



**REGIONAL  
AUSTRALIA  
INSTITUTE**

# **MID NORTH COAST LABOUR FORCE ANALYSIS**

## **RDA MID NORTH COAST**

**December 2023**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Regional Development Australia (RDA) Mid North Coast (RDAMNC) engaged the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) to undertake desktop analysis of key labour force data for the Mid North Coast RDA region, to support their understanding of broader labour market challenges in the region. The outcome of this project will support the RDA to develop further labour force research projects.

The RDA Mid North Coast region is located on the coast of NSW, and includes the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of:

- Coffs Harbour
- Bellingen
- Nambucca
- Kempsey
- Port Macquarie-Hastings, and
- MidCoast.

Data for this region and these six LGAs has been compared with that of the average for regional New South Wales and New South Wales as a whole to contextualize results and identify where the region may need to focus its efforts.

This report includes analysis of:

- Labour force participation rates for people aged 15 to 64 years - by age, gender, Australian and overseas-born, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous.
- Labour force mobility – where people are living in the region versus where they are working.
- Overseas-born workers who are newly arrived and more established - participation rates of overseas-born workers who have arrived in Australia less than one year ago versus those who arrived more than one year ago.
- Participation of younger and older workers in full-time and part-time employment.
- Shares of population in employment for the MidCoast LGA in comparison to the Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour LGAs, across a range of employment and demographic factors.

The findings of the report highlight labour participation challenges across the region, with the overall labour force participation rate for the region at 69.1%, below the 72.5% average for regional NSW and 71.1% for NSW as a whole. However, at an individual LGA level, participation varies across the different demographic groups. The two larger LGAs of Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour largely lead the region in workforce participation, while Kempsey, Nambucca Valley, MidCoast and Bellingen have largely lower participation rates, and show specific areas of labour force challenges.

Analysis of labour force participation rates and other data can be very useful for identifying workforce patterns in a region and contextualizing them within the broader state level data. Our initial interpretation of the participation data is that regions with high participation rates might have better regional systems in place for connecting workers with work. However, this data cannot

explain *why* these patterns are emerging in the region. As such, further research and support for labour force participation in this region should consider the *why* of these labour market patterns.

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## METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the report centres around analysing labour force participation rates using data from the 2021 Census, accessed via the Table Builder tool. The focus is on the working-age population, defined as those between 15 and 64 years old. The study first compares the labour force participation rate of the Mid North Coast RDA region with those of its constituent Local Government Areas (LGA), regional New South Wales (NSW), and the state as a whole.

Labour force participation rate is defined in this study as the share of working population in the age group of 15-64 years in the economy who are currently employed or seeking employment. It is calculated as a percentage, which is the division of the number of individuals in the labour force (aged 15-64) by the total population within the same age group, multiplied by 100. By restricting the age range to 15-64 this analysis provides different participation rate results to the ABS estimates which are based on a population of people aged over 15 – with no upper limit.

The analysis is structured at three hierarchical geographic levels:

1. **State Level (NSW):** The analysis begins with an examination of labour force participation rates at the state level, including both the entirety of New South Wales (NSW) and specific regional areas within NSW.
2. **Regional Level (Mid North Coast):** The focus then narrows to the Mid North Coast region to understand the labour force participation within this RDA region.
3. **Local Government Area (LGA) Level:** The analysis drills down further into six specific LGAs within the Mid North Coast region, namely Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca, Kempsey, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast. Each LGA's labour force participation rates are assessed individually.

Following this geographic analysis, the report delves into the labour force participation rates of the Mid North Coast region through the lens of demographic characteristics. This includes examining variables such as age, gender, cultural background, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons. This analysis is conducted separately for each LGA, with one demographic lens applied at a time.

Lastly, the analysis involved collaborating with RDAMNC to identify a select set of 'demographic deep dives' into participation rates. This includes examining labour mobility – comparing usual residence and workplace locations for individuals in each LGA to understand the extent of employment outside their home region; the overseas-born workforce – discerning whether overseas-born individuals in the workforce are long-term residents or recent arrivals; and a comparative analysis between the MidCoast LGA area and the Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-hastings LGAs to identify how employment in MidCoast differs from that in a more urbanised and possibly more diverse economic environment.

# RESULTS

## LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

### OVERALL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

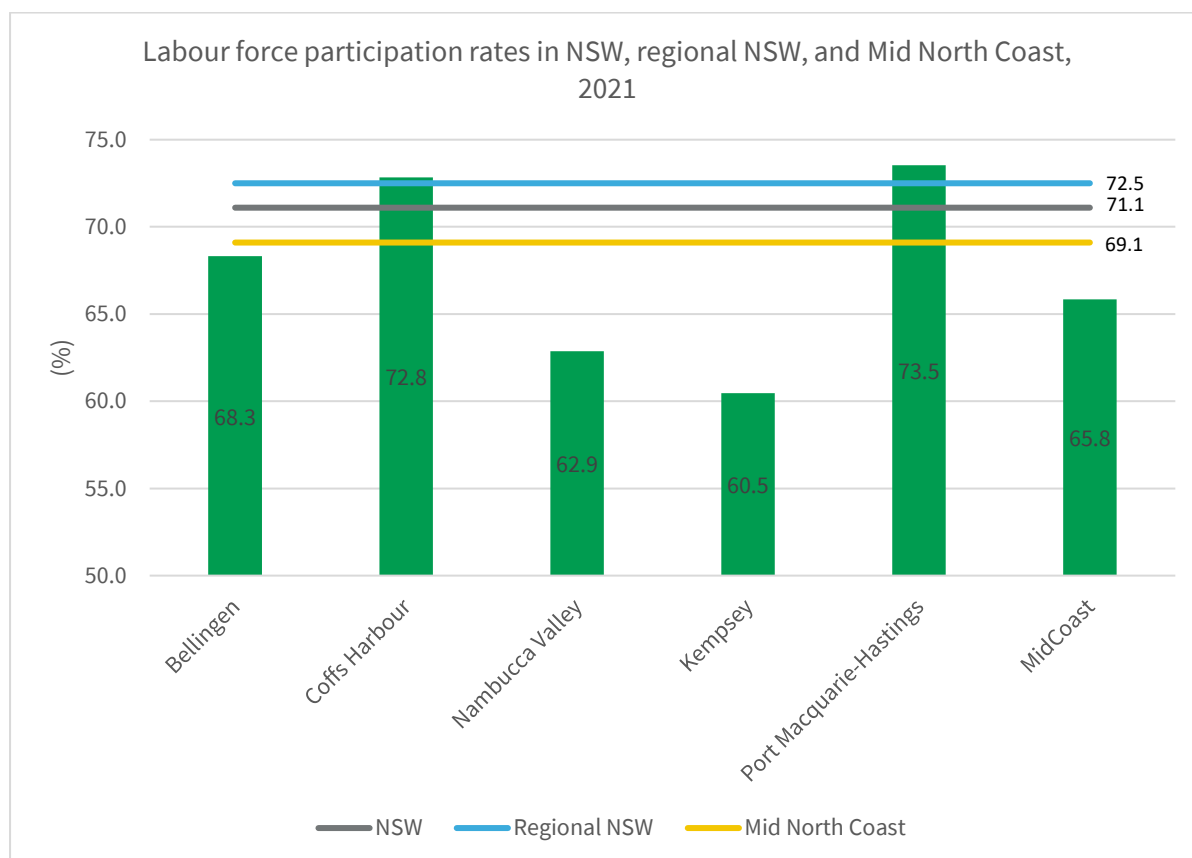


Figure 1 Labour force participation rates in NSW, regional NSW, and Mid North Coast, 2021

This section examines the labour force participation rates of the Mid North Coast region, in comparison to regional NSW and NSW as a whole, across a range of demographic factors.

The labour force participation rate for the Mid North Coast region is 69.1%, which is slightly lower for the average of New South Wales (NSW) as a whole (71.1%) and the average of regional NSW (71.5%). At the LGA level, the participation rates vary significantly. Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour have the highest participation rates at 73.5% and 72.8%, indicating a thriving economic environment and diverse job opportunities. In comparison, Kempsey and Nambucca Valley exhibit lower rates at 60.5% and 62.9%, significantly below regional and state averages. Bellingen and MidCoast also fall below the average benchmarks, though not as drastically as Kempsey and Nambucca Valley.

## AGE

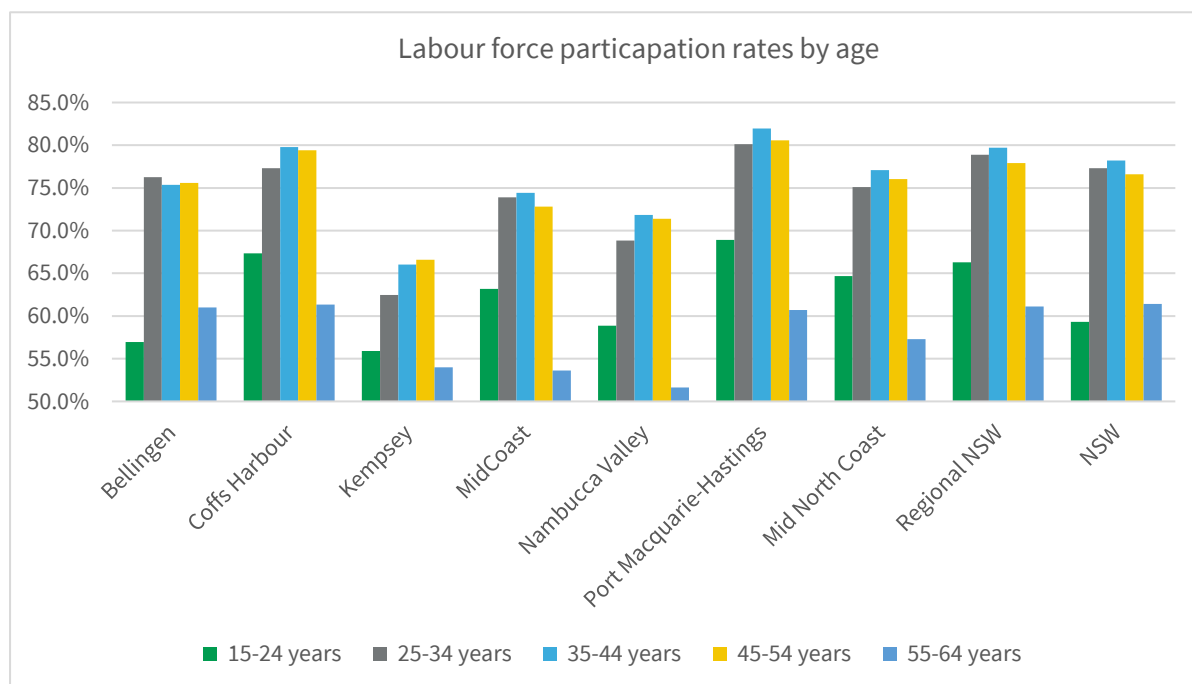


Figure 2 Labour force participation rates by age, 2021

Labour force participation rates across age ranges showed a largely consistent trend across the Mid North Coast, regional NSW and NSW as a whole, as well as each of the individual LGAs. This age distribution, resembling a bell curve, reflects common workforce engagement patterns. Younger individuals and older populations tend to have lower presence in the labour market due to factors such as educational commitments, entry-level career challenges, retirement, or health-related issues.

Across, the Mid North Coast region the highest workforce participation is observed among individuals aged 25-54, with those aged 35-44 being the most engaged. This group is often most settled in careers, offering experience and job stability, contributing significantly to workforce robustness.

There are some unique age group patterns in the region. The Bellingen LGA is an outlier in the individual LGAs, with a higher proportion of older people (55-64 years) engaged in the workforce, than younger people. Kempsey also shows a higher proportion of 45-54 year olds engaged in the workforce than 35-44 year olds, which is out of step with the other LGAs.



## GENDER

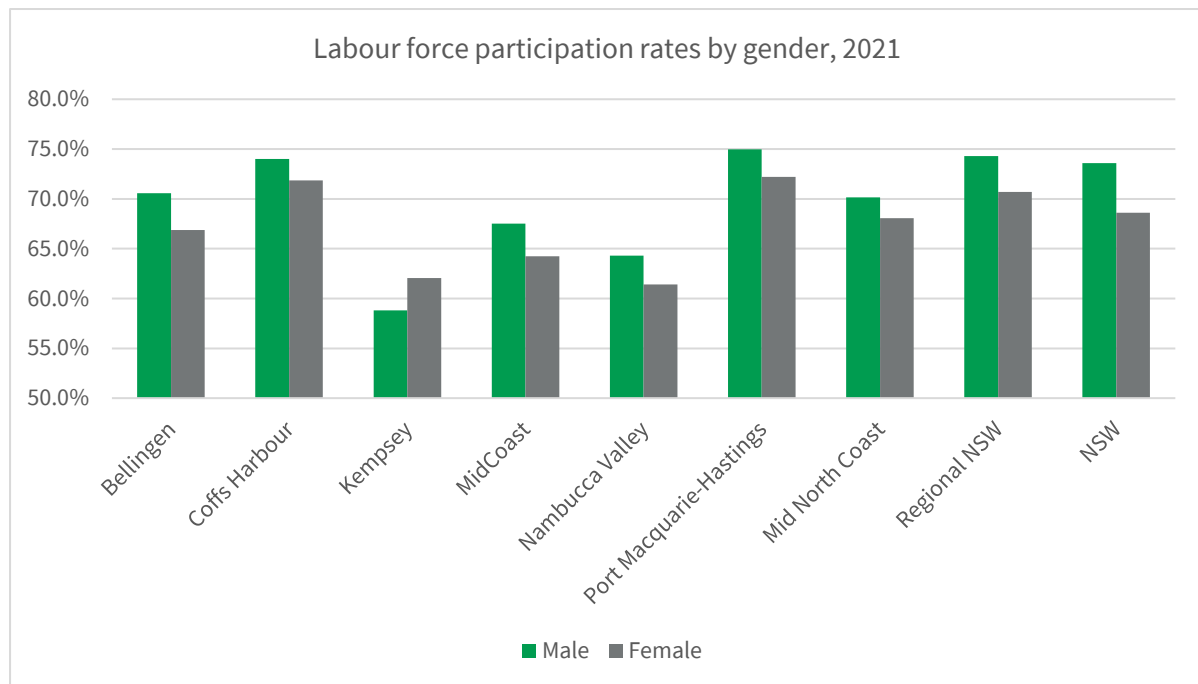


Figure 3 Labour force participation rates by gender, 2021

In most LGAs, as well as the Mid North Coast, regional NSW, and NSW as a whole, there is a consistent trend: male participation in the workforce is significantly higher than female participation. Kempsey stands out as an exception to this trend, where higher female participation rates are observed.

This pattern reflects broader national and global trends, where various factors influence the extent of female participation in the workforce, including societal norms, expectations, and the challenges of balancing work and family life, particularly for women, contribute to this gender-based workforce participation gap<sup>1</sup>.

While participation is lower for both males and females in the Mid North Coast region than in regional NSW and NSW as a whole, the gap between male and female participation is less significant in the Mid North Coast region. This gap is only 2.1 percentage points, in comparison to regional NSW at 3.6 points and NSW as a whole at 5 points.

Across the LGAs, Bellingen showed the greatest difference between male and female participation (3.7 points) and Coffs Harbour the lowest (2.1 points).

<sup>1</sup> Del Boca, D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., & Rossi, M. (2020). Women's and men's work, housework and childcare, before and during COVID-19. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 18, 1001-1017.

## AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS-BORN POPULATION

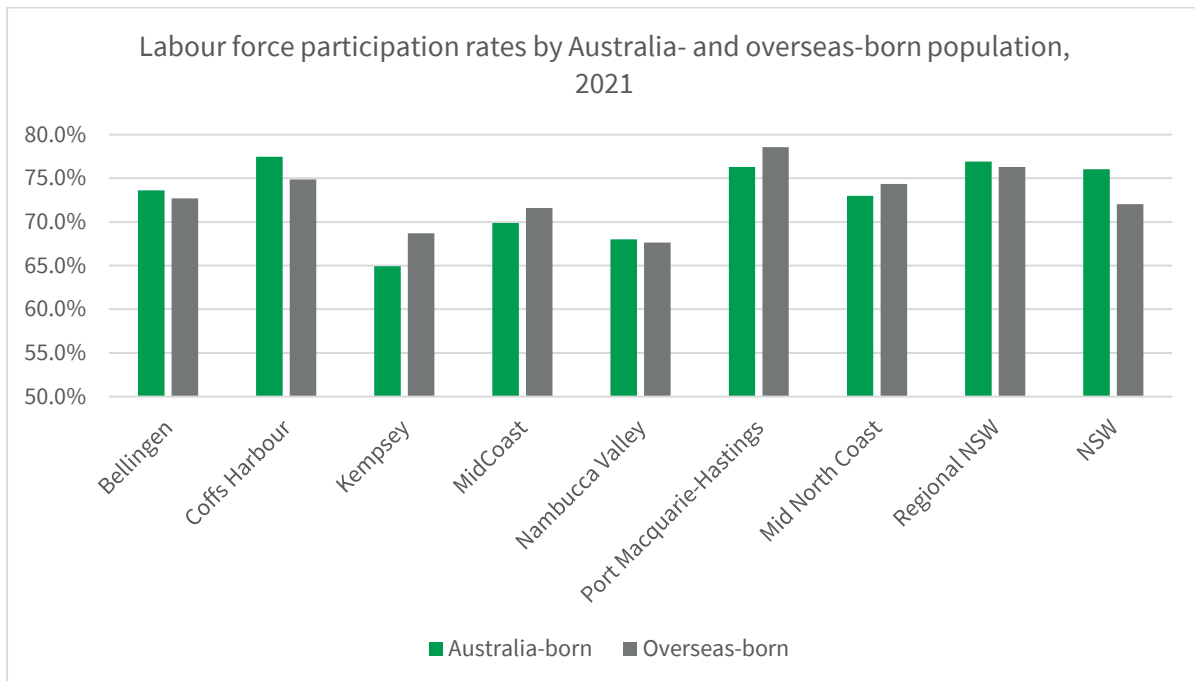


Figure 4 Labour force participation rates by Australia- and overseas-born population, 2021

Overall, the participation rate of Australian-born individuals in the Mid North Coast region is marginally lower than that of overseas-born individuals, 73% to 74.3%. In terms of the population mix, the proportion of Australian-born individuals living in the region is 92.9% and the proportion of overseas-born individuals is 7.1%.

In regional NSW, labour force participation rates between the Australia-born and overseas-born populations are the most closely matched. However, in NSW as a whole, a more pronounced gap exists, with the Australia-born population being more actively engaged in the labour market than their overseas-born counterparts (a difference of 4 percentage points).

Australian-born individuals in Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, and Nambucca Valley are more engaged in the labour market. In comparison in Kempsey, MidCoast, and Port Macquarie-Hastings, overseas-born individuals show higher labour force participation. The greatest difference in participation between Australian and overseas-born individuals is in Kempsey (3.8 percentage points), whilst the smallest is in Nambucca Valley (0.4 percentage points). That the LGA (Nambucca Heads) with the lowest participation of overseas-born persons is also the LGA with the smallest difference in participation between the groups, indicates that participation for overseas-born persons might be due to factors external to the group such as some limitations on employment options in the LGA.

## INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

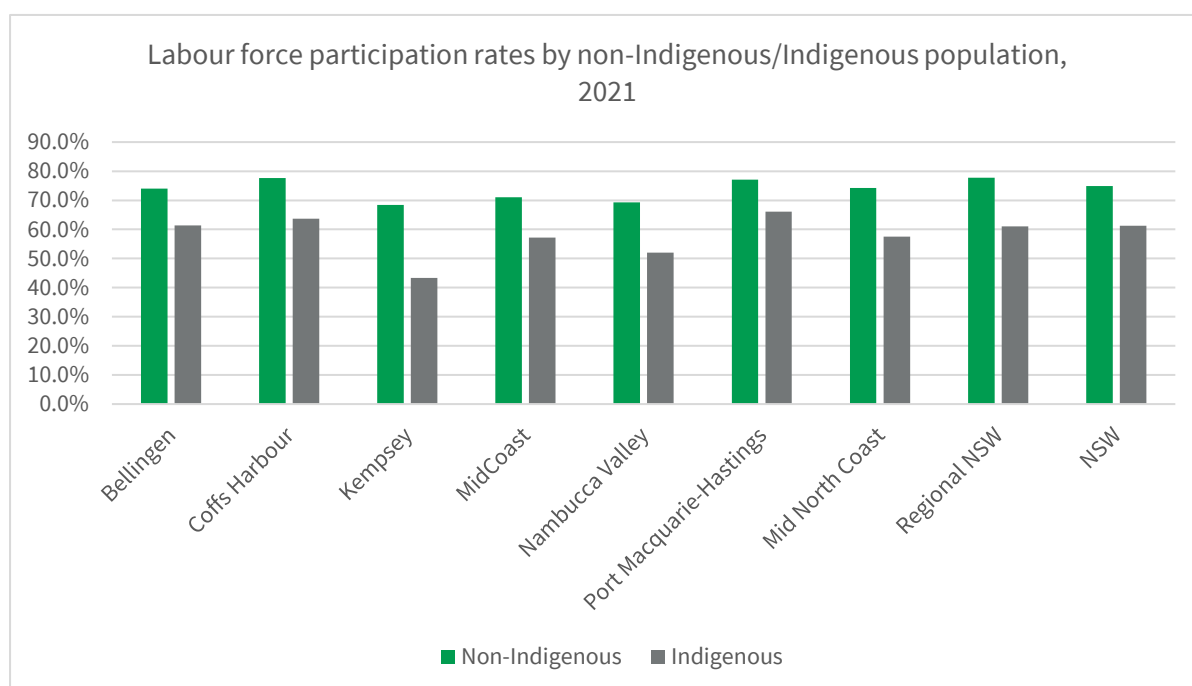


Figure 5 Labour force participation rates by non-Indigenous/Indigenous population, 2021

The proportion of non-Indigenous individuals living in the region is 94.2% while the proportion of Indigenous individuals is 5.8%. The non-Indigenous population consistently has higher labour force participation rates than the Indigenous population across all studied regions, highlighting challenges faced by Indigenous communities. The difference between the rates of participation in the Mid North Coast (16.7 percentage points) is on par with that of regional NSW (16.76 points), and a little higher than that of NSW as a whole (13.68 points).

Of the individual LGAs, Port Macquarie-Hastings has the highest labour force participation rate for Indigenous people at 66.1%, and the smallest difference in participation between the two groups (11 percentage points), but a relatively small proportion of Indigenous people (4.4%). In comparison Kempsey shows the lowest Indigenous participation at 43.3% and the most significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – 25.1 percentage points, as well as a considerable Indigenous population (11.5%). Considering these two data points together indicates that Kempsey may be experiencing specific challenges regarding Indigenous participation.

## LABOUR FORCE MOBILITY

This section examines the labour force mobility of employed individuals, focusing on the usual residence and place of work for people in each LGA of the Mid North Coast. This analysis aims to understand whether people work outside their usual area of residence.

In each LGA, the area of usual residence tends to coincide with the place of work. This indicates that people are more likely to work in their region of residence. However, this trend varies in degree. More than 80% of employed residents in areas including Coffs Harbour (85.4%), Port Macquarie-Hastings (85.4%), MidCoast (82.3%), and Kempsey (82.0%) work within their usual residence. In contrast, a smaller proportion of employed residents in Nambucca Valley and Bellingen, at 67.3% and 54.3% respectively, choose to work in their LGA of usual residence.

As outlined in Table 1, some LGAs ‘supply’ a significant number of employed persons to other LGAs. The most significant example of this in the Bellingen LGA, which supplies 27.4% of its employed persons to Coffs Harbour, and Nambucca Valley, which supplies 13% of its employed persons.

However, from a net gain or loss perspective, Nambucca Valley is losing more people to other LGAs overall, while Coffs Harbour is gaining the most. In contrast, Kempsey is employing more people from other LGAs in the region than it is supplying to others and Port Macquarie-Hastings only has a small net loss of 159 people. Importantly, across all LGAs, there is also a consistent 9% to nearly 16% of employed persons working elsewhere in the country.

There is also a consistent trend of people who do not work in their home LGA, working in a neighbouring LGA to the one they live in. For example, the Bellingen residents working elsewhere in the region, largely do so in neighbouring Coffs Harbour and Nambucca Valley. Nambucca Valley residents who work elsewhere in the region, do so in Coffs Harbour (linked to the LGA by Pacific Highway), Kempsey and Bellingen.

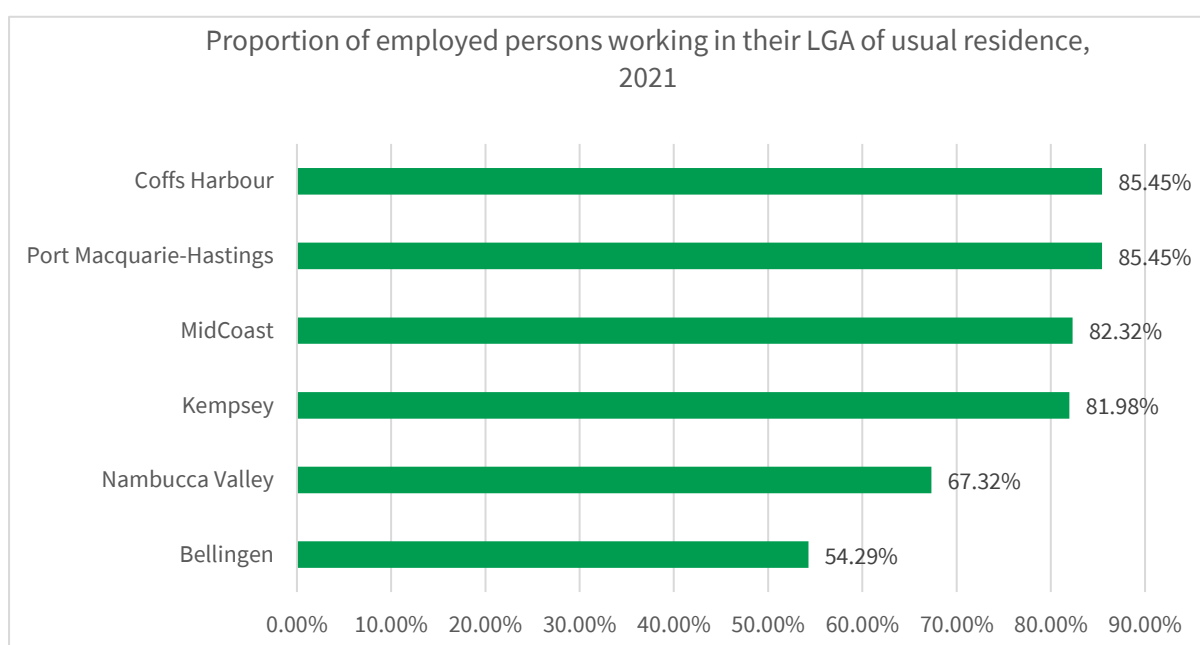


Figure 6 Proportion of employed persons working in their living residence, 2021

Usual Residence \ Place of Work	Bellingen	Coffs Harbour	Kempsey	MidCoast	Nambucca Valley	Port Macquarie-Hastings
Bellingen	2,621	568	20	0	252	4
Coffs Harbour	1,325	27,390	66	18	839	48
Kempsey	11	33	8,052	39	272	883
MidCoast	0	21	19	25,583	0	487
Nambucca Valley	183	320	148	6	4,349	18
Port Macquarie-Hastings	12	44	622	559	44	28,460
Net outflows (to the other five LGAs)	687	-1,310	-363	95	732	159

Table 1 Usual residence and place of work of employed persons, 2021

## OVERSEAS BORN WORKERS – NEW AND ESTABLISHED ARRIVALS

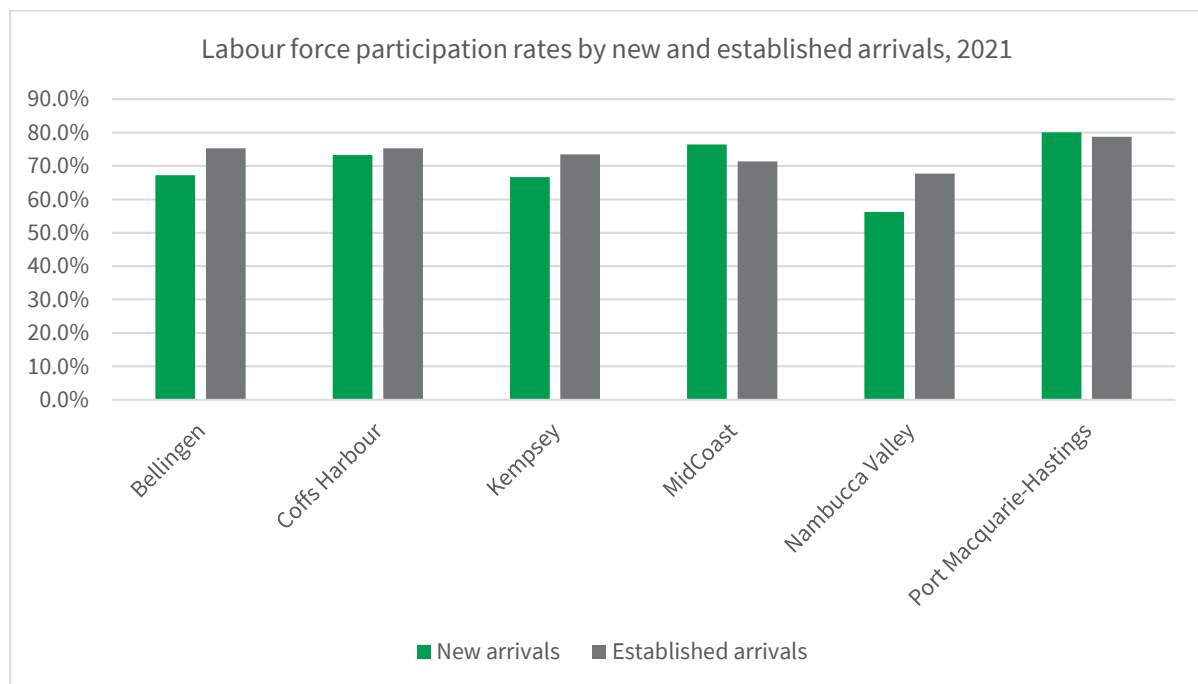


Figure 7 Labour force participation rates by new and established arrivals, 2021

More than 80% of overseas-born residents arrived more than one year before the 2021 Census across all LGAs in the region. Labour force engagement between new arrivals (arriving less than one year before) and established arrivals (arriving more than one year before) can provide a basic indicator of engagement, showing new migrants to the region in work and whether there may be a lag between newer arrivals and more established arrivals.

As depicted by Figure 7, the labour force engagement difference varies by LGAs. In Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, and Nambucca Valley, established arrivals present a higher labour force participation rate than their newly counterparts. With longer settlement in the region, established arrivals are more likely to engage in the labour market as they have had time to become familiar with the local environment. However, this pattern does not apply to MidCoast and Port Macquarie-Hastings, where new arrivals show a higher engagement than established arrivals.

Amongst those LGAs in the Mid North Coast region, Port Macquarie-Hastings records the highest engagement rates for both new arrivals and established arrivals. In contrast, the Nambucca Valley has the lowest engagement rates for these groups.

## YOUNGER AND OLDER WORKERS IN FULL- AND PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

This section considers the split of full-time and part-time employment. It sets out the percentage of the population engaged in either full-time or part-time employment within each demographic group.

Among younger individuals aged 15-24 years, there is a noticeable trend towards part-time employment over full-time positions in every LGA. Port Macquarie-Hastings stands out with the highest percentage of young people employed in both full-time and part-time roles. While Bellingen shows a considerable share of its youth in part-time employment (30.1%), it also has the



smallest percentage of younger full-time workers (16.2%) compared to other LGAs. These differences probably relate to the different mix of industries and jobs in the two LGAs – with the mix more favourable to young people working in Port Macquarie-Hastings.

Generally, a larger proportion of the older workforce is employed full-time rather than part-time. However, this trend is less pronounced in Bellingen and Nambucca Valley. Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour not only have the greatest percentage of older adults in full-time or part-time employment but also the highest rates of full-time employment, at 29.9% and 29.7% respectively. In contrast, Nambucca Valley has the smallest overall employment proportion for older people employed (48.6%, including people employed but away from work) and the lowest full-time rate (22.2%).

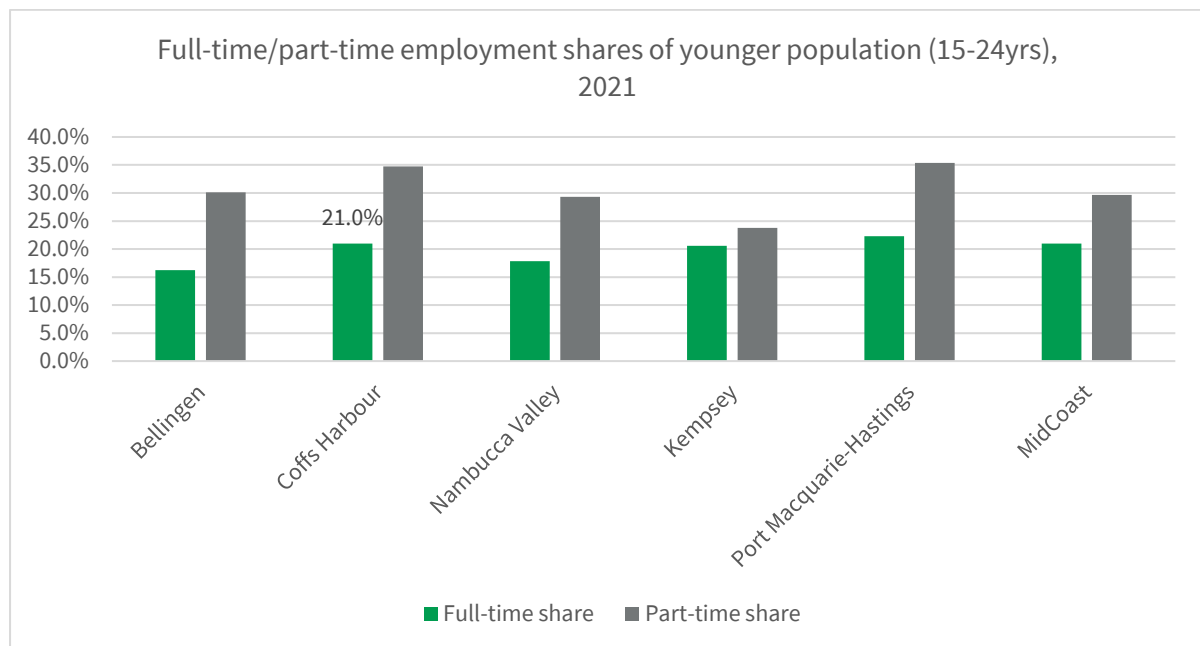


Figure 8 Full-time/part-time employment shares of younger population (15-24yrs), 2021

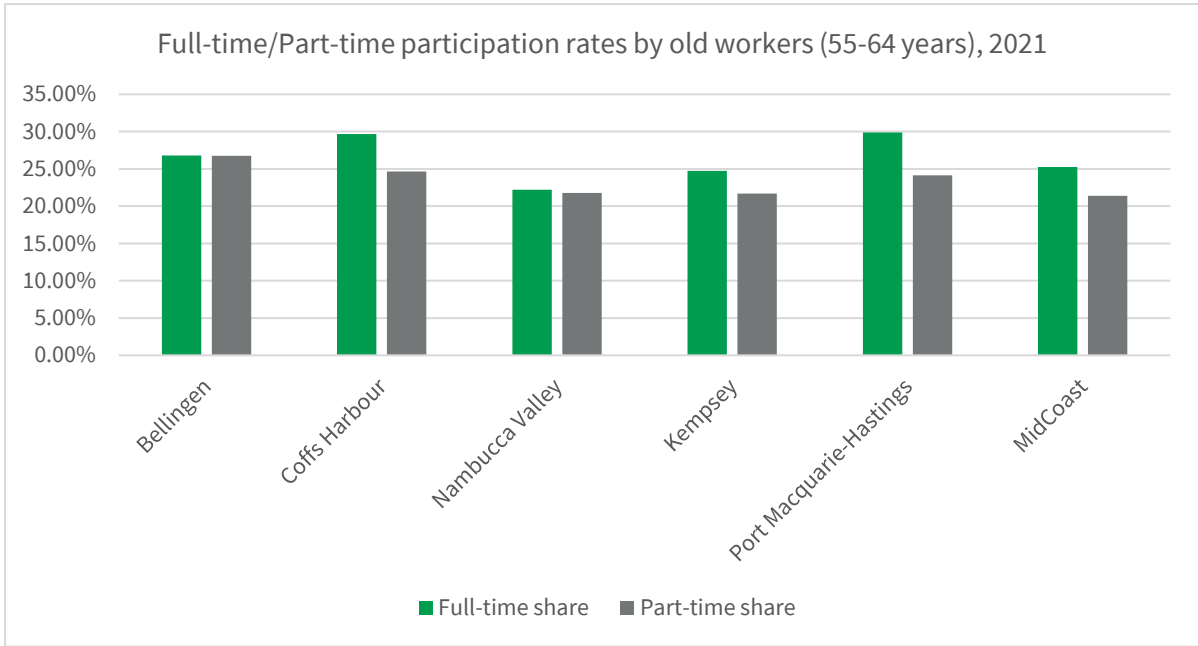


Figure 9 Full-time/part-time employment shares of older population (55-64yrs), 2021

## MIDCOAST LGA

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The following analysis compares shares of employment across different demographic, employment and occupation groups in the MidCoast, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour LGAs. The three LGAs have similar sized populations, between 80,000 and 100,000 people, but have different population concentrations. Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour both have cities, although Port Macquarie-Hastings is larger. In comparison the MidCoast LGA is made up of a number of smaller towns.

This includes:

- Shares of full-time and part-time employment by older and younger population
- Shares of full-time and part-time employment by male and female population
- Shares of full-time and part-time employment by Australian and overseas-born population
- Shares of full-time and part-time employment by the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population
- Shares of employment by occupation by age
- Shares of employment by occupation by male and female population
- Shares of employment by occupation by Australian and overseas-born population
- Shares of employment by occupation by age the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population.

## YOUNGER AND OLDER POPULATION GROUPS

Young people living in the Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA are experiencing the highest proportion of employment out of the three LGAs, and MidCoast the lowest. Across the three LGAs, the 15-24 years group is consistently employed in part-time work in greater proportions than in full-time work. Similarly, the MidCoast LGA also has the smallest proportion of older people (55-64 years) employed across these three LGAs, whilst Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings the most. In all three LGAs, 55 to 64 year olds are employed in greater proportions in full-time work, than in part-time work, although the difference is smallest in the MidCoast.

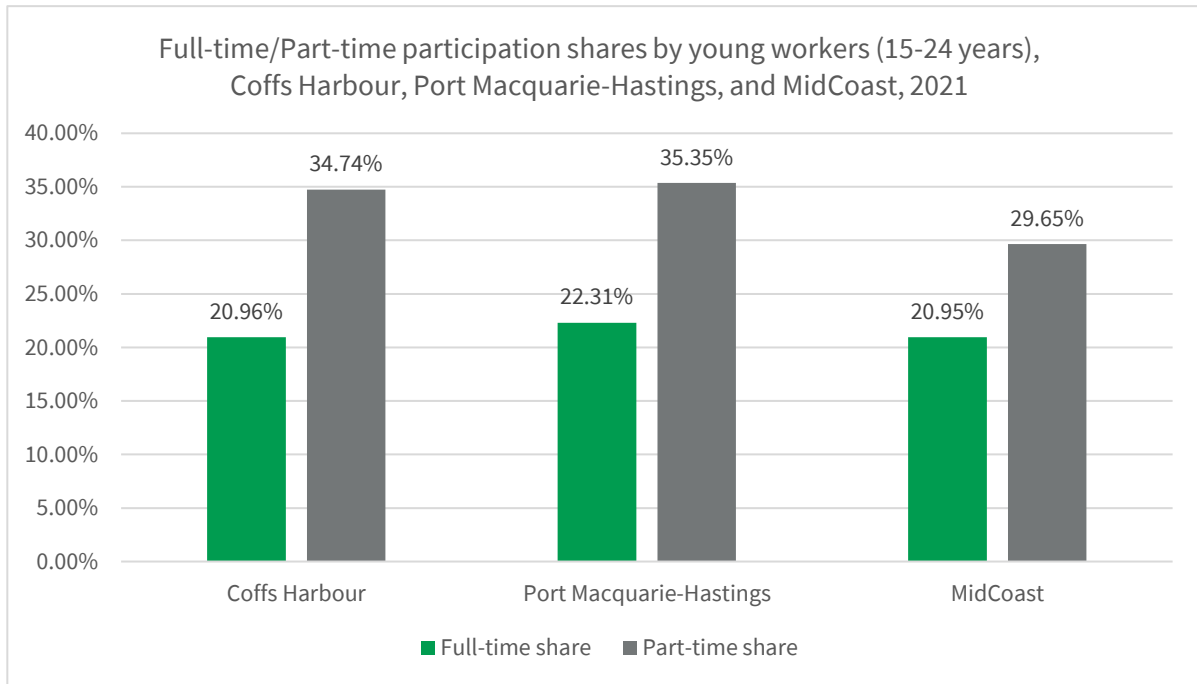


Figure 10 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of younger population (15-24yrs), Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

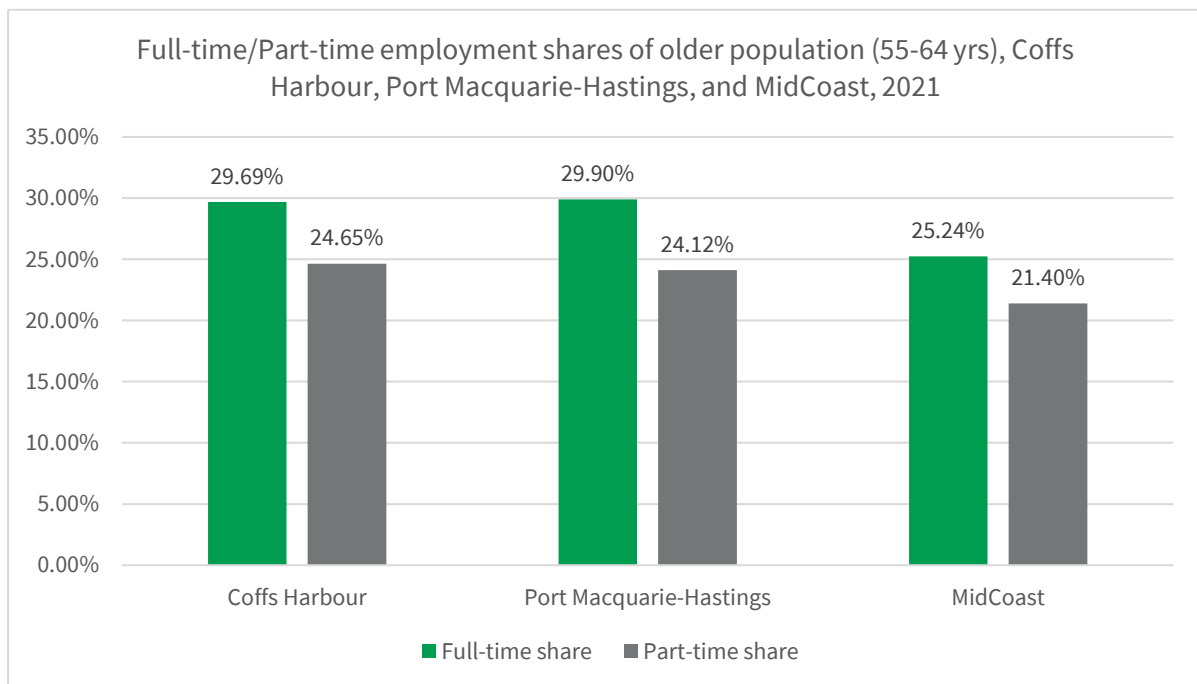


Figure 11 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of older population (55-64yrs), Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

## MALE AND FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

Across all three LGAs, the proportion of male employment in full-time work is significantly higher than in part-time work. The opposite is true for female employment in full-time work, which is lower than the share in part-time work. However, the gap between female employment in full-time and part-time employment is substantially smaller than for male employment. Additionally, the employment shares for both males and females in Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings surpass those in the MidCoast LGA.

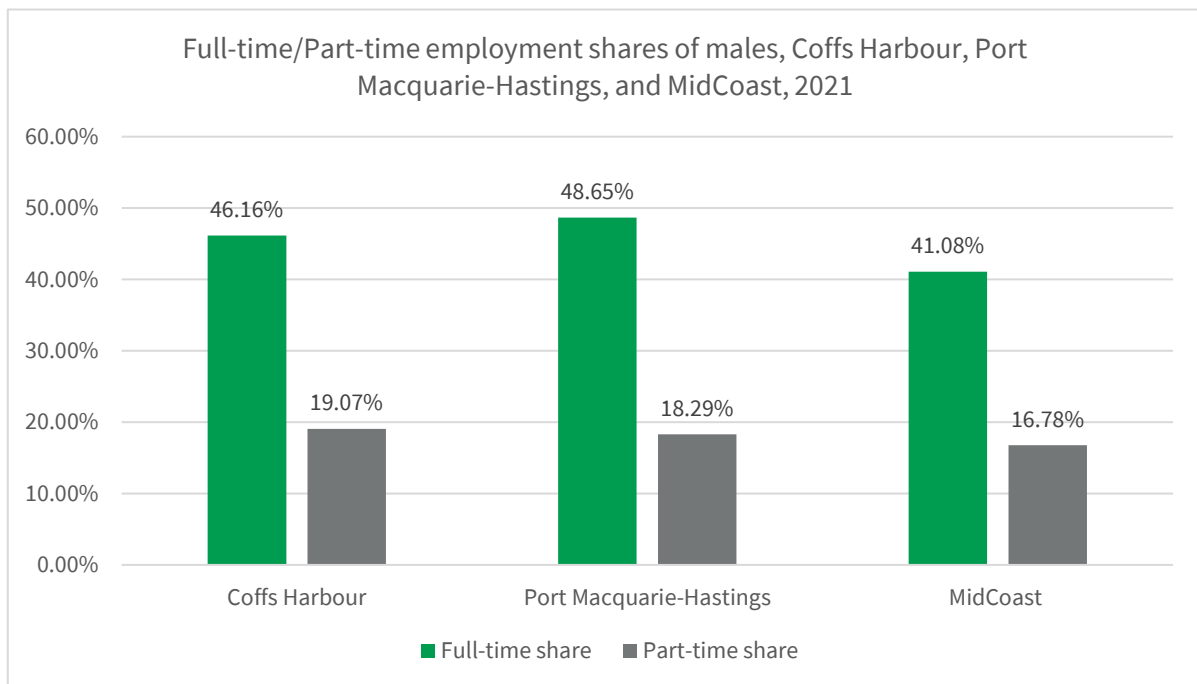


Figure 12 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of males, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

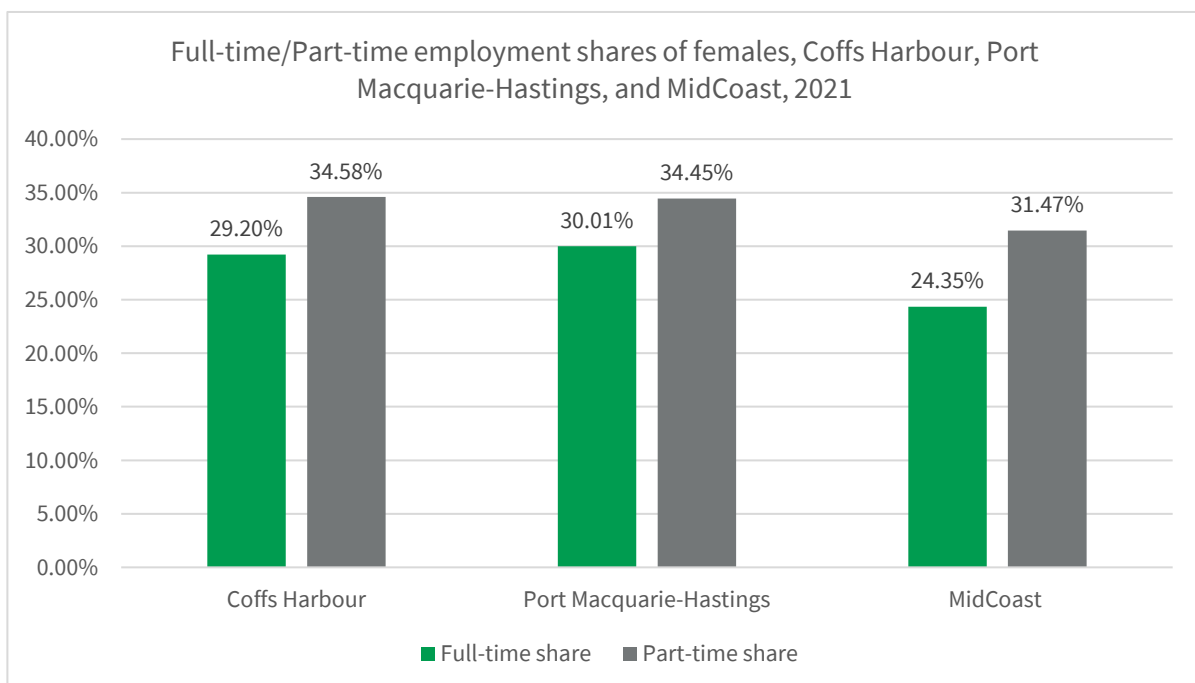


Figure 13 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of females, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021



## AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS BORN

The overall proportion of Australian and overseas-born people employed in these three LGAs is largely consistent. This consistency is also seen in the proportion of each population group in full-time and part-time employment. However, across all three LGAs, the proportion of full-time workers is higher among both Australian-born and overseas-born population. The employment shares in the MidCoast LGA for both Australian and overseas-born people, in both full-time and part-time employment, are lower than in Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings.

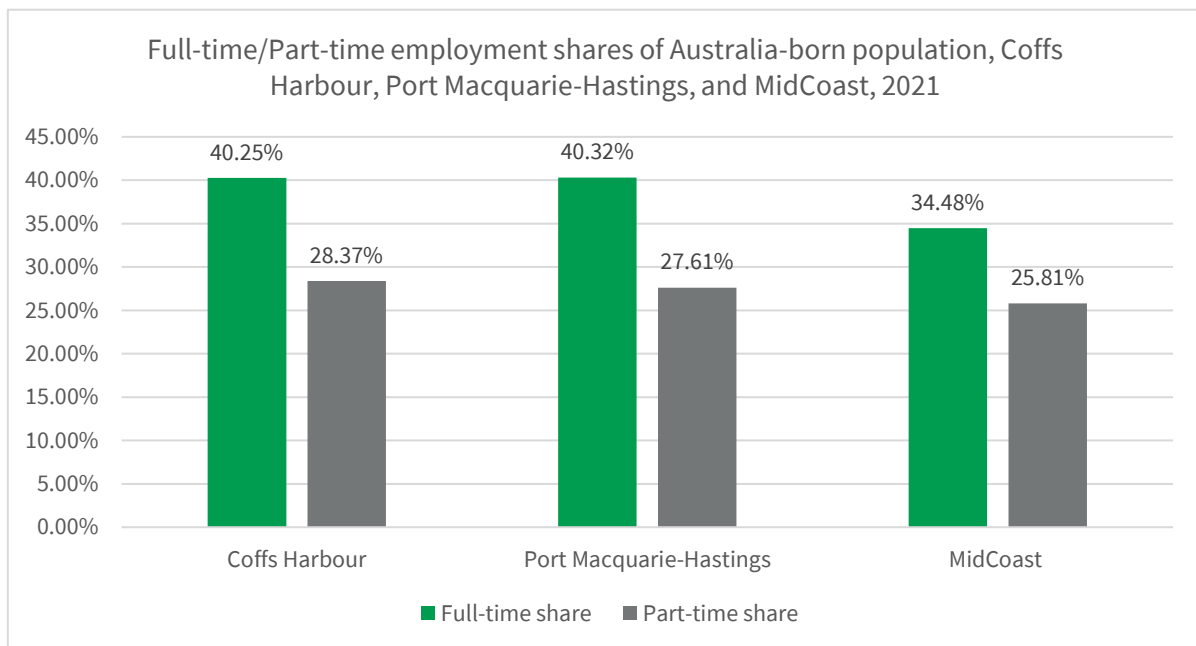


Figure 14 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of Australian-born population, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

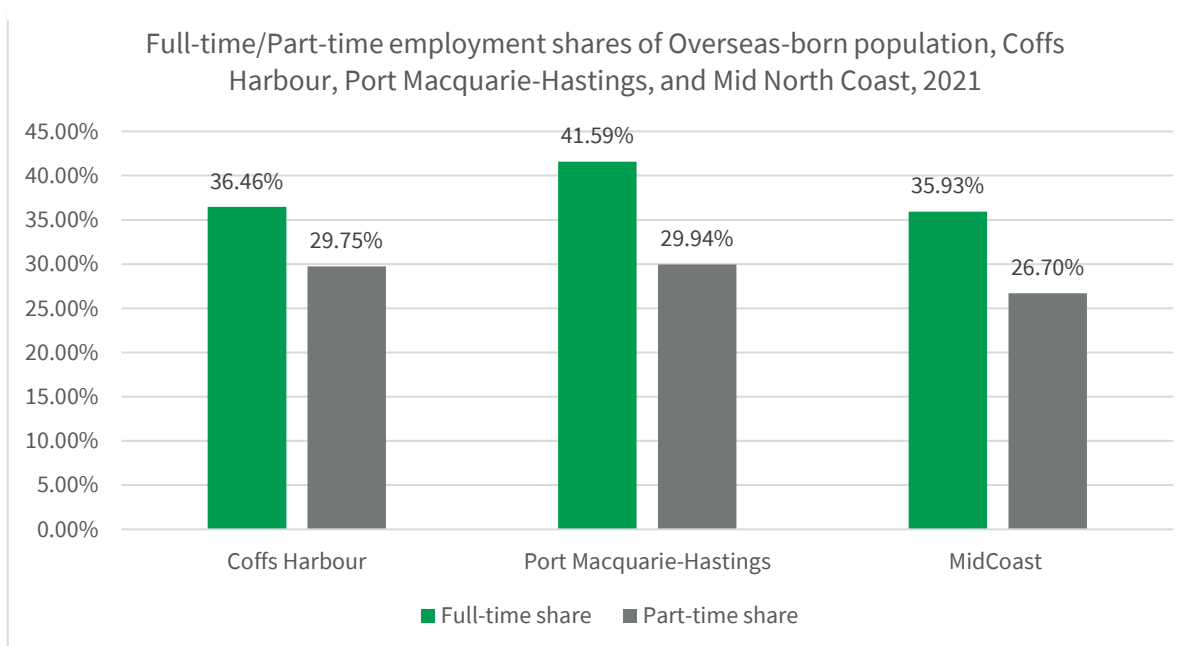


Figure 15 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of Overseas-born population, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

## INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION

Across all three LGAs, the proportion of both full-time and part-time workers is higher for non-Indigenous people than Indigenous people. For both groups, the share of employment in full-time employment is higher than in part-time employment. In all three LGAs regions, the disparity between full-time and part-time employment is less pronounced for the Indigenous population compared to non-Indigenous population. Additionally, the employment shares for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous population in Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings are higher than those in the MidCoast LGA.

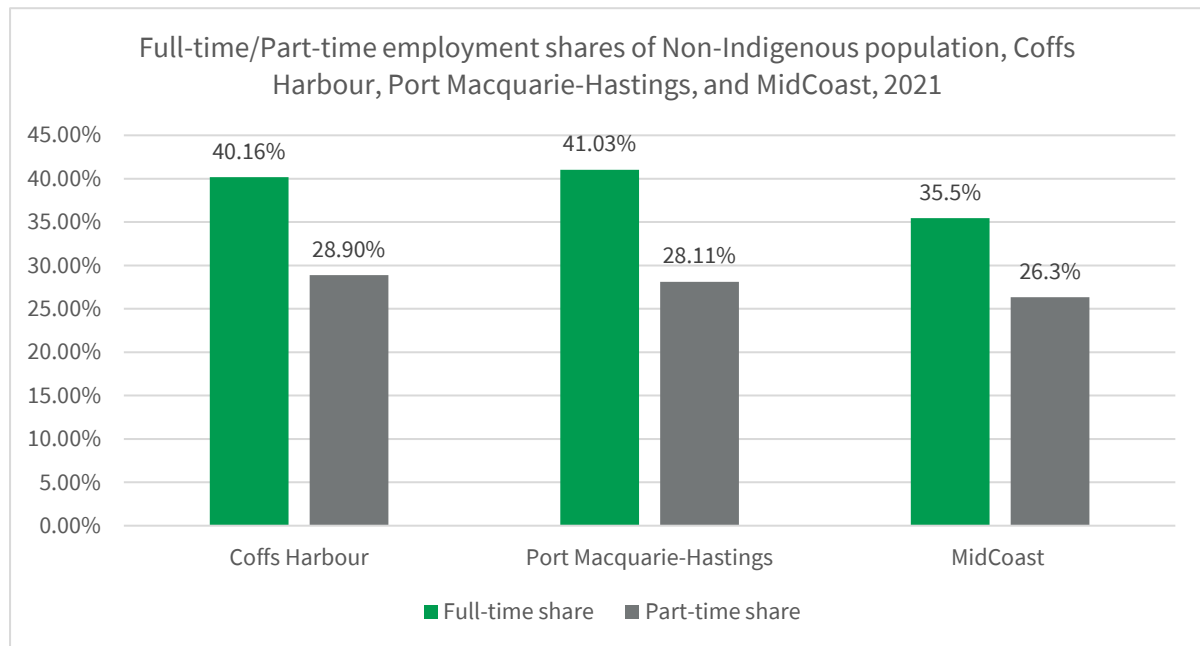


Figure 17 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of Non- Indigenous population, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

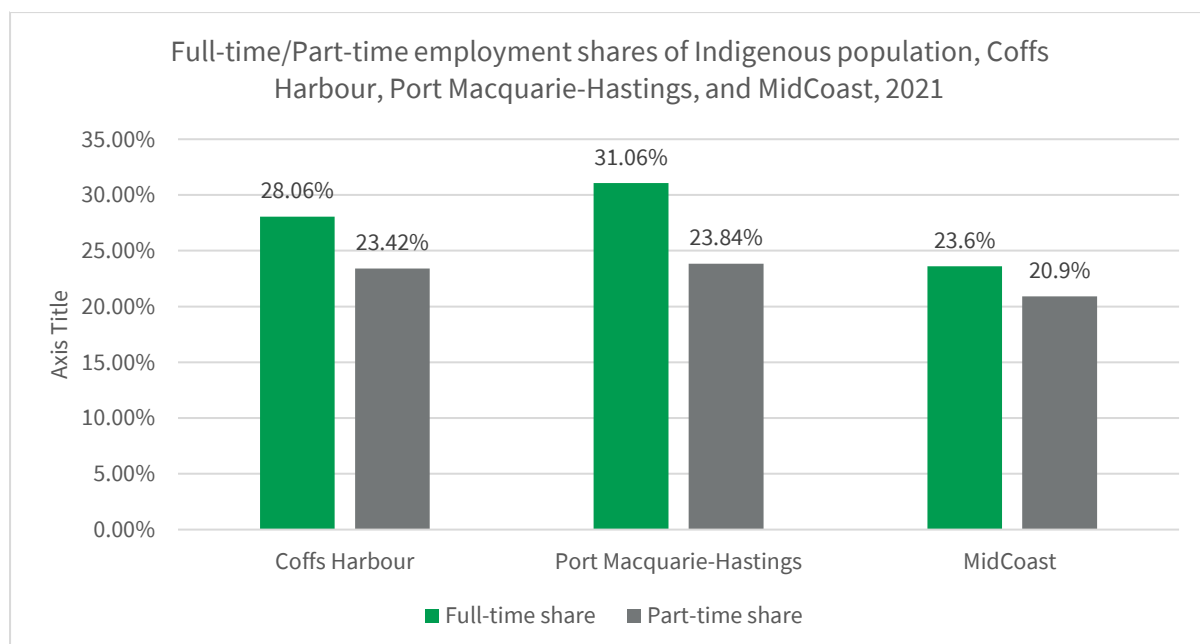


Figure 16 Full-time/Part-time employment shares of Indigenous population, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

## EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION

### OVERALL EMPLOYMENT

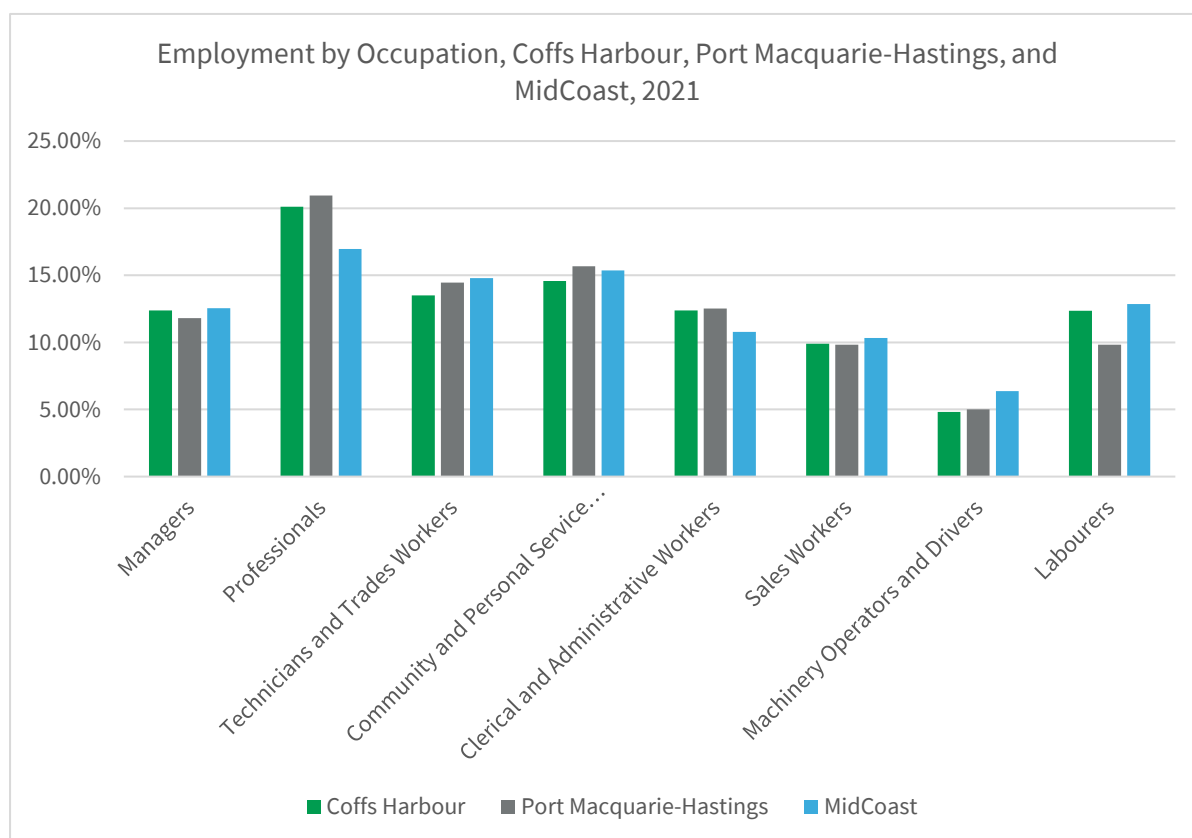


Figure 18 Shares of employment by occupation, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

The largest share of employment across the three LGAs is in Professional occupations, followed by Community and Personal Service Workers and Technicians and Trades. The Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA has the largest proportion of Professionals, Community and Personal Service Workers, and Clerical and Administrative Workers, while the MidCoast has the largest proportion of Managers, Technicians and Trades, Sales Workers, Machinery Operators and Labourers.

## AGE

Occupations appear to follow distinct age patterns. For Example, Managers, Clerical and Administrative Workers and Machinery Operators and Drivers appear to have ageing workforces. That is, the age-profile shows an increasing proportion of workers as the age increases. In comparison, Professional, Technicians and Trades, Community and Personal Service Workers, Sales Workers and Labourers largely show a declining proportion of workers as the age increases. Some occupations show specific age-related peaks, such as Sales Workers, Community and Personal Service Workers and Labourers, which have a high proportion of 10-19 year olds across all three LGAs. There does appear to be a high proportion of Managers aged 70 and over, however this is likely due to there being only a smaller number of people employed in this age range.

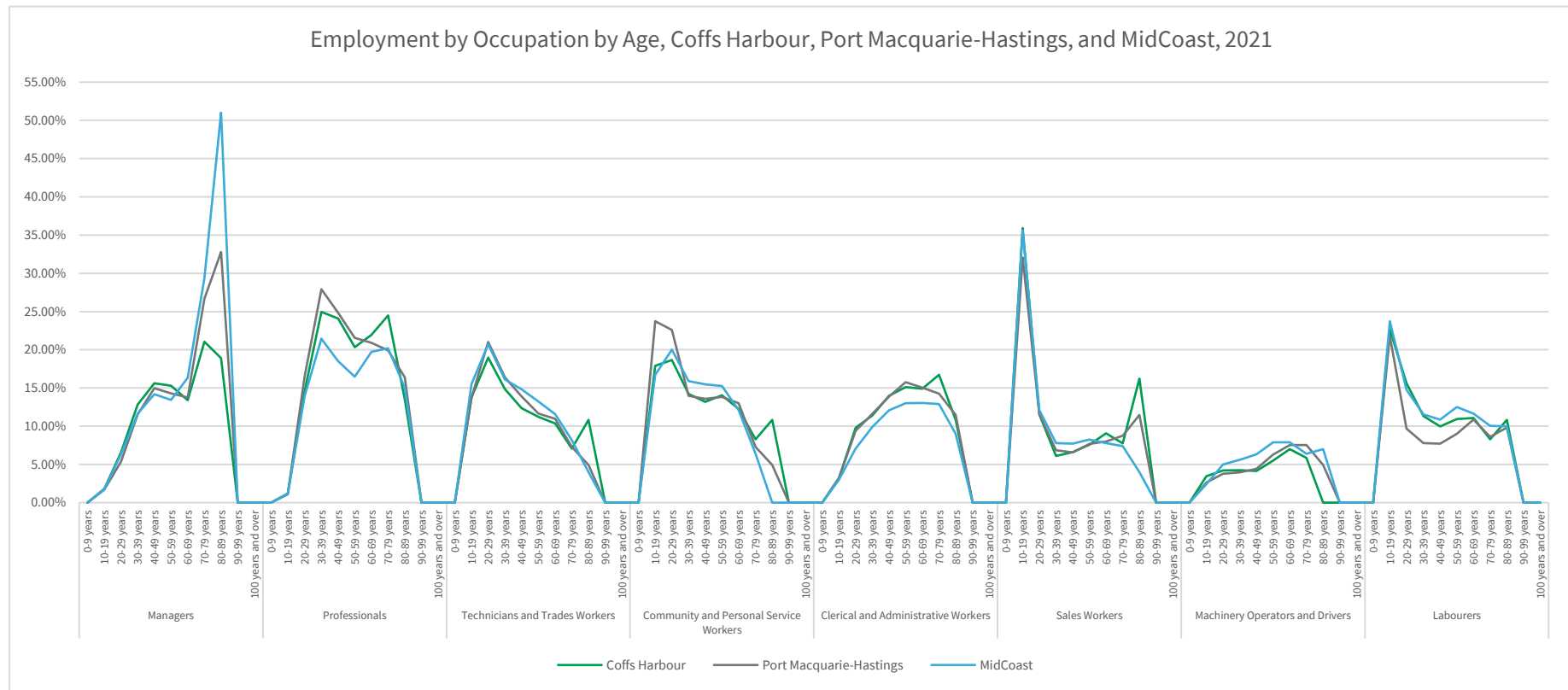


Figure 19 Shares of employment by occupation by Age, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

## GENDER

The largest proportion of males employed in these three LGAs are in Technician and Trades occupations, while females are largely employed in Professional and Community and Personal Services Worker occupations. Similarly, in the Port Macquarie- Hastings and Coffs Harbour LGAs, females are most commonly employed in Professional occupations. In the MidCoast LGA, a marginally larger proportion are employed in Community and Personal Service Worker occupations. In comparison, males in all three LGAs are largely employed as Technician and Trades, followed closely by Labourers and Professional.

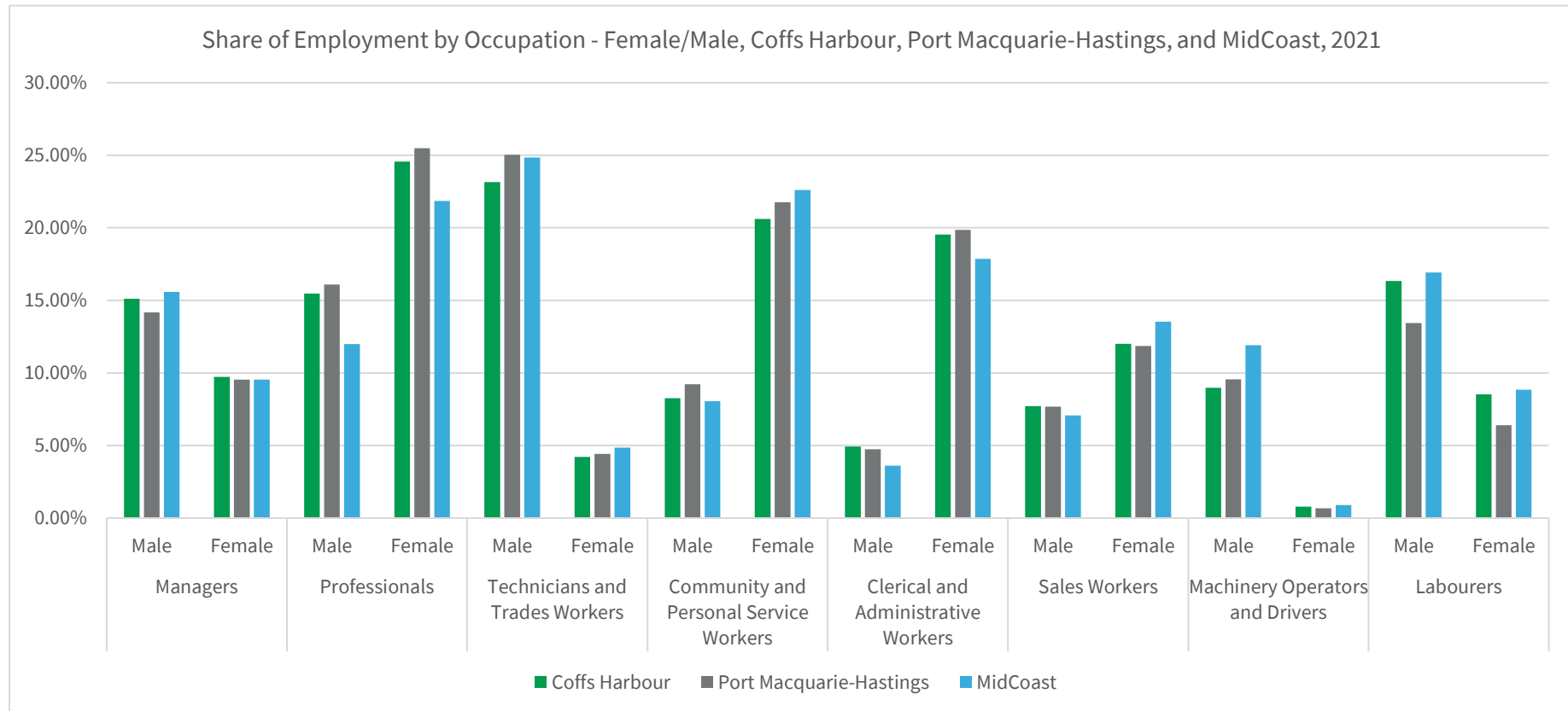


Figure 20 Shares of employment by occupation by gender, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021



## AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS BORN

Both overseas and Australian-born workers in these three LGAs are most commonly employed in Professional occupations. Overseas born workers are employed in greater proportions as Professionals and Managers, while Australian born people are employed as Professionals and Technicians and Trades. In comparison to Port Macquarie-Hasting and Coffs Harbour, the MidCoast LGA has the largest proportion of Australia-born Managers, Technicians and Trades, Sales Workers, and Machinery Operators and Labourers, and the largest share of overseas born Technicians and Trades and Machinery Operators.

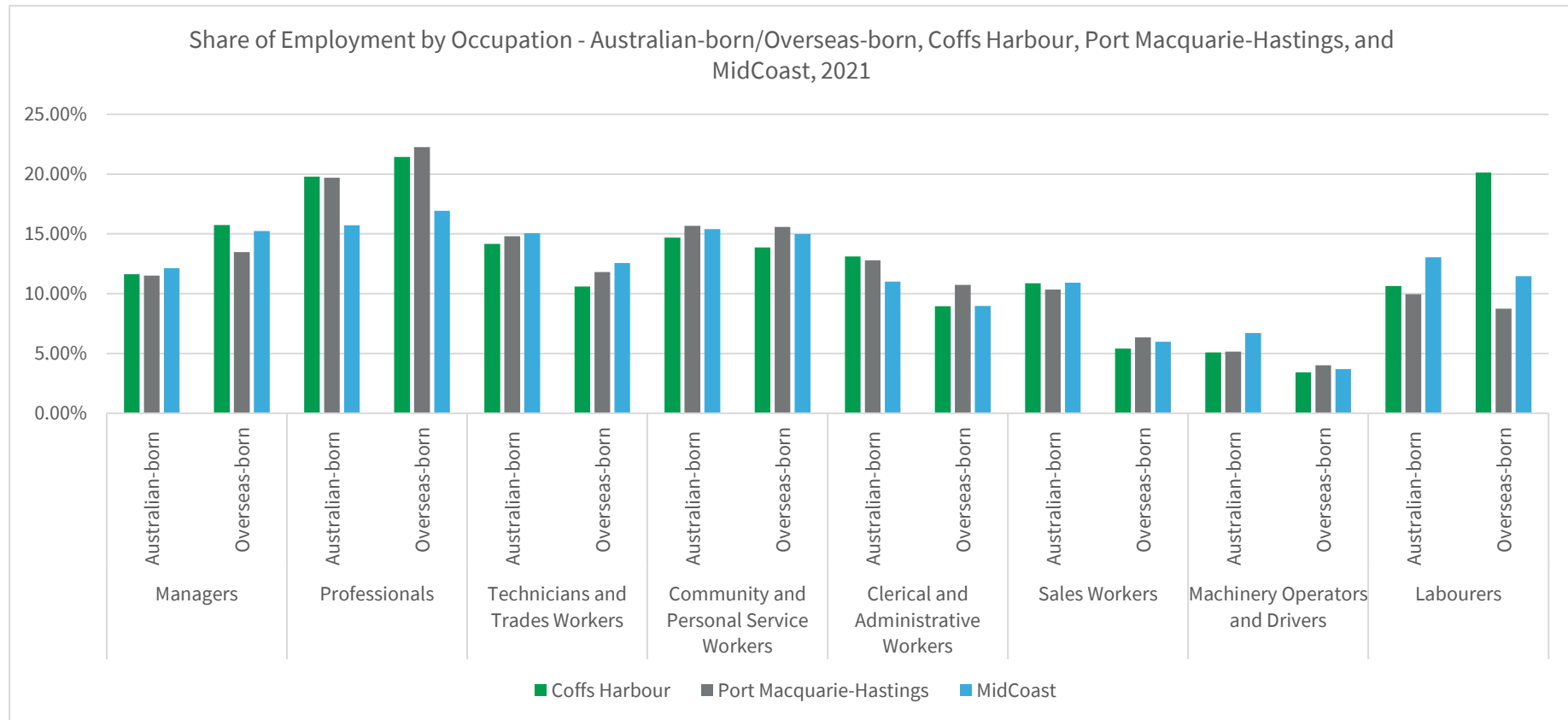


Figure 21 Shares of employment by occupation by place of birth, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

## INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

The largest proportion of Indigenous people across the three LGAs are employed in Community and Personal Service Workers and Labourer occupations, whilst for non-Indigenous people it is in Professional occupations. In comparison to Port Macquarie-Hasting and Coffs Harbour, the MidCoast LGA has the largest proportion of Non-Indigenous Managers, Sales Workers, and Machinery Operators and Labourers, and the Indigenous Sales Workers and Machinery Operators and Labourers.

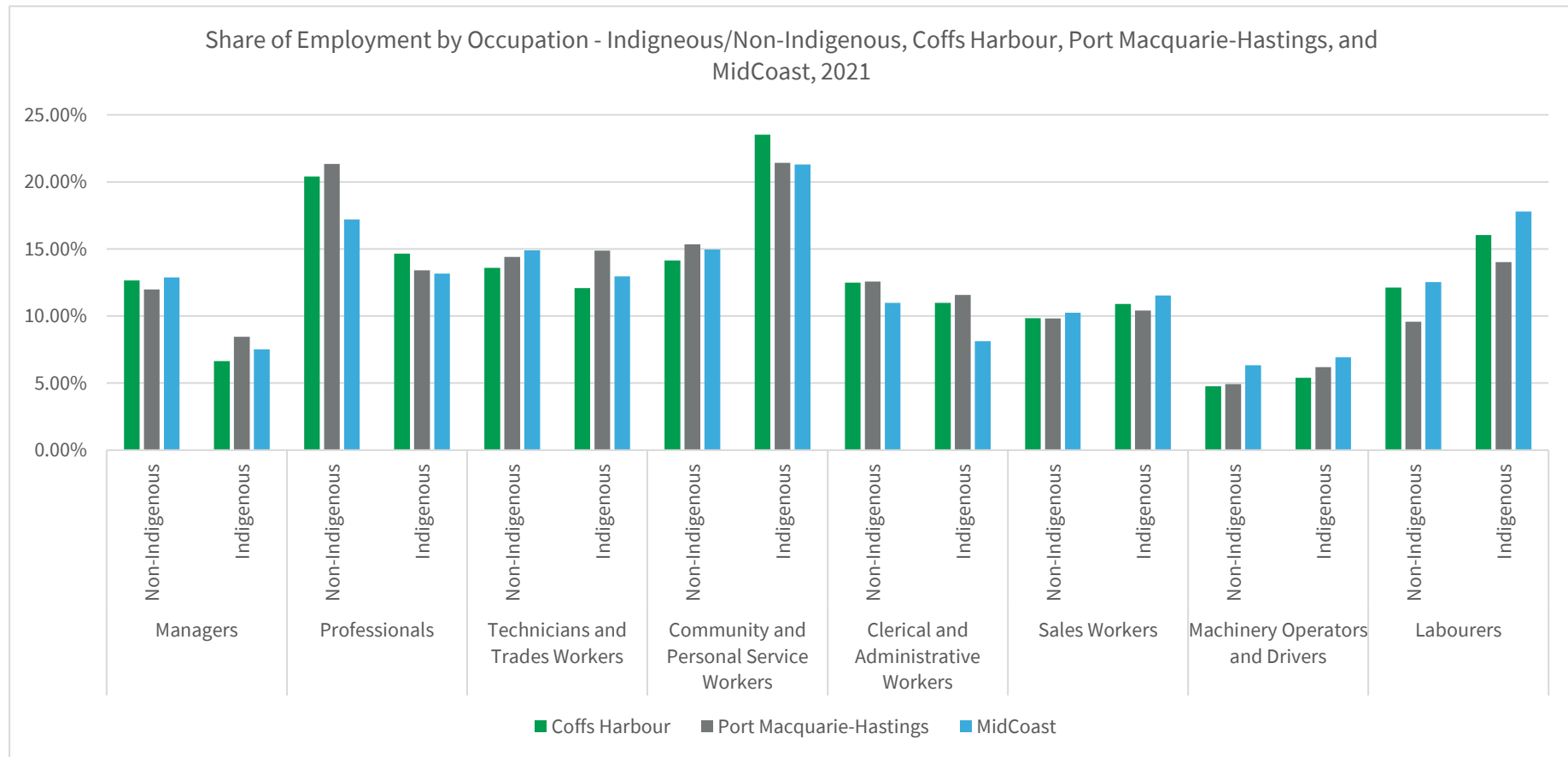


Figure 22 Shares of employment by occupation by Indigenous/Non-Indigenous population, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie-Hastings, and MidCoast, 2021

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## DISCUSSION

Consideration of labour force participation rates and other labour force factors can help to identify work patterns in a region, and across different groups in that region. In undertaking this research it is important to understand that participation rates offer limited utility as a measure for explaining why labour market patterns present in the way they do. Participation indicates that a person worked; it offers no explanation of their work patterns or the reasons for their actions and choices.

Our initial interpretation of the participation data is that regions with high participation rates might have better regional systems in place for connecting workers with work. However, further elaborations and investigations of intersectional factors (such as gender, disability, age, etc.) shaping workforce participation for people in the priority groups is needed to further understand what may be affecting these results. This issue is explored in more detail in the RAI's recent report [\*Against the Odds: Realising regional Australia's workforce potential\*](#).

Overall, the Mid North Coast RDA region has a lower participation rate than that of regional NSW and NSW as a whole, indicating that workforce participation is more of a challenge in this region. However when considering participation across the different LGAs there are important differences.

The Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA shows the most engaged labour force environment across the factors analysed in this report. This LGA has the highest rate of participation in the region and importantly has a higher rate than that of both regional NSW and NSW as a whole. This LGA also shows the highest participation rates across almost all age groups, male and female employed persons, employed people born overseas and Indigenous people. It also has higher participation rates for both newly arrived and more established migrants in the region. The LGA also has the largest proportion of younger and older people employed in both part-time and full-time work and is lending its employment environment to approximately 1,200 people from the other LGAs in this region (although also sending out 1,500 people to other LGAs in the region as well). Very similar results were also seen in Coffs Harbour, the other large urban centre in this region.

Together this indicates that the two larger centres in this region are areas that may not need the same level of or targeted workforce interventions that other LGAs in the region may in order to support labour participation. In contrast to this, the smaller LGAs in the region, specifically the Kempsey and Nambucca LGAs, appear to face the most challenges in participation and labour force across the analysed data. However, there are also important nuances across the smaller LGAs in the region.

Kempsey has the lowest participation rate across the LGAs, substantially lower than that of regional NSW and NSW as a whole. It also has the lowest participation rate for Indigenous people and Australia-born people, and the biggest difference in participation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and Australia-born and overseas-born people. However the LGA is also the only region with higher female participation than male participation and a higher participation rate for 45-54 year olds than 35-44 year olds. Its labour force is also largely working in the LGA although the LGA is supplying more people to the rest of the region than it is getting back. This indicates that this LGA may need to focus its efforts on workforce engagement for Australian-born, male and Indigenous population groups, and with support for local employment opportunities.

In comparison, Nambucca Valley, whilst also having a lower participation rate than that of regional NSW and NSW as a whole, has the lowest engagement in overseas born people, female workers, and people aged 55-64 years. The LGA also has a lot more people working elsewhere (45.7%), than in Kempsey (17.2%) and net losses of people to other LGAs in the region is the highest. However, the LGA also has the smallest difference between the participation of Australian-born and overseas-born people. This indicates that this LGA may wish to focus its efforts on overseas-born people (particularly those who have more recently arrived in the region), and older and female workers. Further, the combination of labour mobility and lower participation rates may indicate less workforce opportunities in this LGA than in other in the region.

The Bellingen LGA has the most mobile workforce, lending approximately a third of its workforce to other LGAs in the region while at the same time borrowing 844 workers from the region, overall losing a net 687 people to the rest of the region. At the same time, the participation rate in the LGA is below the averages for regional NSW and NSW as whole. Similar to Nambucca Valley, this combination of labour mobility and lower participation rates may indicate less workforce opportunities in this LGA than in others in the region. It is also the only LGA with a higher proportion of older people (55-64 years) in the workforce than younger people (15 to 24 years) and has the smallest proportion of younger people in full-time employment. As well as this, it has the biggest difference between male and female participation. This indicates that it may be valuable to focus on the employment of younger people and female workers, in the LGA.

The MidCoast LGA has a lower participation rate than that of regional NSW and NSW as a whole. However, across the labour force factors analysed in this report, this LGA sits in the middle of the LGAs in the region, although largely contributing to the lower end results. The deep dive into the MidCoast LGA has highlighted that whilst the region has a different geographic spread and lower overall proportions of people in employment (both full-time and part-time), comparisons with its more urban neighbours of Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie-Hastings show some important similarities. Professional occupations account for the largest share of employment across the three LGAs, male employment is consistently higher for full-time employment, whilst female employment is higher for part-time work. However, there are some differences seen when employment in different occupations is considered against different demographic groups, largely around the occupations of employment – with the MidCoast LGA consistently employing larger proportions of Machinery Operators, Labourers, Sales Workers, and Community and Personal Service Workers. This difference in employment mix is likely to underpin some of the variations in participation rates noted earlier.

However, regional differences are unlikely to explain all of the differences in participation rates across these demographic groups in all areas. In this region, female and Indigenous participation is almost universally lower in comparison to the averages for regional NSW and NSW as a whole.

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## CONCLUSION

This analysis of labour force participation and mobility in the RDA Mid North Coast region has highlighted that further local (qualitative) investigation would be beneficial to understand different aspects of labour force participation across this region.

Overall, the region's labour force participation rate of 15 to 64 year olds is below that of both the average of regional NSW and NSW as a whole, at 61.1%. The region in particular shows much lower participation rates for female and Indigenous groups. However, there are also significant regional nuances in this analysis.

The Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA and the Coffs Harbour LGA show the most engaged labour force environment across the factors analysed in this report, with on-par or higher levels of participation across most indicators in comparison to the NSW rates. This indicates that these two larger and more urbanised LGAs may offer some insight into positive connections with the labour market.

In contrast, the Kempsey, Nambucca Valley, MidCoast and Bellingen LGAs show lower participation rates, but with distinct differences for each of the demographic groups. Further investigations and support in Kempsey may need to focus on workforce engagement for Australian-born, male and Indigenous population groups, and with support for local employment opportunities. While in Nambucca Valley, further research should consider overseas-born people (particularly those who have more recently arrived in the region), and older and female workers, and local workforce opportunities. In the Bellingen LGA it may be valuable to focus on the employment of younger people and female workers, in region. Bellingen has a relatively high participation rate for older workers, indicating there may be some lessons here for other LGAs.

Further investigations could explore why these regional differences are present in the region – looking to identify the factors that are influencing the connection between different groups in this diverse region and the labour market.