

# Union Action Plan

The rights of  
young workers.



**ACTU**  
CONGRESS 21



# ACTU Congress briefing: The rights of young workers

## Why it matters:

Young Australian workers are doing it tough. Insecure work, wage theft and flatlining wage growth means they are in desperate need of union representation to improve their working lives, yet this group of workers are the least likely to be union members. And that needs to change.

Australia is not meeting the aspirations of young workers. They are looking for a bright future where they can be positive about their working life, but their world of work is one full of jobs without any clear career pathway. Often, the only opportunities open to them are unpaid internships and insecure jobs without entitlements like sick pay, holiday pay, or superannuation.

They are subject to dodgy employers stealing their wages and are vulnerable to harassment, abuse, bullying, and sexual harassment at work. The cost to their mental health is enormous.

For many of these young workers, planning ahead for their future is a pipe dream without the security of permanent work. If they want to secure a loan for a car or a house, they can almost forget it.

The Government has only made the situation worse, as the decline of traineeships and apprenticeship programs, the ongoing neglect of the TAFE system and the skyrocketing cost of higher education has made skilling up for a career ridiculously difficult and expensive.

Despite all these challenges, younger Australian workers have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and a strong desire to change a system that has left them behind.

The entire Australian Union movement - not just the young members - understand the predicament young workers find themselves in is through no fault of their own. It is through their unions that young workers are heard, listened to, supported, and ultimately win. And the union movement is stronger for it.

This is what we are all about - bringing people together to support one another to improve our working lives. What we know is that by working collectively, we can achieve far more than we ever could if we are working alone.

Our unity is our power, and our power is in working people. Every worker has a place in the union movement.

Everyday young union members are joining their union and acting collectively to win better rights and justice. It is the responsibility of the entire union movement to have their back and to help advance the interest of young workers. Just like every generation before us.

The young workers of Australia are the future of the Australian trade union movement. But never have the conditions for joining a union, being active in their union and reliable work been tougher for young workers. The Australian Union movement must meet this challenge.

## Australian Unions believe:

- The next generation should do better than the last and urgent action is required for this to be the case.
- We believe in equality. That there is massive intergenerational inequality problems; secure work, affordable housing and access to affordable quality education. We must take action to address it.
- Young workers have dreams and ambitions for themselves and for Australia. It is the responsibility of the Government to support these ambitions and to recognise the aspirations of young workers as the building blocks of our common future.
- Young workers are being left behind by the Morrison Government.

## Action Plan 2021-25

Australian Unions will work together on the following priorities:

- Australian unions will continue to campaign for more safe and reliable employment. Casual employment is most common among young workers,
- Prioritise community and political campaigns that will allow younger workers, through their unions, to shape the future of Australia and the type of nation we are. This includes campaigns around the climate crisis, greater social equality, and against the explosion of wealth inequality,
- Australian unions will continue to advocate for improvements in pay, superannuation and working conditions for young workers and to develop opportunities for young people to build capacity to campaign around these issues,
- Unions will continue to campaign for the removal of youth wages, particularly for those aged 18 and over,
- Share research, insights and organising best-practice within the movement that focuses on engaging, and growing young worker membership and responding to the issues that they face,
- Dedicate resources into developing movement-wide simplified joining mechanisms that reflect the realities of the current workforce,
- Australian Unions will develop resources targeted toward young workers that explain the role and function of unions, provide information of their rights at work, illuminates the historic contribution of our movement to Australia's social and economic progress, and provide educational resources that can be practically used by young workers,

➤ Recognise that young people want to be positive about their future. They have aspirations and dreams and want constructive relationships with their future employers, where they are not taken advantage of. We need to make sure the way we talk about work matches their aspirations,

➤ Identify key measures for career advancement within industries and push for these to become central focuses in future campaigns and bargaining periods. By committing ourselves to the ongoing career development and opportunities of young workers, we will demonstrate our value and relevance to their aspirations,

➤ Devise ongoing engagement mechanisms to ensure we are speaking with young workers, not at them. This includes ensuring that we are engaging with young workers in all the diversity: young workers from the suburbs and regional areas as well as the cities, First Nations young workers, CALD workers, workers of all gender identities (including no identity), LGBTIQ+ workers, and differently abled young workers.

