

Organising Young Workers

Introduction

1. The Australian trade unions are committed to engaging, protecting, and empowering young workers. Young workers are a key part of our movement, and young workers are the future leaders of our movement.
2. Young workers are more likely to be engaged in low paid employment, with barriers to bargain directly with their employer over wages and conditions. Young workers face outsized exploitation and ill treatment from bad bosses.
3. Increasing casualisation of the workforce and disproportionate youth unemployment and underemployment. It is harder than ever for young people to be engaged in decent, permanent, paid work. It is more important than ever that young people are active in their unions, and trade unions represent the interests of young workers.
4. Young people are key to the union movement. It is crucial the union movement focuses on joining and developing young members and young leaders.
5. Congress recognises that young workers come from a range of backgrounds and experiences, and those young people who face additional forms of discrimination are doubly affected by unfair employment systems and societal discrimination.
6. Young people are more likely to be motivated by values of social justice and has been reinforced by our own union research and member engagement. Congress acknowledges that recent social and environmental justice movements outside the union movement have seen mass mobilisations of new unionised workers, many of them young.
7. Congress recognises that unions leading, participating, and aligning with broader social justice movements inside and outside the workplace is a key strategy not only to uphold the values of unionism, but to grow, retain, educate, and build activism amongst young workers now for the future of our movement.
8. The cost of living, and housing crises are disproportionately affecting young workers. Wage discrimination in the forms of youth wages, discriminatory super rules, and forms of unpaid work are compounding generational economic insecurity. Young workers are locked out of the housing market and high rents and low vacancy rates are creating insecure lives for young workers. Congress resolves to campaign on these priority issues and recognises the right to housing is a key issue affecting young worker participation and engagement in all spheres of life, including in our unions.

ACTU Youth Committee

9. 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.
10. The Youth Committee will focus on nationally coordinated action in the following 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; and,
 - e. Work health and safety issues pertinent to young workers.

11. 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.
12. 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 Apprenticeship Conferences;
 - b. Union internships; and,
 - c. Mentoring programmes.
13. 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, the ACTU Youth Representative will report at Executive on growth campaigns targeted at young workers from across the movement. It is intended that at Congress the union movement will report on its progress at recruiting young workers.

The changing nature of work and the economy

14. 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 shadow economy, where young workers are disproportionately subject to exploitative labour practices compounded by insecure work such as cash in hand, wage theft, unpaid super, dodgy contracting, and lack of access to leave entitlements.
15. Unions will ensure measures in awards and EBAs exist to protect young workers from insecure work.
16. Congress acknowledges the climate crisis will have a profound and irreversible effect on the future of young workers if not imminently acted upon. Young workers deserve to have a future and jobs that are sustainable, ethical, and secure. Congress resolves to involve young workers in combatting the climate crisis, in working towards just transitions, and creating secure new industries that are sustainable and safe for workers and the planet.
17. Congress calls for tax reform focused on fairness for current and future generations of young workers. Congress calls for young workers to be represented in the process of determining economic, social, and environmental reform measures to ensure that the interests of young workers are appropriately considered.
18. Young workers want new workplace technologies to only be used in the interest of ethical, meaningful work. Young workers must be included and involved in strategies to make sure artificial intelligence, digitisation, and automation are used and developed in the interests of a future that continues to value worker humanity. Many young workers are digitally adaptable and have the skills and capability to drive education and support unions to be across rapidly changing technologies. The benefits of the productivity gains should be shared with workers. These skills should be leveraged to build understanding and adaptability within our movement.

Congress resolves to:

- a. Focus on recruiting young people in precarious work and working with them to achieve job security and bargain for automatic casual conversion clauses in all new EBAs; and
- b. Prioritise issues and campaigns relevant to young workers.

Same job, same pay – no matter our age

19. Young workers are paid less based on assumptions that they are supported, unskilled, not live full lives, or don't hold responsibilities. Economically young workers already face twofold barriers to secure housing and secure employment. We need two steps forward so we can be on fair ground.
20. Youth wages are discriminatory Congress resolves that youth wages should only be paid where a young worker is also gaining accredited skills or qualifications and should be abolished in their entirety at 18. Where awards and agreements continue to contain youth wages, unions will take steps to remove them as they fail to consider young workers' actual skills, experience, and length of service.
21. Congress acknowledges that young workers are likely to face more difficult economic conditions than generations before them. They are low paid, as they are often in their first job in retail and other industries. The neoliberal working environment has meant that young workers are socially and economically disempowered and less likely to have participated or witnessed union campaigns and wins in the workplace. There is opportunity in campaigning on issues that speak to young workers.
22. Congress notes that the current superannuation system discriminates against young workers, and it is not paid to workers under 18 unless they work 30 hours per week. With the compounding effect of superannuation, even a small amount earned at a young age will significantly boost retirement earnings.
23. Unions will fight for superannuation to be paid on every dollar earned and removing any minimum hours of work to be criteria for being eligible to receive superannuation.
24. 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.
25. Australian unions will collectively campaign for an increase in the minimum wage for young people on apprentice and trainee wages, noting that the current wages remain too low to provide a decent standard of living.
26. 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 needs of young workers in bargaining processes.
27. Unpaid internships are becoming commonplace for young workers seeking to gain the experience required to obtain an entry level job. Unpaid internships are affecting more industries, from media and the creative arts to law and not-for-profits.
28. Congress opposes unpaid internships. The work and efforts of all young people should be recognised, valued, and remunerated at a fair level. Australian unions commit to ensuring that they do not engage unpaid interns in their own organisations, except as part of an accredited course.
29. All workers deserve to be paid for their work. Congress will campaign for required on the job placements as part of university courses to be paid. Unpaid placements are currently prohibitive. Such placements mean young people out of becoming skilled in industries that Australia desperately needs workers.
30. Congress notes the extensive work by Trades and Labor Councils to opposes unpaid internships which significantly disadvantage students who are financially supporting themselves through their training and/or have caring responsibilities. Congress calls on the Federal Government's commitment to introduce a scheme to pay students while undertaking placements.

Representing young workers

31. Young people are more likely to change employment frequently. 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 and tertiary educational systems before they enter employment.

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

Engagement and consultation

35. 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.
36. The ACTU, TLC's and unions should ensure that any data that is collected includes their member's age to map trends across age and to be able to identify trends in growth, issues, and organising potential amongst young workers.
37. The achievements of young people should be regularly showcased in union communications, publications, and online content.
38. 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.
39. Young people should be engaged through union decision making structures. This may be through positions of leadership, consultative bodies, and or union youth networks. 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.
40. Unions will seek to engage with young people online and through social media by embracing digital platforms for young workers to participate in union led actions, including:
 - a. Tools to assist in organising worksites;
 - b. 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.

Union education and training

41. Unions have a fundamental role in the education of young people. This duty applies equally to both young union members and non-members. To grow our unions, unions should continue and broaden education efforts prior to workers entering the workforce. Examples could be engaging students in trade union education in school, vocational, and university settings as well as in their workplaces.
42. Australian unions will consider developing and undertaking specific training and educational events for young delegates, activists and members. 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.

Leadership development

43. 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.

44. 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.
45. Affiliates resolve to prioritise the development and identification of young delegates and activists and to jump on the opportunities provided by improved industrial rights to educate and empower young activists.
46. Australian unions will provide opportunities for young workers to develop their skills and networks through formal mentoring programs.
47. 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.
48. The ACTU acknowledges the work Trades and Labour Councils are undertaking with young people through various strategies including youth committees or networks activist training, activities in schools, TAFE and universities which introduce young people to unions.

Formal education

49. 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.
50. 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.
51. 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.
52. Congress acknowledges the devastating impacts of an insecure tertiary education workforce and widespread wage theft and its consequences for student experience, learning and career outcomes, which has disproportionately impacted young academics, researcher and professional staff.
53. Tertiary education is a vital pathway to a secure job and the design of the fee system unfairly disadvantages younger workers, in particular in times of high inflation where indexation exceeds workers' wage rises. Congress calls on the Government to create a fairer fee system.
54. Congress condemns "sham traineeship" arrangements whereby employers engage young trainees as cheap labour and provide minimal or substandard training and calls on Federal and State Governments to expand full-pay traineeships and apprenticeships and crack down on exploitative training practices.

Youth Unemployment and Housing

55. The current housing crisis is a pressing and urgent issue for young workers. Young workers have been locked out of the housing market. Intergenerational wealth transfer is fast becoming the key pathway for young people to access the housing market. Low tenancy rates and disproportioned rent increases are also making renting a particularly insecure and frightening situation for young people to gain security in our lives.
56. Secure housing is a basic human need that at its most basic underpins our whole ability to participate in life fully and improve our futures, in and outside of the workplace.
57. Housing underpins the right to rest, is where we raise the next generation, and care for our families and communities. Having a secure place to live has a profound effect on our social, economic, physical and mental health. Congress recognises that housing equity is a priority issue for young workers supports the need for more public housing, affordable housing, and avenues to reduce barriers to home ownership and renting for young people.
58. Young people are disproportionately impacted by unemployment and are more likely to be underemployed and the current housing and rental crises are compounding this inequity.
59. 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. No one should be forced to work for free or below minimum wage, and unions acknowledge that these programs are often trialled first on young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
60. Congress affirms that Australia's employment services system should be brought into public hands. Congress agrees that the privatised, for-profit, employment services system has led to a punitive system that fails to support young Australians into employment.
61. Congress recognises that Governments as employers have a responsibility to create meaningful jobs for young people.

Our 'youth' is only one part of our picture

62. Young workers live full lives. Young workers do not all face the same experiences, or systematic barriers.
63. While all young workers face discrimination due to assumptions and systematic barriers based on age, many young workers face additional and compounded barriers to accessing rights. For example, a woman worker might experience being locked out of the housing crisis alongside with others of the same age, but if she experiences domestic violence (a gendered issues) her ability to her safety and security is doubly compromised.
64. A young worker may not be disadvantaged by the housing crisis personally if their family is wealthy and gifts or supports their access into the housing market.
65. A young contract worker working for a religious organisation may have to keep secret their sexuality for fear their contract may not be extended.
66. A young Aboriginal man may experience barriers to employment both due to his youth, and due to racism.
67. An employer may target a young migrant woman for sexual harassment because she is young, a woman, and because her visa status makes it difficult for her to speak out.
68. Congress recognises that there is no single issue, solution, or campaign that will be a 'catch all' magic bullet for growing youth membership and participation without considering young people in the context of all social and economic barriers to union participation and worker empowerment.
69. When considering strategies or issues that may drive growth, retention or activism of young members, we must consider this and create avenues for youth participation and leadership in all workplace and social issues

70. Young workers care deeply about the multitude of issues that affect our lives, and our care, responsibility and our drive for change is an opportunity for our movement to support, build upon, for the benefit of all workers, young, old, and in-between.
71. To properly assist members and engage potential members it is important Unions develop materials and infrastructure appropriate to our members. Our union materials must be culturally and/or linguistically appropriate, recognising the diversity of our membership, and tactics be developed and that campaigns embrace diversity and are run in a culturally sensitive manner.
72. 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

73. 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.
74. Australian unions recognise the important role training plays in the prevention of workplace injuries, especially for young 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 develop young delegates and HSRs to create safer workplaces.
75. Young workers are particularly vulnerable to workplace injuries and incidents. Recognising this, unions will prioritise education about health and safety issues and actively target and develop young members to be as Health and Safety Representatives, to take responsibility for safety in their workplace, and participate in campaigns and actions to bring about and maintain safety at work.