



Vacancy Report

March 2024

Released 17 April 2024

Internet Vacancy Index Key Points

This month's report shows the period of record growth in advertisements following the COVID-19 pandemic is ending, with vacancy numbers having decreased in eight of the past twelve months. Despite this, vacancy numbers remain at record levels, with around 50% more advertisements in the labour market presently than compared with the monthly average for 2019.

- Online job advertisements at the national level increased slightly in March 2024 (up by 0.2% or 400 job advertisements) to stand at 249,000.
 - Over the year to March 2024, online job advertisements decreased by 12.4% (or 35,300 job advertisements). Vacancy numbers, though, are at high levels historically.
 - This downward trend is present in other demand indicators, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Job Vacancies, Australia* series showing a 17.7% decrease in advertisements over the year to February 2024.¹
- Minor increases in recruitment activity were recorded in most states and territories over the month. The strongest increase was recorded in the Australian Capital Territory (up by 1.2% or 80 job advertisements).
 - Job advertisements decreased in the Northern Territory (down by 0.9% or 30) and Tasmania (down by 0.1% or 10).
- Over the month, advertisements increased across three Skill Level groups, with the strongest increase recorded for Skill Level 4 (commensurate with certificate II or III) occupations (up by 1.8% or 1,200 job advertisements). Other Skill Level groups recorded changes under one per cent in March 2024.
- Advertisements increased for four Major Occupation groups over the month. The strongest increase was for Community and Personal Service Workers (up by 3.0% or 830 job advertisements) followed by Machinery Operators and Drivers (up by 2.5% or 320).
- Recruitment activity was concentrated in metropolitan Australia, with 71.5% of job advertisements in March 2024 found in Australia's capital cities. Over the last 12 months, job advertisements have decreased in regional areas (down by 12.2%), however a slightly larger decrease was recorded for capital cities (down by 16.2%).
- Each month the IVI report provides a more detailed analysis of a particular labour market segment. This month's report spotlights Domestic Cleaners.

249,000

Seasonally adjusted

▲ 0.2% Monthly change

▼ 12.4% Annual change

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¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), '[Job Vacancies, Australia](#)', February 2024.

Cleaning House: Does declining demand for Domestic Cleaners have the potential to exacerbate disadvantage for some workers?

Demand for Domestic Cleaners increased dramatically during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers reportedly faced staffing barriers in the absence of international students, working-holiday travellers and those unable to work as usual because of the need to supervise children with remote learning arrangements.² More recent decreases in demand appear to have reversed the long-term trend of employment growth for this occupation. It is necessary to consider a range of data to triangulate conditions in this segment of the labour market. This is due both to the high rate of self-employment and indications that this occupation fared somewhat differently to prevailing conditions during and following the pandemic. Drawing on a range of data, it appears as though Domestic Cleaners face a formidable set of conditions in context of growing cost-of-living pressures. Considering the demographic and labour market characteristics of this workforce, careful attention may be warranted.

Internet Vacancy Index results indicate demand for Domestic Cleaners continues at relatively high levels. That said, recent sharp decreases signal the combination of an end to sky-rocketing demand driven by conditions related to the pandemic and squeezing of household discretionary spending. Unlike the aggregate demand conditions, vacancies for Domestic Cleaners increased significantly during the pandemic. Advertisements rose more than threefold over the year to June 2020, compared with the 46.7% decline recorded for all occupations over this period.³ Vacancy numbers continued to increase through the post-pandemic period, before a precipitate decline from mid-2022. Since mid-2022, vacancies for Domestic Cleaners have decreased by 64.1%, compared with the 13.7% decline recorded for all occupations over this period.⁴ While internet vacancies only show part of the picture of demand for Domestic Cleaners, due to the high rate of self-employment, they are one of few available indicators of conditions in the sector.

Employment data already show impacts of declining demand. The long-term growth in employment for Domestic Cleaners, with a 15.5% increase in workers recorded over the last decade, has flattened.⁵ Employment has decreased by 4.2% since the May quarter of 2022 to around 35,600.

The high rate of self-employment among Domestic Cleaners is increasing. In 2021, 43.3% of Domestic Cleaners were self-employed, a three-percentage point increase from the preceding census.⁶ This proportion equals the number working as employees in this occupation. Self-employment exposes Domestic Cleaners to precarious work conditions and potentially sub-optimal superannuation outcomes, a consideration particularly relevant to these workers.

Current conditions for Domestic Cleaners appear fraught. Households are responding to cost-of-living increases by jettisoning some discretionary spending. A recent consumer survey indicated a majority of households continued to cut various discretionary spending items to cover day-to-day living expenses during the fourth quarter of 2023.⁷ Almost one-quarter of respondents were forgoing household services such as cleaners and gardeners.⁸

Small businesses are also facing challenging conditions. The 2022-23 financial year saw the highest rate of business failure (15%) since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008.⁹ Conditions appear especially difficult for small businesses. The rate of non-employing business exits equalled the entries during 2022-23, the highest rate for this proportion during the reported period (since 2019).¹⁰ The proportion of exits to entries, for non-employing businesses, was almost 20 percentage points higher than the average for employing businesses over this period.¹¹ While the number of non-employing businesses grew during the past financial year, by 2.3%, almost all of this growth can be attributed to movement of micro-employing businesses into the non-employing category.¹² Businesses in the Administration and Support Services industry, which includes Domestic Cleaners, recorded the largest decrease in the number of businesses during 2022-23.¹³ These indicators suggest challenging conditions, especially for Domestic Cleaning sole-traders, as forecasts suggest continuing softening of aggregate conditions.

The demographic and labour force characteristics of the Domestic Cleaner workforce warrant the focus on this occupation, despite the relatively modest number of Australians it employs. Some 80% of Domestic Cleaners are women.¹⁴ Half of all men employed in this occupation are under the age of 35 years, suggesting this work represents a

² C Fitzsimmons, 'Pandemic-led cleaner shortage hits vulnerable people, busy families at home', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 6 2022.

³ Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), 'Internet Vacancy Index', March 2024.

⁴ JSA, 'Internet Vacancy Index'.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Labour Force Survey, Detailed', February 2024, trend data by Jobs and Skills Australia.

⁶ ABS, 'Domestic Cleaners (OCCP) by Status in Employment (SIEMP) 2016 and 2021', [Census of Population and Housing, TableBuilder], 2021.

⁷ National Australia Bank, 'NAB Consumer Sentiment Survey Q4-2023', 2024.

⁸ National Australia Bank, 'NAB Consumer Sentiment Survey Q4-2023'.

⁹ ABS, 'Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits 2019-2023', 2023.

¹⁰ ABS, 'Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits 2019-2023'.

¹¹ ABS, 'Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits 2019-2023'.

¹² ABS, 'Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits 2019-2023'.

¹³ ABS, 'Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits 2019-2023'.

¹⁴ ABS, 'Domestic Cleaners (OCCP) by Age (AGE5P) and Sex (SEX) 2021' [Census of Population and Housing, TableBuilder], 2021.

kind of pre-career job or a stepping stone to other roles in this sector for many.¹⁵ In contrast, almost 60% of women working as Domestic Cleaners are over the age of 44 years suggesting, for a normative life-course trajectory, this work represents a primary economic activity.¹⁶ As a Skill Level 5 occupation, Domestic Cleaners fall among a narrowing segment, with the increasing skills requirements of Australia's labour market. Employment projections for this occupation forecast a growth of 1.0% over the five years to May 2028, well below the average growth of 6.5% and below that of all Skill Level 5 occupations (1.8%).¹⁷ Some domestic cleaning workers appear to be at an intersection of labour market characteristics that limit agency. For example, high competition for the available jobs that do not require post-school qualifications presents barriers to job mobility.¹⁸ A vast majority of jobs currently advertised require post-school qualifications and those jobs that do not have this pre-requisite have considerably lower earning potential.¹⁹

Domestic Cleaners provide noteworthy public benefit. These workers support independent living arrangements for people with disabilities, older Australians, and others such as those funded by worker compensation programs. Despite the importance and public benefit of this work, like other female-dominated occupations, it is low paid and can be precarious. The concentration of mature-age women employed in this occupation encourages noting of the consequences of the pervasive gender-pay gap over a working life, cumulative impacts of career interruptions and the lower superannuation payments of low paid jobs, especially for those self-employed or with contract-based work arrangements.

Considerable work is underway to accelerate progress towards equitable workplaces in Australia. For example, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency is bringing transparency to the gender pay gap.²⁰ Workforce Australia's Career Transition Assistance program offers resources to support job mobility.²¹ The National Skills Agreement opens pathways to skills and capabilities needed to obtain well-paid, secure work.²² Nevertheless, with the recent passage of International Women's Day, it seems timely to promote the visibility of a workforce that appears to be prototypical of the consequences of gender, age, and labour market disadvantage and is experiencing turbulent demand for labour.

¹⁵ ABS, 'Domestic Cleaners (OCCP) by Age (AGE5P) and Sex (SEXP) 2021'.

¹⁶ ABS, 'Domestic Cleaners (OCCP) by Age (AGE5P) and Sex (SEXP) 2021'.

¹⁷ JSA, 'Victoria University Employment Projections - May 2023 to May 2033', 2023.

¹⁸ Chambers, K, 'Low-Skilled Job Seekers Facing Barriers to Work', Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2018.

¹⁹ National Careers Institute and Jobs and Skills Australia, 'Australian Jobs 2023', 2023.

²⁰ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Employer gender pay gaps published for the first time [media release]', Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 27 February 2024.

²¹ Workforce Australia, 'Training and Education', 2024.

²² Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 'National Skills Agreement', 2023.

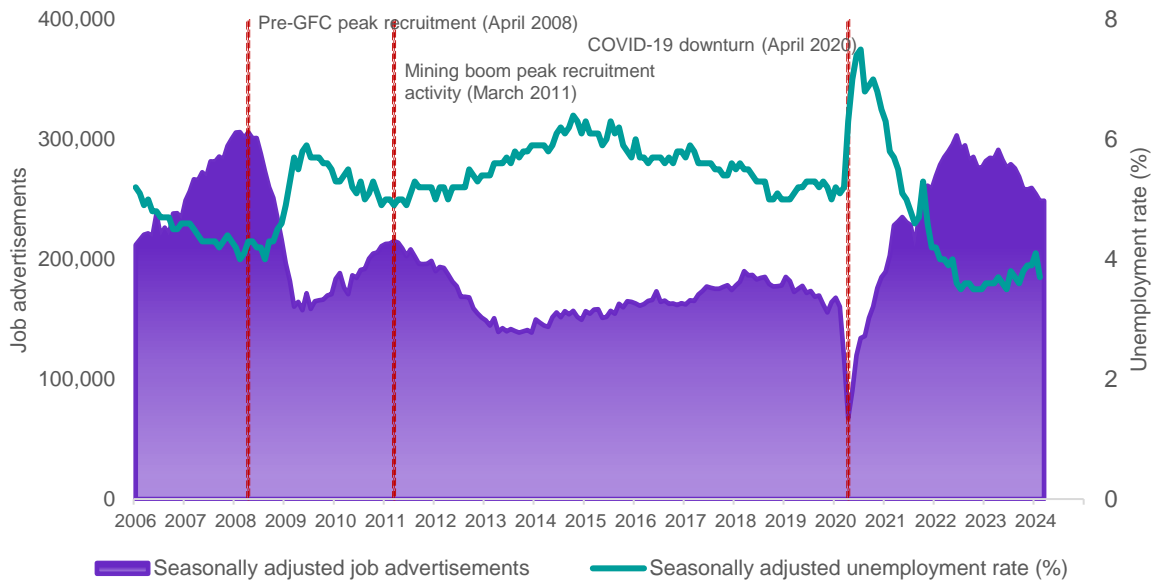
Internet Vacancy Index Summary Sheet - March 2024

	Number of job ads (no.)	Monthly change (no.)	Monthly change (%)	Annual change (no.)	Annual change (%)
Australia	249,000	400	▲ 0.2%	-35,300	▼ -12.4%
New South Wales	73,300	440	▲ 0.6%	-14,000	▼ -16.0%
Victoria	58,700	120	▲ 0.2%	-13,700	▼ -18.9%
Queensland	56,800	0	- 0.0%	-4,200	▼ -6.9%
South Australia	14,800	40	▲ 0.2%	-400	▼ -2.6%
Western Australia	30,800	30	▲ 0.1%	-2,400	▼ -7.1%
Tasmania	4,600	-10	▼ -0.1%	440	▲ 10.6%
Northern Territory	3,300	-30	▼ -0.9%	90	▲ 2.8%
Australian Capital Territory	6,800	80	▲ 1.2%	-1,100	▼ -14.0%
Managers	28,700	-100	▼ -0.3%	-2,900	▼ -9.1%
Professionals	71,900	-880	▼ -1.2%	-11,400	▼ -13.7%
Technicians and Trades Workers	33,800	-380	▼ -1.1%	-4,500	▼ -11.7%
Community and Personal Service Workers	28,100	830	▲ 3.0%	-4,100	▼ -12.6%
Clerical and Administrative Workers	38,600	490	▲ 1.3%	-4,900	▼ -11.2%
Sales Workers	19,200	140	▲ 0.7%	-1,500	▼ -7.1%
Machinery Operators and Drivers	13,300	320	▲ 2.5%	-2,000	▼ -13.1%
Labourers	15,100	-100	▼ -0.7%	-4,400	▼ -22.7%
Skill Level 1 - Bachelor degree or higher	91,400	-850	▼ -0.9%	-13,800	▼ -13.1%
Skill Level 2 - Advanced Diploma or Diploma	27,900	140	▲ 0.5%	-2,300	▼ -7.7%
Skill Level 3 - Certificate IV or III* (Skilled VET)	37,500	-90	▼ -0.2%	-4,300	▼ -10.2%
Skill Level 4 - Certificate II or III	65,400	1,200	▲ 1.8%	-9,400	▼ -12.5%
Skill Level 5 - Certificate I or secondary education	26,400	30	▲ 0.1%	-5,900	▼ -18.3%

*Includes at least two years of on-the-job training.

Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, Internet Vacancy Index, March 2024, seasonally adjusted data.

Figure 1: Job advertisements and unemployment rate, January 2006 to March 2024



The next IVI release is scheduled for 15 May 2024. The IVI is published on the JSA website at jobsandskills.gov.au/work/internet-vacancy-index.

The Internet Vacancy Index (IVI) is a monthly data series measuring online job advertisements, compiled by Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA). The IVI counts job advertisements newly lodged on the SEEK, CareerOne and Workforce Australia online job boards. Commencing in 2006, the IVI is the longest continuous time series for vacancy data in Australia. JSA research indicates the proportion of all vacancies covered by IVI has increased from 38% in 2016 to 60% in 2023. More detail on the IVI is available at jobsandskills.gov.au/work/internet-vacancy-index.



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