



# Social Justice STOCKTAKE



## Unemployment and Underemployment

Attributable to Head of Community Engagement, Major Brad Watson

### Were you surprised by the Stocktake's findings?

The issue of unemployment and underemployment was a top concern for 24.1 per cent of our survey respondents. This is not surprising, especially when we think back over the past two years and see the toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken people's job security and mental health.

Employment not only underpins the economic output, and enables people to support themselves and their families, it also allows us to connect with, and contribute to, our broader society. Generally, we like to think that we are recovering well from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, but our survey findings suggest that unemployment and underemployment are priority concerns, ranking among the top ten issues across every jurisdiction.

### It appears that some regions rate employment concerns higher than others. Can you explain why?

Even though the national employment rate now sits just above 4 per cent, unemployment and underemployment concerns comprised up to 35-39 per cent of survey responses in some areas, confirming what we already know - that unemployment affects people in certain areas much more than others, for example low-skilled/casual workers and those living in lower socio-economic and regional and rural areas.

There were only a handful of electorates, mostly in the more affluent inner-metro areas, where concerns about unemployment were comparatively low. Between states and territories though, the Stocktake results seem to broadly reflect unemployment trends. For example, South Australian respondents were most concerned about unemployment and underemployment, and South Australia has the highest unemployment rate in the country. There were lower rates of concern about the issue among respondents in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, where unemployment rates are lower.

### How much do you believe COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions have impacted the result?

We believe COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions have impacted the survey results to an extent, particularly because many parts of Australia were under lockdown or other restrictive health orders at the time the survey was conducted.

We know that underemployment and long-term unemployment are the biggest challenges Australia faces in building an inclusive COVID-19 recovery in which no one is left behind, yet the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have not fallen with equal severity on all shoulders. Low paid workers, many of whom are women, have been exposed to the full health and employment effects of the crisis, resulting in lower workforce participation rates than men and the additional stresses of at home child-care and schooling.



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What can The Salvation Army offer someone presenting with employment issue through its Employment Plus (EPlus), EPlus Local and Doorways services?

Employment Plus is one of Australia's largest government-funded employment service providers.

We provide job seekers with specialised training, work experience and a range of support services to help them find meaningful employment.

EPlus Local can assist people seeking asylum to find paid work and help meet their practical and social needs while they await the outcomes of their visa application.

Salvation Army Doorways provides emergency relief and holistic case management with referrals to internal and external support services.

The Salvation Army works with people who may face additional barriers to employment, including people seeking asylum, youth, and people with disability. What are some things that need to be improved, at any level, to ensure these jobseekers have the best opportunity of finding and retaining meaningful and secure work?

I think part of the answer is in the question – it's about recognising and addressing that these people face *additional* barriers to employment, and it's these additional barriers that need to be tackled first before people can turn their energies to thinking about employment.

The Salvation Army supports people in overcoming these additional barriers. This might include anything from English language training or driving lessons, tailored youth training programs, supporting people into secure housing, tailored supports to those with a disability, injury or health condition to help them be work-ready, helping people with their application and interviewing skills or having suitable work clothes.