

Ford workers willing but unlikely to find decent jobs: study

Written by The Conversation

When Ford closes the doors on its vehicle manufacturing operations today [about 600 workers](#) will walk out of the factory gate for the last time at the Broadmeadows assembly plant in Melbourne's northern suburbs and at the company's engine and stamping plants in Geelong. Preliminary results from [a survey of more than 400 auto workers](#) show that most of them still want to work but are unlikely to find secure, long-term jobs.

Most will become jobseekers in regions which are [already socio-economically disadvantaged](#) with higher than average unemployment levels and lower than average household income. While 46% expect to be made redundant at some point in the next 12 months and 24% expect to remain with their current employer (either in the same role or redeployed within the company), 27% still don't know whether or not they will have a job. This partly reflects the large number of workers employed in the supply chain and uncertainty about the survival chances of many of these businesses.

Most workers (62%) will want a new job if and when they are retrenched. Only a small minority plan to retire (8%), take a break from work (6%) or go into business or self-employment (1%).

Importantly, 50% say it is important that they stay in the same or a similar occupation. This finding highlights the ongoing need for governments to support manufacturing occupations, skills and careers. These could come from key manufacturing corridors of Victoria such as Melbourne's southeast and northern suburbs.

Unfortunately, many workers will struggle to find jobs that fit their preferences and skillsets. In areas like Melbourne's northern suburbs, near Ford's Broadmeadows assembly plant, hundreds of newly-retrenched workers will join a local labour market in which more than one in every five jobseekers are currently out of paid work.

Many workers have received comprehensive assistance from the carmakers or state governments. For example, 53% say their current employer has provided help and 64% found this help useful. But there remains a critical role for government in carefully monitoring the transition for workers over the coming months and years.

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The survey is a representative sample of all trade union members in the Victorian auto industry and part of a long-term study which will monitor the future work, job quality and health and wellbeing of these workers over the next three years. It includes employees of Ford (17%), Toyota (28%), GM Holden (7%) and many manufacturers which produce components in the auto supply chain (43%), where most of the job losses will be experienced.

The Australian car manufacturing industry will be gradually wound down over the next 12 months as GM Holden and Toyota follow suit and close their local car-making operations. Projected job losses resulting from these decisions are somewhere between [40,000](#) and [200,000](#) jobs nationally.

Australia has never before experienced such a rapid closure of an entire, strategically-important industry, with the process taking approximately three years from the closure announcements in 2013/14 to the final shutdown in 2016/17.

The major concern of this study is the quality of work and quality of life outcomes for workers and communities in regions affected by closures.

Preliminary results from our study show that the average age of workers is 50, the average length of time with their current employer is 19 years (with some having been employed for up to 45 years). And approximately one in five primarily speak a language other than English at home.

Workers with limited formal education and accredited skills may also struggle. Almost half (45%) of workers left school before Year 12 and 48% do not have a trade qualification.

Numerous studies of past large-scale closures and redundancies suggest that particular groups are disadvantaged as jobseekers, including older workers, workers who have been with a single employer for a long period of time and workers from a non-English speaking background.

Workers in these categories find it more difficult to negotiate local job markets. They tend to

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take longer to find alternative employment and often move into poorer-quality employment with lower wages and inferior employment conditions.

The first round of results from this survey of auto workers will be launched at the Victorian Parliament on October 26.

Tom Barnes does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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