

Underpayments

Your rights and options if you are not paid correctly



How much should I be paid?

All employees in Australia must be paid money (**wages**) set by law and have some other rights (**entitlements**).

The amount you should be paid (your **wages** and **entitlements**) depends on:

What type of worker you are (casual, full time, part time).

When you work.

What type of work you do.



All employees have an **employment contract**. This can be written down, or agreed in a conversation (verbal), or both.

Your boss must pay you what they promise in the contract, but it can't be less than the relevant minimum wage.



What is the minimum wage?

There are different legal documents and rules (e.g. Awards, Enterprise Agreements) that set the minimum wages for different employees.

Anything less than minimum wage is against the law (even if you agree).

All employees get at least **minimum wage** and minimum working conditions set by law (the National Employment Standards).

Most employees (who work in particular jobs or industries) have a set of rules called an **Award**. This gives them higher minimum wages and some extra entitlements.

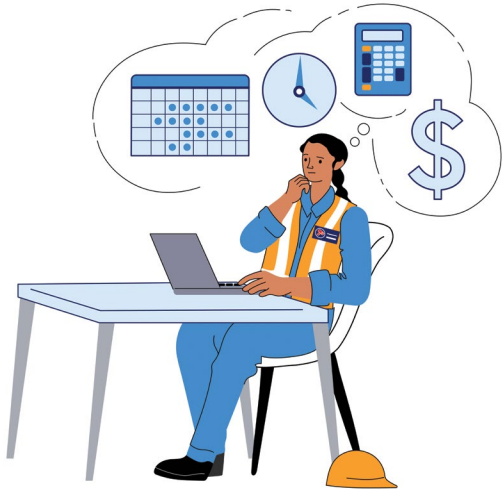
Some employees have an **Enterprise Agreement**. This gives them higher minimum wages and some extra entitlements.



Find your pay rate here

<https://calculate.fairwork.gov.au/findyouraward>

Or call the Fair Work Ombudsman
13 13 94



How much have I been underpaid?

You need to work out:

- A** How much you were actually paid.
- B** What days/hours you worked.
- C** What you should have been paid (your **legal pay rate**).
- D** The difference between what you were paid and what you should have been paid.

What if I'm not paid correctly?

If your contract is for less than the minimum wage, or you are not paid correctly, you can bring a legal claim against your employer.

You can bring a claim even if you are paid in cash and/or you agreed to the pay rate.

You are legally protected if you complain.

Your employer is not allowed to treat you badly because you have made a complaint or inquiry about wages or entitlements.

If you are fired or some other negative action is taken against you, this is against the law. This is called **adverse action** or may be **discrimination**.

Unfortunately this does happen sometimes. If so, please get legal help **quickly** (ask us for another appointment).



You choose what happens

It is up to you whether you want to make a claim or a complaint. There are many options to resolve the issue without having to go to court.



1



Talk to your employer.

Be polite and try to speak calmly.

Explain your legal pay rate and how much you should be paid.



Tips for talking to your employer

You can bring a support person (such as a friend, family member or union representative).

Take written notes about what was said during the conversation and send them to your employer after the meeting (by text or email).

If you reach an agreement, write down what you each agreed to.

2



Write a letter of demand to your employer.

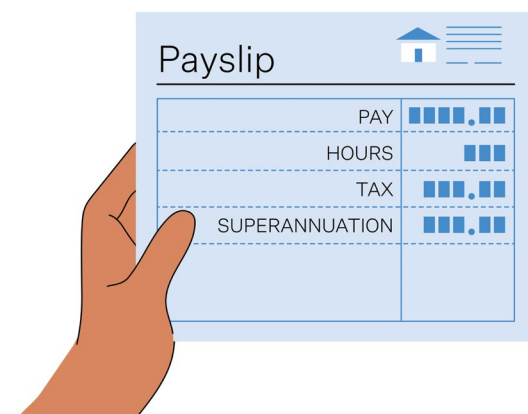
This is a formal letter to explain:

- A How much your employer owes you (including your calculations); and
- B What the consequences will be if your employer doesn't pay you.

You can request your employment records.

An employer must keep records and give you a copy if you ask for them.

An employer must also give you **pay slips** — records to show when you worked and what you were paid.



3

Make a complaint to the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO).

The FWO investigates complaints and sometimes will help employees who are not getting paid the right amount.

The FWO will decide whether they can help you.

The FWO may decide to:

3a

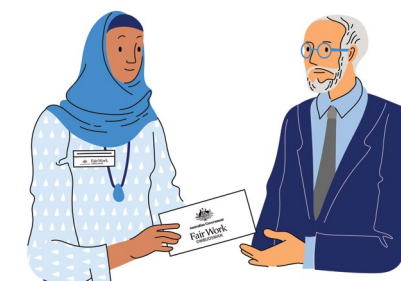


Organise a mediation.

A FWO mediator will help you and your employer to talk to try and agree to a solution. This is voluntary.

The FWO mediator does not decide your case — it is up to you and your employer to work it out.

3b



Issue a compliance notice or take action.

The FWO may give your employer a warning or tell them to pay you.



You can make an anonymous report.

You can also tell FWO about what happened without using your name, but you will not be told about what happens.

To make a report, you can complete this form:
<https://tinyurl.com/isktzomp>

4

Go to Court.

It may cost you money if you go to court.

If you go to court you will need to fill out forms and prepare evidence. You will also need to follow the court rules (for example, giving a copy of the forms to the employer — this is called ‘service’).

4a



There may be a mediation first.

The mediator will help you and your employer to talk to try and agree to a solution.

The mediator does not decide your case — it is up to you and your employer to work it out.

4b



If you and your employer can't agree, the case may go to trial.

A judge will listen to you and your employer and look at the evidence (for example, bank statements, pay slips, diary records).

They will decide if your employer has to pay you, and how much.

Your employer may have to pay back all or some of your wages. Your employer may also have to pay a fine (**penalty**).



Are there any time limits?

If you don't start your legal claim within the relevant time limit, you might lose your right to bring that claim.

Underpayment claims

You have 6 years from the date of an underpayment to bring a claim in Court.

If you are fired

You have 21 days from the date your job ended to bring a claim at the Fair Work Commission.

Discrimination claims

You have 6 months (Federal law) or 12 months (State law) from the date of the discrimination to bring a claim in the Tribunal or Court.

Adverse action claims

(If you are not fired)

You have 6 years from the date of the adverse action to bring a claim.

Questions?

WEstjustice

(Interpreters available)
(03) 9749 7720
westjustice.org.au

Illustration Lilian Darmono @liliandarmono
Design Stephanie Mulder @yardbird_studio
Strategy Tim Dow @timrobdondow

Disclaimer

This document contains general information only and is NOT legal advice. If you require advice about your specific circumstances please consult a lawyer or your union. This information is current at 16 February 2021.

