

Young Workers

Developments since 2009

Since Congress 2009 the ACTU Youth Committee has reconvened to work towards including the views and the voice of young people in the ACTU and the broader union movement.

Key Issues

The Organising Young Workers policy is aimed at addressing a number of key issues that are facing young workers and young people more broadly. These issues are outlined below:

Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

- Youth unemployment, for those aged 15-24, for March 2012 is 11.7%, more than double the overall rate of 5.2%.
- Teenage unemployment is high, those aged between 15-19 years of age is at 16.8% for March 2012 more than three times the unemployment rate of 5.2% for the overall labour force.
- According to research by the Foundation for Young Australians, more than one quarter of young adults are not in full-time work or study in 2011. The number of discouraged job seekers has increased.¹
- Also of concern for younger workers is underemployment, young workers tend to miss out on full-time jobs, especially in tighter economic times. The underemployment rate for February 2012 those aged between 15 and 24 is 13.6% compared to 7.3% for the total labour market.
- With the number of teenagers in full-time work dropping from 550,000 in 1981 to 200,000 in 2011. Some of this can be attributed to the increase in the numbers of young people in full-time study, but not all.

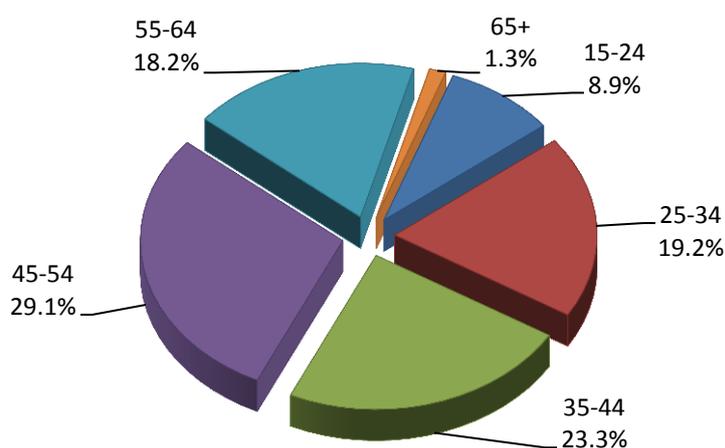
¹ Foundation for Young Australians; How Young People are Faring, 2011 pg 31-35

Insecure Work

- Australia has one of the highest rates of casual work in the OECD, only 60% of workers are engaged in full-time or part-time ongoing employment. Almost a quarter of all employees on Australia, over 2 million workers – are casual employees.
- The ACTU Working Australia Census results show that young people are bearing the brunt of the growth in insecure working arrangements. Of the total Census sample of 40,113 workers 14.2% of respondents were working in insecure or non-permanent arrangements, of this group close to a third were aged under 35.
- Of those Census respondents aged under 25, 41.6% were working in some form of non-permanent work, compared to 11.6% for those aged over 35. That means that young workers were close to four times more likely to be in insecure arrangements.

Unions and Labour Market Participation

Union Membership by Age Group 2010²



- Approximately one quarter of union members are part of Generation Y. Of the nearly two million union members in Australia, 8.9% are aged between 15 and 24, and 19.2% are aged between 25 and 34.
- Of all those employed, on either a full-time or part-time basis, those aged under 35 represent 39.3%, a significant proportion of the employed workforce.
- The industries where young people are most likely to be employed are Retail Trade at 14.2%, Accommodation and Food Services at 10.7% and Construction at 9.7%. As the graph below shows, there are major differences between industries in terms of part-time and full-time employment. With Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services the main industries that employ on a part-time basis. Whereas full-time employment was more likely to be found in the Construction, Manufacturing and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industries.

² 6310.0 - Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, Aug 2010, ABS

Youth Wages and Superannuation

- Youth Wages in awards affect young workers under the age of 20. Currently under the Retail Award and most modern awards workers aged 18 earn only 70% of an adult wage, those aged below that earn even less.
- Superannuation is also not extended in full to those aged under 18 years of age. With it only available to those working more than 35 hours a week. Excluding young people working a full-time load across several jobs or working irregular hours.

Occupational Health and Safety

- According to Worksafe Victoria young workers aged between 15 and 24 are more likely to experience a workplace injury than any other age group in Victoria.³ SafeWork SA also reports that young people are more likely to be injured at work and are often unfamiliar with workplace hazards, safety procedures and their rights.⁴
- Young workers are a specific and often more vulnerable group in the workplace and this may create the circumstance where young workers do not feel comfortable speaking out or seeking compensation if injured.

Education and Training

- Given the high number of young people that are engaged in formal education and training, this area has particular influence on the over wellbeing of many young Australians. Nearly half (47%) of all school leavers continued in further education and 29.2% of young adults (aged between 20-24) were in full-time study.⁵
- However education is becoming an increasing burden on young people. With educational costs often high and the support from government programs insufficient.

Health, Homelessness and Poverty

One of the main causes of death for those aged under 25 is suicide. Mental health and access to mental health services are pressing issues for young people, especially young people that are geographically or socio-economically isolated.

There is a need for the continued improvement in mental health strategies that include early intervention and meeting service needs of young people. One in four young people aged between 16 and 24 are living with a mental disorder and one in three experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress.⁶

³<http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/wsinternet/WorkSafe/Home/Safety%20and%20Prevention/Health%20And%20Safety%20Topics/Young%20Workers/Info%20for%20young%20workers/>

⁴ <http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/youth/>

⁵ Foundation for Young Australians; How Young People are Faring, 2011 pg 30

⁶ National Strategy for Young Australians

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/OfficeForYouth/YouthPrograms/Documents/NatStrat.pdf>

One in six Australians aged between 15 and 24 is living in poverty and young people are vastly over-represented in the statistics of homelessness. Relationship breakdown, family conflict and domestic violence and abuse are often cited as the main causes for this. Substance abuse and mental illness are also common among young homeless people.⁷

Agenda 2012-2015

The main priority areas of the Youth Committee and the Youth Policy over the upcoming years are to work in the priority areas below:

- Leadership/mentoring of young worker/apprentice members;
- Development of graduate members and member structures;
- Recruitment and communication methods tailored to young workers;
- Education of young workers, including future members of school age;
- Campaigns with a focus on the pay and conditions of young workers.

⁷ <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/UserFiles/File/Fact%20sheets/Fact%20Sheets%202011-12/Homelessness%20&%20Young%20People%202011-12.pdf>