

Labor Shortage Drives Australian Mining Companies to Recruit Inexperienced Foreign Workers

A former U.S. nanny and two young Irish backpackers are among a growing wave of migrants turning working holidays into long-term mining careers.

PERTH, WA, AUSTRALIA, September 19, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Australia's mining industry is grappling with a severe workforce crisis that has forced companies to increasingly recruit inexperienced foreign workers to fill critical roles. According to a [2025 Skills Survey](#) by Learning And Assessment Management Portal (LAAMP), the labour demand for mining operations is projected to require around 24,400 new workers by 2026, but only about 16,000 are expected to be available — a shortfall that signals continuing high vacancy levels.



Overseas workers fill critical roles amid Australia's mining labour shortage

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Sam Bohr, CEO and founder of National Courses PTY LTD

The labor crunch has created unprecedented opportunities for international workers with no mining background, who are finding pathways to high-paying FIFO (Fly-In, Fly-Out) positions that offer salaries exceeding \$100,000 AUD annually.

International Workers Fill the Gap

The Australian mining sector's recruitment challenges are creating new opportunities for overseas workers from a

wide range of countries, including the United States, UK, Canada, and Ireland.

Just a few years ago, Cindy Koopman was working as a nanny in Maryland, USA. Now, she's earning over \$120,000 AUD a year operating 45-foot mining trucks in outback Western Australia

— with all her flights, food, and accommodation covered, plus four months off a year.

Koopman, 32, moved from the USA to Perth in 2020, unsure of what direction her life would take. A friend recommended she look into mining, and she gave it a shot. Within months, she was driving one of the biggest trucks on site — a 793F — and working FIFO rosters that allow her frequent travel in her time off.



"Money was quite tight. My friend said you need to move to Perth for the mining - you can make so much good money," Koopman recently told the UK Edition of the Sun.

She decided to take her friend's advice and moved to Perth to start work as an entry-level geologist assistant on an \$80,000 USD (\$120,000 AUD) annual salary.

"I was working alongside drillers learning so much. I had a paint pack on my back spraying out a map the geologists had created for the diggers to know where to dig for gold. It was just so different, and I love a bit of physical work," she says.

Career Pivots Driven by Economic Pressures

A growing trend of young workers leaving behind traditional career paths in favour of high-paying, hands-on roles in remote Australia is also being fuelled by economic pressures at home. With rising living costs and limited job prospects, many are opting for career pivots that offer better pay and more stability — even if it means changing industries entirely and moving to a new country.

Caithilín Hughes, 26, left Claudy, Northern Ireland, after realising that no matter how hard she worked, she couldn't get ahead financially. With a degree in film production and experience as a videographer, she followed the path she was "supposed to" — but still found herself struggling.

"Like so many others, I packed my bags and moved to Australia," she told the Derry Journal. "Now I spend my days driving huge machines in the mines of Western Australia, earning in two weeks what would take some people at home nearly two months to earn."

After seeing FIFO mining roles advertised on social media, Hughes relocated to Perth and spent around \$3,000 USD (\$5,000 AUD) on required certifications — including a Heavy Rigid truck licence. She says she earned it all back in her first paycheck. Today, she flies to a mine site in the

remote Kimberley region to operate a massive 777 dump truck on a FIFO roster.

"FIFO mining has become a life-changing option for young Irish," she said. "It's an industry that doesn't even exist at home, yet it's giving people like me the chance to save serious money and come back to Ireland in a much stronger position."

Cal McIlwaine, 29, left Northern Ireland in June 2023 with no mining experience, no job certifications, and almost no savings. After arriving in Perth on a working holiday visa, he borrowed money to cover two and a half weeks of training — including a [White Card](#), working-at-heights, CPR certification, and a Heavy Rigid (HR) licence — then applied for jobs non-stop for 10 days.

"I had no experience in mining, I'd never driven a truck or bulldozer. I just knew I wanted to make quick money and travel," he told Insider. "I borrowed what I needed for training and hammered the job sites. Within a month, I secured a FIFO job."

McIlwaine now flies into Western Australia's Pilbara region, working 12-hour days as a field serviceman on a three-weeks-on, one-week-off roster. He maintains a fleet of over 40 machines and his on-site expenses — including flights, food, and accommodation — are fully paid for by his employer.

Despite taking a seven-week break over Christmas, he's earned around \$80,000 USD before tax in his first nine months working on an Australian mine site.

"Some weeks I make over \$5,000 AUD — that's about \$3,500 USD — and I don't even work every week," he said. "Back home, it would take five weeks to earn that."

Originally planning to stay just a few months, McIlwaine now intends to return for a second year after travelling through Asia. "Once I started learning the machines and the money kept coming in, I didn't see a point in leaving," he said. "I'm getting the adventure I was craving — and building a future at the same time."

Training Over Experience

Industry observers note that Australia's mining sector has become more accessible to international workers, particularly those willing to invest in proper training and certification upfront.

Sam Bohr, a former FIFO worker who now operates a [Registered Training Organisation \(RTO 41072\) National Courses](#), says the opportunity for international workers has grown significantly due to the labor shortage. "We're seeing a growing number of international workers from countries like the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Ireland arrive with no background in mining, complete a series of short accredited courses, and transition directly into high-paying FIFO roles. It's a clear pathway to both immediate income and long-term career opportunity. What sets successful

candidates apart in Australia's mining sector isn't prior experience — it's holding the right certifications," Bohr said.

RTO's like National Courses provide the mandatory certifications required for entry-level mining jobs — including the White Card, Mobile Plant licences, Working-at-Heights, First Aid training, and specialized equipment certifications.

Industry Outlook and Opportunities

While FIFO roles offer attractive salaries, they also demand resilience. Workers can expect long 12-hour shifts in remote locations, time away from family and friends, and physically intensive conditions — often in harsh climates.

Despite these challenges, the current labour shortage has created a rare window of opportunity. For those willing to relocate, upskill, and adapt to FIFO life, Australia's mining sector presents a fast-track to financial independence and career growth.

The experience of workers like Koopman, Hughes, and McIlwaine reflects a growing pattern — overseas jobseekers increasingly viewing Australia's mining industry as a viable and rewarding career move.

About National Courses

National Courses (RTO 41072) is a leading provider of accredited training for high-risk industries in Australia, including construction, mining, civil works, logistics and more. Its network of expert training companies includes National White Card Courses, National Online Courses and National First Aid Courses — government-approved training providers that help thousands of jobseekers and career changers gain the certifications needed for in-demand roles across Australia.

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