

Submission to the Employment White Paper - Consultation

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Executive Summary

UNICEF Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Employment White Paper following the landmark 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit. We are in a time of economic uncertainty and transition. The commitment to addressing workforce challenges, delivering safe and secure employment, and creating more opportunities for all Australians, including our most marginalised communities is an important one and one which is most welcome.

UNICEF Australia's submission focuses on specific areas of concern, in line with our mandate to protect and improve the lives of children and young people. These are to ensure that young people, particularly those in First Nations communities, have reduced barriers to employment in the long run; that workplace planning and labour shortages in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) industry are addressed in line with recent announcements to expand access to ECEC in Australia; and that young people are supported to take up the jobs of the future, specifically in the renewable economy. These focus areas address two key themes of the consultation paper, namely a.) lifting participation and reducing barriers to employment, and b.) maximising opportunities in the industries of our future. We welcome the opportunity to make further comment on the contents of this submission if required.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Address barriers to employment and labour force participation, particularly for marginalised youth**
 - Provide additional investments to expand the Community Investment Centre (CIC) model, including in States and Territories in which it does not exist, and in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.
 - Introduce a Youth Job Guarantee in Australia for young people who are unemployed, even in the short-term (< 1 year).
 - Provide Federal Government funding to refresh the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index with newly available data every two years.
 - Commission a national data project which aims to identify the extent of birth under-registration in Australia.
 - Provide Commonwealth funding for programs that conduct outreach into communities across Australia to help people register their or their children's births late and apply for a birth certificate without cost.
- 2. Ensure workforce preparedness for rapidly growing care economy needs in Australia**
 - Ensure that the reforms proposed as part of the ECEC Workforce Action Plan are included in the roadmap for an adequate, better-trained, and more productive care workforce.
 - Provide sustainable funding for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled early years sector, including for tailored training of First Nations ECEC educators.
- 3. Calibrate education and training opportunities to prepare young Australians for jobs in the renewable energy economy**
 - Ensure that the needs, perspectives, and voices of young people are included in workforce planning processes for critical industries of the future.

Detailed Recommendations

1. Address barriers to employment and labour force participation, particularly for marginalised youth

Despite the national unemployment rate being historically low, barriers to unemployment remain for many people in Australia, including young people and First Nations communities. Targeted measures to address these barriers will help Australia maintain close-to-full employment levels across the economy, whilst also reducing the volume of people in need of social protection (welfare).

The consequences of youth unemployment are far-reaching. Poor employment outcomes, particularly early in working life, bring suffering at a personal and societal level.ⁱ Without work, individuals not only lose income, but also suffer from reduced job prospects, mental ill-health and lack of social integration in both the short and long term.ⁱⁱ At the macroeconomic level, unemployment imposes fiscal costs on governments, and reduces tax revenue and output. Young unemployment impacts upon wealth creation, and aspirations such as home ownership, particularly in an increasingly tough and competitive macroeconomic environment.

The extent of youth unemployment varies by location, socio-economic status, and gender. For example, young people in rural, remote, and regional areas faced the compounding impact of declining retail, hospitality and manufacturing industries and the reality that "technology-driven opportunities are more limited in regional Australia."ⁱⁱⁱ These young people also face smaller, less diverse labour markets, limited education options, and fewer opportunities to start businesses.

Disparities also became particularly stark during the pandemic. For example, in May 2020, the proportion of young people who were considered NEET (not in employment, education or training) was more than twice as high for those living in the lowest socioeconomic areas as for those in the highest (18% or 96,000 compared with 8.7% or 66,000).^{iv} Young women suffered higher initial job losses, whereas young men were more likely to have their hours drastically reduced, experiencing underemployment.^v In general, after an unprecedented spike in the first year of the pandemic, youth unemployment has fallen significantly in the last year, albeit remaining more than twice the rate of unemployment in Australia as a whole.^{vi}

The intersection of place-based, gendered, and socio-economic barriers to unemployment necessitates localised approaches to addressing youth unemployment. One solution which has been trialed in six different regions across South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales is that of the Community Investment Committee (CIC).^{vii} CICs collaborate to create community-led solutions to youth employment, involving a lead partners (local youth services), employers, key local industry leaders, skills and training providers, government representatives, and community groups.^{viii} The key benefits of the CIC model include stakeholder familiarity and trust, and a common stake in improving youth wellbeing and employment outcomes in the communities in which they too live and work.

Recommendation: Provide additional investments to expand the CIC model, including in States and Territories in which it does not exist, and in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in collaboration with Community.

Young people are particularly vulnerable while making the transition from school to further education or work. Some factors that make this transition more difficult, including low educational outcomes, the use

of drugs and alcohol, domestic and family violence or family breakdown, health issues, insufficient secure housing or homelessness, and a lack of understanding of education and career pathways.^{ix}

These unique challenges necessitate specific youth-centric policies to address labor force participation and reduce barriers to employment. Indeed, research has found that countries with detailed youth employment policies, including Japan, Germany, and Israel, saw increases in youth unemployment during the pandemic of between 1.5% and 1.9% only. Countries with less tailored policies, including Canada, the United States, Ireland, and Australia experienced higher increases between 4.5% and 12.4%.^x

Youth Job Guarantees have been successfully incorporated into employment policies across the Nordic Countries, led by Finland.^{xi} These guarantees include a suite of demand (i.e. Creating safe, sustainable jobs in growth industries) and supply (i.e. Ensuring young people are appropriately skilled and job-ready) side policies designed to ensure as close to full employment as possible.^{xii} An Australian Youth Job Guarantee could include policies such as funding for personalized employment support and better funding for employment services, developing private sector job creation programs across industries, and offering subsidized training programs to enable individuals to become job ready.^{xiii}

Recommendation: Introduce a Youth Job Guarantee in Australia for young people who are unemployed, even in the short-term (< 1 year).

Considered from a life-course perspective, the determinants of youth unemployment can be found in children's experiences during the earliest years. Among other factors, child poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, access to services, and violence all play a role in life outcomes during adolescence, young adulthood and beyond. To prevent, plan for, and address youth unemployment decades and even generations, it is vitally important for policymakers to develop a more comprehensive and holistic picture of children's wellbeing.

The Federal Government's commitment to including an emphasis in the most recent budget on the wellbeing of Australian children is a welcome initiative. Child-responsive budgeting would be a valuable next step in the process of considering children's wellbeing in the allocation of public spending. Going hand-in-hand with this change is the need for comprehensive data that measures the wellbeing of Australia's children. Without comprehensive data, the impact of and benefit of our investment will not be understood and decisions for future spending will lack an evidence base.

Australia currently lacks a national comprehensive dataset which tracks the holistic wellbeing of children, however, UNICEF Australia and ARACY have undertaken to develop one through the creation of the [Australian Children's Wellbeing Index](#). The Index aims to use data to describe how Australian children are faring across all aspects of wellbeing and how this is changing, and is organised using the Nest, Australia's evidence-based framework for child and youth wellbeing.

Whilst the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index is helping us better understand the needs of Australia's children, requires regular updating as new data is released to maintain an accurate picture of child wellbeing. Government investment in the Index would allow decision-makers and policy professionals to track Australia's progress towards improving child wellbeing over the long-term, regularly feeding back

into the budget process to ensure our investments in Australia's next generation are producing their desired outcomes.

Recommendation: Provide Federal Government funding to refresh the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index with newly available data every two years.

Young people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face significant barriers to employment. There are many reasons for this. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experience more chronic disadvantage across every thematic area of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC).^{xiv}

This includes in all stages of development, key health and wellbeing indicators, school attendance, and learning outcomes. Persistent racism coupled with Australia's history of colonization, violent dispossession and the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, cultures and lands has had profound intergenerational impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their ability to grow up strong in their culture.^{xv} These manifests in, for example, disproportionately high levels of homelessness, and contact with the child protection and youth justice systems.^{xvi}

There remains a critical and urgent need for the Australian Government to invest in dedicated measures to address the impacts of intergenerational trauma and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This must be grounded in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and communities, relying on the competencies and cultural knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led civil society groups and services.^{xvii}

Amongst all the laws, policies, and practices at Federal, State and Territory, and Local levels designed to address entrenched disadvantage in First Nations communities, UNICEF Australia has identified the disproportionately high rates of unregistered births as an issue, that if addressed early, could prevent problems that emerge later in life, including those of long-term unemployment and on overreliance on social protection.

Birth registration is a child's first right. It establishes their existence under the law and allows for their full participation in society over the course of their life. With birth registration comes access to a birth certificate, a pivotal document that allows a child, a young person, and then an adult, to access those things needed to take part in society.

Without a birth certificate there is no passport, drivers' licence, tax file number, or bank account, and without these essential things, access to employment, health care, education, training, and welfare support, all become difficult. This compounds disadvantage which then cascades— no access to training can lead to unemployment, unemployment can lead to reliance on welfare support, no access to welfare support can lead to poverty, poverty can lead to poor health outcomes amongst others. At its worst, research has shown it can place a person on a trajectory to criminal justice involvement and even imprisonment, due to driving without a license for which a birth certificate is a prerequisite.^{xviii}

The true extent of under-registration is unknown but one study in Queensland, for example, shows that 15-18% of births to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island mothers are not registered compared to 1.8% of births to non-indigenous mothers.^{xix} There are a whole raft of reforms that Federal, and State and Territory

governments could take to address birth under-registrations, and thereby reduce barriers to employment in the long-term. Here we focus on two initial steps, which will help identify the scope of the problem, and address pre-existing non-registrations, and community education in remote communities.

Recommendation: Commission a national data project which aims to identify the extent of birth under-registration in Australia.

Recommendation: Provide Commonwealth funding for programs that conduct outreach into communities across Australia to help people register their or their children's births late and apply for a birth certificate without cost.

2. Ensure workforce preparedness for rapidly growing care economy needs in Australia

The pandemic has seen many parents, families and carers, particularly women, struggle to manage the competing priorities of caring for children, remaining in the workforce, and dealing with the growing cost of living. These are not new pressures, long pre-dating the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF Australia has consistently advocated for increases in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC) subsidy rate, and the removal of the activity test for the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) to enable greater access to ECEC for lower income families. UNICEF Australia welcomes the Government's announcement in the Federal Budget to increase the maximum CCS rate from 85% to 90% for a families' first child in care, to make increases to the rate accessible to all families earning \$530,000 in household income, and to maintain current higher CCS rates for families with multiple children aged five or under in childcare. This is a proven approach to investing in the early years. ECEC has significant developmental, cognitive, and social benefits for young children, which carry through into adulthood, and greater access to ECEC enables more parents, especially women, and carers to participate in paid work.^{xx}

However, as the consultation paper notes, the entire care workforce, including within the ECEC sector, faces acute and worsening shortages. Part of the challenge is that ECEC workforce which is made up mostly of women also face serious workplace challenges, including low pay, underinvestment in skills development, and limited outlook for career progression, leading to a high staff turnover, which in turn holds back the quality of care provided.^{xxiii}

The estimated increase in demand for early learning as a result of the Government's Cheaper Childcare changes will require the equivalent of 9,650 additional full-time educators by next year, in addition to the 39,000 educators needed by July 2023. The ECEC workforce is contracting at an unprecedented rate, and this is a challenge that needs to be urgently addressed.

The quality of the ECEC workforce has a direct impact on the wellbeing of children. It is vital to address the supply and retention of suitably qualified educators, particularly in rural and remote areas, to ensure there is a pipeline of future educators and teachers to deliver the quality of children that need, and that parents need in order to work and provide for their families.^{xxi}

The ECEC sector has identified several ways in which we can address urgent workforce issues in the sector. The ECEC Workforce Action Plan, which has received broad endorsement from the sector and from academia,^{xxii} is one set of measures that can be employed to address these workforce challenges. The Plan calls for:

- an immediate pay rise for early childhood educators and teachers, comparable to the salary and conditions of school education sectors;
- amendments to the Fair Work Act to allow for effective equal pay cases and sector level bargains to ensure that sector industrial instruments better reflect the professional value of the work performed by early childhood educators and teachers, with government committing to fund the higher level of wages;
- ensuring that the actions and implementation initiatives outlined in the National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy are adequate to meet the current workforce crisis and fund those initiatives in the October budget;
- establishment of a process for sector collaboration around longer-term ECEC workforce reform.

Recommendation: Ensure the reforms proposed as part of the ECEC Workforce Action Plan are included in the roadmap for an adequate, better-trained, and more productive care workforce.

First Nations children in particular are half as likely to access ECEC as non-Indigenous children.^{xxv} As SNAICC’s submission to the Senate Committee on Work and Care notes, in addition to the general ECEC workforce issues, community-controlled services seeking Indigenous staff to provide culturally safe education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, face additional recruitment issues including but not limited to institutional and systemic barriers in education; uneven, inadequate, or culturally unsafe support for tertiary education institutions, and lack of familiarity with technologies used for blended or online learning.^{xxiii}

Additional measures for supporting First Nations young people to access and complete tertiary education in ECEC are crucial. Trained First Nations ECEC educators are crucial building block in ensuring that ECEC services run by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are able to provide tailored holistic support to First Nations children, grounded in culture and trauma-informed practice, and capable of responding to the complex needs that the children and their families may be facing.^{xxvi} Culturally-safe ECEC is a key protective factor to ensure the education and healthy development of First Nations children,^{xxvii} and funding for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled ECEC sector continues to be a pressing need.

One potential approach is that of SNAICC’s National Intermediary THRYVE Pilot Project, which supports and represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled early years services to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible and culturally strong supports for children, families, and communities. Not only does THRYVE respond to local priorities to strengthen service design, governance, sustainable funding and service quality, it considers training and workforce development needs in the local community. The pilot has commenced work in New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia, and could be expanded in the future, if working effectively.^{xxiv}

Recommendation: Provide sustainable funding for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled early years sector, including for tailored training of First Nations ECEC educators. One option could be to support and potentially scale-up the SNAICC National Intermediary THRYVE Pilot Project.

3. Calibrate education and training opportunities to prepare young Australians for jobs in the renewable energy economy

Australia is an aspiring renewable energy superpower, with ambitious plans to boost the renewables share of the National Electricity Market (NEM) to 82% by 2030, to establish the Rewiring the Nation initiative, to grow and strengthen the electricity vehicle market, and to set up the National Reconstruction Fund, which will transform industry.^{xxv} Australia is also poised to become a key exporter of lithium and rare earth minerals.

Building resilience to the impacts of climate change and to increasingly frequent and intense disasters will also require investments in new infrastructure and skills, whilst also necessitating shorter-term workforce expansions in sectors such as construction. For example, upgrading school and early learning infrastructure across a growing volume of flood, bushfire, and heatwave-prone communities around the country will require more workers in construction with new skills.

UNICEF welcomes the steps already taken to prepare the Australian workforce for employment in these critical industries of the future. This includes the announcement of \$95.6 million over nine years from 2022 – 2023 to support 10,000 people to complete New Energy Apprenticeships in the form of \$10,000 support payments, and \$9.6 million over five years from 2022-2023 to support a new mentoring program to help train and support new energy apprentices and develop fit-for-purpose training pathways. In the former announcement, additional targeted support has been identified for First Nations peoples, people in regional and remote areas, and in culturally and linguistic diverse communities (CALD), however the extent and nature of this support has not.

The commitment at the Jobs and Skills Summit to commence cross-jurisdictional energy transition workforce planning is also an important one, however should be cross-demographic and cross-sector. A proposed *Clean Energy Capacity Study 2023* covering the distribution of jobs, existing skills and workforce capacities, and the transition process analysis will provide a clearer picture of current workforce capacities and future needs in this transition.

It is important that these investments and these planning processes for longer term workforce transition take a youth-centric approach. What this means is that youth unemployment rates, youth labor-force participation rates, and youth socio-economic disadvantage are considered in how new apprenticeships are allocated and how they are expanded. Workforce planning discussions should consider, to the extent possible, national, state, and local-level youth unemployment rates, audits of existing qualifications, and further incentives to enable more young people to work these industries of the future, particularly in communities reliant on extracting or burning fossil fuels, and in situations where young people are incentivized to move back to rural areas.

Ensuring the voices and perspectives of youth representatives from the newly created National Youth Steering Committee are included in these planning processes is paramount.

Recommendation: Ensure that the needs, perspectives, and voices of young people are included in workforce planning processes for critical industries of the future.

About UNICEF Australia

UNICEF believes in a fair chance for every child and we are the world’s leading organisation working to protect and improve the lives of children in over 190 countries. At UNICEF Australia we work to protect and promote children’s rights by advocating for the rights of children in Australia and overseas.

ⁱ The Australia Institute (2022), *Youth Employment and the Pandemic*, <[*Youth employment \(australiainstitute.org.au\)](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/austrlii/au/institute/youth-employment.html)>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Brotherhood of St. Laurence (2021), *Seizing the opportunity: transforming the Australian youth employment system after Covid-19*, <[Seizing the opportunity: transforming the Australian youth employment system in and after COVID-19 \(bsl.org.au\)](https://www.bsl.org.au/publications/seizing-the-opportunity-transforming-the-australian-youth-employment-system-in-and-after-covid-19)>

^{iv} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021), Engagement in education or employment, <[Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/education/engagement-in-education-or-employment)>

^v Brotherhood of St. Laurence (2020), *Youth Employment Monitor*, <[COVID the great disruptor: another blow to youth unemployment \(bsl.org.au\)](https://www.bsl.org.au/publications/youth-employment-monitor)>

^{vi} Australian Bureau of Statistics (October 2022, "Labour Force Statistics," <[Labour Force, Australia, October 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/publications/labour-force-statistics)>

^{vii} Brotherhood of St. Laurence, "Community Investment Committees," <[Community Investment Committees - NYEB \(bsl.org.au\)](https://www.bsl.org.au/publications/community-investment-committees)>

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Engagement in education or employment, <[Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/education/engagement-in-education-or-employment)>

^x *Youth Employment and the Pandemic*, <[Youth employment \(australiainstitute.org.au\)](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/austrlii/au/institute/youth-employment.html)>

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} UNICEF, "Child Protection," <<https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Documents/Child-Rights-Taskforce-NGO-Coalition-Report-For-UNCRC-LR.pdf>>

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} Gerber, P., & Castan, M. (Eds.) (2021). *Critical Perspectives on Human Rights Law in Australia: Volume 2*. (1st ed.), Chapter 5: Realising the Right to Birth Registration in Australia (Melissa Castan, Geeta Shyam, Paula Gerber) <<https://research.monash.edu/en/publications/critical-perspectives-on-human-rights-law-in-australia-volume-2>>, citing Alice Barter 'Chapter 5: Indigenous Driving Issues in the Pilbara Region' in Melissa Castan and Paula Gerber (eds), *Proof of Birth (Future Leaders 2015)* 62, 63.

^{xix} Queensland Ombudsman, 'The Indigenous Birth Registration Report: An Investigation into the Under-Registration of Indigenous births in Queensland' (Report, June 2018)

^{xx} PwC (2019), *A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of early childhood education in the before school in Australia*. <<https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>>

^{xxi} Ibid.

^{xxii} Thrive By Five, "The ECEC Workforce Action Plan," <https://thrivebyfive.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/tb5_200722_workforce_plan_A5_digital-1.pdf>

^{xxiii} SNAICC, Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care, September 2022.

^{xxiv} SNAICC, "SNAICC National Intermediary THRYVE Pilot Project," <[SNAICC National Intermediary THRYVE Pilot Project - SNAICC](https://www.snaicc.org.au/national-intermediary-thryve-pilot-project)>

^{xxv} Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment, and Water, "Government priorities," <[Powering Australia | energy.gov.au](https://www.poweringaustralia.gov.au)>