Building construction (increased by 128,500) and Road freight transport (increased by 87,000) were the other industries that recorded substantial increases in employed people.⁸

Despite Agriculture, forestry and fishing, and Manufacturing industry divisions both experiencing large declines, there was growth in some specific industries within these divisions. Grain, sheep and beef cattle farming grew by 44% (adding 40,300 employed people), and Aquaculture grew by 19% (600). In Manufacturing, the number of people employed in Non-ferrous basic metal product manufacturing (added 5,200) and Recorded media manufacturing and publishing (added 1,500) both doubled.

Areas with high overall employment growth figured among areas with the fastest employment growth in the main growth industries identified above. For instance, in Melton-Wyndham, in outer Melbourne, the number of people employed in School education more than doubled, from 1996 to 2006 (to 3,000), as well as a doubling in Hospitals and nursing homes employment (to 2,700). This is indicative of the general rapid development in that area.

On the other hand, some areas with large growth in specific industries were not areas of high overall employment growth. One example is King in Western Australia, which includes Albany. Employment in Hospitals and nursing homes grew in King by 150% from 1996 to 2006 despite overall employment growth of only 27%. This coincided with the building and extension of hospitals and nursing homes in Albany from 2001 to 2006.

Ageing industries

As Australia's population ages, so its workforce is also ageing and some industries are affected more than others by this trend.

In 2006, the median age of all employed people was 40 years. Farming industries had the oldest workforces: Grain, sheep, and beef cattle farming had a median age of 51 years, Other crop growing, 48 years and Horticulture and fruit growing, 46 years. Road passenger transport (51 years), Religious organisations and Knitting mills manufacturing (both 48 years) also had older workforces.

Many employed people in these industries were aged 65 and over: 18% of Grain, sheep and beef cattle farming workers and 13% of Other crop growing workers were in this age group compared with only 2% of Australia's employed people. Very few younger workers were engaged in these industries: while 21% of Australia's employed people were aged 25–34 in 2006, between 11% and 16% of employed people in the above industries were in this age group.



Major occupation groups, proportion of all employed, 1996 and 2006(a)

(a) Comparable information on employment by occupation is not available for 1986.

Professionals the largest occupation group¹⁴

Another aspect of the changing face of employment in Australia is the occupations of Australian workers. In 2006, Professionals were the largest occupation group (1.7 million or 20% of all employed people), followed by Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (1.5 million or 17%) and Tradespersons and related workers, and Associate professionals (both 1.1 million or 12%). Professionals recorded the fastest growth in employment since 1996 for any occupation group (34% growth), followed by Associate professionals, Elementary clerical, sales and service workers (both 27%) and Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (26%). In contrast, Advanced clerical and service workers declined (down 12%).

Changes in the distribution of occupation groups have been accompanied by the increasing prevalence of non-school qualifications in the community (see the 'Education overview', p. 114–122). As well, changes in the demand for new and existing products and services have resulted in changes to the skills needed to provide them.

More sales assistants, carers and aides, and school teachers

At a more detailed level, Sales assistants was the most common occupation in 2006 (5.8% of all employed people), followed by School teachers, and Carers and aides (both 3.2%). These occupations also grew the most between 1996 and 2006: the number of Sales assistants increased by 132,700 to 517,500 in 2006, School teachers increased by 53,200 to 288,700 and Carers and aides increased by 99,600 to 284,000. Much of the growth in these

Growth occupations, 1996 to 2006

Largest numerical growth



(a) Accountants, Auditors and Corporate Treasurers.

Fastest growth



three occupations was in part-time employment, which contributed 87%, 46% and 70% respectively.

Reflecting growing shares of employment in the broad Professional and Associate professional groups, many of the specific occupations with the greatest increases were from these groups. They included Welfare associate professionals, which grew by 69% from 1996 to 2006—the second highest growth over the period—and Computing professionals (57%).

In contrast, within the slower-growing Intermediate production and transport workers group, trends varied. Intermediate mining and construction workers recorded the equal fastest growth of any occupation (69%) from 1996 to 2006, whereas Intermediate textile, clothing and related machine operators declined by 41%.

Some occupations grew faster in inner cities and outer suburbs

Occupations did not grow uniformly across the country. The number of Carers and aides and Elementary service workers increased in outer suburban areas and in centres adjacent to capital cities. The largest growth in the number of Carers and aides was in North Metropolitan Perth and South Eastern Outer Melbourne. with 2,900 and 2,600 respectively. Elementary service workers increased the most in Western Melbourne, and Newcastle in New South Wales—1,100 each. The number of Computing professionals increased most in inner urban areas such as Central Northern Sydney (adding 2,300) and Inner Melbourne (adding 2,200), close to places of work but with higher housing costs, reflecting *higher incomes* of people working in this occupation.

Unemployment declined

Despite declining rates of unemployment, this issue remains an ongoing concern for both Australian governments and the community. Unemployment is affected by a number of factors, including the strength of the economy and the extent to which skills match the labour market.

Unemployment rate: the number of people who are unemployed as a proportion of all those employed or unemployed.

Changes in level of unemployment



Unemployment rates may decline due to greater job availability; discouraged job seekers no longer looking for work; unemployed people leaving a region; an increase in the availability or attractiveness of other activities such as study or child-rearing; or changes in people's retirement patterns.

The unemployment rate at the 2006 Census (5.2%) was the lowest it had been since 1986 (9.2%). The high level of unemployment in 1991 (11.6%), followed by consistent decreases at each subsequent census, can be largely attributed to the economic downturn of the early 1990s followed by consistent economic improvement since then.¹⁵

At any point in time, the unemployment rate can vary for different groups and regions. For example, unemployment is typically higher for younger people and men reaching retirement ages than for those in other age groups. According to the Survey of Job Search Experience in 2007, young people may have difficulty finding work as they often lack the required skills or experience required for many jobs. Older people looking for work reported that they were considered too old by potential employers for the jobs they applied for, or had difficulty finding work due to illness or disability.¹⁶

Unemployment rate by age, 2006



...younger people

Of all people aged 15–24 years in the labour force (that is, either working or looking for work), 10.2% were unemployed in 2006. In contrast, the unemployment rate was below 5% for all ages of people aged 25 and over.

Young people's unemployment levels declined sharply for each year of age, with the exception of 18 year olds, where the rate was 13.3%, higher than that for 17 year olds (12.1%). This may be due partly to young people completing Year 12 at age 18, and partly to the fact that government benefits are more easily accessible to people aged 18 and over, resulting in extra incentive both to look for work and to report having been unsuccessful in finding work.¹⁷

...older men

For the most part, unemployment is lower for people the older they are. However, this pattern reversed for men aged 50 years and over. In 2006 the unemployment rate increased gradually up to 64 years, from 3.5% to 5.1%. From 65 years and over, the unemployment rate dropped to 1.9%: at older ages most men who are not working are retired rather than unemployed.⁶

...geographic areas

Areas with the highest levels of unemployment overall were also areas with high youth unemployment and high unemployment for older men.

All areas with the highest youth unemployment were in regional areas. The 4 highest levels were all in northern New South Wales: Clarence (excluding Coffs Harbour), with an unemployment rate for 15–24 year olds of 19.2% in 2006, Hastings (excluding Port Macquarie) with 17.9%, Northern Tablelands (17.5%), and Lismore (17.0%). Pirie (16.6%) and Whyalla (16.5%) in South Australia also had high youth unemployment.

Selected Statistical Subdivisions with high unemployment



Unemployment rate, 1986 and 2006

Unemployment rate of high risk groups: all 15–24 year olds, men aged 45–64, 2006





Statistical Subdivisions in rural and regional Australia featured in this overview

Many major centres also had pockets of high youth unemployment, including Wollongong (14.9%), Newcastle (14.0%), Greater Dandenong City in outer Melbourne (14.6%), and Fairfield-Liverpool in Sydney (13.7%).

High unemployment among older men was found in the same areas. For example, Clarence (excluding Coffs Harbour) had the highest rate in 2006 (10.4% of men aged 45–64 in the labour force). Some outer suburban areas of capital cities also recorded high unemployment of older men, including Fairfield-Liverpool in Sydney and Greater Dandenong City in Melbourne (both 7.3%). These areas have experienced declines in manufacturing activity over the last 20 years.

Many of these areas with high unemployment for certain groups have had persistently high overall unemployment since 1986, although in most of these cases unemployment declined. Again, areas in rural New South Wales featured prominently. An example is Coffs Harbour, on the north coast of New South Wales. This area had unemployment at 18.0% in 1986, dropping to 8.6% in 2006. The rate for young people aged 15–24 was 14.9% in 2006, while the rate for men aged 45–64 was 7.5%.

Endnotes

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12 ABS 2007, *Australian System of National Accounts, Australia, 2006–07*, cat. no. 5204.0, ABS, Canberra.

13 For more on workers in school education, see the article 'School teachers', p. 129–135.

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