

LABOUR STATISTICS

AUSTRALIA, 1983

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Australian Statistician



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GENERAL INFORMATION

Symbols

The following *symbols*, where shown in columns of figures or elsewhere in tables mean:

- n.a. not available
- . . not applicable
- nil or rounded to zero
- n.e.c. not elsewhere classified
- * subject to sampling variability too high for most practical uses
- p preliminary figure subject to revision

Other

In tables, totals may differ slightly from the sum of the items because of rounding.

PREFACE

This publication is the seventh in the series summarising the range of labour statistics produced by the ABS.

This issue provides for the first time an outline of recent developments within the ABS to upgrade labour statistics. Additionally, far greater emphasis is given to international comparisons than previously, and a number of new areas are explored including underemployment, labour underutilisation, marginal attachment to the labour force, career paths of tradespersons and apprentices.

The format of the publication presents the statistics by subject matter rather than source of collection.

The statistics shown are the latest available data and generally relate to the calendar year 1983 and wherever possible a time series of the principal characteristics is also given back to 1973.

Because of limitations of space only a summary of the principal statistics is shown in the relevant tables. Users requiring more detailed information should refer to the specific ABS publications indicated at the bottom of each table or chart.

A full list of data sources corresponding to each chapter is given in Appendix I. Details of definitions used, accuracy of results and other technical aspects are given in Appendix II.

Comments on the usefulness of the changes made to the publication and suggestions for further improvements would be welcomed. Correspondence should be addressed to:

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INTRODUCTION

Recent ABS developments in Labour Statistics

User demand on the ABS in the field of labour market statistics has been considerable and consistent over many years and has led to continued improvements in both the quality and comprehensiveness of the data.

Nevertheless, because the pressure comes from users in both the economic and social areas and their specific needs for data are many and varied, the demand for an even more comprehensive service continues unabated.

Broadly, and at the risk of oversimplification, users tend to be interested in the following topics :

- The relationship of labour market indicators to macro and other economic data.
- The social, demographic, industrial, occupational, educational and labour force characteristics of the working age population.
- Income and non-wage benefits derived from the efforts of labour and award rates of pay and their relationship to overall income.
- Work patterns, hours of work, job satisfaction and work preferences.
- Industrial relations and industrial disputation.
- Labour costs and labour productivity.
- Conditions of the workplace including occupational health and safety and industrial accidents.

The ABS relies on a mix of household and employer-based surveys and administrative data to produce the wide range of labour market statistics currently available.

The focus of this section will be to indicate recent developments with each of these data systems. In addition, some comments are made on the progress of the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) and on recent developments concerning the dissemination of labour statistics.

Recent developments concerning Household Surveys

The *Household Surveys* include the monthly Labour Force Survey, supplementary surveys carried out in conjunction with the Labour Force Survey and a set of separate special household surveys employing somewhat different methodologies.

The *Labour Force Survey* has been in existence from the early 1960's. Collection of monthly labour force data began in February 1978, prior to which it had been conducted at quarterly intervals.

The most recent major developments to the Labour Force Survey have been :

- The introduction of a new computing system in January 1983. Under the previous processing system preliminary unemployment data were largely manually compiled, and preliminary employment and labour force estimates were generally not available until two or three weeks later. Under the new system, preliminary data of the labour force as a whole are released some three weeks earlier than previously. In addition, final data are now produced prior to the release of the next month's preliminary data, whereas previously the final data were often not released until three or four months after the reference month. The new processing system also enables ABS State Offices to produce statistics to satisfy State-specific user needs.
- The recalculation of survey estimates back to February 1978 to conform with revised population estimates which take account of results of the 1981 Census and the change in official population estimates to a place of usual residence basis. All reweighted data back to February 1978 were published in *The Labour Force, Australia*, February 1984 (6203.0), and the Labour Force Survey statistics reproduced in this Labour Statistics publication are also based on the reweighted data.
- The recommencement of the seasonally adjusted series in February 1982. When the Labour Force Survey changed from a quarterly to a monthly collection, seasonal adjustments could not be published until sufficient information could be gathered to estimate the seasonal factors. The seasonally adjusted series has since been revised in February 1983 and again in February 1984 following the annual re-analysis.
- The survey sample reselection. After each Census of Population and Housing the sample is reselected to allow data from the latest Census to be used to improve the efficiency of the population survey sample design. A new sample was selected and introduced in all States and Territories starting with the October 1982 survey.
- The addition in the Labour Force Survey of standard questions for the identification of family relationships within households. The processing system will enable the monthly publication of basic labour force data at the family level or for individual family members. More detailed analysis will be issued annually in a separate publication.
- The preparation of a specialised analytical bulletin on employment, underemployment and unemployment which analyses the trends in employment, unemployment and underemployment over the period 1966 to 1983, and examines the conceptual base underlying the statistics.

Supplementary Surveys attached to the Labour Force Survey have been conducted since the 1960's. They enable the collection of information on aspects covered in the Labour Force Survey in more detail or on new topics. Since the mid-seventies, topics which have been covered by the supplementary survey program have increased markedly and the conduct of some surveys on a regular basis has led to the development of time series of various social and labour force indicators. New topics conducted in 1982 and 1983 which are of particular relevance include :

- *Methods of Obtaining Jobs, July 1982 (6245.0)* which sought information from persons who recently obtained a job about whether the job was their first job ever held, the steps which resulted in getting the job, whether they were out of work prior to starting the job or whether they just changed employers, and the type of job obtained.
- *Employment Benefits, August 1983 (6334.0)* which collected information on non-wage employment benefits provided by employers to wage and salary earners.
- *Language Survey, May 1983 (4504.0)* which collected details, for persons aged 15 years and over, of the languages they first spoke, current usage of those languages, and their understanding and usage of later acquired languages.

In addition there have been significant changes to some on-going supplementary surveys. These have included :

- *Transition from Education to Work, May 1983 (6227.0)* which collected for the first time data on apprentices, including their demographic and labour force characteristics, field of trade and current year of apprenticeship.
- *Persons Retired from Full-time Work, September 1983 (6238.0)*. A predecessor, 'Persons Aged 50 to 69 Years Ceasing Full-time Work, May 1980', was restricted to persons aged 50 to 69 years while the 1983 survey covered persons aged 45 years and over. In addition, there have been some changes to question wording. The September 1983 survey collected information on age at retirement, retirement scheme coverage and type of payment received from these schemes as well as housing arrangements and main source of income both at retirement and when the survey was conducted.
- Various modifications to the survey *Persons Not in the Labour Force, September 1983 (6220.0)* in order to provide a more comprehensive range of data. These modifications include the introduction of the concept 'marginal attachment to the labour force' and improvements to the measurement of discouraged jobseekers, the inclusion of persons

not in the labour force aged 65 years and over, and a shift in focus from those not actively looking for work to those available to work within four weeks but not actively looking for work. 'Marginal attachment to the labour force' includes both persons who want work and are available to start work within four weeks as well as persons who are actively looking for work but are not available to start work within four weeks. 'Discouraged job-seekers' (a subcategory of those marginally attached to the labour force) are those persons who are available to start work within four weeks but who are not actively looking for work for reasons which are assessed to indicate discouragement with their employment prospects, e.g. they believe they would not find a job because employers consider them to be too young or too old; language or racial difficulties; they lack the necessary training, skills, or experience; or because there are no jobs in their locality, line of work, or no jobs at all.

Special Household Surveys are generally large-scale omnibus surveys covering topics considered too complex or sensitive to be incorporated into a monthly supplementary survey. Some of the more recent topics concerning the labour market covered by this collection vehicle include :

- *Alternative Working Arrangements, March-May 1982 (6341.0)* which obtained information about certain aspects of the working arrangements of employees and their preferences for changes to those arrangements.
- *Career Paths of Persons with Trade Qualifications, September-November 1982 (6243.0)* which sought information enabling the identification of persons with trade qualifications, and whether those qualifications are being or have been used.
- *Superannuation, September-November 1982 (6319.0)* which collected data on the extent of coverage of superannuation or retirement schemes and life assurance policies in conjunction with the 1982 Income and Housing Survey. This was the first ABS survey to include information on superannuation coverage and costs, on the extent of coverage of life assurance policies, and on payments (including lump sum payments) received from superannuation schemes, life assurance policies, and worker's compensation as well as current and annual income.
- *Income and Housing Survey, September-November 1982 (6502.0)* which collected current and annual income, along with data on housing occupancy and costs.
- The *1984 Household Expenditure Survey (HES)* twelve month field enumeration began in January 1984. The main objective of the survey is to obtain data on 'household expenditure', namely expenditure on those goods and services for private

consumption. The collection of statistics on household expenditure is a prime objective since households are important economic and social units, and private consumption by households is a major determinant of their well-being. The HES will also provide information which is useful for the analysis of the expenditure and income of disadvantaged groups (e.g. the unemployed), of special interest groups (e.g. young families), and of low income households, etc. It will also provide the capacity to analyse data from a labour force perspective.

Household expenditure will be cross-classified by a number of data items. Those items most relevant to the area of labour statistics could include :

- (a) number of household members working and the number of unemployed persons in the household;
- (b) household weekly income from specific sources, particularly wages and salaries, own business/self-employment, superannuation/annuity, workers' compensation and unemployment benefits;
- (c) employment status and weekly income of the head of the household and spouse;
- (d) occupation of the head of the household; and
- (e) number of weeks in a previous twelve month period that the household head was unemployed.

For more information on the HES refer to the *Information Paper : 1984 Household Expenditure Survey* (6527.0).

Employer-Based Surveys — For many years, employers' payroll tax records were used to obtain numbers of civilian employees, to produce an average weekly earnings series and to create a framework for other employer-based surveys including the distribution and composition of employee earnings and hours, job vacancies and overtime. Following a review of the Civilian Employees Series in 1981, it was decided to discard payroll tax records as a source of the employment and earnings series, primarily because significant and frequent increases to payroll tax exemption limits meant that a large number of small businesses were excluded. This deficiency in coverage of small businesses also affected the quality of data on average weekly earnings because small businesses were under-represented. It was decided that the information required would be best obtained directly from employers using sample surveys based on the ABS register of businesses and organisations. After a three year development phase of the new statistical system the following employer-based surveys are now undertaken by the ABS :

- Quarterly Survey of Average Weekly Earnings
- Quarterly Survey of Employment and Earnings
- Quarterly Survey of Overtime
- Quarterly Survey of Job Vacancies
- Biennial Survey of Employee Earnings and Hours

The development of the new integrated statistical system has been based on the ABS register of businesses which over the past two years has been substantially upgraded, particularly in the coverage of small businesses.

During the development phase extensive field testing was undertaken on a variety of reporting and collection methods to minimise the reporting burden on employers and ensure the collection of quality data.

Features of the new statistical system include :

- (a) the adoption of a new statistical unit, the enterprise/State unit for all of the above surveys;
- (b) the standardisation of definitions (where applicable and feasible) for all the above surveys and the monthly Labour Force Survey;
- (c) the basing of all industry data from the new statistical system on the 1978 edition of the *Australian Standard Industrial Classification* (ASIC) (1201.0 and 1202.0);
- (d) the development of a new computer processing system to assist in the processes of sample selection, despatch of forms and the subsequent editing, estimation and tabulation of results;
- (e) extensive field testing of a variety of reporting and collection methods to minimise the reporting burden on employers and to ensure the collection of quality data.

Further details on the new statistical series outlined above have been published in *Information Paper New Statistical Series : Employment, Average Weekly Earnings, Job Vacancies and Overtime* (6256.0).

Other ABS labour statistics collections

Award Rates of Pay Indexes. In December 1982 a new and more comprehensive series of 'Award Rates of Pay Indexes' was introduced to replace the old series 'Wage Rates Indexes'. The old series was based on the occupational structure that existed in 1954 and only concerned those awards which related solely or mainly to wage earners.

When the decision to rebase the series was made, the only suitable source available was the May 1976 Survey of Employment Earnings and Hours which included all full-time adult wage and salary earners whose rates of pay are normally varied in accordance with awards, determinations or registered collective agreements. The new series provides a more reliable measure of trends payable under awards, because it is based on more up-to-date relative distribution of occupations between and within industries and includes salary earners, who have become a larger proportion of the total number of employees.

Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO)

The impetus for the development of ASCO came from the Norgard (1977) and Crawford (1979) reports. These reports were critical of the occupational classifications then in use primarily because of the lack of comparability between the classifications, the inadequacies of occupational definitions and descriptions, insufficient emphasis on skill, excessive emphasis on industry, inappropriate and obsolete categories and inadequate treatment of occupations in new fields.

In mid-1979 the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR) and the ABS began the development of ASCO as a joint project.

Considerable work has been undertaken including extensive fieldwork by DEIR to contact professional, trade, industrial and other interested organisations. In 1983 the Working Draft of ASCO was published and identified two main structures. Both of these are 'kind or

work' structures; one placing more emphasis on 'materials worked on' and 'products produced' and the other placing greater emphasis on different skill levels and areas of expertise.

The ABS has conducted feasibility testing of both structures using Population Census data and Labour Force Survey data. At the same time the Commonwealth Employment Service has been using the Working Draft for job placement and guidance, and a review of its use has been undertaken. Furthermore, a User Requirements Survey has recently been undertaken to canvass views on different structures, on the need for a quantitative link between the old and new occupational classifications, and any other suggestions or criticisms concerning the Working Draft.

The final version of ASCO comprising one structure will be published in time for its use in the 1986 Population Census. The introduction of ASCO into the Labour Force Survey is expected shortly thereafter.