

An Agreement Between  
the Australian Council of  
Trade Unions and the  
Australian Council of  
Social Service

Australian Jobs  
**SUMMIT**  
Canberra, September 2022

# Background

## **Aims and purpose**

The Australian Jobs Summit provides a unique opportunity for the representatives of employers and employees to come together and collaborate for the betterment of the industry and the workforce.

In that spirit, the ACTU and ACOSS agree that achieving and sustaining full employment should be a core goal of the Summit and the Employment White Paper. Full employment has different meanings but at its heart we agree that it means that people can obtain the jobs and paid working hours they need, the quality of jobs and real income levels are improving along with productivity, and the benefits are fairly shared.

In this agreement, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and ACOSS outline our shared policy ideas to help reach this vision.

# The Parties to the Agreement and Who We Represent

## **The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)**

The ACTU is the peak national representative body of the union movement in Australia. The ACTU provides a singular voice for our 43 affiliated unions and state-based trades and labour councils, which represent more than 1.7 million union members in industries and regions across the country.

We believe in cooperation and collaboration to build a strong, growing, productive economy for the twenty-first century which helps all Australians achieve their aspirations. This economy can only be built if working people have a strong representative voice in the debates that will shape Australia's future.

## **The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)**

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national voice in support of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality and the peak body for the community services and civil society sector.

ACOSS consists of a network of approximately 4000 organisations and individuals across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

Our vision is an end to poverty in all its forms; economies that are fair, sustainable and resilient; and communities that are just, peaceful and inclusive.

## Introduction

The Australian Jobs and Skills Summit provides a unique opportunity for the representatives of employers, workers and civil society to come together and collaborate in the national interest.

In that spirit, the ACTU and ACOSS agree that achieving and sustaining full employment should be the guiding framework of the Summit and Employment White Paper of the Summit and the Employment White Paper.

This agreement advances policy proposals to assist with achieving this in a number of priority areas. They represent common ground between the parties, and do not represent the complete policy positions of either party.

The ACTU and ACOSS are also parties to an agreement with the BCA on policies to sustain full employment.

### 1. Achieving and sustaining full employment

Full employment has different meanings but at its heart we agree that it means that people can obtain the jobs and paid working hours they need, the quality of jobs and real income levels are improving along with productivity, and the benefits are fairly shared.

We agree that Australia should not forego the unique opportunity we now have to achieve and sustain full employment, which we have not experienced for the last 50 years.

To get there we need to:

- a. Reduce inflation in fairer ways than the blunt instruments of aggressive hikes in interest rates or fiscal austerity policies, for example by:
  - Increasing the supply of social, public and affordable housing and urban planning reforms to increase the supply of homes;
  - Better regulation of energy supply and the taxation of windfall profits as Australia transitions to a renewable energy economy.

- b. Remove barriers to participation in the labour market and strengthen workforce skills by:
  - A shared commitment to reduce long-term unemployment as outlined below;
  - Establishing robust workforce planning systems (national, industry and regional) led by a newly established Jobs and Skills Australia to broaden people's career opportunities, ease labour and skills shortages, and meet emerging workforce needs; and
  - Increased investment in quality training, including through TAFE and public and community providers.

## 2. Removing barriers to employment participation and lifting people out of poverty

Despite recent increases in job vacancies, barriers to employment remain for many people, with 760,000 people who have had to rely on unemployment payments for over a year, including younger and older people, First Nations people, women caring for a child alone or with unequal caring responsibilities, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and those living in employment-deprived regional and remote areas.

Too many people are left behind and pushed into poverty by inadequate income support payments.

Women's participation in paid employment is hampered by the one-sided reliance on them to care for children and other family members, a growing gender pay gap, workplace discrimination and a labour market that fails to provide secure employment with paid hours that allow both women and men to combine paid work and care.

We call for:

- a. JobSeeker and related income support payments to be lifted to pension levels, from \$46 to \$70 a day;
- b. A shared commitment to reduce long-term unemployment through investment in programs that make a difference, including a flexible Jobs and Training Offer for people on unemployment payments for more than 12 months.
- c. Reform of employment services to move away from the present punitive compliance-driven approach towards genuine help based on individual circumstances and labour market conditions, including referrals to suitable

- employment, quality vocational and foundation skills training, and other help with barriers to employment;
- d. Progressively introduce a system of free universal and quality childcare;
  - e. Tackle all forms of discrimination and harassment in the workplace;
  - f. Replacement of the Community Development Program in remote First Nations communities with a scheme that is genuinely co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled organisations and that includes a substantial paid employment component through the establishment of a Remote Jobs Investment Fund;
  - g. Reform of the Supported Wage System to ensure it does not further contribute to inequality, exploitation and discrimination of people with disability;
  - h. A shift in the focus of workforce-oriented immigration policy towards permanent skilled migration rather than temporary work visas, and better regulation to prevent under-payment and mistreatment of people on temporary visas, especially in entry level jobs.

### 3. Improving our workplace relations system.

We support a workplace relations system that is fair and provides equal protection for all.

The system should actively support sustained real wage growth, together with income support and family payments that are benchmarked to wage movements as well as consumer price movements (as is the case now with pensions but *not* Jobseeker Payment or Family Tax Benefits), so that the benefits of improvements in productivity are widely and fairly shared.

It should be fair and simple.

The Award system and national minimum wage should act as a genuine, relevant safety net that ensures no one slips through the cracks.

The gender pay gap should be progressively eliminated.

The emerging 'gig economy' in care and community services should be better regulated.

The enterprise bargaining system is not working for millions of workers in the care sector and community services or their employers. It is very challenging, especially in the many smaller organisations across the sector, for unions and employers to use

this complex, rigid and time-consuming process to negotiate pay and conditions for workers. That leaves the vast majority of workers in the sector completely reliant on the Award system alone.

We need a fairer and simpler system of enterprise bargaining that could allow organisations to bargain together in multi-enterprise agreements to reach outcomes that better support care and community organisations and their employees. This must be underpinned by public funding arrangements that leave neither employers nor workers out of pocket. The details of how this would work in practice matter and our organisations are committed to working together to explore the best ways to reform workplace laws to deliver this.

Often the victims of deliberate underpayment of wages are workers in low paid employment, who are the least able to absorb the impact of lost wages. We need mechanisms that allow workers to quickly recover unpaid wages without being dragged through a long legal battle.

#### 4. The care economy and community services

The care economy employs about two million workers, the majority of whom are women, and it will be the largest creator of new jobs in the future. Yet it faces tremendous challenges in recruiting and retaining staff and providing quality care – challenges that could worsen as demand for care services increases.

We must put care and the needs of service users at the centre of care services: including the recruitment, training, pay and conditions for care workers, the funding of services, and quality assurance and contractual arrangements.

Too many care workers are underpaid, over-stretched, under-valued and lack security of employment or sufficient paid hours and security of employment in their main job. These factors contribute to high stress and staff turnover and reduce service standards.

Market-driven models of public funding and service provision often undermine service quality, transparency and cost-effectiveness, as funds are diverted from services to profits.

We call on the Federal Government to address these significant challenges by ensuring that people receive the quality care, support and advocacy they need, the community sector workforce has good quality jobs, and this is underpinned by adequate public funding.

Longer term funding for all sectors in the care economy, and the public revenue required to sustain this, should also be considered within the Government's White Paper.