

NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND

Support **equal access** to welfare for temporary migrants

Survey Results



Contents

About Unions NSW	3
Acknowledgments	3
Executive summary	4
Introduction	6
Methodology	6
Section I: Survey participants	7
Gender and age	7
Participants' year of arrival	7
Participants and employment	8
Nationality of participants	9
Visa held by participants	9
Participants top ten nationalities per visa category	10
Visa category and occupation	12
Visa category and year of arrival	13
Section II: COVID-19 impact on work	14
Unemployment	14
Reduction in work hours	16
Impact upon work by visa category and nationality	19
Impact on international students	19
Impact on working holiday makers	20
Impact on graduate visa holders	21
Impact on other visa categories	22
Impact upon work by time in the country	23
Exposure to workplace health and safety risks	24
Exposure to workplace health and safety risks by employment type and visa category	25
Case study	26
Section III: Impacts on housing	27
Impact on housing by visa category and nationality	28
Impact on international students	28
Impact on working holiday makers	30
Impact on graduate visa holders	32
Impact on other visa categories	34
Case study	35
Section IV: Food insecurity	36
Food insecurity by visa category and nationality	36
Food insecurity among international students	36
Food insecurity among working holiday makers	37
Food insecurity among graduate visa holders	38
Food insecurity among other visa categories	39
Case study	40
Section V: Financial support	41
Reliance on savings	41
Government support	41
Charity support	41
Participants' alternative plans	42
Alternative plans by visa type	42
Case study	43
Visa issues	44
Conclusion	44
Recommendations	45
References	46

About Unions NSW

Unions NSW is the peak body for trade unions and union members in New South Wales, with 48 affiliated trade unions and Trades and Labour Councils, representing approximately 600,000 workers across New South Wales. Affiliated trade unions cover the spectrum of the workforce in both the public and private sectors. Unions NSW aims to create a fairer and just society and actively campaigns to improve workplace pay and conditions for all workers in New South Wales, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background.

In 2019, Unions NSW, in partnership with the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC), created Visa Assist, a non-for-profit service which provides free immigration advice and legal support to migrant workers in New South Wales who are union members. Campaigns led by Unions NSW under the Visa Assist umbrella have engaged over 20,000 migrant workers. The Visa Assist program has also provided over 500 legal services since its creation a year ago.

Acknowledgments

Unions NSW would like to express its gratitude to all the temporary migrants who participated in the survey and shared their experiences during this difficult time. This report would not have been possible without the tireless work of the communities and the generous support provided by activist groups, including:

- Brazilian Aid, with special thanks to president Gabriela Laverde for her exceptional coordination of volunteers from the Brazilian community and their widespread distribution of the survey
- Visa Assist committee, with outstanding leadership from Decheng Sun, Abby Gi, Takako Maruoka, Sarina Manandhar, Bijay Sapkota and Jessie Lee
- The Migrant Worker Justice Initiative, specifically Prof. Laurie Berg and Prof. Bassina Farbenblum for providing insightful feedback on an early draft of the report
- Other organisations: Hong Kong Why, Korean Working Holiday Youth (KOWHY), The Migrant Workers Centre, Victoria and Tom and Mia Legacy

Executive summary

About the survey

Unions NSW's survey is the first large-scale data set regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related government economic and social restrictions, upon temporary migrants. Temporary migrants have been particularly impacted because of the reluctance of the Australian government to extend access to its JobKeeper and JobSeeker schemes to visa holders.

The survey was available in Chinese and English, conducted online and open from late March 2020 until mid-May 2020. The survey received 5,342 valid responses, with the majority being received between 26 March 2020 and 5 April 2020. Participants were nationals from 95 countries; notably, 23% were from China, 22% from Brazil, 17% from Colombia, 10% from Nepal and 5% from India.

At 67%, the majority of participants were on student visas, followed by 10% who were working holiday makers, 7% on bridging visas, 7% on graduate visas and 4% on sponsorship visas.

At 39%, the majority of respondents worked in hospitality, followed by cleaning and professional services, both at 11%, while 10% were retail assistants.

At 50%, the majority of respondents were casual employees, 33% were part-time employees, 15% were full-time employees and 2% worked under an ABN.

The survey contained 22 questions and was aimed at identifying how COVID-19 impacted the lives of temporary migrants in four key areas; employment and housing, food and financial security. Additional questions gathered information on participant's intentions to stay in Australia and alternative plans if unemployed. Participants were also given the opportunity to share their stories and views on how they could be assisted during the crisis.

Respondents were offered the option of providing their contact details, with more than 50% who provided them being contacted in order to confirm answers and to offer advice on support services for financial hardship or other issues.

Key findings

Overwhelming majority of temporary migrants lost their job or has had their employment hours reduced

As a direct result of COVID-19, 65% of respondents lost employment and 23% had their hours significantly reduced. Workers in

the entertainment and tourism sectors were the most affected, with 75% suffering job loss, followed by 74% in hospitality. 37% of health and aged care workers experienced a reduction in work hours, followed by 34% of factory workers and cleaners.

Significant numbers of temporary migrants are unable to pay rent and anticipated eviction

At the time of the survey, 30% of respondents could not pay rent and anticipated imminent eviction, with 4% already being effectively homeless. 23% were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs, while 9% indicated that their roommates had moved out and left them responsible for a large rent which they were unable to pay. Only 3% were in the process of negotiating a rent reduction with their landlord.

An alarming number of temporary migrants are forced to skip meals because of their financial circumstance

43% of respondents were skipping meals on a regular basis due to COVID-19 related financial hardship. Notably, 70% of participants from Indonesia, 58% from India and 52% from China were impacted.

Temporary migrants are relying on rapidly depleting savings

87% of respondents were experiencing difficulty paying their weekly expenses, of which 61% were relying on savings but expected them to run out in a few weeks and 11% did not have enough money to cover one week's expenses.

International students are severely impacted

60% of international students lost their job and 21% had their hours significantly reduced. 9% reported being exposed to health and safety risks.

31% did not have money to pay rent and anticipated imminent eviction, while 26% were sharing a bedroom and 10% had moved into a share house to reduce costs. 46% were financially forced to skip meals on a regular basis.

Of those experiencing difficulty in paying their weekly expenses, 84% were relying on savings but expected them to run out in a few weeks and the remaining 16% did not have enough money to cover one week's expenses.

Working holiday makers are significantly affected

77% of working holiday makers lost their job and 13% had their hours significantly reduced.

Housing insecurity was prominent, with 13% of backpackers effectively becoming homeless and a further 17% unable to pay rent and expecting imminent eviction. 22% were sharing a bedroom and 18% had moved into a share house to reduce costs.

45% were skipping meals on a regular basis, with 89% of those experiencing difficulty in paying their weekly expenses relying on savings, which they expected to be exhausted within a few weeks.

Graduate visa holders are experiencing high levels of hardship

Half of all graduate visa holder survey participants had lost their job and 21% had their hours significantly reduced.

41% were unable to pay rent and anticipated imminent eviction, while 20% were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs. 43% were financially forced to skip meals on a regular basis, with 91% of those experiencing difficulty paying their weekly expenses expecting their savings to run out within weeks.

Other visa categories are impacted

Job loss was experienced by 54% of bridging visa and 31% of sponsorship visa holders.

31% of participants on a bridging visa and 28% on a sponsorship visa were unable to pay rent and expected near term eviction. Additionally, 34% of bridging and 27% of sponsorship visa holders were skipping meals to reduce expenses.

Significant numbers of temporary migrants hoped for government assistance

When asked about their plans if already or becoming unemployed, 37% of respondents reported that they plan to rely on family, friends or a partner for support, while 31% hoped to gain government assistance and 20% planned to leave Australia.

COVID-19 challenges for the Australian visa system

70% of temporary migrants were experiencing visa related issues. 23% needed to apply for a visa extension in order to conclude their studies, 13% were on a graduate visa but unable to work because of limited opportunities and 12% reported that their visa would expire this year but they were unable to return to their country. 4% of temporary migrants were unable to complete their farm work because of quarantine and 4% were affected by their working holiday visa restriction of not being able to work with the same employer for more than 6 months. 3% stated that their sponsorship visa had been or would be cancelled.

Conclusion

The Unions NSW survey results confirm that the Federal Government's abandonment of temporary migrants and its failure to provide equal access to financial support including, the refusal to provide JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments to visa holders, has resulted in a humanitarian crisis.

An overwhelming majority of temporary migrants lost their jobs as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many no longer having the resources to meet their most basic needs. A significant number of temporary migrants are homeless or facing imminent eviction and are skipping meals on regular basis. Most migrants that are reliant on savings expect these to be exhausted within a few weeks.

Australia has the highest number of temporary migrants per capita among all OECD countries.¹ Temporary migrants inject billions of dollars annually into the Australian economy.² The tourism and education sector are particularly reliant on temporary migrants.³ To prevent a deepening of the humanitarian crisis and to support its own economic recovery, the Australian Government must take immediate action and provide financial support to temporary migrants.

Recommendations

Immediately extend the JobKeeper program to include temporary migrants, with a provision for retrospective application.

Immediately extend the JobSeeker program to temporary migrants, to alleviate the severe financial hardship they are experiencing.

Abolish the 40 hours per fortnight work restriction for international students, to reduce the pressure that pushes them into the cash economy.

Remove the 88-days regional work placement requirement for working holiday makers, to reduce their vulnerability to exploitative practices.

Introduction

COVID-19 is one of the deepest economic and humanitarian crises since the Second World War.⁴ Over a million Australians are now unemployed and existing frontline workers are exposed to significant health and safety risks.⁵ The Australian government has responded with several measures to cushion the impact of the crisis, including introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement, JobKeeper payments and JobSeeker increase.⁶ However, except for New Zealand citizens on Special Category Subclass 444 visas, temporary visa holders have been excluded from government financial support.⁷

In March 2020, there were 2,172,648 temporary visa holders in Australia. Data from the Department of Home Affairs indicated that in June, 2,029,721 still remained, despite a 28% decline in the number of working holiday makers.⁸

It is estimated that international students inject over \$37 billion into the Australian economy each year⁹ and working holiday makers, approximately \$3 billion.¹⁰ Despite often perpetuated misconceptions, research indicates that temporary migration does not negatively impact wages or job opportunities for Australian born workers¹¹ and in fact, international education alone supports over 240,000 jobs.¹² Temporary migrants also boost government revenue. They pay taxes like Australian workers, with some even paying higher rates, although the majority are not entitled to subsidised government services.¹³

Academic research has consistently highlighted the endemic exploitation experienced by temporary migrants. A recent survey found that 77% of international students were paid below the minimum casual hourly rate.¹⁴ The federal government's abandonment of temporary migrants during the pandemic will only intensify existing endemic work exploitation, adding pressure to engage in illegal work and exacerbating the vulnerabilities created by current visa conditions that prevent the reporting of exploitative practices.¹⁵

A coalition of unions, leading academics, not for profit organisations, activists, universities and business owners, among others, have warned the federal government about the humanitarian and economic cost of deserting temporary migrants during the crisis.¹⁶ However, the government has remained obstinate, despite revealing on 22 May 2020 that the Federal Treasury had miscalculated and overstated the total value of JobKeeper by approximately \$60 billion, clearly indicating that funds are available.¹⁷

Australia has the highest number of temporary migrants per capita among all OECD countries.¹⁸ However, the Australian Government's reluctance to support temporary migrants

contrasts with the approach adopted by other OECD countries, which have provided financial support to temporary migrants as a key element in their recovery.¹⁹

This report relies on survey responses from over 5,000 temporary migrants to assess the humanitarian cost of the federal government's abandonment of temporary migrants during COVID-19.

Methodology

The survey was online and open for responses from late March 2020 until mid-May 2020. It was available in Chinese and English. Participants were asked for their contact details and a significant number were emailed or called to confirm their survey answers.

The survey was distributed through Unions NSW social media channels and to different migrant communities by email, online events and social media platforms such as Wechat, Weibo and Facebook. A committee of activists and volunteers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds was constituted to ensure participation from different demographics. Over 80% of the responses were collected between 26 March 2020 and 5 April 2020.

SECTION I

Survey participants

The first section of the survey asked participants their nationality, age, gender, time in Australia and the type of visa held at the time of the survey. The report only relies on the 5,342

respondents who held a temporary visa. Participants who indicated that they had permanent residency or had become citizens were excluded from the analysis.

Gender and age

At 62%, the majority of participants were female, 37% were male and 1% indicated other.

59% of the respondents were 25 to 34 years of age, 28% were 18 to 24 years and 12% were 34 to 44 years.

Figure 1. Gender of survey participants (n=5,300)

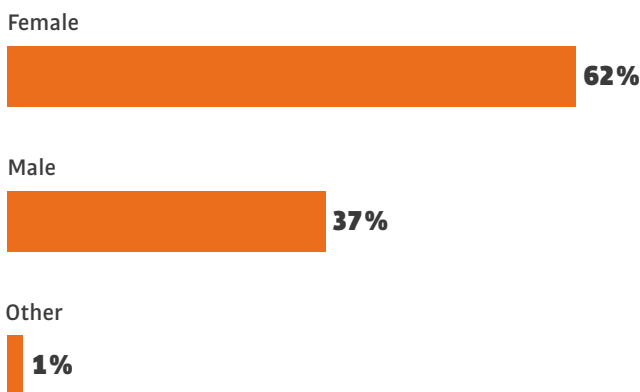
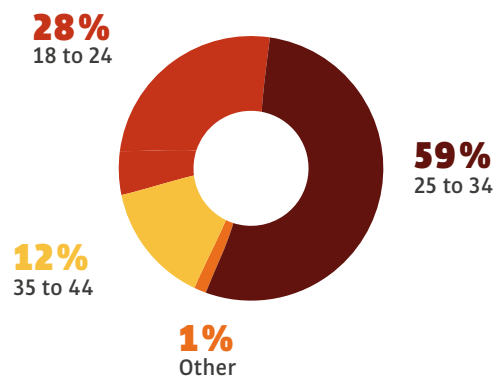


Figure 2. Age of respondents (n=5,308)

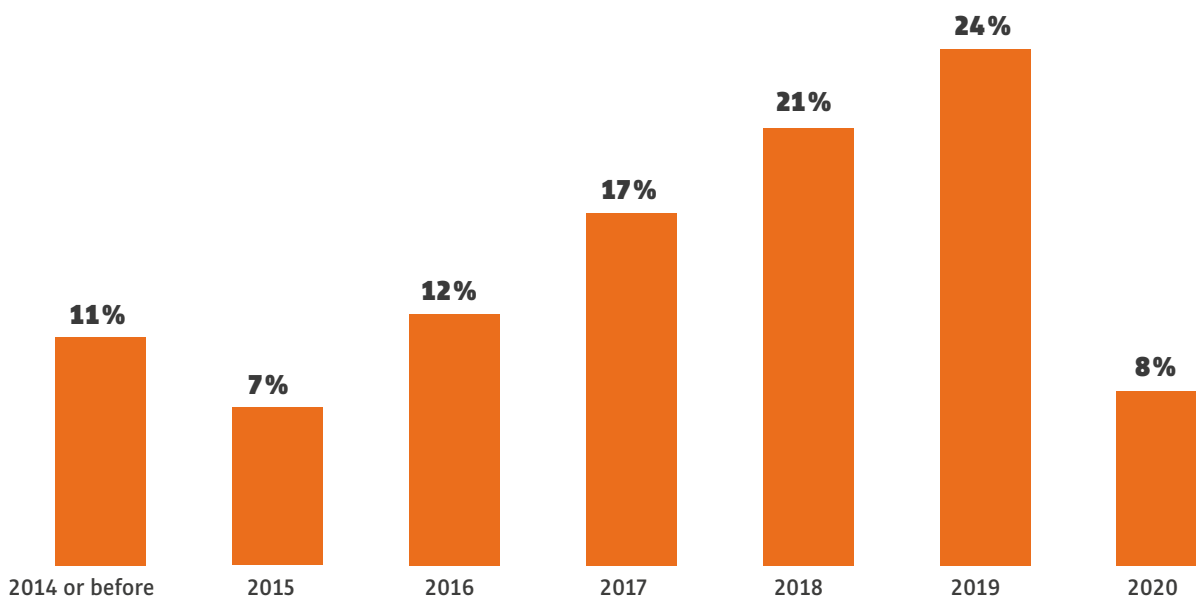


Participants' year of arrival

The majority of participants arrived in Australia within the last 3 years, with 8% coming in 2020, 24% in 2019 and 21% in 2018.

17% of participants arrived in 2017, preceded by 12% in 2016, 7% in 2015 and 11% in 2014 or earlier.

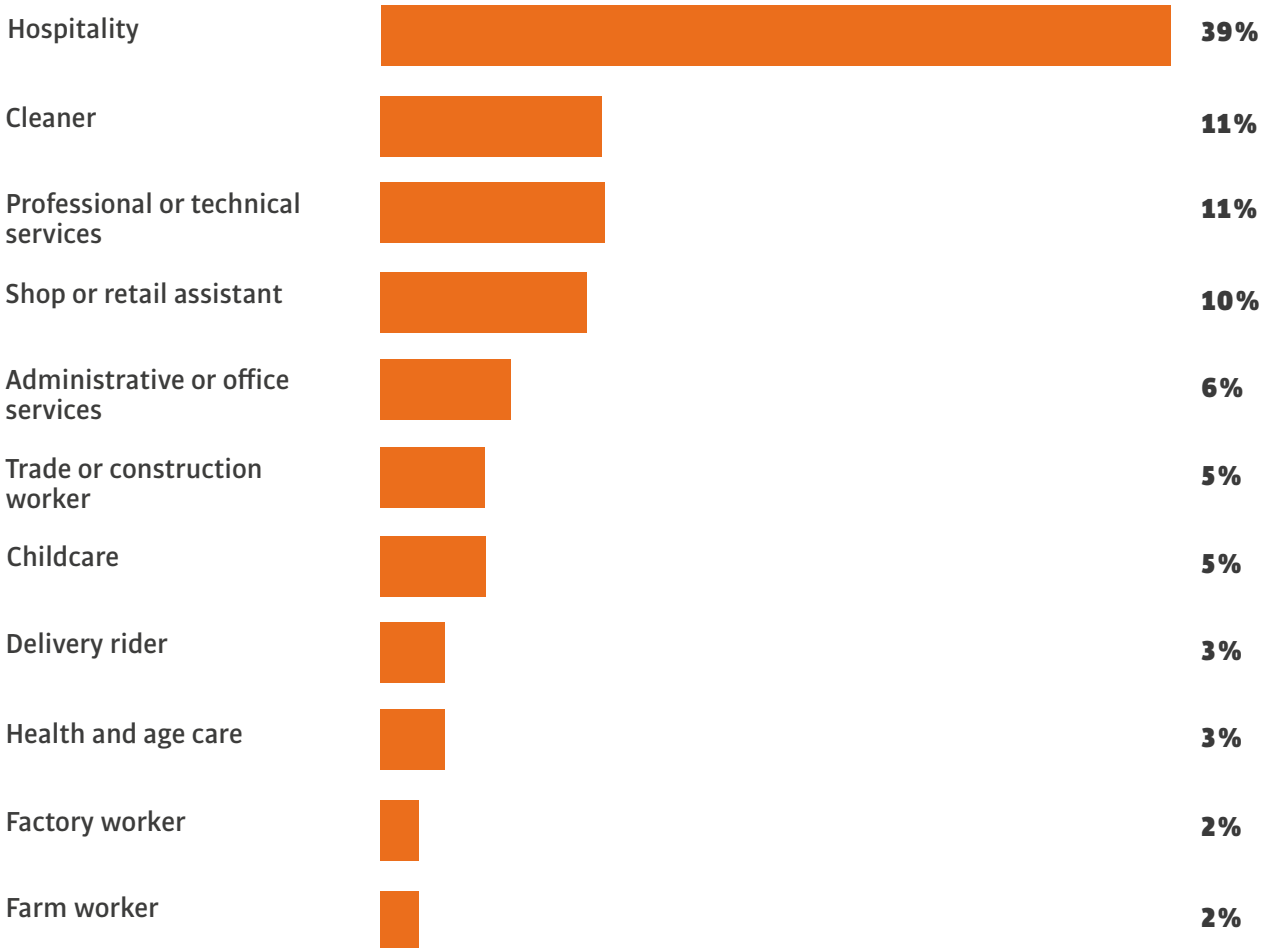
Figure 3. Year of participants' arrival in Australia (n=5,000)



Participants and employment

At 39%, the majority of respondents worked in hospitality. 11% worked as cleaners, 11% provided professional or technical services and 10% worked as retail assistants.

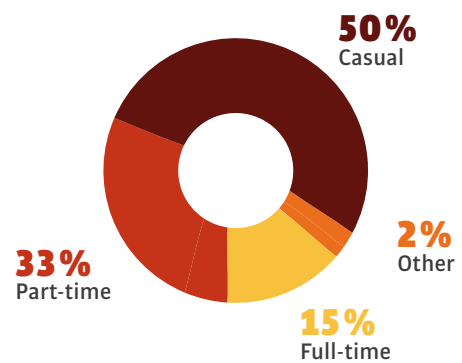
Figure 4. Occupation of participants (n=4,170)



Participants' employment contract

At 50%, the majority of respondents were casual employees, 33% were part-time employees, 15% were full-time employees and the remaining 2% worked under an ABN.

Figure 5. Employment contract of participants (n=4,010)

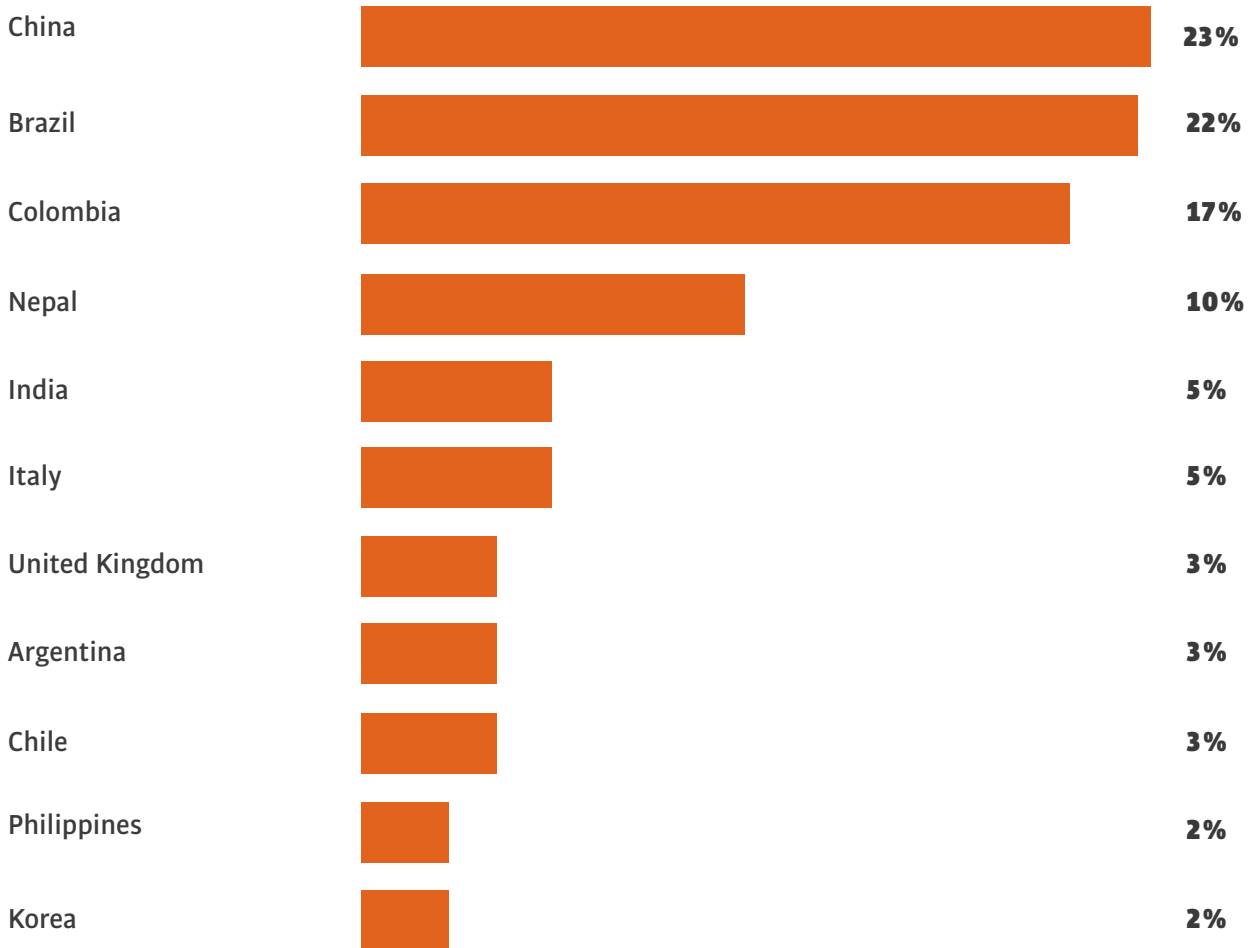


Nationality of participants

Survey participants were nationals of 95 countries, with 23% being from China, 22% from Brazil, 17% from Colombia, 10% from Nepal and 5% from India.

The majority of respondents were international students. These demographics are consistent with the Department of Home Affairs' nationality trends among temporary migrants.²⁰

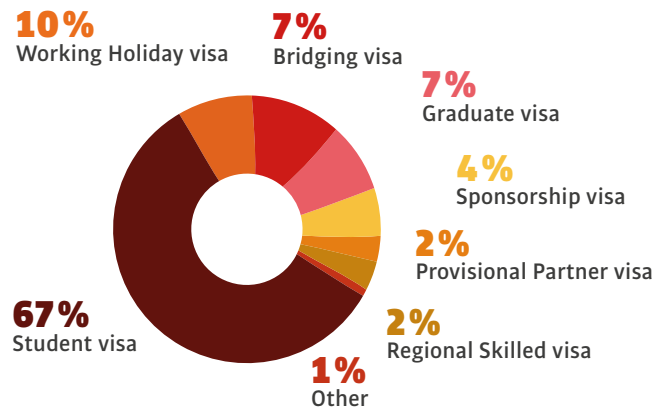
Figure 6. Top fourteen nationalities of participants (n=5,342)



Visa held by participants

At 67%, the majority of participants were on a student visa. 10% were working holiday makers,²¹ 7% were on a graduate visa, 7% were on a bridging visa and 4% were on a sponsorship visa. This is consistent with recent government data indicating international students as the biggest group of temporary migrants after New Zealand citizens.²²

Figure 7. Visa held by participants (n=5,300)

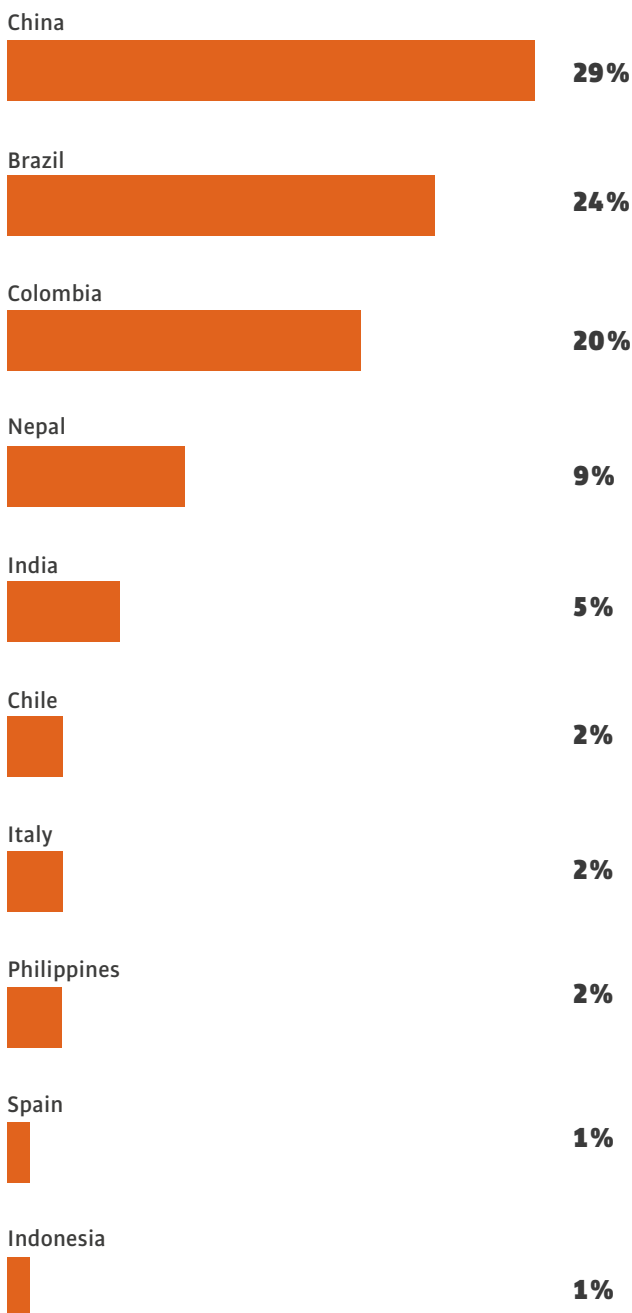


Participants top ten nationalities per visa category

Top ten nationalities of international students

29% of the international students who completed the survey were from China, 24% were from Brazil, 20% were from Colombia, 9% were from Nepal, 5% were from India, 2% were from Chile, 2% were from Italy and 2% were from the Philippines. According to recent government data, China, India, Nepal and Brazil are among the top five nationalities of international students.²³

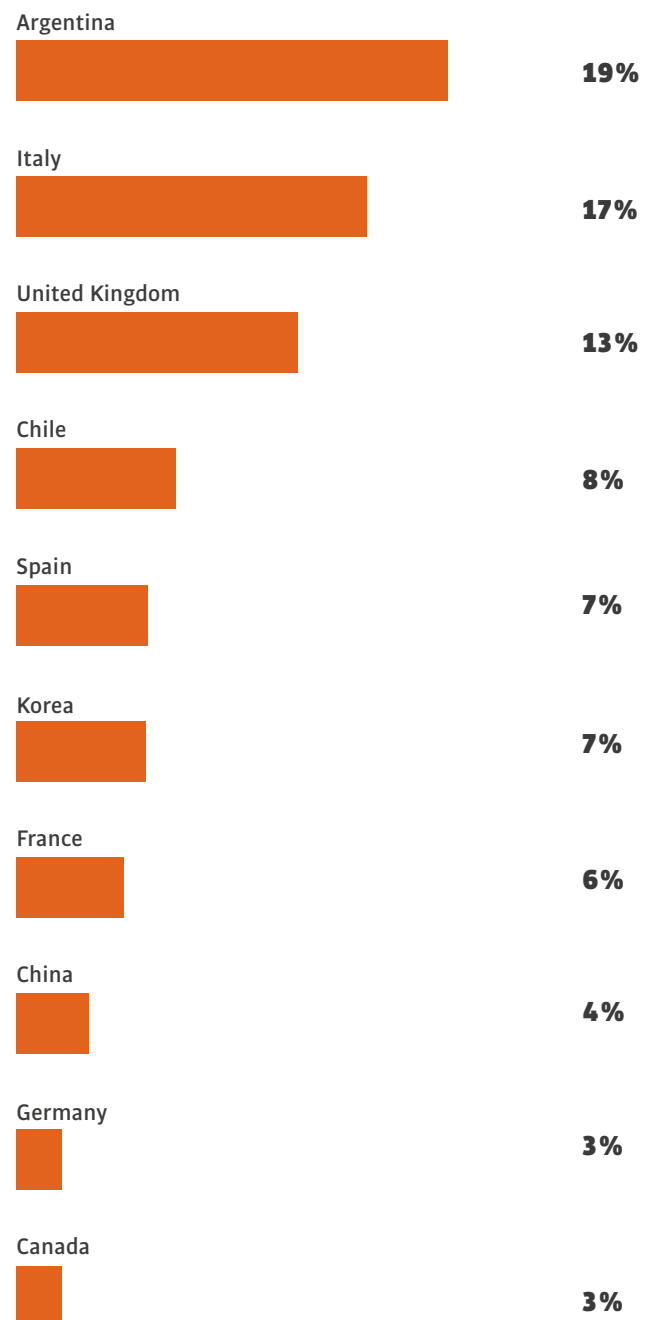
Figure 8. Top ten nationalities of international students



Top ten nationalities of working holiday makers

19% of the working holiday makers who completed the survey were from Argentina, 17% were from Italy, 13% were from the United Kingdom, 8% were from Chile, 7% were from Spain, 7% were from Korea, 6% were from France, 4% were from China, 3% were from Germany and 3% were from Canada.²⁴

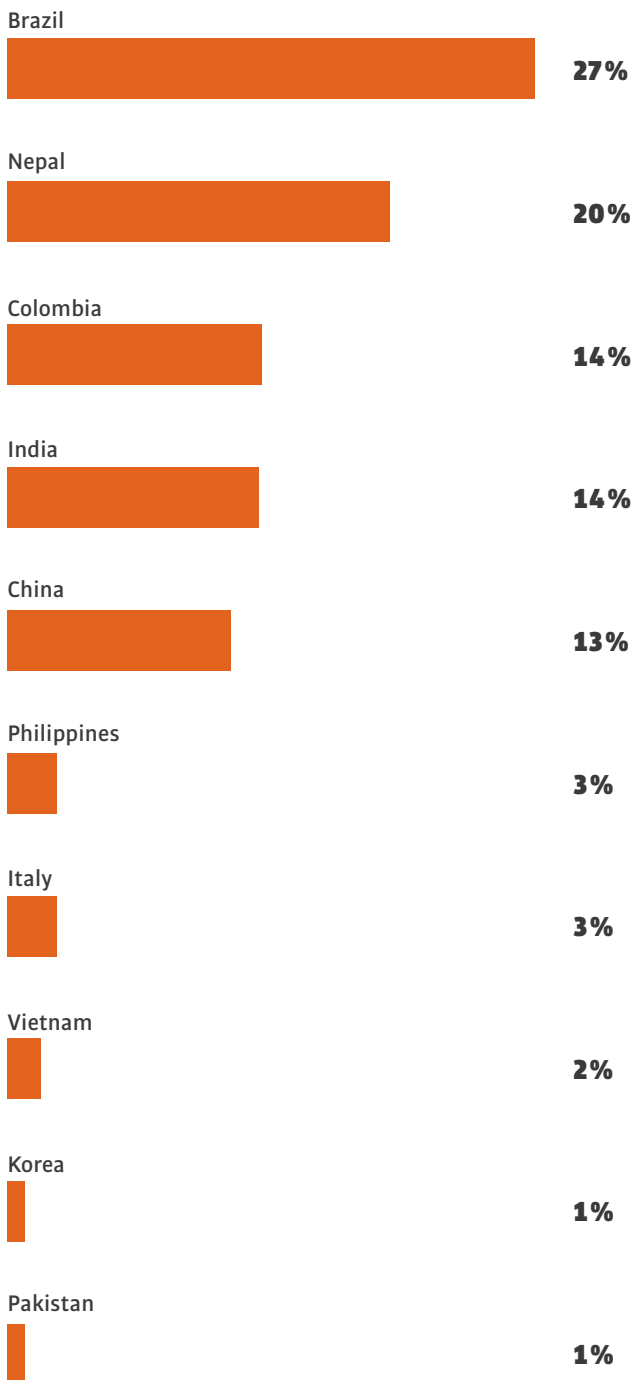
Figure 9. Top ten nationalities of working holiday makers



Top ten nationalities of graduate visa holders

22% of graduate visa holders who completed the survey were from Brazil, 20% were from Nepal, 14% were from Colombia, 14% were from India, 13% were from China and 3% were from the Philippines.

Figure 10. Top ten nationalities of graduate visa holders



Other visas and top nationalities

Of the respondents on a bridging visa, 26% were from Brazil, 14% were from Nepal, 13% were from Colombia and 11% were from China. Of those on a sponsorship visa, 26% were from Brazil, 21% were from Italy and 18% were from the United Kingdom.

Figure 11. Top nationalities of sponsorship holders

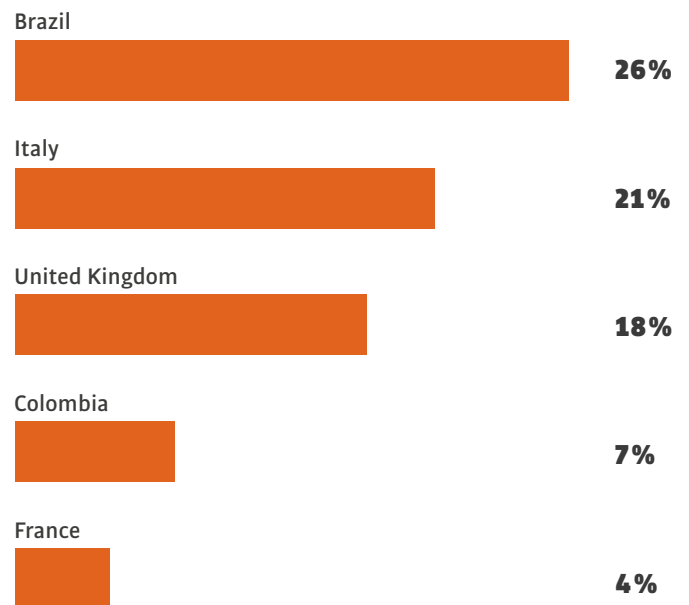
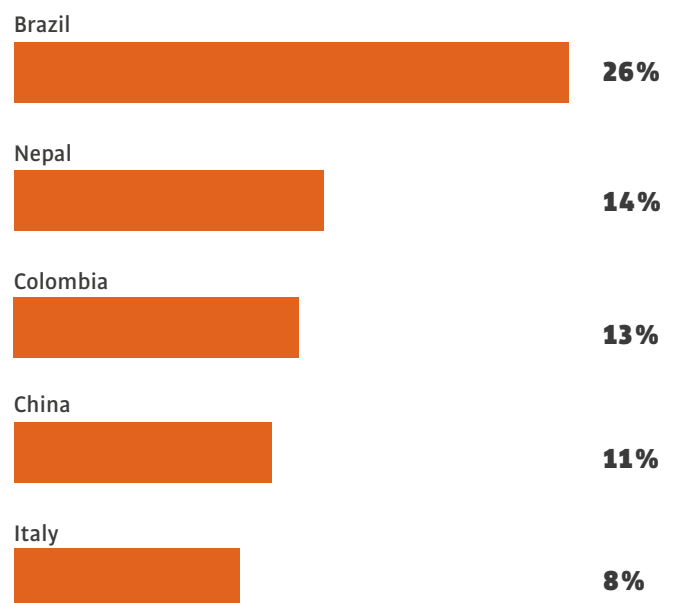


Figure 12. Top nationalities of bridging visa holders



Visa category and occupation

42% of working holiday makers were employed in hospitality, 14% were engaged in farm work and 8% were providing professional or technical services.

40% of student visa holders were working in hospitality, 15% were employed as cleaners, 11% were shop or retail assistants, 7% were providing professional or technical services and 5% were performing administration or office services.

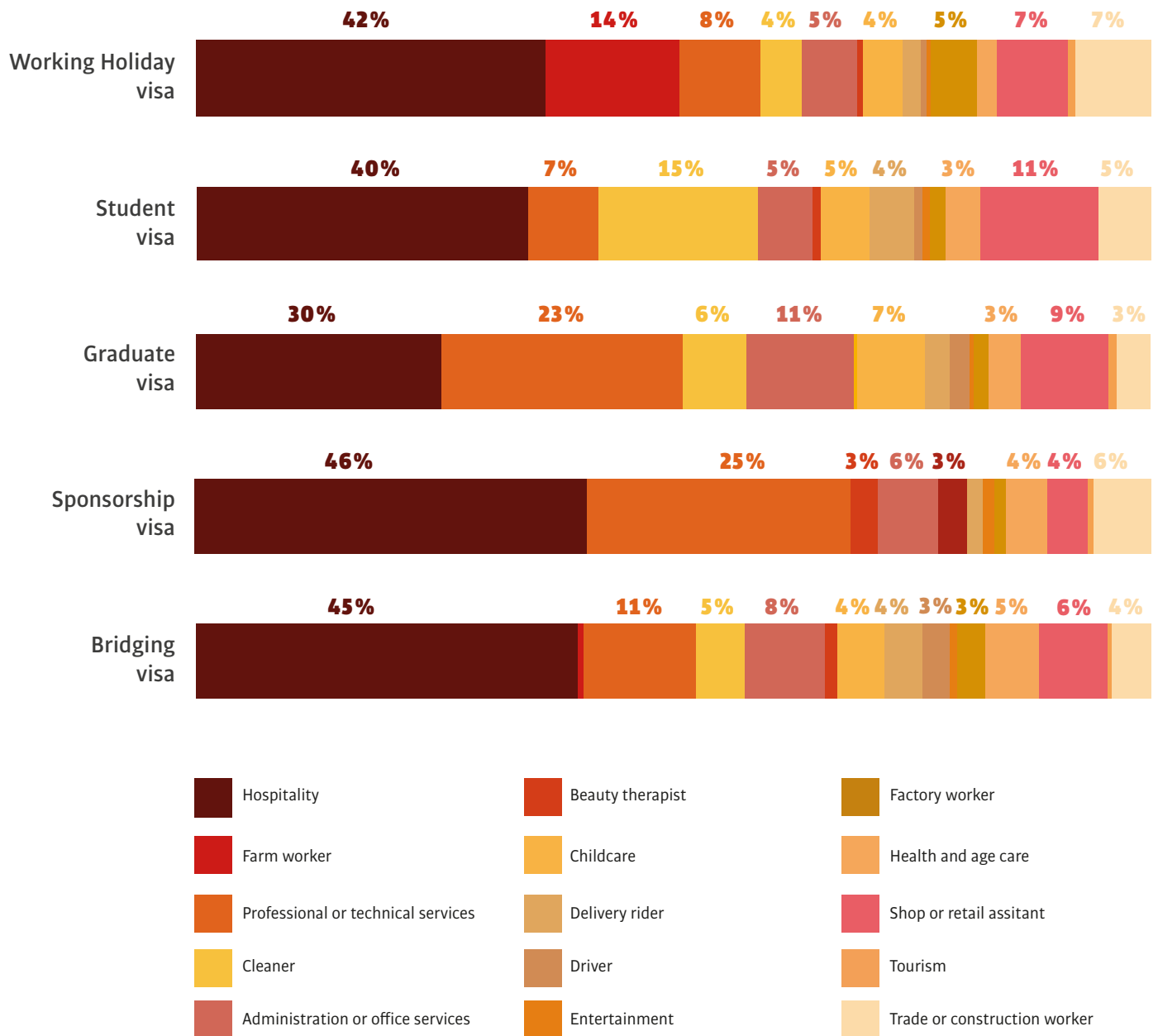
30% of those on a graduate visa were working in hospitality, 23% were providing professional or technical services, 11%

were in administration or office service roles and 9% were working as shop or retail assistants.

46% of sponsorship visa holders were working in hospitality and 25% were providing professional or technical services.

45% of those on a bridging visa were working in hospitality and 11% were providing professional or technical services.

Figure 13. Visa type and occupation of survey participants

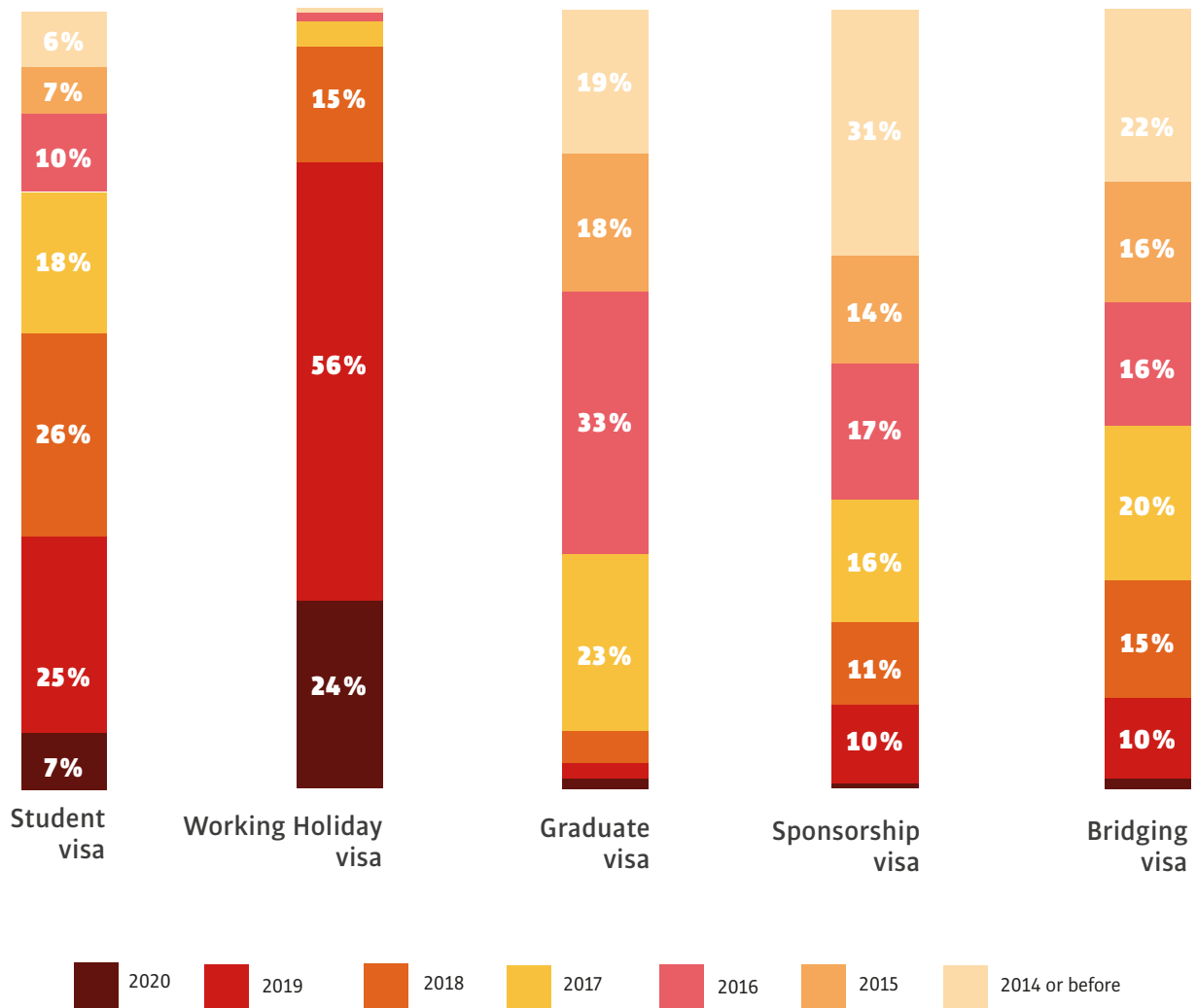


Visa category and year of arrival

26% of student visa holders arrived in 2018 and 25% arrived in 2019. 56% of working holiday makers arrived in 2019, while 33% of graduate visa holders arrived in 2016 and 23% arrived in 2017.

22% of those on bridging visas arrived in 2014 or earlier and 31% of those on sponsorship visas arrived in or before 2014.

Figure 14. Visa category and year of arrival (n=4,300)



SECTION II

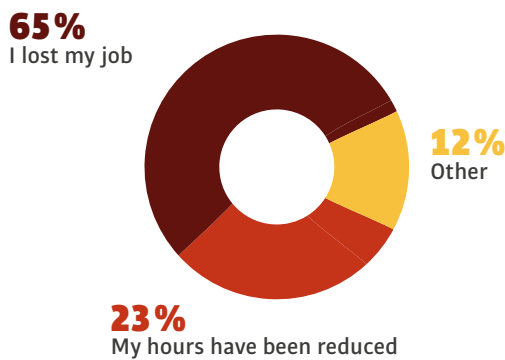
COVID-19 impact on work

The second section of the survey asked participants about the impact of COVID-19 on their employment. Answers indicating that the participants had been unemployed before the crisis were excluded from the analysis. The most prominent issues experienced were unemployment, reduction of work hours and exposure to health and safety risks. Wage theft and being forced to take unpaid leave also occurred.

Unemployment

An overwhelming proportion of respondents indicated that they had lost their job (65%), and 23% stated that their hours had been reduced.

Figure 15. Impact on work (n=4,417)



Impact by occupation

In 13 of the 15 most common occupations among survey participants, the level of job loss exceeded 45%. At 75%, the highest rate of job loss was experienced by those working in entertainment and tourism. In respondents' most common occupational sector, hospitality, 74% lost their job. Additionally, 74% of beauty therapists became unemployed.

Most affected by job loss:



75%
Entertainment and tourism



74%
Hospitality



74%
Beauty therapists

Least affected by job loss:

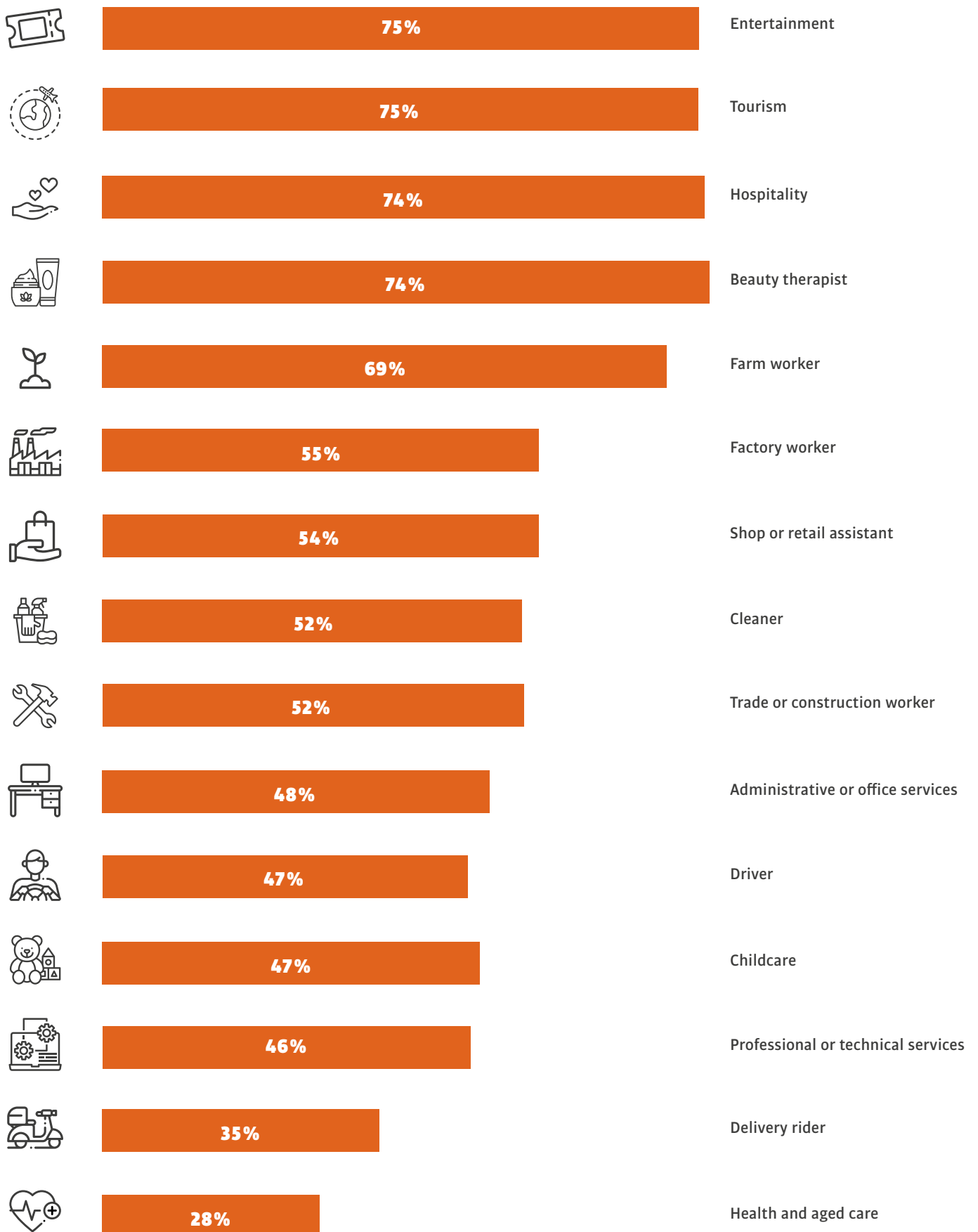


35%
Delivery riders



28%
Health and aged care workers

Figure 16. Job loss by occupation



Job loss by employment type

61% of casually employed respondents lost their job, as did 46% of part time workers and 44% of those working under an ABN.

Figure 17. Job loss by employment type

61%

of casually employed respondents lost their job

44%

of those working with an ABN lost their job

46%

of part time workers lost their job

36%

of full time workers lost their job

Reduction in work hours

Participants working in health and aged care, factories and cleaning were most affected by a forced reduction in work hours. 37% of those working in health and aged care saw their hours significantly reduced and 34% of those working in factories or as a cleaner had their hours negatively impacted.

Most affected by a reduction in work hours:



37%

Health and aged care workers



34%

Factory workers



34%

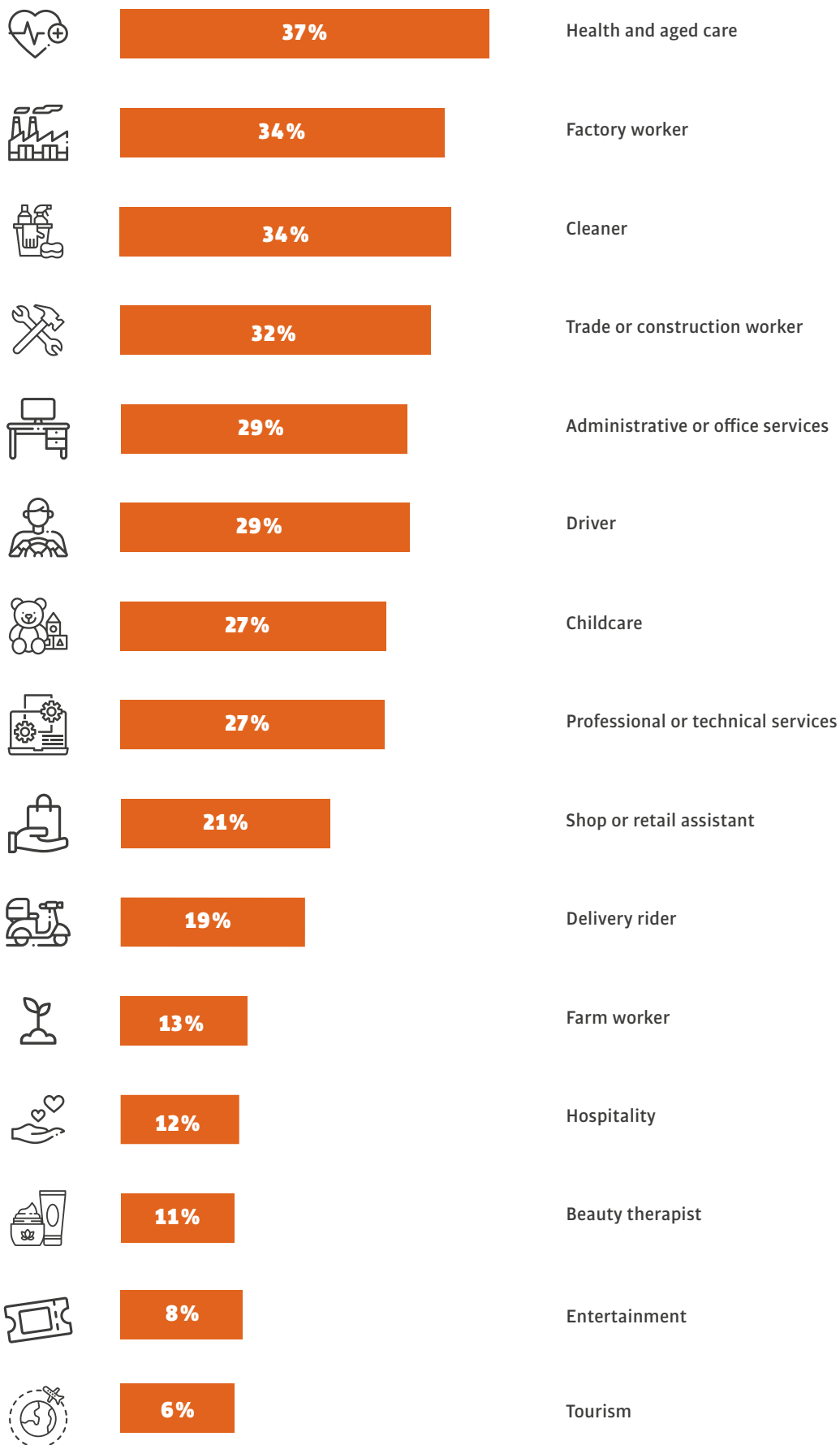
Cleaners



32%

Trade and construction workers

Figure 18. Reduction in work hours



Reduction in work hours by employment status

27% of respondents employed on a part time basis saw their hours reduced, as did 26% of casual workers, 23% of full time workers and 19% of those working under an ABN.

Figure 19. Reduction in work hours by employment status

27%

of part time workers lost their job

23%

of full time workers lost their job

26%

of casually employed respondents lost their job

19%

of those working with an ABN lost their job

Impact upon work by visa category and nationality

Employment impact on international students

60% of international students lost their job and 25% had their hours significantly reduced. Additionally, 9% reported having been exposed to health and safety risks.

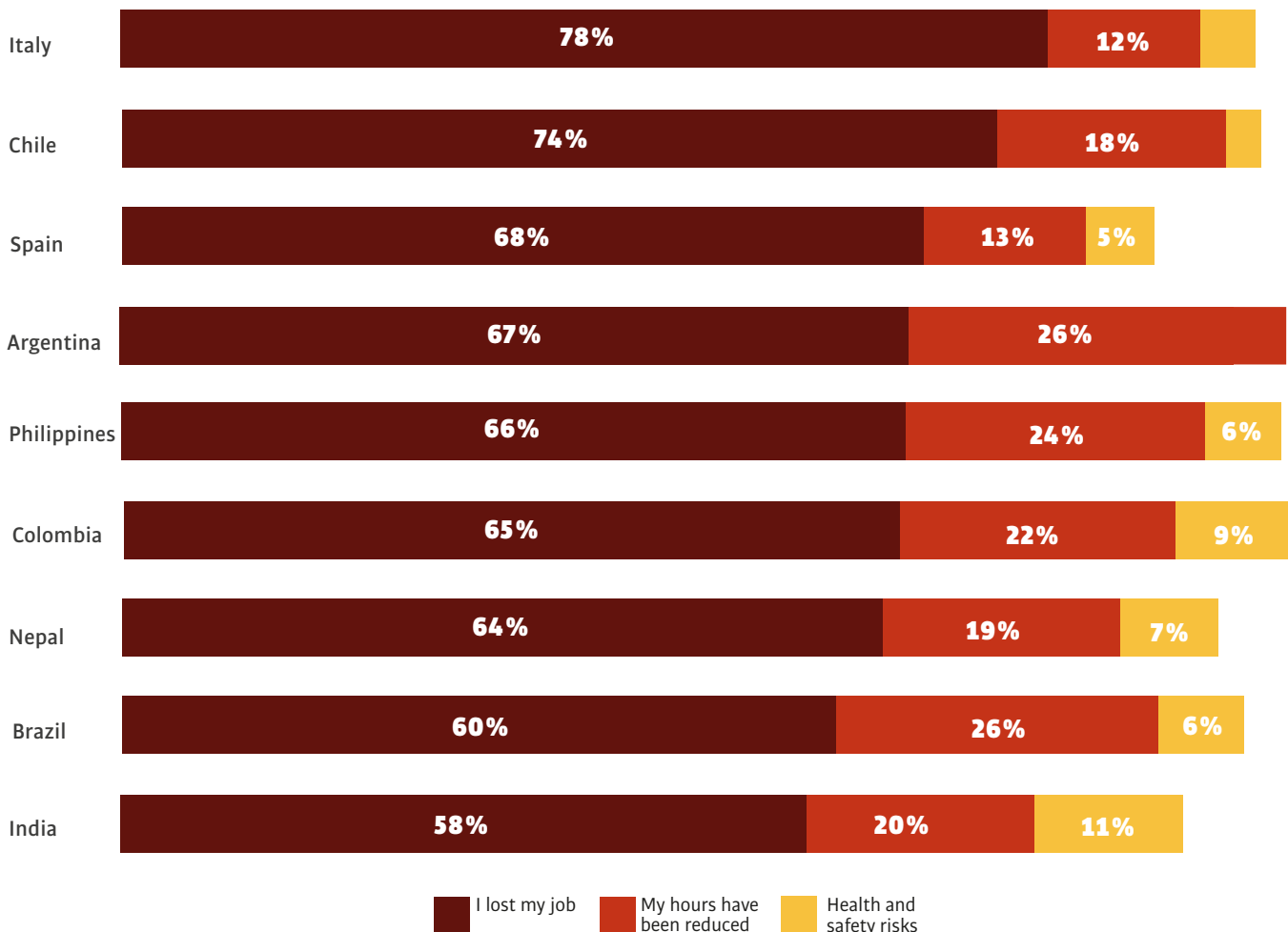
Figure 20. Impact upon work for international students



Nationality of highly affected international students

Over 50% of respondents from the top 8 nationalities of student visa holders lost their job, including 78% from Italy, 74% from Chile, 68% from Spain, 67% from Argentina, 66% from Philippines, 65% from Colombia, 64% from Nepal, 60% from Brazil and 58% from India.

Figure 21. Nationality of highly affected international students



Employment impact on working holiday makers

An overwhelming proportion of working holiday makers (77%) lost their job and 13% indicated that their work hours were significantly reduced. 6% reported that they had been exposed to health and safety risks.

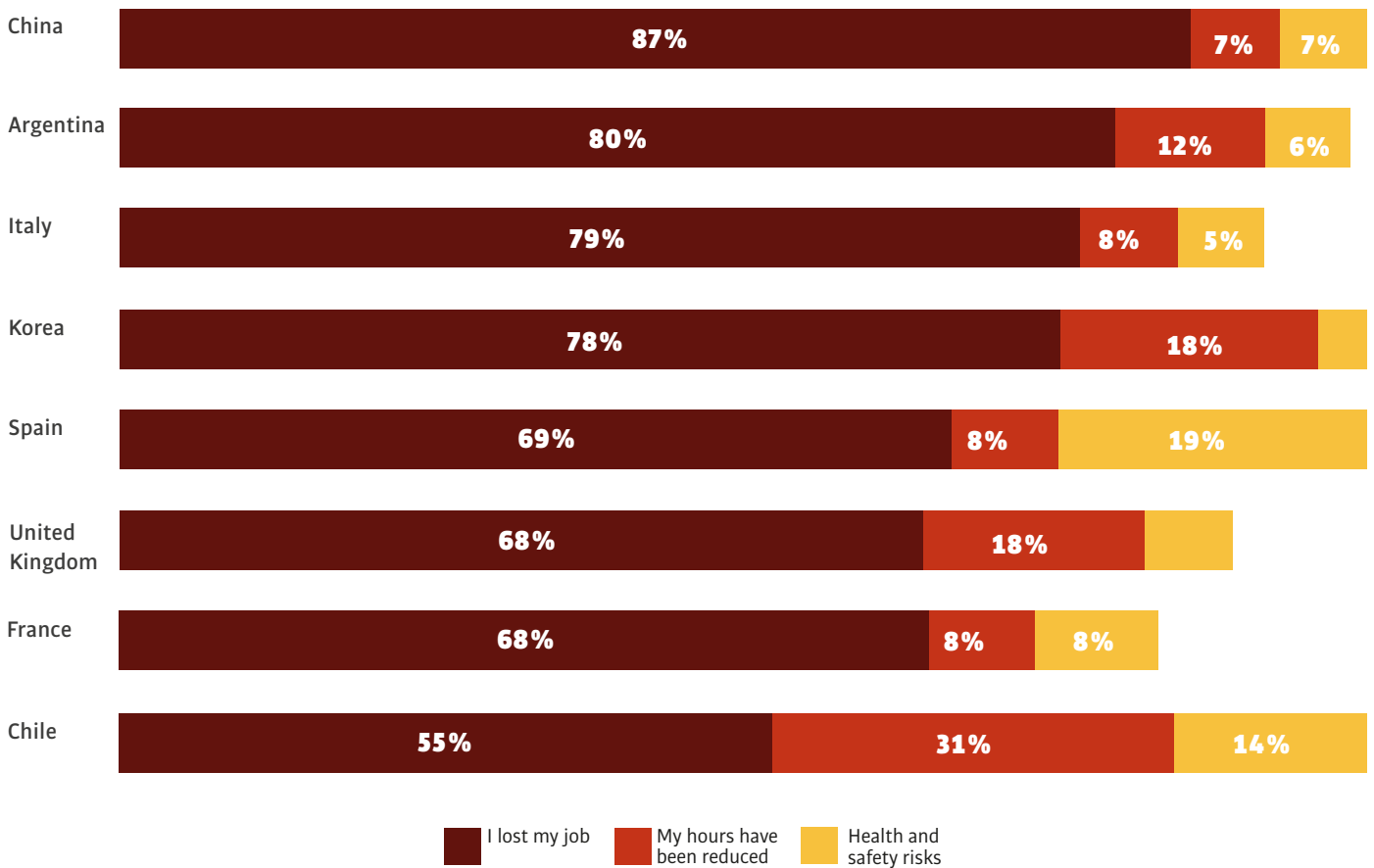
Figure 22. Employment impact on working holiday makers



Nationalities of highly affected working holiday makers

Over 55% of respondents from the top 8 nationalities of working holiday makers lost their job, including 87% from China, 80% from Argentina, 79% from Italy, 78% from Korea, 69% from Spain, 68% from the United Kingdom, 68% from France and 55% from Chile.

Figure 23. Nationalities of highly impacted working holiday makers



Employment impact on graduate visa holders

Half of the temporary migrants on graduate visas lost their job and 21% experienced a significant reduction in their work hours. 9% indicated that they had been exposed to health and safety risks.

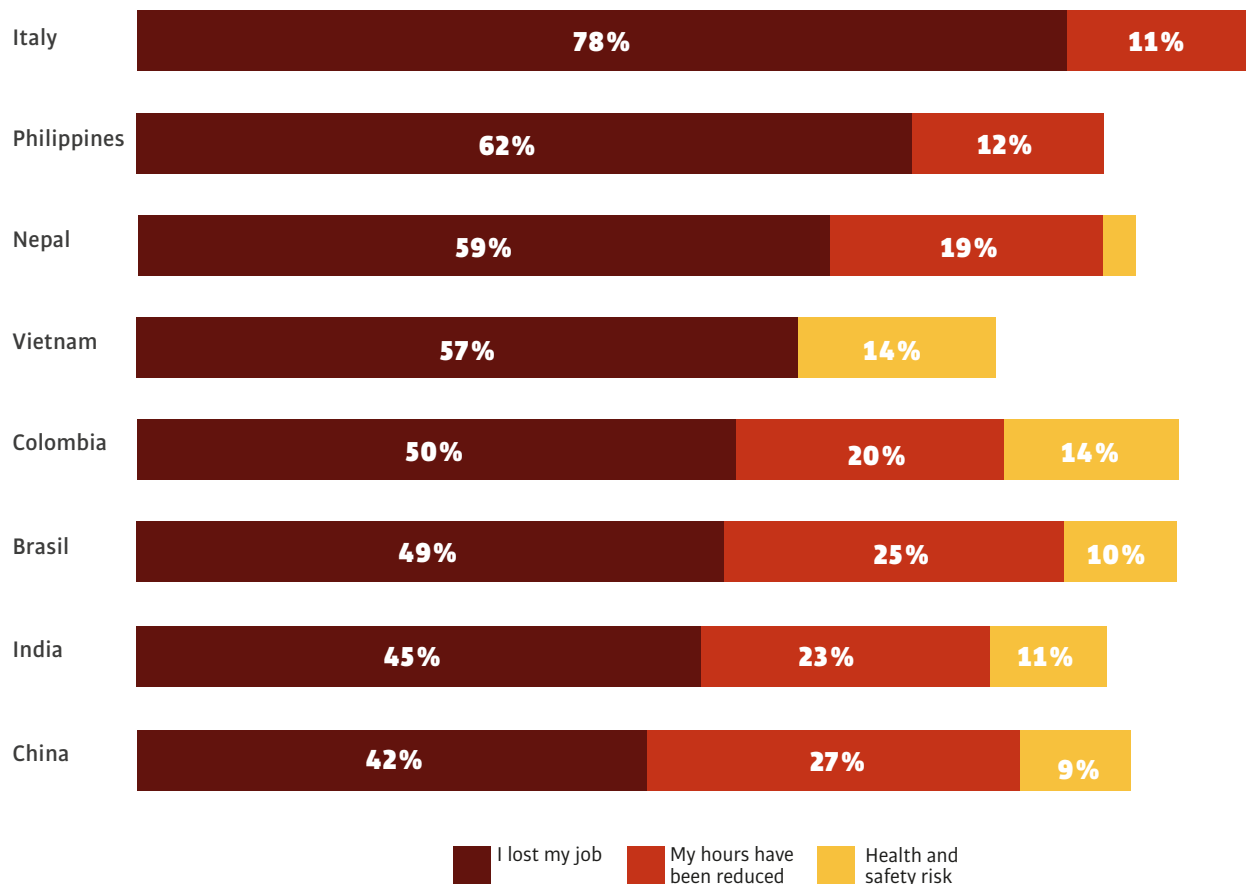
Figure 24. Employment impact on graduate visa holders



Nationality of highly impacted graduate visa holders

Over 40% of respondents from the top 8 nationalities of graduate visa holders lost their job, including 78% from Italy, 62% from the Philippines, 59% from Nepal, 57% from Vietnam, 50% from Colombia, 49% from Brazil, 45% from India and 42% from China.

Figure 25. Nationality of highly impacted graduate visa holders



Employment impact on other visa categories

54% of respondents on a bridging visa and 31% of those on a sponsorship visa lost their job, while 23% on a bridging visa and 22% on a sponsorship visa experienced a significant reduction in their work hours.

Figure 26. Employment impact on other visa categories

Sponsorship visa



31%
I lost my job

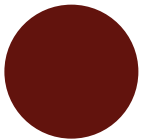


22%
My hours have been reduced



9%
Health and safety risks

Bridging visa



54%
I lost my job



23%
My hours have been reduced

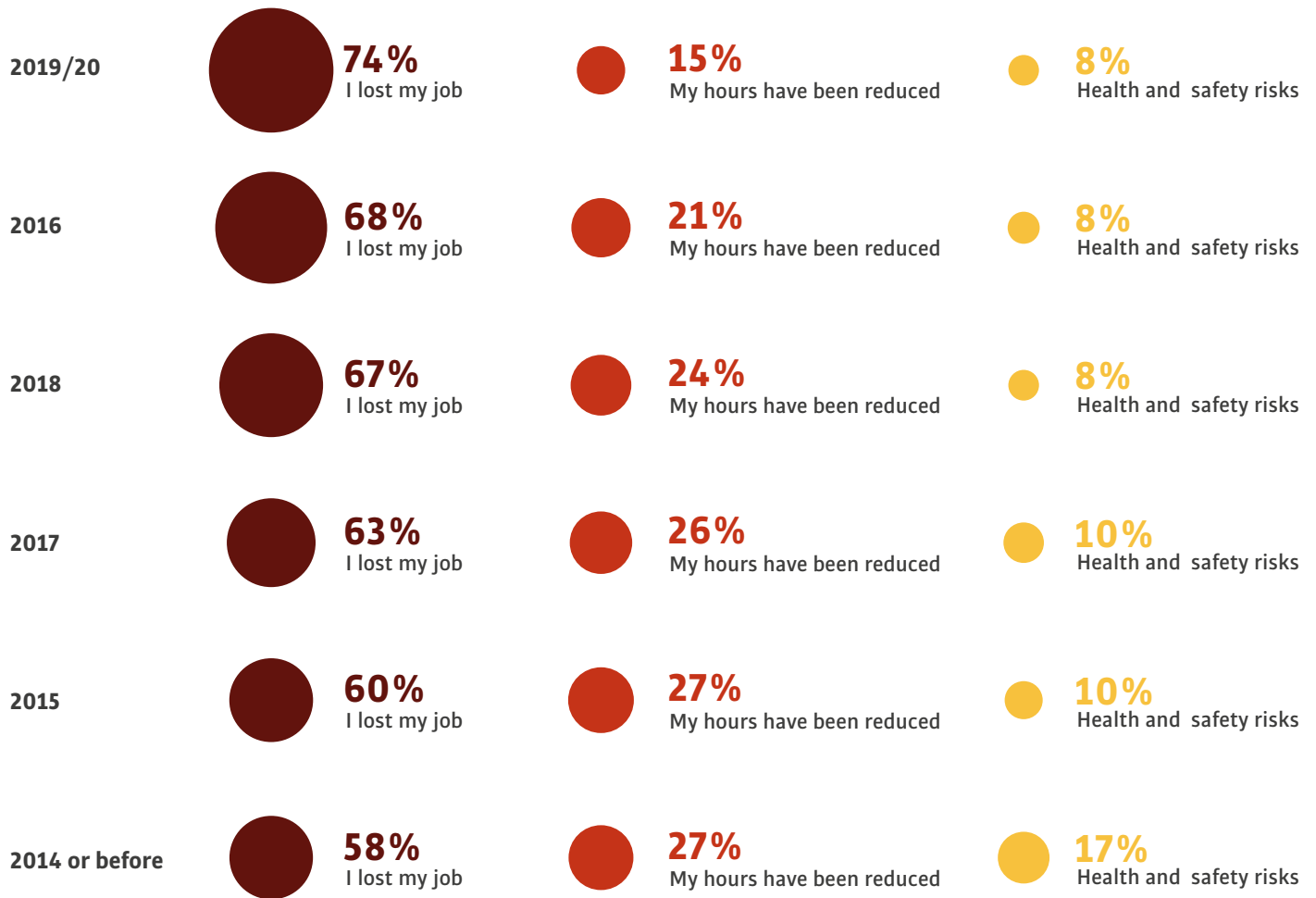


11%
Health and safety risks

Employment impact by time in the country

At 78%, loss of employment was greatest amongst newcomers.
At 58%, those who had been in Australia for 6 or more years were least affected.

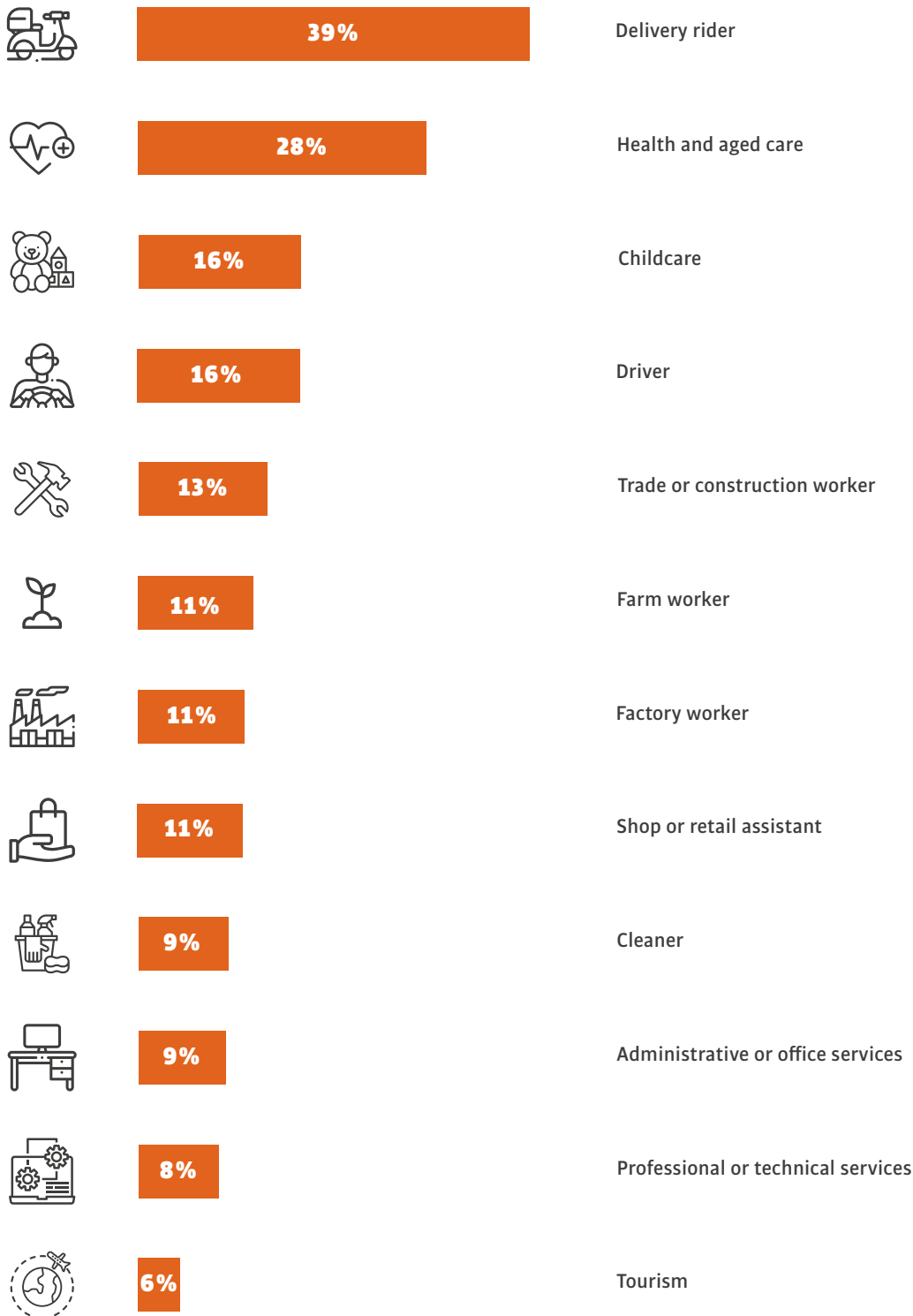
Figure 27. Employment impact by time in the country



Exposure to workplace health and safety risks

10% of respondents reported having been exposed to workplace health and safety risks. Those affected included 39% of delivery riders, 28% of health and aged care workers, 16% of childcare workers and 16% of drivers.

Figure 28. Exposure to workplace health and safety risks



Exposure to workplace health and safety risks by employment type

25% of those working under an ABN had been exposed to workplace health and safety risks, as had 11% of part time, 11% of full time and 8% of casual employees.

Figure 29. Exposure to workplace health and safety risks by employment type

25%

of those working with an ABN lost their job

11%

of part time workers lost their job

11%

of full time workers lost their job

8%

of casually employed respondents lost their job

Exposure to workplace health and safety risks by visa category

When considering each visa category, 11% of bridging visa holders were exposed to health and safety risks, as was 9% of student, graduate and sponsorship visa holders. 6% of working holiday makers had also been exposed.

Figure 30. Exposure to workplace health and safety risks by visa category

11%

Bridging visa

9%

Student visa

9%

Graduate visa

9%

Sponsorship visa

6%

Working holiday visa

Case study

A high number of participants who lost their jobs shared their stories and views on how they could be assisted during the crisis. Many were on a student visa with dependents (partner and children). Leo's story captures some of the difficulties experienced by this visa group.²⁵

Leo and his wife are from Brazil. They arrived in Australia in 2019 on a student visa. They were here studying when Leo's wife was diagnosed with cancer. Medical advice was that it would be better for her to finish her treatment in Australia. Leo was working as a construction worker and is their sole provider but lost his job as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. He is very worried because if he does not get a job or receive government support within a few weeks, he will not have enough money to cover the cost of rent and food.

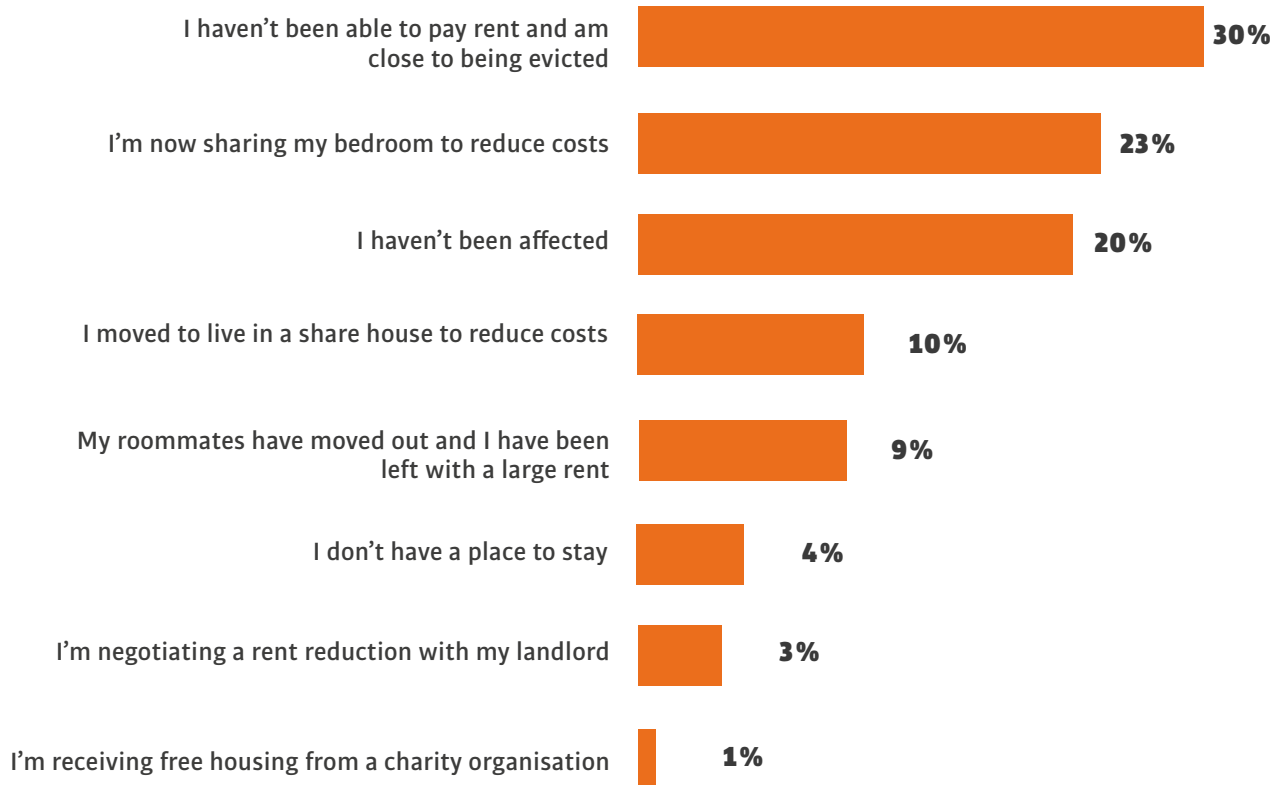
SECTION III

Impacts on housing

Participants were asked how COVID-19 had affected their living arrangements. 30% of respondents were behind on rent and anticipated imminent eviction, while 4% were already effectively homeless. 23% were sharing a bedroom and 10%

had moved into a share house to reduce costs. 9% stated that their roommates had moved out and that they were left with a large rent which they were unable to pay. Only 3% were negotiating a rent reduction with their landlord.

Figure 31. Impacts on housing (n=4,000)



Impact on housing by visa category and nationality

13% of working holiday makers, 3% of student visa holders and 3% of those on a sponsorship visas did not have a place to stay. A large percentage in each visa category was unable to pay rent and anticipated eviction, including 41% of graduate visa

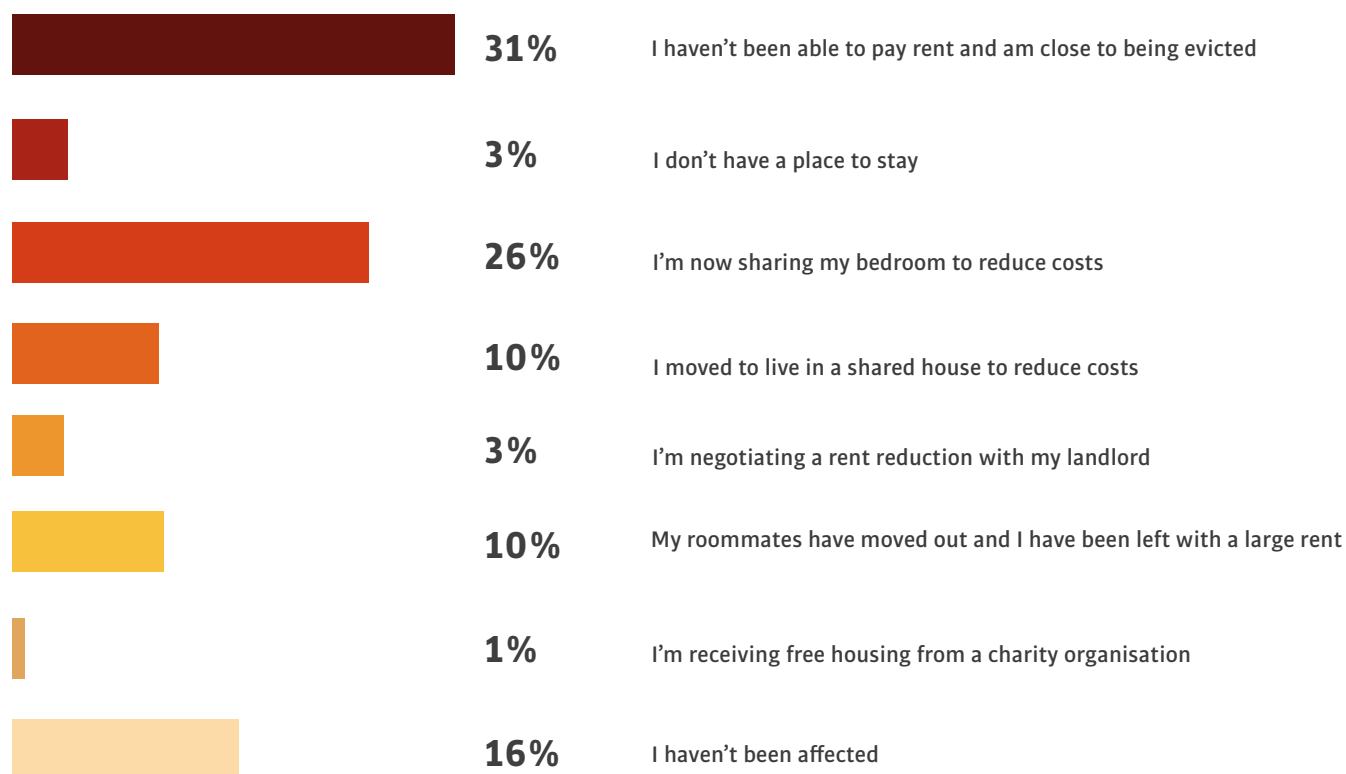
holders, 31% of student visa holders, 31% of bridging visa holders, 28% of those on a sponsorship visa and 17% of working holiday makers.

Impact on international students

Only 16% stated that their housing situation had not been affected by the pandemic. 31% of international students did not have money to pay rent and anticipated eviction, while 3% were effectively homeless. 26% were sharing a bedroom to

reduce costs and 10% had moved into a share house to lessen expenses. 10% reported that their roommates had moved out and left them with a large rent, but only 3% were in the process of negotiating a rent reduction with their landlord.

Figure 32. Impact on international students



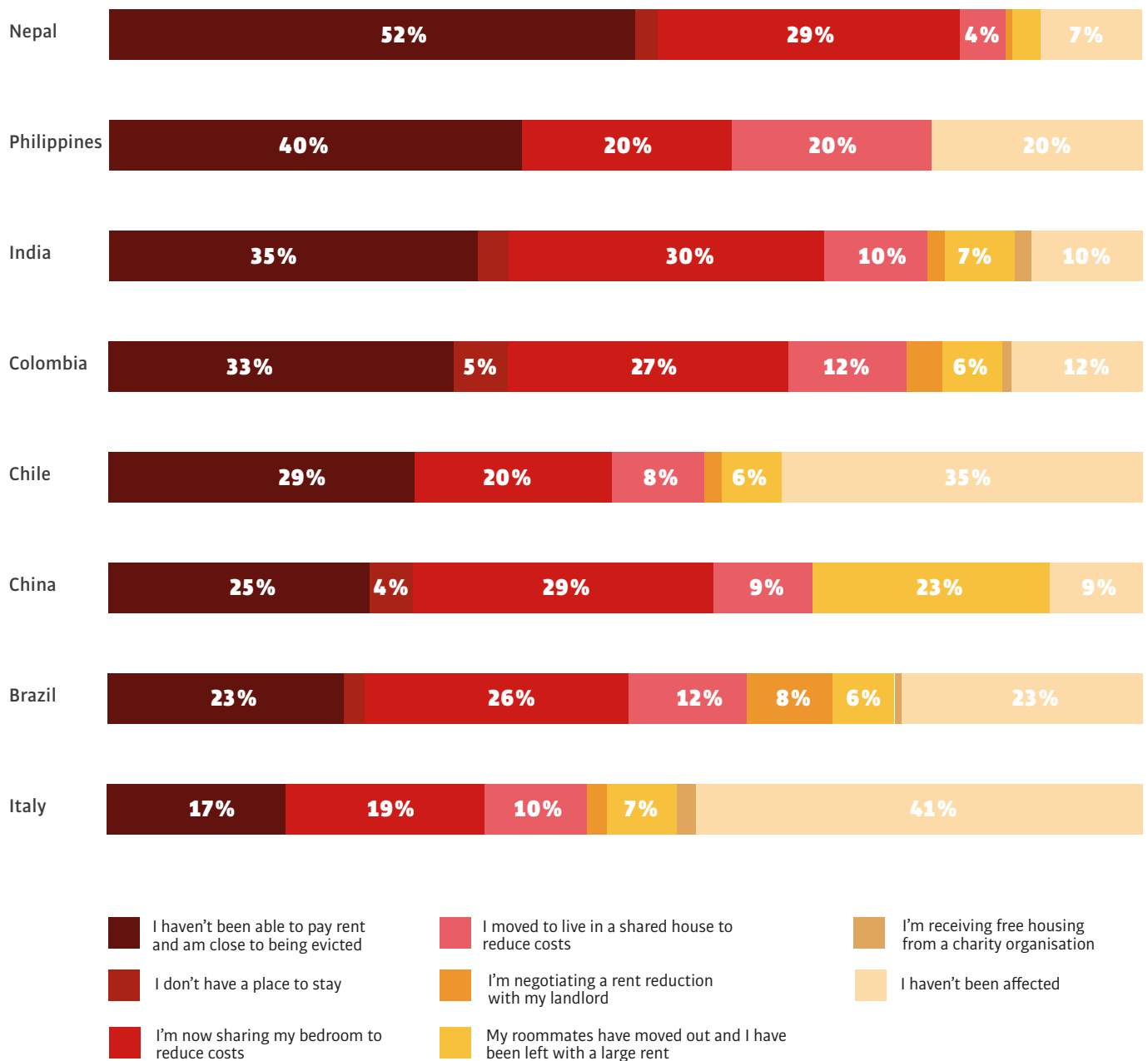
Nationality of highly impacted international students

A significant number of international students were unable to pay rent and expected to be evicted, including 52% from Nepal, 40% from the Philippines, 35% from India, 33% from Colombia, 29% from Chile, 25% from China, 23% from Brazil and 17% from Italy.

5% of Colombian and 4% of Chinese nationals on student visas were effectively homeless.

A significant number of international students were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs, including 30% from India, 29% from China, 29% from Nepal, 27% from Colombia, 26% from Brazil, 20% from the Philippines, 20% from Chile and 19% from Italy.

Figure 33. Nationality of highly impacted international students

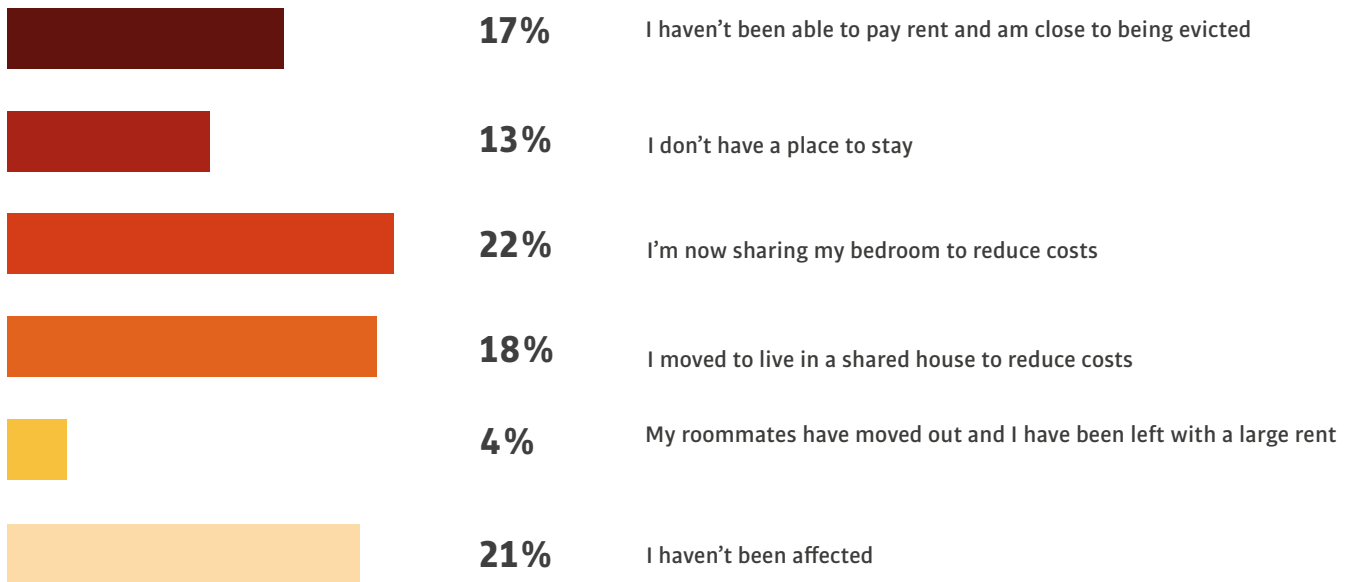


Impact on working holiday makers

Housing insecurity was predominant among backpackers. 13% were effectively homeless, 17% were unable to pay rent and anticipated eviction, 22% were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs, 18% had moved into a share house to lessen

expenses and 4% reported that their roommates had moved out and left them with a large rent. 21% reported that their housing situation had not been affected.

Figure 34. Impact on working holiday makers

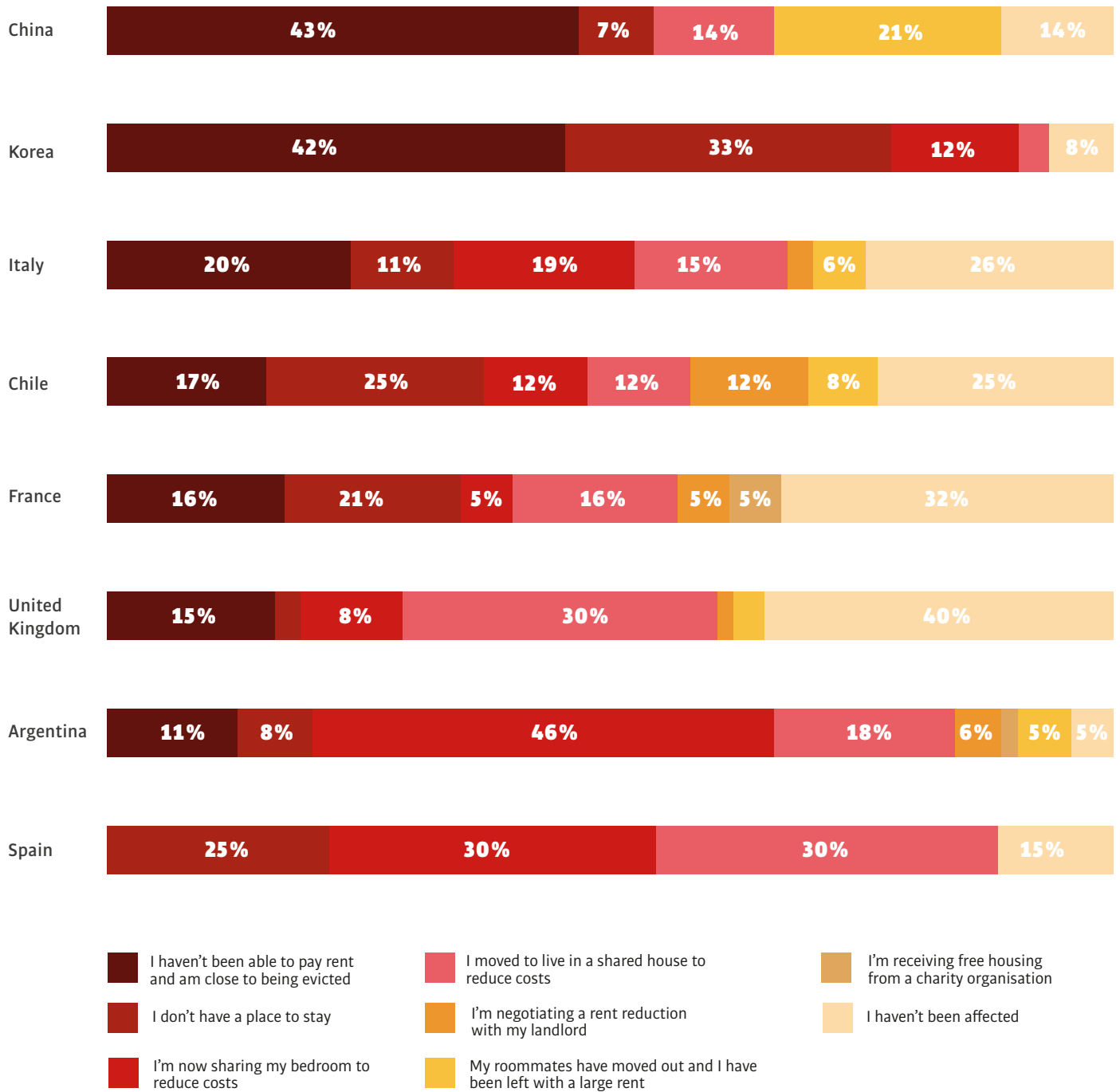


Nationality of highly impacted working holiday makers

33% of Korean nationals on a working holiday visa stated that they were effectively homeless, as were 25% of Spanish, 25% of Chilean, 21% of French, 11% of Italian and 7% of Chinese nationals.

43% of working holiday makers from China were unable to pay rent and close to being evicted, as were 42% of Korean, 20% of Italian, 17% of Chilean, 16% of French, 15% of English and 11% of Argentinian working holiday makers.

Figure 35. Nationality of highly impacted working holiday makers

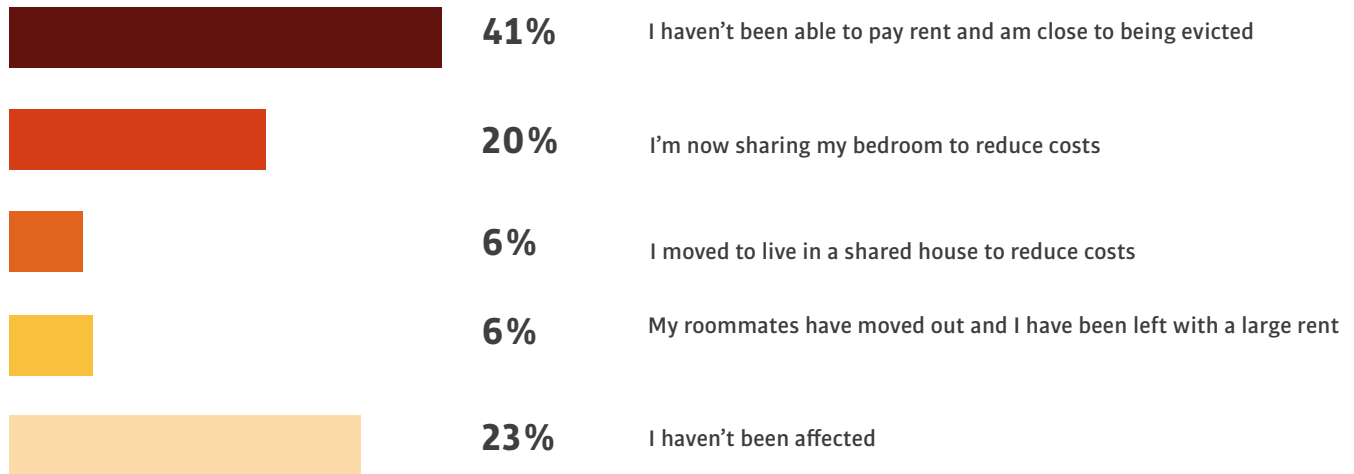


Impact on graduate visa holders

41% of respondents on a graduate visa were unable to pay rent and anticipating eviction. A further 20% were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs and 6% had moved to a share

house to lessen expenses. Only 23% of graduate visa holders reported that their living arrangements had not been affected by COVID-19.

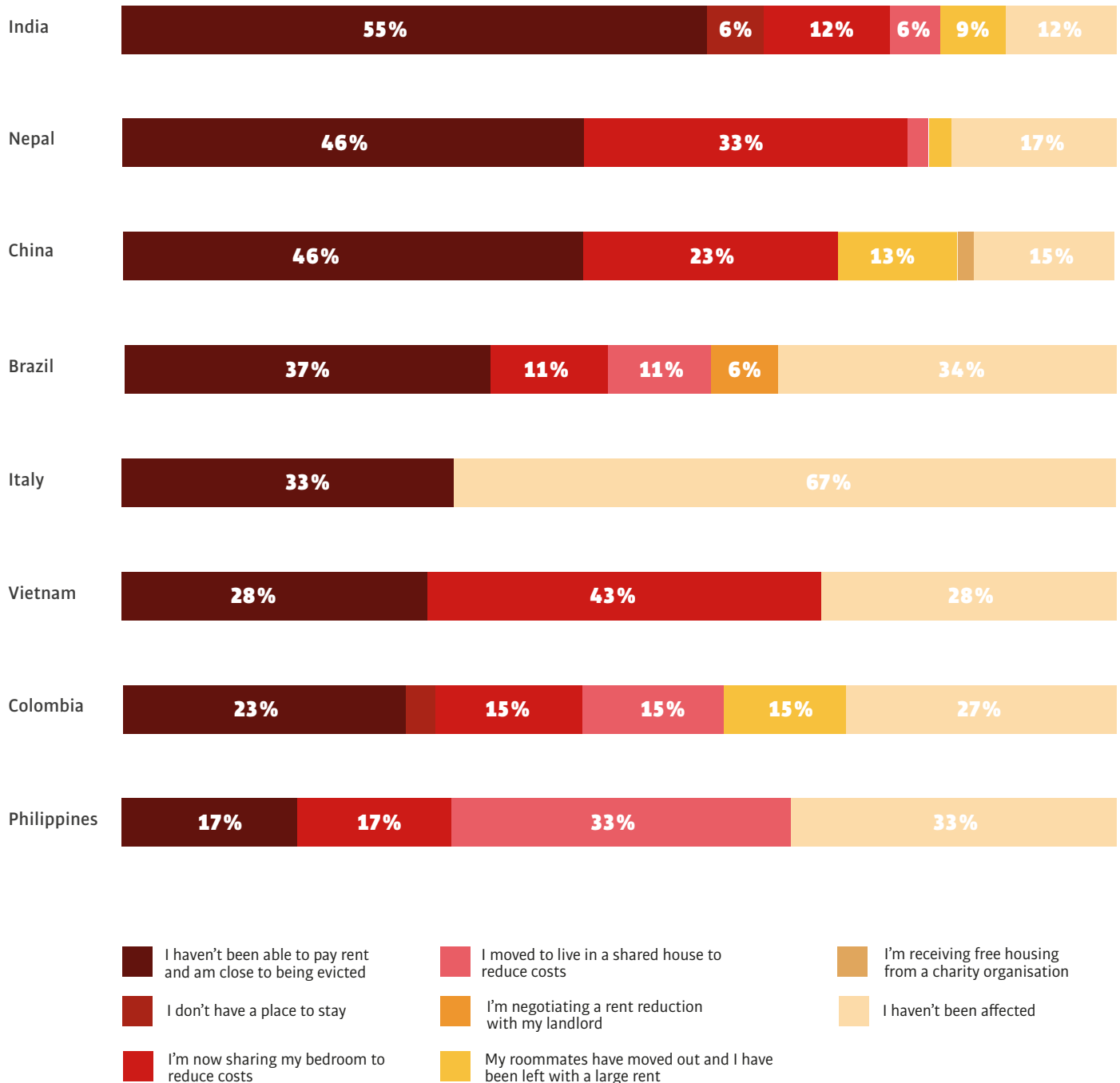
Figure 36. Impact on graduate visa holders



Nationality of highly impacted graduate visa holders

6% of Indian graduate visa holders were effectively homeless. Those unable to pay rent and anticipating eviction included 55% from India, 46% from Nepal, 46% from China, 37% from Brazil, 33% from Italy, 28% from Vietnam, 23% from Colombia and 17% from the Philippines.

Figure 37. Nationality of highly impacted graduate visa holders



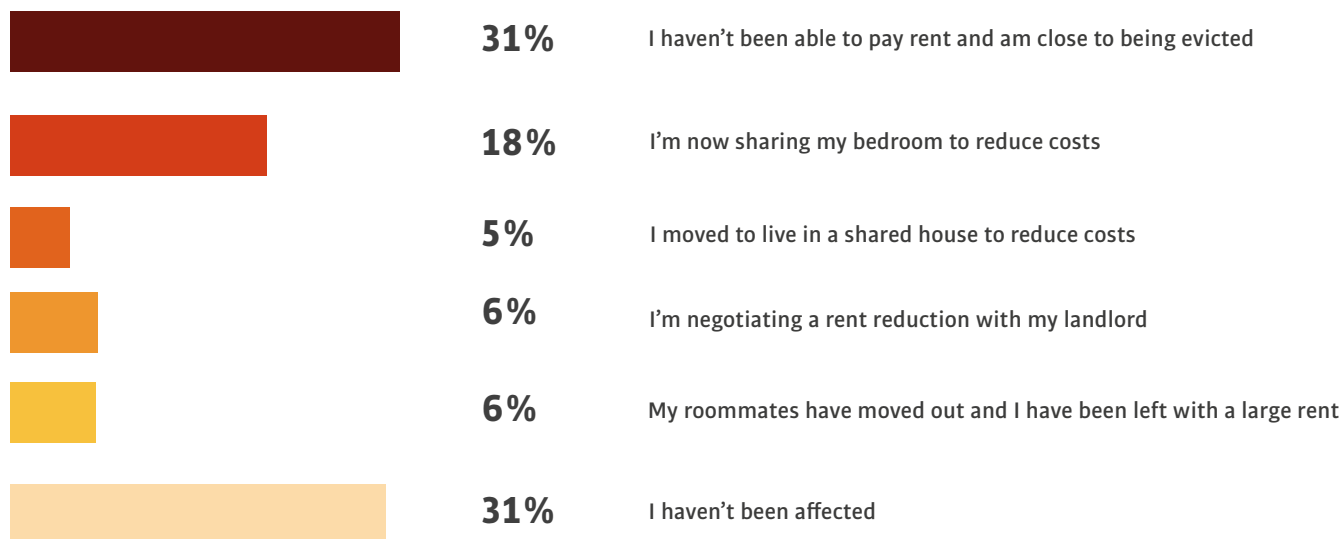
Impact on other visa categories

31% of respondents on a bridging visa were unable to pay rent and anticipated eviction, while 18% were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs.

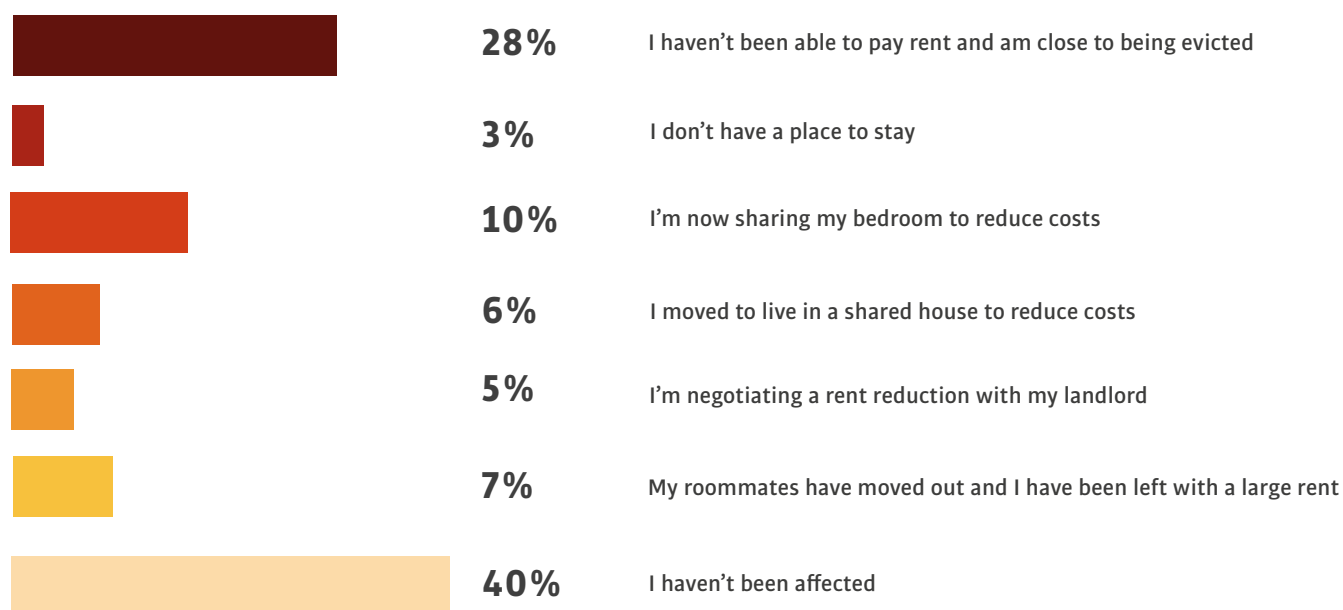
28% of respondents on a sponsorship visa were unable to pay rent and close to evicted, 10% were sharing a bedroom to reduce costs and 3% were effectively homeless.

Figure 38. Impact on other visa categories

Bridging visa



Sponsorship visa



Case study

A significant number of working holiday makers who were homeless or at risk of being homeless shared their stories. John's story reflects the level of hardship experienced by this visa cohort.

John was a working holiday visa holder from Germany who worked on a farm but lost his job as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. John and two of his friends did not have a place to stay and are living in a car.

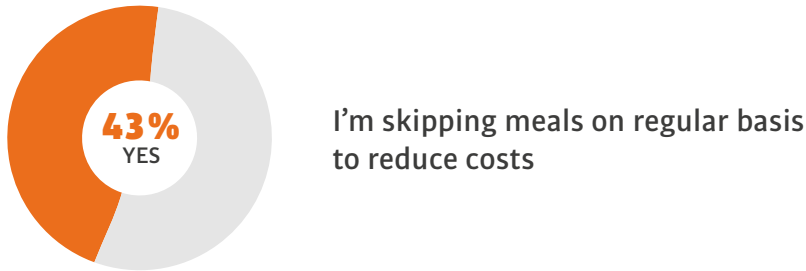
John wanted the government to at least open the camping grounds so that they could have showers and a place to base themselves while they continued to look for work, despite employment prospects being scarce. John loved farm work and if he could, would happily stay in Australia helping farmers.

SECTION IV

Food insecurity

Participants were asked if they were forced to skip meals on regular basis to survive. 43% reported that they were regularly skipping meals in order to reduce costs, including 70% of Indonesian, 58% of Indian, 52% of Chinese and 51% of Nepalese respondents.

Figure 39. Experiencing food insecurity (n=4,200)



Food insecurity by visa category and nationality

Food insecurity and international students

46% of international students were skipping meals on regular basis.

Figure 40. Food insecurity among international students

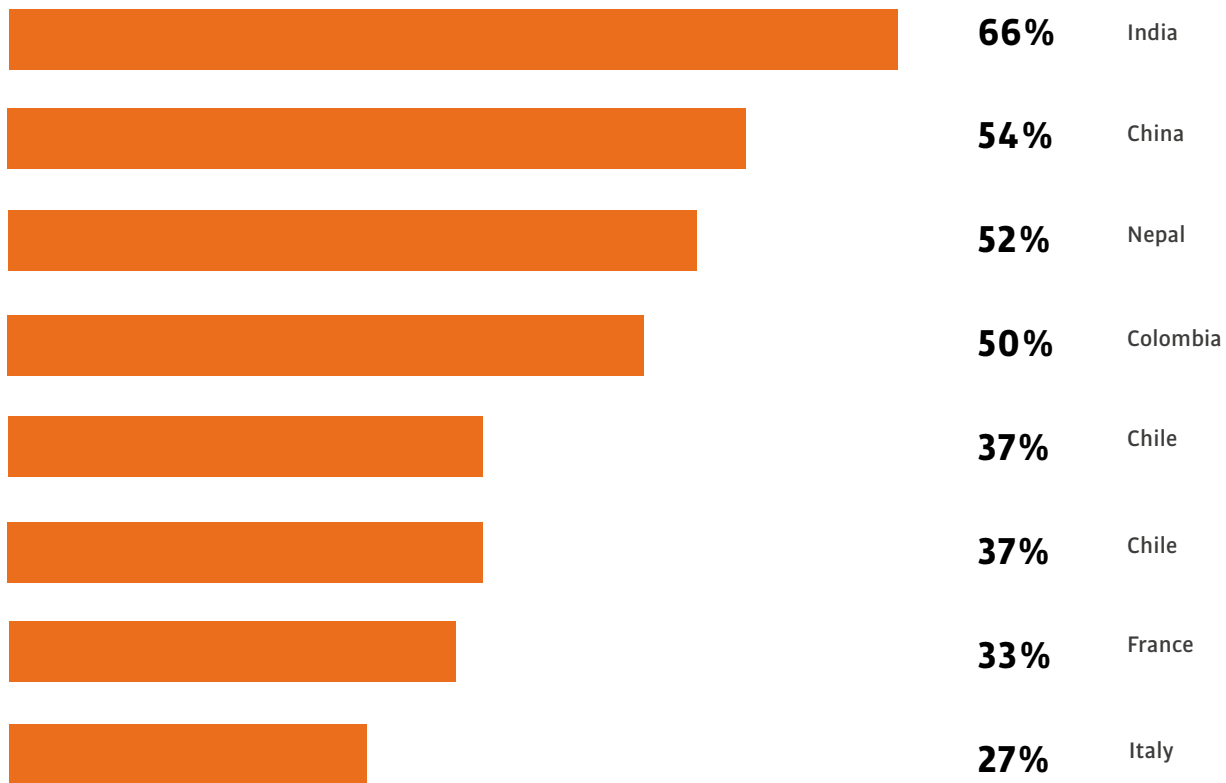


46%
of international students were skipping meals

Nationalities of highly impacted international students

66% of international students from India stated that they were skipping meals on regular basis, as were 54% from China, 52% from Nepal, 50% from Colombia, 48% from the Philippines, 37% from Chile, 35% from France and 27% from Italy.

Figure 41. Nationality of international students highly impacted by food insecurity



Food insecurity among working holiday makers

45% of working holiday makers stated that they were financially forced to regularly skipping meals.

Figure 42. Food insecurity among working holiday makers

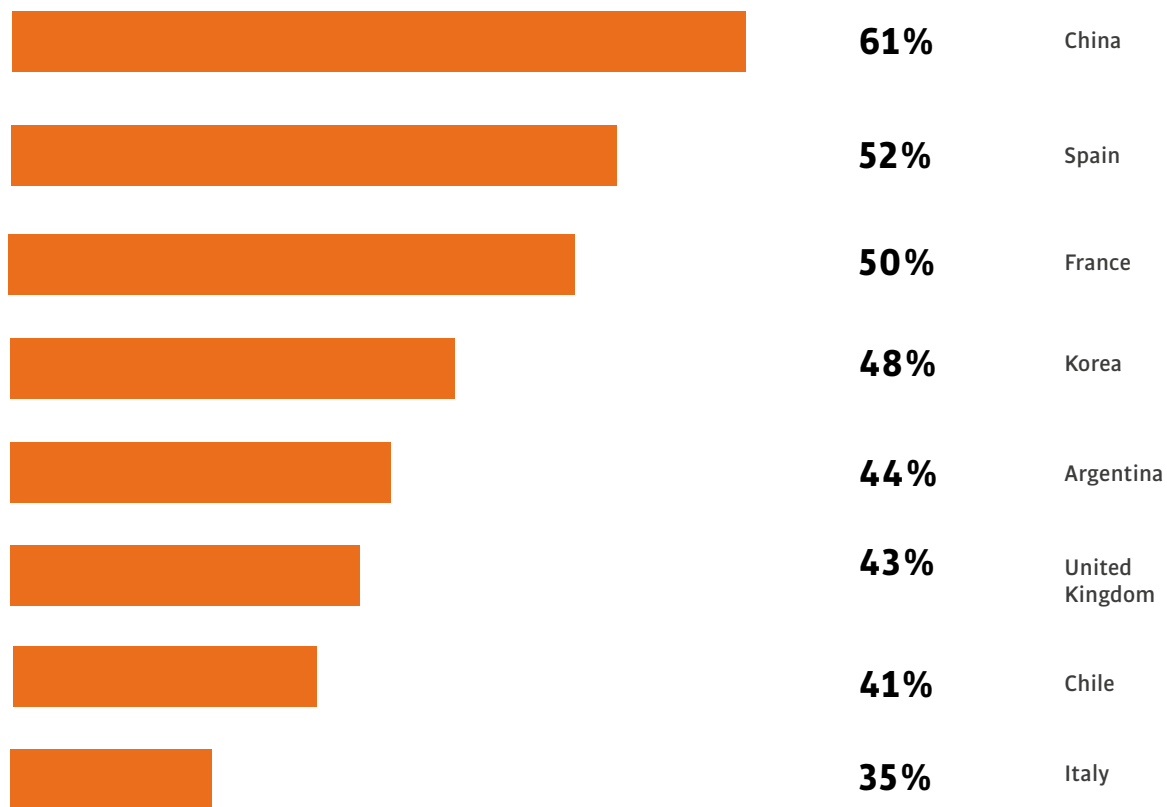


45%

of working holiday makers were skipping meals

61% of working holiday makers from China were regularly skipping meals in order to reduce expenses, as were 52% of nationals from Spain, 50% from France, 48% from Korea, 44% from Argentina, 43% from the United Kingdom, 41% from Chile and 35% from Italy.

Figure 43. Nationality of working holiday makers highly impacted by food insecurity



Food insecurity among graduate visa holders

43% of graduate visa holders reported that they were forced to skip meals on regular basis in order to reduce costs.

Figure 44. Food insecurity among graduate visa holders

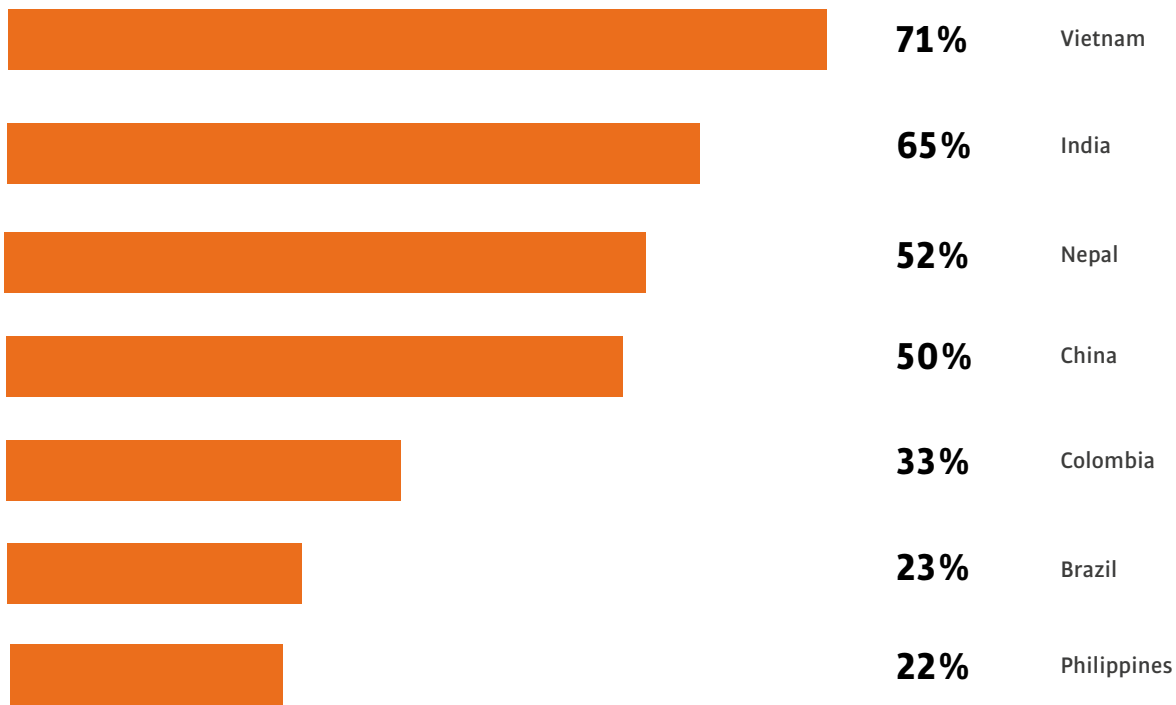


43%

of graduated visa holders were skipping meals

71% of graduate visa holders from Vietnam, 65% from India, 52% from Nepal, 50% from China, 33% from Colombia, 23% from Brazil and 22% from the Philippines were skipping meals on a regular basis to reduce costs.

Figure 45. Nationality of graduate visa holders highly impacted by food insecurity



Food insecurity among other visa categories

34% of respondents on a bridging visa and 27% on a sponsorship visa were skipping meals on regular basis to reduce costs.

Figure 46. Food insecurity among other visa categories



34%

of bridging visa holders were skipping meals



27%

of sponsorship visa holders were skipping meals

Case study

Hundreds of temporary migrants refer to reliance on friends and skipping meals as their way to survive during the crisis.

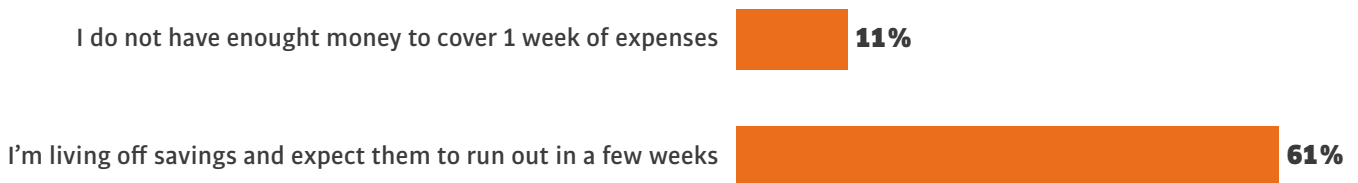
Carolina arrived in Australia in 2019 on a student visa. The house she was living in burnt to the ground on February 14, 2020, taking over three thousand dollars in cash, her credit cards and all her belongings, with it; leaving her only with her passport and a few minor belongings. She has been trying to support herself through casual work as a cleaner but lost this work as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. She is now living at a friend's house and is skipping meals on regular basis just to survive.

Financial support

Reliance on savings

Participants were asked if they were able to pay their weekly expenses. 87% were experiencing difficulty, with 61% relying on savings but expecting them to run out in a few weeks and 11% not have enough money to cover one week's expenses.

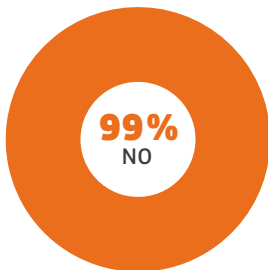
Figure 47. Capacity to pay weekly expenses (n=5,374)



Government support

Participants were asked if they were receiving income support from the Australian government. 99% reported that they were not receiving any form of income support from the government.

Figure 48. Receiving government support (n=4,300)



Charity support

Participants were asked if they were receiving support from a charity organisation, to which 99% of respondents stated that they were not.

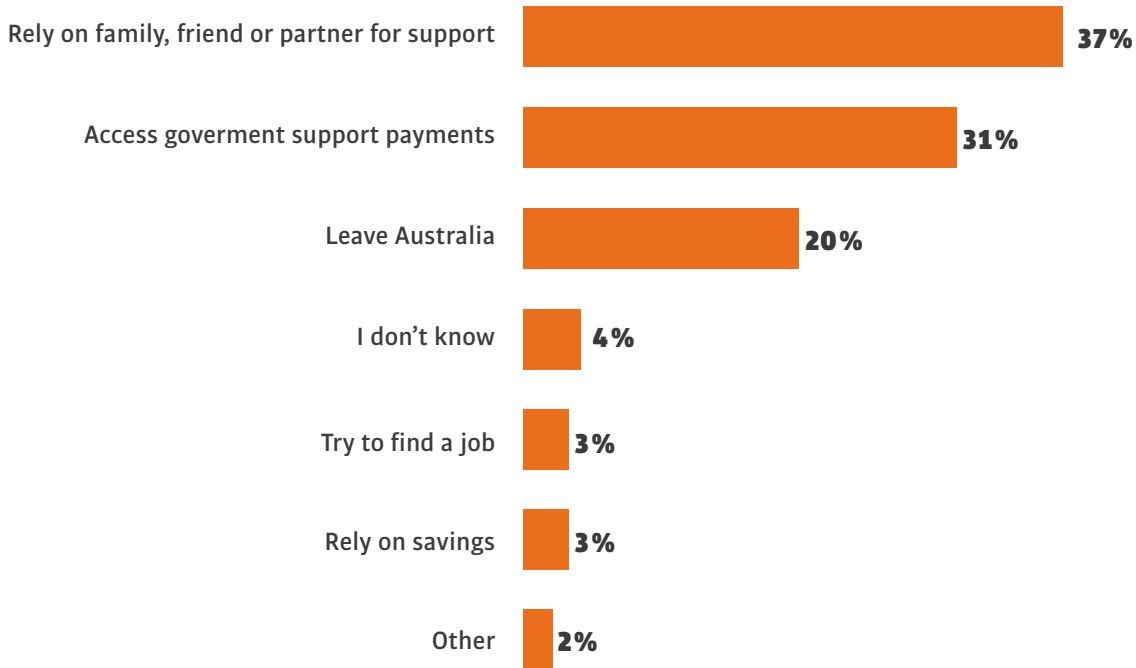
Figure 49. Receiving support from a charity organisation (n=4,310)



Participants' alternative plans

Participants were asked about their plans if they were already unemployed or became unemployed. 37% expected to rely on family, friends or a partner for support, 31% hoped to receive government aid and 20% planned to leave Australia, while 4% did not know what they would do and only 3% expected to be able to depend on savings.

Figure 50. Alternative plans if already unemployed or become unemployed (n=5,000)



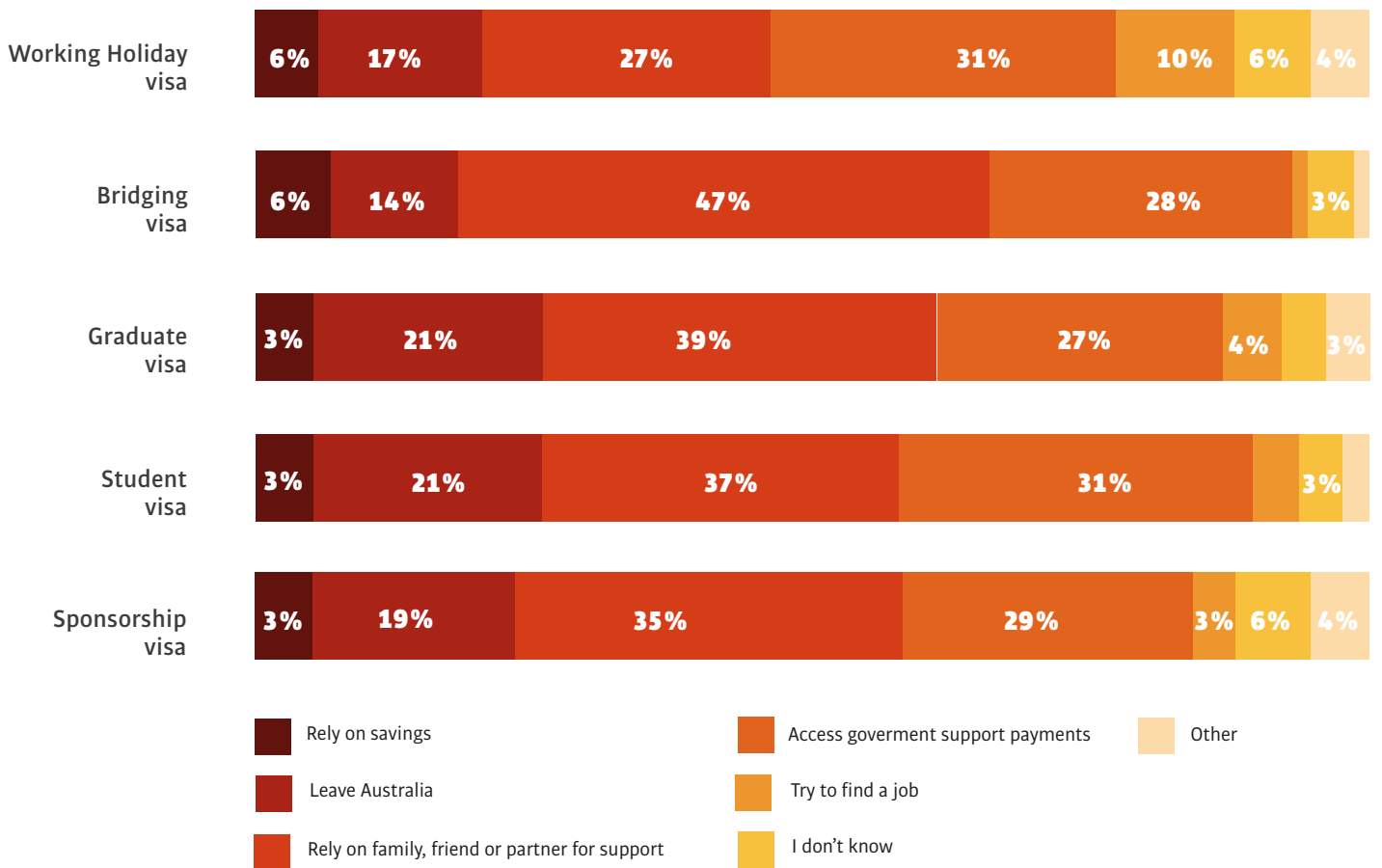
Alternative plans by visa type

If already unemployed or if they became unemployed, 21% of those on a graduate visa, 21% of on a student visa, 19% on a sponsorship visa and 17% on a working holiday visa planned to leave Australia.

If unemployed, those that planned to rely on family, friends or partners for support included 47% of bridging visa holders, 39% of graduate visa holders, 37% of student visa holders, 35% of sponsorship visa holders and 27% of working holiday makers.

Respondents hoping for government support if unemployed included, 31% of international students, 31% of working holiday makers, 28% of bridging visa holders, 29% of sponsorship visa holders and 27% of graduate visa holders.

Figure 51. Alternative plans by visa type



Case study

Many temporary migrants stated that they were unable to leave Australia because their home countries had closed their borders or in the event that they were open and flights were available, airfares were exorbitantly priced.

Maria is a student visa holder from Argentina who arrived in 2018, excited to undertake an Australian qualification. She was working in childcare to support herself while studying but lost her job as a consequence of the pandemic and has been forced to share a bedroom in order to reduce costs. She is waiting for the borders to open so that she can return home. She will have to leave Australia without concluding her studies, to which she has invested a lot of time and money. She doesn't know how she is going to pay for her return airfare, as flights to Argentina are three times the normal price.

Visa issues

Visa restrictions placed on international students and working holiday makers are often referred to as a primary cause of the work exploitation experienced by a large number of temporary migrants. There have been many previous calls for reform.

70% of participants indicated that they were experiencing visa related issues as a result of COVID-19.

23% needed to apply for a visa extension in order to conclude their studies and 13% were on a graduate visa, allowing them to only work for 18 months but unable to find employment because of limited opportunities under the pandemic.

12% reported that their visa would expire during COVID-19 but they were unable to return to their country because of travel bans.

4% of temporary migrants were unable to complete their farm work due to quarantine restrictions and border closure between states. 4% were impacted by their working holiday visa restriction that prevented them from working for the same employer for more than six months. 3% stated that their sponsorship visa had been or would be cancelled.

Since April, the Federal Government has progressively implemented some visa changes, including allowing working holiday makers employed in COVID-19 critical sector to work for more than six months with the same employer and a temporary lift of the 40 hour fortnight work restriction for international students working in aged care and nursing. Additionally, there has been a commitment to waive visa fees for international students requiring a visa extension to complete their studies.²⁶

Importantly, the 88 days regional work requirement for working holiday makers wanting to apply for a second-year visa remained unchanged. Additionally, the government has not allowed visa extensions for unemployed graduate visa holders.

The majority of survey responses were collected between 26 March 2020 and 5 April 2020. Some temporary migrants have had their visa issues addressed after they completed the survey. However, the most significant visa changes were temporary and only applied to specific sectors and consequently, did not provide a sound solution for most temporary migrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic reemphasised weaknesses in the Australian visa system, which has not only been proven to exacerbate exploitative practices but to be largely unresponsive during times of crisis.

Conclusion

The Unions NSW survey exposes the humanitarian crisis caused by the Federal Government's abandonment of temporary migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thousands of temporary migrants can not afford three meals a day and are living in fear of becoming homeless, if not already homeless, as their savings near exhaustion.

The government must extend its support packages, including JobKeeper and JobSeeker to include temporary migrants for the duration of the crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic also reemphasises the need to permanently remove visa conditions that have traditionally encouraged employer exploitative practices and that have proven to be inadequate during the crisis.

Recommendations

Immediately extend coverage of the JobKeeper program to include temporary migrant workers and include a provision for retrospective application, allowing employers to reinstate an eligible worker whose role was made redundant due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Immediately extend coverage of the JobSeeker program to temporary migrants in Australia.

Abolish the 88-day farm work requirement for working holiday makers applying for second year visa.

Remove the 40 hours per fortnight work restriction for international students.

Permanently remove the condition on working holiday visas prohibiting holders from working for one employer for more than 6 months.

References

- ¹ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) International Migration Outlook, 2019
- ² Effects of temporary migration, Shaping Australian society and economy. CEDA, 2019. Available at <https://www.ceda.com.au/Research-and-policy/All-CEDA-research/Research-catalogue/Effects-of-temporary-migration>.
- ³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Trade investment and economic statistics , June 2020. Available at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/resources/trade-statistics/Pages/trade-statistics>.
- ⁴ The World Bank, press release, COVID-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II, June 8, 2020.
- ⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/27/real-risk-at-the-frontline-how-australias-health-workers-are-getting-covid-19>, 27 July 2020.
- ⁶ Prime Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Families and Social Services, media release, March 2020.
- ⁷ Minister for Families and Social Services, information available at <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/jobseeker-payment/who-can-get-it/residence-rules/residence-descriptions/new-zealand-citizens-claiming-payments-australia>.
- ⁸ Department of Home Affairs, number of Temporary visa holders in Australia, June 30, 2020.
- ⁹ Australian Bureau of statistics, International Trade in Good and Services. Available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5368.0>.
- ¹⁰ Review of the Working Holiday Maker Program and its role in the economic recovery https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/About_the_House_News/Media_Releases/Review_of_the_Working_Holiday_Maker_Program_and_its_role_in_the_economic_recovery.
- ¹¹ Effects of temporary migration, Shaping Australian society and economy. CEDA, 2019. Available at <https://www.ceda.com.au/Research-and-policy/All-CEDA-research/Research-catalogue/Effects-of-temporary-migration>.
- ¹² Parliament of Australia, Overseas students in Australian higher education: a quick guide, 20 June 2019.
- ¹³ Taxation Administration Act 1953 (TAA) Schedule 15 – Tax table for working holiday makers.
- ¹⁴ Bassina Farbenblum and Laurie Berg, International Students and Wage Theft in Australia (2020), April 7 2020.
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ Peter Whiteford ,The conversation, Open letter to the prime minister: extend coronavirus support to temporary workers, April 2020.
- ¹⁷ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/significant-error-treasury-reveals-much-lower-jobkeeper-use-20200522-p54vkl.html>
- ¹⁸ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) International Migration Outlook, 2019
- ¹⁹ Effects of temporary migration, Shaping Australian society and economy. CEDA, 2019. Available at <https://www.ceda.com.au/Research-and-policy/All-CEDA-research/Research-catalogue/Effects-of-temporary-migration>
- ²⁰ Department of Home Affairs, number of Temporary visa holders in Australia, June 30, 2020. Available at [www. data.gov.au](http://www.data.gov.au)
- ²¹ Include work and holiday visa 462 and working holiday visa 417.
- ²² Department of Home Affairs, number of Temporary visa holders in Australia, June 30, 2020. Available at [www. data.gov.au](http://www.data.gov.au)
- ²³ Ibid
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ All personal Information contained in the case studies such as name and nationality, have been changed to protect participants identity.
- ²⁶ <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au>.