



**K E E P  
A U S T R A L I A  
F L Y I N G**

# Keep Australia Flying Report

10 February 2021

## **Keep Australia Flying Report**

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# Keep Australia Flying

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the people who work for airlines or in ground handling.

Despite talks of a “comeback” for the broader Australian economy in late 2020, the aviation and airline sector remains mired in economic and operational uncertainty at a level not seen elsewhere in Australia.

Aviation remains heavily impacted by ongoing border closures, mass stand downs and sector wide disruption.

It is clear that it will take airlines longer to rebuild than other parts of the economy, and it is unlikely that people will resume interstate and international travel at the pre-COVID-19 rates for some time.

The Australian Services Union surveyed a total of 563 aviation workers about their experience in the industry during COVID-19. This report examines the effects on the people who work for airlines or in ground handling.

Here’s what they said about the impact on COVID-19 on their work.

## Key findings

Airlines workers have been stood down at extremely high rates, and expect that recovery for their sector will be longer than in other parts of the economy.

The results of this survey demonstrate that airlines workers are worried about losing their job, decreased hours and losing pay.

They are worried about how the pandemic will affect the Australian economy and they are worried about their health and safety at work.

**They think the aviation sector needs support to avoid collapse.**

**88% have been stood down during COVID-19**

**78% are currently receiving JobKeeper**

**1 in 5 do not qualify for any government support**

**30% still have no hours of work at all**

**72% are worried about being unable to financially support their family**

**44% had accessed their super early**

**82% do not feel their job is secure**

**86% believe it will be difficult to find a new job**

**Aviation workers need their jobs, wages and conditions protected so that when Australia is ready to fly again, the workers are too.**

# The cost of COVID-19 on aviation workers

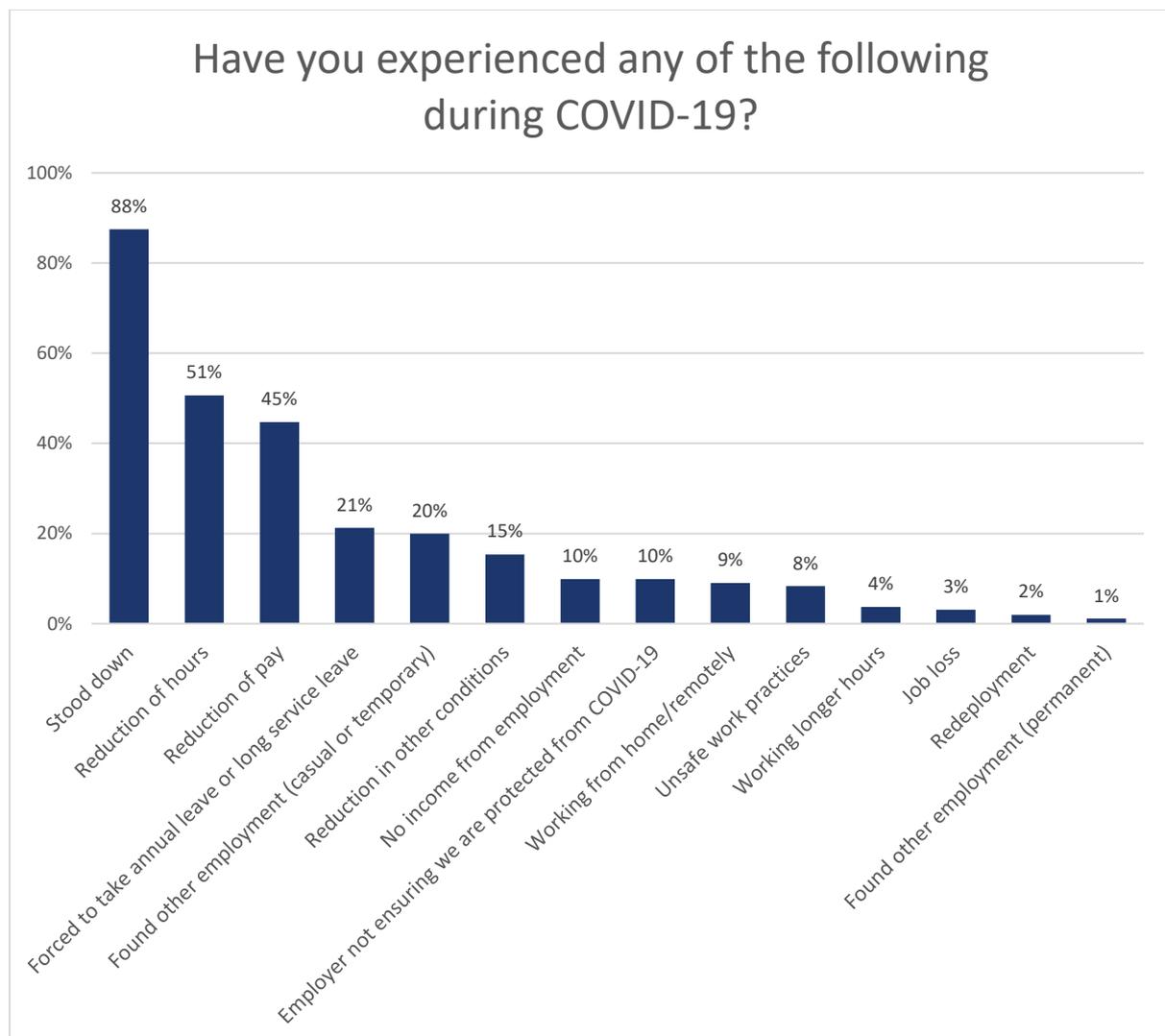
The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing border closures have wrought devastation on the aviation industry and for the tens of thousands of Australians working in aviation.

The Keep Australia Flying report reveals the firsthand experience of the workers who have borne the brunt of the economic and social devastation of the global pandemic.

## The work cost: zero hours and stand-downs

**88% of respondents had been stood down due to the pandemic.**

Workers also experienced reduction of hours (51%), reduction of pay (45%), and reduction in other conditions in response to the pandemic (15%).



*“Unable to sleep due to being worried about money. Savings have been decimated and running out very quickly. May have to sell house and move in with relative.”*

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of respondents (65%) worked in excess of 31 hours per week in February 2020. Since March 2020 this was reduced to 18%.

## 29% of respondents reported working zero hours.

Women reported a higher rate of zero hours (33%) overall.

Over one-third of respondents reported being available to work but stood down (37%), and nearly 50% of respondents are still either stood down or on leave without pay.

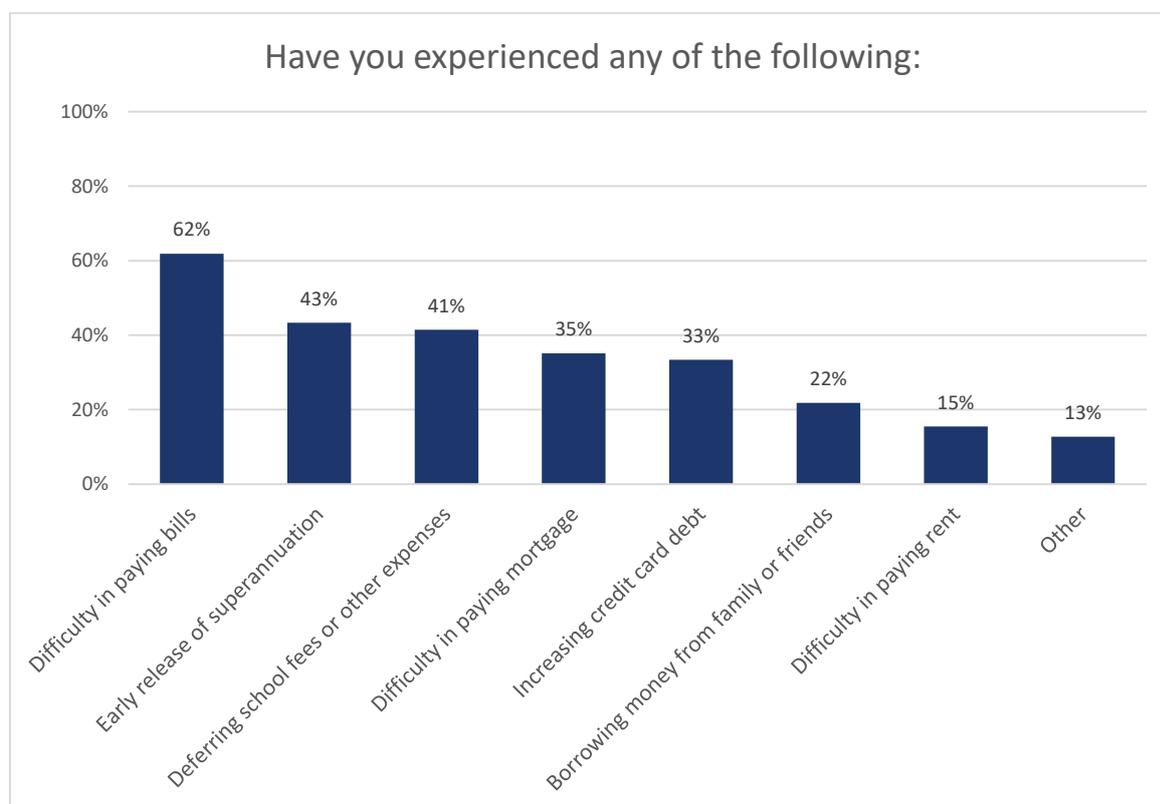
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## The personal and financial cost

### The majority of survey respondents (88%) have seen their household financially impacted by COVID-19.

The most common issues experienced were:

- Difficulty in paying bills (62%)
- Difficulty in paying their mortgage or rent (50%)
- Deferring payments for kids sport, school fees and other expenses (41%)
- Increasing credit card debt (33%)



### Nearly half of all respondents had accessed an early release of superannuation (44%).

## Early access of superannuation: Stripping retirement savings to pay the bills

Nearly half of all respondents had accessed an early release of superannuation (44%).

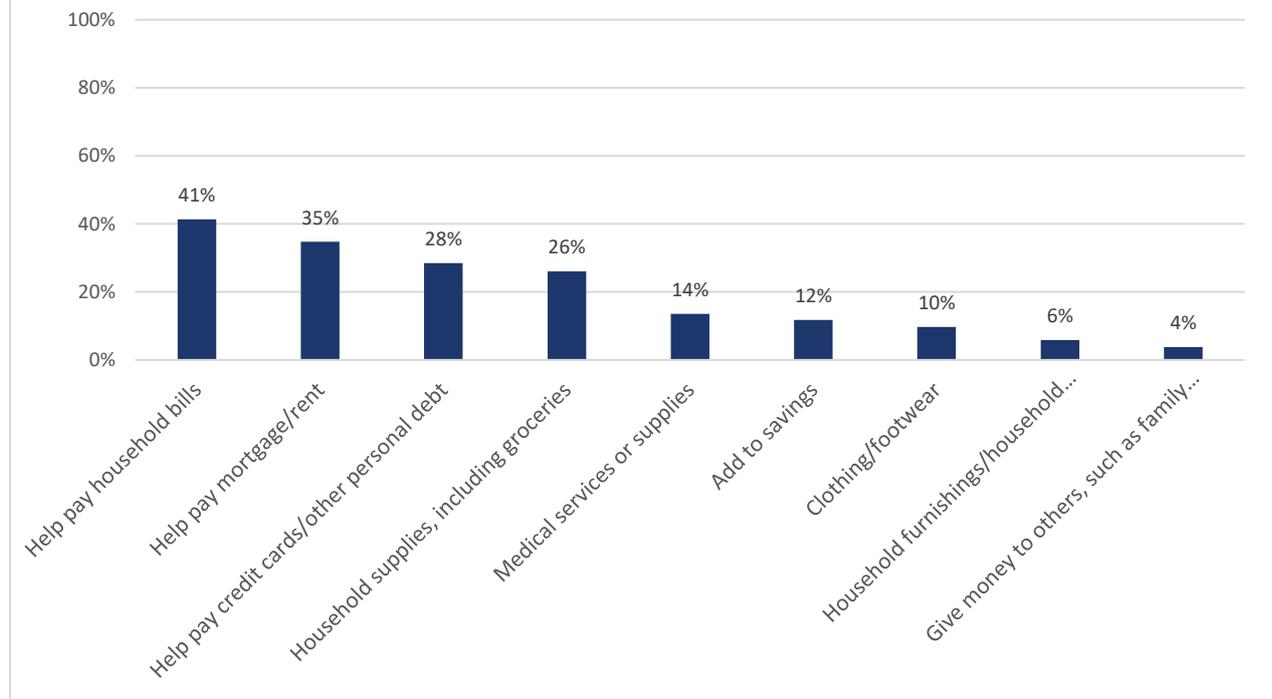
Early access to superannuation was made up of predominantly women workers (55%) of respondents.

We asked what the intended use for the withdrawal was:

- 41% responded to help pay household bills,
- 35% said to help pay mortgage/rent, and
- 26% said to help with household supplies such as groceries.

**Workers describe their financial anxiety:**  
*"I have had to draw down my Super Fund, that doesn't have enough in there as it is. I've had to move out of my rental apartment and am couch surfing. My anxiety grows daily as March looms closer. It's very stressful. The uncertainty of having a job is tormenting but I remain hopeful my hours will increase. With no assurance or guarantee, all I can do is stay positive. When the JobKeeper ends, I'll be quite destitute and not sure how long my drawn super will keep me afloat."*

### If you accessed an early release of superannuation, what is the intended use for this money?



*"I have been impacted financially by COVID as I have had to take out my superannuation to pay rent and basic necessities. Mentally I feel very drained and depressed as I have lost my routine in my life and sense of security within my job."*

# JobKeeper

## An overwhelming 78% of survey respondents are relying on JobKeeper.

Airlines workers have been stood down at extremely high rates, and many have not been eligible for JobKeeper.

Financial support during COVID-19	
I am receiving JobKeeper	78.26%
I am receiving JobSeeker	2.39%
I am receiving both JobKeeper and JobSeeker	1.09%
I am receiving another Government funded scheme	0.43%
I don't qualify for any Government funded scheme	17.83%

## Almost 1 in 5 respondents do not qualify for any Government-funded scheme.

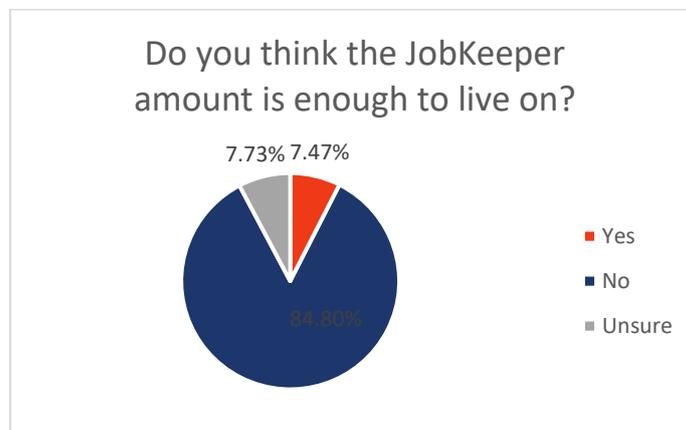
A significant number of aviation workers do not qualify for any Government funded scheme and have received no financial support throughout COVID-19 and the significant aviation stand downs.

It is primarily dnata and other international airline employees who are unable to receive any JobKeeper support due to a loophole in the scheme that prevents Australian workers whose employer is owned by a sovereign government from being able to access any financial support.

*"I have been working in the aviation industry for over 25 years but I am now out of work and struggling to find similar work. I only have experience in the aviation industry so finding work in another industry is very difficult. Furthermore, I received no support from the government as Dnata is not an Australian company. At the moment, my future is still uncertain and I have no idea when I will find work again."*

*"Watching the fed govt turn their backs on Australian tax paying dnata workers and sending my colleagues to the scrap heap was truly depressing. I will never forget this moment. We were not Australians enough. I'm still angry about this injustice."*

Additionally, when asked if JobKeeper is enough to live on 84% answered no.



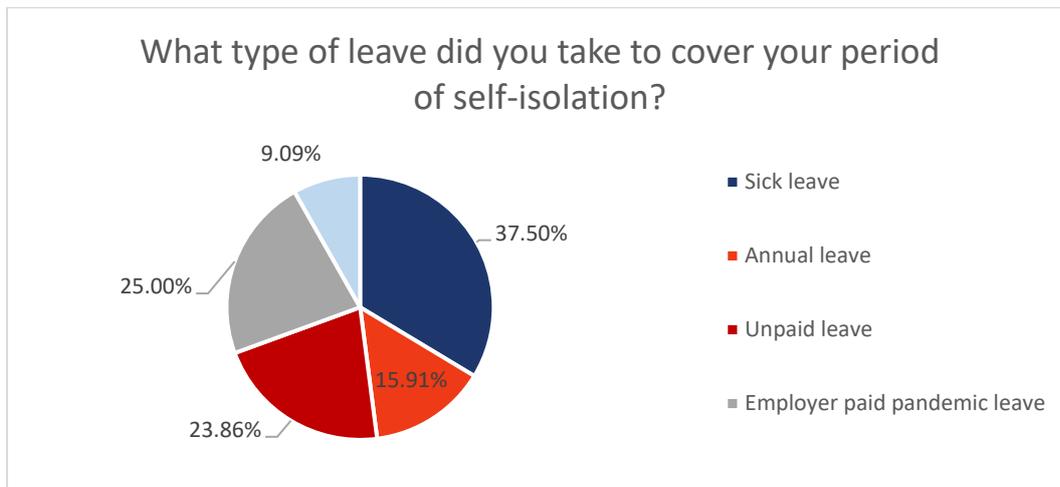
# The health and safety cost

## 1 in 5 aviation workers have had to self-isolate during the pandemic.

Airlines workers reported they were very concerned about their health and safety at work as well as the financial impact exposure has on them.

If workers had to self-isolate due to potential exposure to COVID-19 or by government requirement:

- 25% received employer paid pandemic leave
- 36% took sick leave
- 16% took annual leave
- 25% took unpaid leave



Respondents to the survey were very concerned about their health and safety at work (32%) and flagged a lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at work as being an issue of concern (14%).

A further 17% were concerned there were no or limited workplace policies around COVID-19.

Respondents to the survey were very concerned about being exposed to COVID-19, with 48% worried about being exposed whilst at work or while commuting.

## The future for aviation workers: in their words

Aviation remains heavily impacted by ongoing border closures, mass stand downs and sector wide disruption.

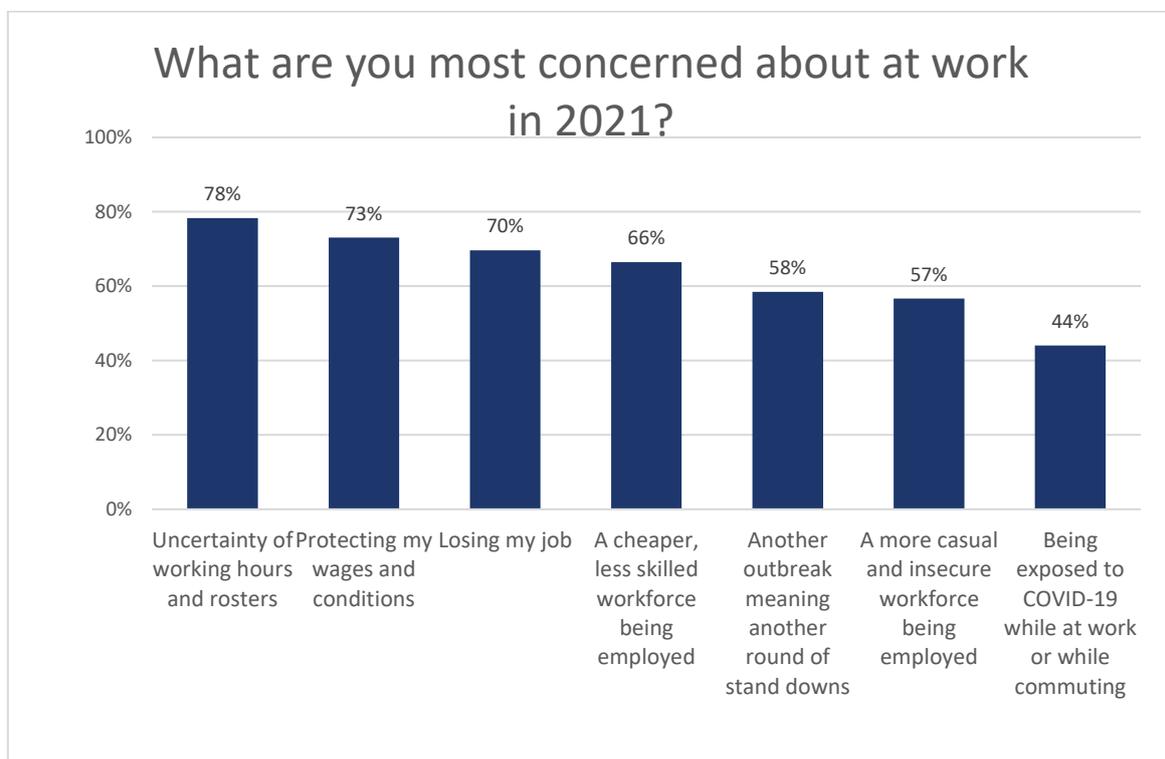
It is clear that it will take airlines longer to rebuild than other parts of the economy, and it is unlikely that people will resume interstate and international travel at the pre-COVID-19 rates for some time.

Workers were asked what they are most concerned about at work or around COVID-19.

**70% are worried about losing their job.**

**78% are concerned about decreased hours at work, or the uncertainty of working hours and rosters.**

**46% are concerns about their health and safety or lack of PPE at work.**



## Getting back to work

The survey asked respondents how they believe their working hours will be affected over the next 3 months.

**75% said their hours will either reduce or stay the same.**

Only 25% felt their working hours would increase.

*"It feels like it will never return and there are no answers to when the work will return."*

## JobKeeper cliff

The survey asked respondents how they felt about JobKeeper ending in March 2021.

### **72% are worried about being unable to financially support their family.**

Stories from the frontline – airlines worker views on the end of JobKeeper:

***“Both my husband and I are in the travel industry. We are struggling with both of us on JobKeeper. Without it we will be unsure how to pay the mortgage and buy food.”***

*“No income as the industry is forecasted to slow down again in March and more stand downs...no work no pay. No jobkeeper we are screwed.”*

***“I have a mortgage and If JKP ends in March, I may be forced to sell my home of 35 years.”***

*“My husband is also currently on job keeper in an industry that is unlikely to survive we have 3 children and the normal costs and commitments of a family this puts a great deal of stress on us mentally we have always lived within our means, but the complete removal of means places us in a hard position with no clear recovery in sight.”*

***“We’ve already had to sell our family home to try and survive, so when Jobkeeper reduces again, and then ceases completely in March, then we will be destitute... we’re expecting our first child towards the end of March, so I am extremely worried about our future.”***

*“Financially we have gone through all our savings, and are living as frugally as possible. I struggle to cope mentally with the stress of both of us in the travel industry, both having limited income, and facing the end of Jobkeeper with no suggestion our incomes will return at the same time.”*

***“Stress at home with regard to ongoing employment options and unsure about future work opportunities. Financially with regard to paying bills and budget, kids missing out on sports and activities due to less income.”***

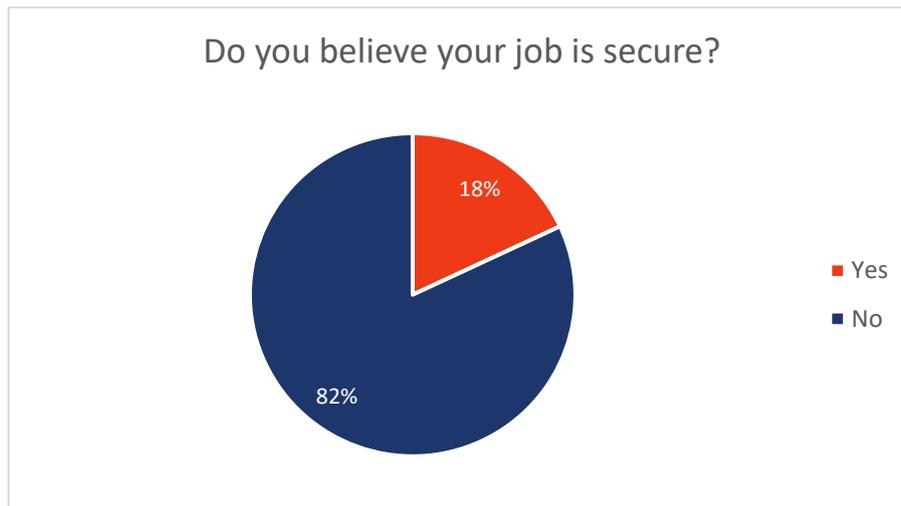
*“Probably have to sell my home as won’t be able to afford mortgage.”*

***“I am struggling to afford the mortgage and food and pay the bills. My husband is a travel agent, I am with the airline. We got a double hit. We have both lost hours, have struggled mentally with stress and depression, and financially with keeping up with the bills with significantly less income. With Jobkeeper dropping, and eventually ending I am not sure how we will cope at all.”***

*“I’m already struggling to pay off my home and car payments and all the deposits I had made for my upcoming wedding prior to the stand down, have nothing for myself therefore when jobkeeper finishes I assume I will be worse off and will need assistance to continue to pay off what I need to.”*

## Insecure work & limited job opportunities the future without aviation support

Respondents were asked if they believed their job is secure. 82% said no, with only 18% believing their job is secure into the future.



If forced to find new employment:

**86% believe it would be difficult to secure a new job.**

Age (86%) was one of the most cited reason as to why they may have difficulty finding a new job.

*"At 60 years old and being female, my future job prospects are extremely limited."*

Other reasons included: in the current environment, it is difficult to find a job (82%) and I don't have the skills or training to work in a new industry (35%).

## The case for AviationKeeper

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the loss of almost 10,000 aviation jobs at major carriers and ground handlers, including Qantas, Virgin and dnata.

These job losses are projected to increase even further if JobKeeper ends in March 2021.

The results of this survey highlight the compelling human story of the pandemic for those people working on the frontline in aviation, who have borne the brunt of the economic and social devastation of the global pandemic.

With the Government's planned end of JobKeeper and aviation support in March 2021, the Australian Services Union holds serious concerns for the future of the aviation industry and for the tens of thousands of people employed in the sector.

Aviation contributes enormously to our economic strength as a nation, including as a major employer.

As a vital industry that connects Australia to the world economy through international and domestic travel and access to world markets, it is of critical importance to Australia's future economic success.

**Without a viable aviation industry, Australia's economic recovery will suffer.**

This report highlights the urgent need for swift and meaningful action from the Federal Government to support aviation workers, save the industry and Keep Australia Flying.

*"There needs to be an aviation package just for our industry.  
JobKeeper needs to be extended for our industry"*

*"We need Aviation support scheme for all airlines workers"*

## Recommendations

Aviation workers and the Australian Services Union have together created recommendations which would support highly skilled airlines workers, save the industry and Keep Australia Flying.

- 1.** The Federal Government should extend JobKeeper in aviation past the current date of March 2021, at the original JobKeeper rate of \$1500, with the extended scheme to apply to all aviation workers.
- 2.** Aviation sector government financial assistance must be linked to airline employers committing to decent conditions and secure jobs for their workers.
- 3.** The Government should introduce Paid Pandemic Leave for aviation workers who are required to self-isolate or be absent from work due to COVID-19.
- 4.** Where a government or employer introduces a restriction on an airport-based employee engaging in alternative employment in order to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19, they must financially compensate the employee.
- 5.** The Government should urgently implement measures to oversee and regulate labour hire and supply chain behaviour in aviation.

**Aviation workers need their jobs, wages and conditions protected so that when Australia is ready to fly again, the workers are too.**



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