



Communicating with migrant and multicultural workers about work health and safety

Australian workplaces are diverse. Many workers come from migrant and multicultural backgrounds and may have different communication needs and preferences.

Persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs), such as employers, have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers at work. This includes ensuring the health and safety of migrant and multicultural workers.

Tailoring communication to the information needs and abilities of workers, and ensuring all workers understand the hazards and risks in their workplace, are important steps for PCBUs to protect the health and safety of everyone in the workplace.

What are workers' rights?

Workers have the right to be healthy and safe at work, including the right to:

1. work in a healthy and safe place with facilities (e.g. easy access to clean toilets and drinking water)
2. know the possible dangers of their job and be shown how to do it safely
3. be given the appropriate equipment and/or clothing they need to work safely before they start work, without charge
4. report health and safety issues at work – as a PCBU you have a legal duty to provide opportunities for workers to raise health and safety concerns without fear of losing their job or being punished for doing so
5. refuse to do work if they are reasonably concerned that it could put themselves or others at serious risk of getting hurt or sick, and
6. be shown how to report an injury or illness at work.

How to meet your work health and safety (WHS) duties

As a PCBU, you must, [in consultation with workers](#) and their representatives, eliminate or minimise health and safety risks, so far as is reasonably practicable. You should do this by following the [risk management process](#).

Remember you [cannot transfer or contract out of your WHS duties](#) and [more than one person can have the same WHS duty](#). For example, if you engage workers through a labour hire agency, both you and the labour-hire agency are responsible for the workers' health and safety.



You must ensure you are managing WHS risks to all your workers, including migrant and multicultural workers, so far as is reasonably practicable.

This may mean changing how the work is performed or how you manage WHS risks.



Translation services

Free translation and interpreting services can be found online at [TIS National](#). The service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with more than 100 languages available.

Here are some ways you can manage WHS risks to migrant and multicultural workers:

- **Communication:** find out how workers prefer to communicate (e.g. preferred languages, ability to understand written and spoken English, and considering cultural differences such as whether making eye contact signals attention or is disrespectful).
- **Consultation:** communicate and consult in multiple ways (e.g. face-to-face, anonymous options if workers may be unwilling to speak out, use translators or ask bilingual workers to assist).
- **Cultural and religious considerations:** consider asking workers how their cultural or religious practices may impact workers' safety and manage the WHS risks (e.g. whether beards or headdress may impact some work tasks, providing more breaks or reallocating physically demanding tasks if workers are fasting).
- **Manage exposure to risks:** identify whether some workers may be more likely to be exposed to particular hazards and how you could manage the WHS risks (e.g. migrant and multicultural workers are more likely to be exposed to harmful behaviours such as racist comments, or workers on the night shift may be exposed to different risks to those on the day shift).
- **Encourage reporting of WHS issues:** ensure workers know how to raise WHS concerns and where to go for help with safety issues at work (e.g. their [health and safety representative](#) or a supervisor). Encourage workers to raise issues as this will contribute to a culture of talking about safety. Be aware some workers may come from cultures where a fear of speaking up may discourage reporting. Be clear to workers that there will be no punishment for speaking up about safety.
- **Tailored instructions:** ensure WHS policies, procedures, training and instructions are accessible to all workers (e.g. provide diagrams of how to safely carry out common tasks or consider using translated materials).
 - Ensure workers understand the instructions and training provided (e.g. correct unsafe practices, ask workers questions and have them demonstrate tasks to check they can competently follow safety procedures).
 - Ensure training is specific to the tasks workers will do (e.g. show workers how to use equipment safely rather than telling them to "use the equipment safely") and actively supervise workers who are new to a task.
- **Review control measures:** regularly review control measures to ensure they are effective so far as reasonably practicable, and that they do not introduce new WHS risks (e.g. if a bilingual worker is helping to support other workers, their workload may need to be modified to manage high job demands). Workers sometimes get unfair negative feedback or criticism about things outside their control.

Workers' compensation

Under Australian law, employers must have [insurance to cover their workers](#) in case they get sick or injured because of work.

All employers of temporary work visa holders are required to have a policy of insurance for workers' compensation from a licensed insurer and to make sure they implement and maintain it. A worker being on a visa does not affect their eligibility for workers' compensation.

Where do I go for more information on supporting migrant and multicultural workers?

The [SBS Cultural Atlas](#) is an educational resource that provides comprehensive information on the cultural background of migrant populations.



WHS regulators and workers' compensation authorities

For information on compliance with WHS and workers' compensation laws contact the WHS regulator and workers' compensation authority in your state or territory:

- [WHS regulators contact information](#)
- [Workers' compensation authorities contact information](#)