



# ORGANISING YOUNG WORKERS

## Introduction

1. Australian trade unions face particular challenges in engaging, protecting and empowering young workers.
2. Young workers are more likely to be engaged in low skill, low paid employment, with little or no power to bargain directly with their employer over wages and conditions. This makes young workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation and ill treatment.
3. With the increasing casualisation of the workforce and the concurrent rise in youth unemployment and underemployment, it is harder than ever for young people to be engaged in decent, permanent, paid work. This means it is more important than ever that young people have trade unions representing their interests.
4. Young people are key to the future of the union movement and their participation in union activities should be nurtured and encouraged.
5. In an active effort to engage with the barriers preventing young people from accessing safe and secure work Australian Union's recognise the disproportionate impact of bullying, harassment, underpayment and discrimination on young women, young indigenous people, young people with a disability, young LGBTIQA people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In order to change unsatisfactory institutional practices such as misogyny and homophobia, there needs to be more education provided to young people about their rights at work and more sanctions put in place for dodgy employers.

## Actu youth committee

6. Australian unions will engage with young workers across the movement through the facilitation and resourcing of an ACTU Youth Committee, with a commitment from affiliates to participate and engage in the work of the Committee.
7. The Youth Committee will focus on nationally co-ordinated action in a number of priority areas:
  - a) Organising and communication methods tailored to young workers;
  - b) Education of young workers;
  - c) Campaigns with a focus on the pay and conditions of young workers;
  - d) Leadership and mentoring of young unionists.
  - e) Work health and safety issues pertinent to young workers.
8. The Youth Committee will focus on highlighting issues affecting young workers and ensuring that the movement responds appropriately. The Youth Committee will ensure that young people are a focus of union campaigning efforts.

9. The Youth Committee will ensure that best practice organising and engagement strategies are shared throughout the movement through mechanisms such as:
  - a) Young Worker Conferences & Forums, including specific Apprentice Conferences;
  - b) Union internships;
  - c) Mentoring programmes.
10. In order to ensure that young people feature prominently in ACTU and union planning, and to gain a better understanding of the experiences unions and young people have with each other, Australian unions will conduct a Young People in Unions survey. The results will be presented at Congress 2024 and will be critical in guiding the ACTU and unions' responses to the critical need of organising young workers. It is intended that this survey be reproduced every three years so that the union movement can track its progress.

## The changing nature of work

11. Congress acknowledges that young workers experience wage theft and other threats from the gig economy at higher rates than older workers. Young people are often employed in insecure and precarious work and are particularly affected by the growth of the cash economy, where they are often paid cash-in-hand and miss out on important safety net entitlements such as personal/carers leave.
12. Australian unions will continue to campaign for more secure employment. Casual employment is most common among young workers and many young people are finding themselves in casual jobs for many years and are struggling to transition from full-time study to secure full-time employment. Unions will continue to advocate for training pathways and casual conversion clauses to enable young people to transition from insecure work into permanent employment.
13. Congress supports the introduction of measures in awards and EBAs to protect young workers from insecure work. This includes casual conversion clauses with an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' approach, and the introduction of portable leave entitlements, as well as ensuring existing employees are offered more hours before employers hire new staff.
14. Congress calls upon the government to fund incentives for young apprentices and trainees, for example, through tools allowances and sign-on bonuses for apprentices to meet cost of living pressures.
15. Congress encourages all affiliates to:
  - a) Focus on recruiting young people in precarious work and working with them to achieve job security if they so wish;
  - b) Bargain for automatic casual conversion clauses in all EBAs; and
  - c) Investigate and pursue instances where young workers are being paid cash in hand and are not receiving their entitlements.

## Pay and conditions

16. Australian unions will continue to advocate for improvements in pay and working conditions for young workers and to develop opportunities for young people to build capacity to campaign around these issues.
17. Unions will continue to campaign for the removal of youth wages, particularly for those aged 18 and over. Where awards and agreements continue to contain youth wages, steps should be taken to remove them on the grounds that they are discriminatory and fail to take into account young workers' actual skills, experience, and length of service.

18. Congress acknowledges that workers under 26 are the first generation likely to be living with worse economic conditions than their parents. They are low-paid, as they are often in their first job in retail and other industries. They are at the coal face of wage stagnation, being subject to cuts in penalty rates and delays to implementation of the minimum wage.
19. Congress notes that the current superannuation system discriminates against young workers and it is not paid to workers under 18 unless working at least 30 hours per week. With the compounding effect of superannuation, even a small amount earned at a young age will significantly boost retirement earnings.
20. Unions will fight for superannuation to be paid on every dollar earned and removing any minimum hours of work to be a criteria for being eligible to receive superannuation.
21. Congress will also engage with young workers on superannuation and Congress commits that Australian Unions will explore ways to improve the financial literacy of young workers and to advocate in relation to the superannuation issues affecting young workers in Australia.
22. Australian unions will continue to advocate for an increase in the minimum wage for young people on apprentice and trainee wages, noting that the current wages still remain too low to provide a decent standard of living.
23. Young workers make up a high proportion of workers in industries which are insecure and susceptible to underpayment of wages and conditions. Congress supports improved measures to educate and empower young workers to be able to identify and claim from their employer any underpayment of wages or non-provision of other work related rights and entitlements. Congress also calls for the establishment of a small claims division in the Federal Jurisdiction for an easier resolution of underpayments for workers.
24. Congress notes that many young workers are Award reliant and paid the minimum wage. Congress will ensure that the needs of young workers are addressed in Australian Unions and ACTU submissions to the AWR. Congress also encourages affiliates to consider and address the particular needs of young workers in bargaining processes..
25. Congress calls for tax reform focussed on fairness for current and future generations of young workers, ensuring young workers don't shoulder the burden of the growing national debt. Congress also supports the establishment of relationships with tax specialists for the developing comprehensive tax policy.
26. Congress calls for young workers to be represented in the process of determining economic reform measures to ensure that the interests of young workers are appropriately considered.

## Representing young workers

27. Young people are more likely to change employment frequently and as a result it can be more difficult for unions to engage with and represent their interests. Unions should therefore develop specific strategies to organise young workers, including by engaging young people through the school system before they enter employment.
28. Congress resolves to explore and support new organising strategies, particularly those that integrate technology with campaigning. We note that young people are more likely to engage through social media than more traditional forms of media, and therefore unions should ensure they are fully equipped to run online campaigns and to seek to engage young workers and potential members through social media.
29. Australian unions will investigate easier joining methods, such as online application forms, and simplified fee structures for young people, which may include free or reduced membership fees.
30. Congress recommends that all affiliates appoint a Youth Contact Officer in each state branch and to publicise the contact details of the Officer so that they may be contacted with queries about joining or getting involved. Unions should have an easy point of call to personalise the membership joining process.

31. Affiliates will investigate whether it is feasible for them to backdate membership to young workers with an issue who wish to join the union in order to have their issue resolved, particularly if the worker is in a non-unionised workplace.
32. Affiliates resolve to work cooperatively to ensure that young workers who change careers or industries remain union members.

## Engagement and consultation

33. Young workers themselves are in the best position to voice their own issues and concerns, and therefore affiliates should actively attempt to engage young union members in decision making around youth-oriented campaigns and organising efforts.
34. The ACTU, TLC's and unions should ensure that any data that is collected includes their member's age and in particular age brackets under 18, 18-25, over 25 to provide analysis on issues impacting young workers.
35. The achievements of young people should be regularly showcased in union communications, publications and online content.
36. Unions should develop specific materials on workplace rights that are targeted towards young people, and should seek active input from young people in developing these materials.
37. Young people should be engaged with the union's decision making bodies, through a youth advisory committee or similar structure, with reporting directly to the union's committee of management.
38. Affiliates should consider whether to entrench these structures into the rules of their organisations, including through the possibility of mandating youth representative positions on committee structures.
39. Unions will seek to engage with young people online and through social media by:
  - a) Establishing an online community that is inclusive and engaging for younger workers through various social media platforms.
  - b) Pathways through digital platforms for young workers to participate in union led actions, including:
    - Tools to assist in organising worksites;
    - Pathways to participate more fully in the work of the Union (delegate identification, campaigns, mapping and organising).
  - c) Online educational resources for younger workers to easily learn about their rights at work and parent hubs to reach the parents of the young workers.

## Education and training

40. Unions have a fundamental role in the education of young people. This duty applies equally to both young union members and non-members.
41. Congress notes the good work that has been undertaken by various affiliates and Trades and Labour Councils to develop educational material on workplace rights, and resolves to continue to support efforts to train and educate young people, particularly during the Year 10 Work Experience requirement. Unions should establish an active presence in schools and conduct outreach activities with other formal education settings.
42. Australian unions will consider developing and undertaking specific training and educational events for young delegates, activists and members, including through the provision of an annual Young Workers Conference.

43. Australian unions will develop materials targeted towards young people to educate them on their workplace rights and safety matters, and to promote the work of unions. These materials will be made available to all affiliates.
44. Recognising that young people are particularly vulnerable to workplace injuries and incidents, young people should be educated on health and safety issues and should be encouraged to be involved as Health and Safety Representatives or through their workplace health and safety committee.
45. Congress recognises the importance of cadetships/traineeships/apprenticeships as critical methods of entry to the workforce for many young people. Unions will continue to advocate for and defend these pathways into work and will work to assist young people to access them.
46. Unions should also advocate for a comprehensive and recognised training program for young people aimed at helping them find secure work including:
  - a) A skills and qualifications framework which incorporates the necessary technical skills to navigate the growth of digitisation, automation, and predictive analytics in work.
  - b) The incorporation of cognitive and collaborative skills such as training in leadership (management) and physical and psycho-social health such as (unreasonable workloads, bullying, harassment, customer abuse and violence).
  - c) Embedding the value of such training and qualifications as required competencies and as such enable workers to be better compensated for costs and time spent on study, particularly through Enterprise Agreements and industry awards.
  - d) Ensuring training is accessible through improved funding arrangements and wage subsidies, there is flexibility for school-aged students to change pathways and for regional and low socio-economic young people to gain greater access.

## Leadership development

47. Young people have the capacity, skills and vision to act as leaders in their workplaces and communities. Young people should be given appropriate support and encouragement to take on further leadership roles within their workplace, noting that many young people who are exposed to the union movement go on to have rewarding careers as union officials.
48. Affiliates resolve to resource and promote Union Summer, Organising Works and similar programs, and to pay all young workers a fair wage for their efforts.
49. Congress also resolves to establish a training and leadership development program for young delegates, similar to the Anna Stewart Memorial Project.
50. Australian unions will provide opportunities for young workers to develop their skills and networks through formal mentoring programs.
51. Trades and Labour Councils will be encouraged to establish youth committees or networks to run social events and to provide a volunteer base for campaigning activities.

## Unpaid work

52. Unpaid internships are becoming commonplace for young workers seeking to gain the experience required to obtain an entry level job. Unpaid internships are affecting an increasingly large number of industries, from media and the creative arts to law and not-for- profits.

53. Unpaid internships are problematic because they are increasingly viewed as a necessary qualification for young people to get their foot in the door of their chosen career. The work and efforts of all young people should be recognised, valued, and remunerated at a fair level.
54. Congress opposes unpaid internships that are not part of an accredited course at an educational institution, and we note that such arrangements would be in breach of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth).
55. Australian unions will work with, and provide support to, organisations running campaigns that raise the awareness of unpaid internships in Australia, including youth-driven groups such as Interns Australia.
56. Australian unions commit to ensuring that they do not engage unpaid interns in their own organisations, except as part of an accredited course.

## Youth unemployment

57. Young people are disproportionately impacted by unemployment, and are more likely to be underemployed.
58. Congress supports a strong welfare system that treats the unemployed with dignity and respect, and provides young people with the assistance they need to find work and/or training.
59. Increase to Government payment schemes.
60. Congress recognises the need for equal access to education and vocational training opportunities that provide young people with the skills and experience needed to enter the workforce.
61. Congress opposes policies which penalise, demoralise or humiliate the unemployed, creating unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to welfare access.
62. Congress also notes that unpaid work placements, including Work For the Dole, Community Development Programme (CDP) and the PaTH Programme, has been proven to be an ineffective way to get jobseekers into meaningful employment. Such programs undercut the labour market by forcing young people to undertake work for free instead of receiving a fair wage for it. In addition, such programs may be in breach of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)
63. Congress also opposes the Government's PaTH program, forcing young jobseekers to work for less than the minimum wage to gain access to their welfare entitlements.
64. Australian unions will continue to campaign for the rights of young jobseekers, and will campaign against all of the Government's unfair changes to welfare payments for young people.
65. Australian unions will advocate for a Youth Minister and the necessary infrastructure to properly prosecute their responsibilities.
66. Australian unions will make submissions protecting and advocating for their workplace rights to not be eroded or further disadvantaged by any legislative changes impacting young workers.
67. Unions advocates for the increase of rent assistance through the CRA and Government payment benefits.
68. Unions will support and contribute to the formation of a national agency to address the rental crisis and youth homelessness.

## Young women workers

69. Congress recognises that young women are more likely to be casual, low-paid and award reliant. They are also more likely to experience violence and harassment at work, including sexual harassment and assault and less likely to report incidents in the workplace or make a complaint.
70. Congress also recognises that the gender pay gap impacts all women, including young women workers, with the gender pay gap evident from the beginning of a woman's life cycle, and increasing over time. The gender pay gap, periods out of the workforce and in part-time and casual roles to undertake the disproportionate care in our society results in women accumulating less in earnings and superannuation over their lifetime.
71. Congress will fight for gender equity for all women workers and will consider the particular needs of young women workers and the policies needed to eliminate the gap in participation of women in the workforce and the gender pay and retirement gap.

## Cultural and linguistic diversity

72. In order to properly assist members and engage potential members it is important Unions develop materials and infrastructure appropriate to them. This includes ensuring some culturally and/or linguistically appropriate material and tactics be developed and that campaigns are run in a culturally sensitive manner.
73. Ensure Officials receive training in the various visa and relevant laws to help them identify and act on cases of exploitation when it comes to young workers rights. This is especially important while the young worker is studying and working. Training should be targeted at being able to assist members that may be new to working in Australia.

## Workplace health and safety

74. Australian unions recognise that young workers due to their age and lack of power in the workplace are at a greater risk than other workers to injury and/or illness. As such, Australian unions advocate for a comprehensive and robust approach to workplace safety for young workers. This includes the recognition of the risks to mental health that toxic workplaces pose, together with a detailed and practical policy to address workplace bullying/harassment.
75. Australian unions recognise the important role training plays in the prevention of workplace injuries, especially for young workers. Furthermore, Australian unions commit to a zero tolerance policy to sexual harassment in the workplace, particularly of vulnerable young women workers. Given the importance of health and safety for young workers, and the potential long term economic and social impact of serious injuries, Australian unions will advocate for comprehensive national strategies as well as the ready availability of resources including free access to specialised health professionals.