

Australians Marginalised From Decent Work

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Background Paper

ACTU CONGRESS 2003

Quick Fact:

Figures from the 2001 Census indicate that the unemployment rate for the Indigenous population is 20%. Without the CDEP Scheme it would be 34%.

In 1997-99, life expectancy at birth for Indigenous males was 56 years, and for Indigenous females 63 years. In comparison, the life expectancy of males in the total Australian population is 76 years and for females it is 82 years.

CONGRESS 2000

1. The Congress 2000 policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples recognised as fundamental that justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and reconciliation, will be achieved only on the basis of the principles of recognition of rights unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as our First Peoples, acceptance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination, and acceptance of the central importance of the right to negotiate.
2. The policy recognised that the development of an effective partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is critical to the process of addressing the economic and social disadvantage and injustices faced by Indigenous peoples.
3. The policy noted that the ACTU needed to:

work actively within its own structures and to actively assist affiliates to develop and implement appropriate mechanisms to ensure the needs, aspirations and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and strongly advocated.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE CONGRESS 2000

4. Indigenous Conferences were held in 2001 and 2002. The Indigenous Committee was reconvened and is active.

ISSUES FOR CONGRESS 2003

5. The economic and social disadvantage faced by Indigenous peoples continues.

Employment

6. Figures from the 2001 Census indicate that the unemployment rate for the Indigenous population is 20%. Without the CDEP Scheme it would be 34%.

Health

7. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that:
 - In 1997-99, life expectancy at birth for Indigenous males was 56 years, and for Indigenous females 63 years. In comparison, the life expectancy of males in the total Australian population is 76 years and for females it is 82 years.
 - Mortality rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were higher than those recorded in the general population for almost all causes of death and for every age group.
 - Indigenous people experience lower levels of access to health services than the general population.
 - Babies of Indigenous mothers were nearly twice as likely as babies of non-Indigenous mothers to be of low birthweight, affecting health in childhood and throughout adult life. Babies of Indigenous mothers were twice as likely to die at birth and during the early post-natal phase.

Education

8. Figures from the 2001 Census indicate that:
 - The highest level of schooling completed for persons aged 15 years and over:

	Indigenous Persons	Non Indigenous Persons
Year 8 or below	17%	9%
Year 9 or equivalent	14%	8%
Year 10 or equivalent	27%	25%

Year 11 or equivalent	9%	10%
Year 12 or equivalent	17%	39%
Still at school	5%	3%
Did not go to school	3%	1%
Not stated	8%	5%

- 15% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over has a stated qualification within the Australian Standard Classification of Education compared to 36% of the Non-Indigenous population aged 15 years or over.
- Of those who have a stated qualification within the Australian Standard Classification of Education, 64% of the qualifications held by Indigenous persons are at Certificate level compared to 45% for Non-Indigenous persons; 15% of the qualifications held by Indigenous persons are Bachelor Degrees compared with 28% for Non Indigenous persons.

Income and Housing

9. Figures from the 2001 Census indicate that:

- 28% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over have a weekly income in the range \$120-\$199, and 24 per cent have a weekly income in the range \$200-\$399.
- Only 32% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households are owner occupier households, compared to a rate of 71% for Non-Indigenous households.
- While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 2% of the population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households account for 22% of all households living in improvised dwellings.

10 The objective of policy arising from Congress 2003 is to encourage affiliates to work closely with the Indigenous Committee to implement the policy priorities, particularly the recruitment and organising of Indigenous members, and to ensure that the needs, aspirations and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and strongly advocated.