



13 FEB, 2024

## Cost of living crisis forces workers to take extra jobs

Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney

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## ECONOMY

Jessica Yun

More hospitality workers are taking up multiple jobs than ever, with many looking to quit for better-paying gigs to cope with cost of living pressures as cafe and restaurant owners contend with mounting operator costs.

The rate of “poly-employment”, or workers holding more than one job at the same time, hit a record high of 6.7 per cent in the middle of 2023.

This trend has been led by the hospitality industry (7.8 per cent) followed by healthcare (7.2 per cent) and retail (5.6 per cent) as casualisation and job insecurity sees workers hedge their bets rather than quitting, according to workforce management platform Deputy’s latest employment report.

“Poly-employment has always been there since the beginning ... but it has risen to probably unprecedented levels. It’s the highest share of poly-employment workers in the labour force since it was first measured,” said labour economist and report author Dr Shashi Karunanethy.

It’s not just hospitality and retail workers looking for extra jobs; last year saw healthcare workers such as nurses increasingly supplement their income by picking up extra shifts in shops and cafes.

“Because of cost of living pressures being faced by all sectors ... we’re seeing a rise in [this type of] employment across different types of sectors, which is absolutely fascinating,” Karunanethy said.

Most multi-job holders tend to be Gen Z, at 65 per cent in 2023. The next biggest demographic is Millennials (27 per cent), while Gen X and baby boomers trail behind at

6 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. The report revealed that better pay has become a key motivator behind job-switching: 35 per cent of Gen Z are considering quitting and finding a new job.

The hospitality sector has been one of the more resilient industries over the past year. Although household budgets have come under pressure, some Australians who chose to hit pause on domestic and international travel plans are still willing to dine out or go on staycations.

Last year also saw Gen Z take over Millennials as the biggest generation in the hospitality industry: 38 per cent of the shift hours worked in hospitality were by Gen Z workers, compared to 34 per cent by Millennials. In 2022, the mix was 35 per cent and 37 per cent respectively, the report showed.

The work-from-home trend ushered in by COVID lockdowns has also resulted in a shift in where young Australians are picking up their first job. Rather than starting out in fast food outlets in the central business district, Generation Alpha – often defined as those born from 2010 – are increasingly turning to nearby cafes, restaurants or local gyms to find work.

But this suburban boom has come somewhat at the expense of bars, pubs and restaurants in business districts, which have been slower to recover.

Karunanethy noted that local government efforts such as the City of Sydney’s establishment of a 24-Hour Economy Advisory Group had gone some way to boosting the nighttime economy, resulting in greater demand for hospitality workers.

“You’re having to find workers

to plug different times and gaps. That creates this trend of poly-employment, particularly in Victoria and NSW,” he said.

Restaurant and Catering Industry Association chief executive Suresh Manickam said he was not surprised to hear that hospitality workers were picking up extra shifts or additional jobs to boost their income. “From an employee perspective, if they’re better off somewhere else, they’re not going

to hang around,” Manickam said.

Hospitality operators are battling rising input costs across ingredients, energy, labour and rent, though the majority are still expecting sales to increase this year. Manickam called on the federal government to provide relief on energy costs for individuals and small businesses in the upcoming May budget.

Employees also appear highly conscious of the role of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in their sector, with 67 per cent of retail workers and 55 per cent of hospitality workers who believe AI will bring changes to their jobs.

Me&u and Dimmi co-founder Stevan Premutico indicated there was more scope for artificial intelligence to impact the sector, given the high input costs faced by operators.

“Everyone’s struggling or can’t find labour. The cost of survival, the cost of plating a dish in Australia today has just skyrocketed and it’s unsustainable,” he said.

“There’s a long way to go on automating the experience in this industry ... there’s a lot there that somebody’s going to need to solve.”

*‘It’s the highest*



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Dr Shashi Karunanethy,  
labour economist



More hospitality and retail workers are working multiple jobs than ever before. Photo: Dion Georgopoulos