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Hours worked steady before major COVID-19 restrictions

The trend monthly hours worked remained unchanged between February and March 2020, according to the latest information released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) today. This followed slowing growth in hours worked in recent months, with the annual growth rate down to 0.8 per cent, around half the rate over the past 20 years (1.6 per cent).

The trend unemployment rate remained steady at 5.2 per cent in early March, from a revised February figure.

The Labour Force Survey collects data from around 50,000 people to measure the labour market in the first two weeks of each month. The March data describes the labour market shortly before the major restrictions in Australia to contain the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Chief Economist at the ABS, Bruce Hockman, said: "Today's data shows some small early impact from COVID-19 on the Australian labour market in early March, but any impact from the major COVID-19 related actions will be evident in the April data."

"Given the expected unseasonal change in key labour market indicators in the current COVID-19 context, the ABS will increase the focus on seasonally adjusted over trend data estimates for April and subsequent months," Mr Hockman said.

"On Tuesday, the ABS announced additional products to assist in measuring the labour market impacts of COVID-19. These additional products will provide useful insights between the March and April releases of Labour Force," Mr Hockman said.

There was no notable impact on survey collection operations in March, with the response to the survey at a similar level to previous months.

Mr Hockman said: "We want to thank Australians for their continued support in responding to our surveys during such a difficult time, given how critically important this information is."

Employment and Underemployment

In March 2020, trend monthly employment increased by around 17,000 people. Full-time employment increased by around 9,000 and part-time employment increased by around 8,000 people.

Over the past year, trend employment increased by around 224,000 people (1.8 per cent), below the average annual growth over the past 20 years (2.0 per cent).

The trend monthly underemployment rate increased 0.1 percentage points to 8.7 per cent in March 2020, and increased by 0.4 percentage points over the past year.

Seasonally adjusted data

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage points to 5.2 per cent in March 2020, while the underemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage points to 8.8 per cent. The seasonally adjusted participation rate remained steady at 66.0 per cent, and the number of people employed increased by around 6,000.

More details are in the March 2020 issue of Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0). In addition, further information, including regional labour market information, can be found in the upcoming March 2020 issue of Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery (cat. no. 6291.0.55.001), due for release on 23 April 2020.

Media note:

- Further information on the additional labour market statistics announced on Tuesday can be found in 'Measuring the labour market impacts of COVID-19'; part of the suite of information available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/covid19>.
- When reporting ABS data, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) must be attributed as the source.
- For media requests and interviews, contact the ABS Media Team on 1300 175 070 or media@abs.gov.au (8.30am - 5pm Monday - Friday AEDT).
- The ABS produces trend estimates to provide a more reliable indicator of the underlying behaviour of the Labour Force series. Trend estimates were introduced into the Labour Force series in the mid 1980s and are available back to February 1978. Trend estimates are considered the best indicators of the underlying behaviour in the labour market. See paragraphs 29 to 38 of the Explanatory Notes in Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0).
- Labour Force Survey data is complemented by other ABS measures to build a comprehensive picture of the labour market.
- Jobs in Australia (cat. no. 6160.0) data provides insights into all jobs held throughout the year.
- Labour Accounts (cat. no. 6150.0.55.003) data provides the number of filled jobs at a point-in-time each quarter, while Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0) data measures the number of people employed each month.
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