

# Budget 2020 – Impacts on young women

## Impacts on young women - Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic is having particularly severe effects on young women in Australia. There is an urgent need for the experiences and needs of young women to be a focus of policy development regarding the crisis response and recovery.

While the 2020/21 Budget includes a focus on young people, particularly on young people's training/education and employment, it falls well short of providing the short- and medium-term measures needed to support young women's economic security, health and safety.

Issues of intergenerational equity are once again present in our understanding of the Budget. With a significant increase to national debt, and the implementation of tax cuts which will overwhelmingly benefit high-income earners, there is little investment in social infrastructure, climate action and other areas that create jobs and lay a foundation for our national future.

Many aspects of the budget impact on young women, including housing and homelessness, climate and environment, health, taxation, disability and social services policies. NFAW's analysis in this section focuses on six key areas: youth policy, employment, education and training, youth allowance and ABSTUDY, mental health and violence against young women.

## Youth Policy

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### The Budget

The [Women's Economic Security Statement](#) highlights the current development of a new National Youth Policy Framework, which will include a focus on addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on young Australians. The framework will highlight the importance of education, skills development and meaningful employment opportunities to the economic security of young women.

There is no specific budget allocation for the National Youth Policy Framework.

The Minister for Youth points to a range of measures including in education, online safety reform, youth mental health and suicide prevention [and says](#) that they "build on [the Government's] existing and ongoing work in developing a whole-of-government National Youth Policy Framework to inform how policies and programs support young Australians and improve their lives".

## Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

A federal Minister for Youth was appointed in 2019, after having no Minister to lead government policy for young people since 2013. The Government has not funded a national peak body for young people since 2013.

Coordinated government policy for young Australians, in combination with gendered budgeting, is needed to ensure that young women are not left behind. This is particularly crucial given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession on young women.

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

The development of a National Youth Policy Framework is positive, however there is no specific funding commitment in this Budget to support implementation of the Framework after it is due to be completed in December.

## Recommendations

1. Include a gender lens in the National Youth Policy Framework to ensure that young women's experiences and needs are addressed.
2. Commit to funding to support the whole-of-government National Youth Policy Framework and measures that will support structural change to issues affecting young women's education, economic security, employment, health and safety.
3. Fund a national peak body for young people to support national youth policy.

## Employment

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### The Budget

Measures in the Budget to support young people's employment include:

- JobMaker Hiring Credit - Under this measure, the hiring credit will be available to eligible employers over 12 months from 7 October 2020 for each additional new job they create for an eligible employee. The credit is \$200 per week if the eligible employee is aged 16 to 29 years or \$100 per week if the eligible employee is aged 30 to 35 years. To be eligible, the employee will need to have worked for a minimum of 20 hours per week, averaged over a quarter, and received the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance (other) or Parenting Payment for at least one month out of the three months prior to when they are hired (Budget Paper No 2 p. 162, 2020) (see JobMaker paper).
- Incentives to encourage young Australians to undertake seasonal work - \$16.3 million over three years from 2020-21 to incentivise seasonal participation in the agricultural industry by creating a temporary pathway for young people who are seeking to qualify as independent for the purposes of assessing Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY payment eligibility. From 1 December 2020, those who earn at least \$15,000 in the agricultural industry between 30 November 2020 and 31 December 2021 would be automatically assessed as meeting independence requirements, provided their parents meet current parenting income testing requirements (Budget Paper No 2, p. 155, 2020).

- Under the Women's Economic Security Statement, \$47.9m over four years from 2020-21 to increase grants from the *Women's Leadership and Development Program* (Budget Paper No 2, p. 67, 2020). This includes [a new Women@Work priority area](#), with grant funding available to create employment opportunities for women. Priority will be given to scalable projects and to organisations that support vulnerable cohorts, including women from diverse backgrounds and young women at high risk of long-term unemployment.
- PaTH Business Placement Partnerships – national industry associations. The Government will provide \$11.9 million over three years from 2019-20 to establish Prepare, Trial Hire (PaTH) Business Placement Partnerships with selected industry associations that have a national footprint. This measure will develop and deliver industry-led employment pathways to help young people into work. It will also draw upon existing government funded employment programs, such as *Youth Jobs PaTH* program and the *National Work Experience Program*. Part of the costs of this measure will be met from existing resources of the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (Budget Paper No 2, p. 236, 2020).

For further analysis, see relevant employment sections of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

## Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Young women, at the beginning of their working lives, have been particularly impacted by the economic fallout of COVID-19. [The unemployment rate](#) (August 2020) for women aged 15 to 24 years (13.1 per cent) is lower than for young men in the same age group (15.6 per cent) but much higher than the whole of population rate (6.8 per cent). Given the concentration of young women in industries that continue to be affected by the economic recession caused by health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that this unemployment data continues to be closely monitored and informs policy responses.

Loss of income and unemployment for young women will have impacts throughout the life course, adding a further challenge to the existing disadvantages that women experience which effect their economic security at all stages of life.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young women were already facing significant barriers to secure employment and financial security. [The casualisation of the workforce, high rates of under-employment and unemployment, increase in the gig economy and increasing unpaid internships](#) make it difficult for young people to find steady, secure employment with access to paid leave and superannuation. Young workers aged 15 to 24 years are [much more likely](#) to be casual workers than other age groups, and therefore not have access to leave entitlements and lack job security. Additionally, young women are disadvantaged by the [gender pay gap](#) from the beginning of their working lives.

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

There is a need for an ongoing focus and strategy from Government on job creation, including pathways for young people to access secure employment. This Budget fails to invest in measures which would allow Government to directly stimulate employment (including for young people) for example through the public sector, care and service sectors. Additionally, measures are needed to address intersecting forms of discrimination that young women experience which

affect their access to and experience in employment including disability discrimination and racism.

The prevalence of sexual harassment, exploitation and assault of women participating in working holiday seasonal worker programs is [well known](#). A [2016 report](#) from the Fair Work Ombudsman on the wages and conditions of people working under the 417 Working Holiday Visa Program identified concerns about exploitation of visa holders including sexual harassment. In this context, it is apparent that the incentives to encourage young Australians to undertake seasonal work has not been developed with a gender lens and does not appear to include safeguards for women. Tying the participation in seasonal agricultural work to qualification for independence requirements for the purposes of assessing Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY creates a power dynamic that could be exploited, in the same way that visa status has been exploited and created dangerous conditions for female workers in the same industry.

The JobMaker Hiring Credit does not take into account women's caring responsibilities and is a short-term hiring program, which the [ILO has found](#) are only effective when they incorporate a substantial training element. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC) [is concerned](#) that the incentive will place young people in temporary, insecure work that does not align with their areas of study and career aspirations. For more detailed analysis and recommendations, see section on JobMaker Hiring Credit in the Gender Lens on the Budget.

Similarly, the PaTH Business Placement Partnerships risks being ineffective as a short-term measure (noting that further details about program design are not yet available). The program will need a gender lens to ensure that it meets the needs and suits the circumstances of young women. The existing Youth Jobs PaTH program provides [a supplementary payment](#) to interns on top of their Youth Allowance or JobSeeker payment, but does not guarantee award rates for hours worked (between 30 to 50 hours for four to 12 weeks) in an internship.

## Recommendations

1. Develop a long-term plan for youth employment as part of the National Youth Policy Framework, with an ongoing focus and strategy from government on job creation, including in female-dominated industries, and measures to address workforce gender segregation.

## Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY independence

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### The Budget

Under the COVID-19 Response Package – recognising the impacts of COVID-19 for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY independence measure, the Government will provide \$25 million over four years from 2020-21 to temporarily revise the independence test for those applying for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY from 1 January 2021. Under the exemption, the six-month period between 25 March 2020 and 24 September 2020 will automatically be recognised as contributing to an applicant's independence test, regardless of whether they meet employment requirements (Budget Paper No 2, p. 152, 2020).

## Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY are important supports for young women wanting to access education and training. Supporting yourself through work is one of the available criteria for individuals to meet [independence tests](#) for these payments.

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

This is a positive measure that responds to the high rates of unemployment experienced by young people during the pandemic, which could significantly hinder access to Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY and thus engagement in education and training.

Further monitoring and analysis will be needed, and consideration of whether the 24 September end date for the automatic recognition period needs to be re-assessed given the continued high youth unemployment rate and recession.

However, the Budget did not permanently increase rates of Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY. An April 2020 [Senate inquiry](#) recommended that reviews be undertaken into the adequacy of the Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY policy criteria and rates of payment, and that Youth Allowance be increased after the Coronavirus Supplement is phased out to ensure that all eligible recipients do not live in poverty.

## Recommendations

1. Review the 'recognising the impacts of COVID-19' for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY independence measure in light of the youth unemployment rate, and consider extending the automatic recognition period past 24 September 2020 in response to continued high youth unemployment.
2. Permanently increase the rate of Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY to support young people to meet their costs of living.

For analysis and recommendations, see the social services sections of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

## Education and training

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### The Budget

For further detail and analysis on Budget measures relating to school, vocational education and training and higher education, see relevant sections of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

## Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Despite high rates of participation in post-secondary education, young women continue to experience inequality in pay. Because of this, Australia's [highly gender segregated workforce, low remuneration in feminised industries](#), and increasing study costs are of great concern to young women when making decisions and participating in education and training.

The education and training sector is a significant employer of women. Recent reforms, particularly to the university sector, compound existing job insecurity and lack of access to career pathways.

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

Education and training initiatives in the Budget fail to address structural issues which disadvantage women while studying and in pursuing post-education career pathways.

A gender lens, including a specific focus on young women, is necessary in education and training funding policy and planning. For example, the JobMaker Plan includes a measure to boost the wage subsidy for first year apprentices, without detail about how this Plan will avoid disproportionately benefiting men and increase pathways for young women to access apprenticeships and traineeships. Retention strategies, including measures to address discrimination in the workplace, are also important for young women wanting to complete apprenticeships in male dominated trades.

The [Women's Economic Security Statement](#) measure to provide \$25.1 million over five years from 2020-21 to establish a *Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Industry Cadetship* program to support 500 women working in STEM industries to complete an Advanced Diploma through a combination of study and work-integrated learning experiences is welcomed but is a small investment compared to investments under the JobMaker and JobTrainer which will disproportionately benefit men.

The Budget fails to address existing structural issues for young women in the university sector, including disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and recent Job Ready legislation contributes to rather than improves this situation. For those wanting to access university study or currently studying, study fees will substantially increase which [will disproportionately effect female students](#). For young women working in universities in all capacities including early career researchers, as well as postgraduate students employed in teaching and reaching and/or wanting to pursue an academic career, there are significant concerns about opportunities for secure employment and career progression.

## Recommendations

1. Apply a gender lens to vocational education and training and higher education measures to ensure equitable access and participation by young women.
2. Job creation and improving job security in the education and training sector should be a key feature of the Government's COVID-19 response and recovery strategy.

For further recommendations, see the education and training section of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

## Mental health

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### The Budget

For further detail and analysis on Budget measures relating to mental health, see the health section of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

## Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young women were already twice as likely as young men to be experiencing psychological distress (30 per cent compared to 16 per cent).

Data from the Monash Alfred Psychiatry research centre shows that the highest rate of suicidal thoughts among adults participating in data collection between 3 April and 3 May 2020 were among young women aged 18-24 with 37 per cent of women in this age group reporting suicidal thoughts, compared to 17 per cent of men. Research shows that young people are feeling anxious, uncertain and scared about the crisis, and young women report specific concerns around their education and the health of their family. Concerningly, there is evidence that these psychological responses to the crisis may last long after the immediate threat of COVID-19 passes.

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

To support the mental health and wellbeing of young women, it is important that mental health initiatives target and engage them in ways that work for this cohort. While there are some positive measures in this Budget do not address the substantial concerns relating to young women's mental health. For example, the expansion of psychology sessions from 10 to 20 each calendar year (for two years) under the Better Access initiative is positive but does not address the high out of pocket costs incurred when accessing these services.

A gender lens should be applied to planning for other mental health measures in the Budget such as the \$45.7 million over four years to expand the *Individual Placement and Support* program under the Youth Employment Strategy to assist vulnerable young people with mental illness to participate in the workforce. Applying a gender lens and developing gender sensitive approaches will ensure that measures meet the needs of young women.

Accessibility of mental health services, including provision of timely and affordable access in regional and rural areas continues to be a concern for young people. Investments in digital mental health services and to the Mount Barker service in South Australia are positive, but a planned approach to workforce development and increasing availability of services in the regions is still required.

## Recommendations

1. Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and impacts on young women, gender should be recognised and centred as a social determinant of mental health, and effective gender sensitive approaches to mental health should be developed in consultation with women's health organisations.

For further recommendations, see the health section of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

## Violence against young women

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### The Budget

Under the Women's Economic Security Statement, the Government has provided \$2.1 million over three years from 2020-21 to establish a Respect@Work Council to assist in addressing sexual harassment in Australian workplaces (Budget Paper No 2, p. 67, 2020). Further detail in the

[Women's Economic Security Statement](#) shows that this announcement includes development of a dedicated online platform which will provide free, practical and accessible information and resources to help ensure workplaces are safe and free from sexual harassment; and national survey on workplace sexual harassment to be conducted in 2022.

Funding is also provided under the Expediting Family Law and Federal Circuit Court Matters measure including \$4.8 million in 2020-21 for the Family Violence and Cross Examination of Parties Scheme, which helps protect victims of family violence in family law proceedings; and \$1.8 million over four years from 2020-21 to implement Federal Family Violence Orders under the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme (Budget Paper No 2, p. 56, 2020).

The budget also includes \$150 million to support Australians at risk of domestic, family and sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Budget Paper No 2, p. 274, 2020). This funding package, [announced by the Prime Minister on 29 March](#); \$130 million has [been distributed](#) to states and territories and the remaining \$20 million spent on Commonwealth initiatives.

An undisclosed amount of funding has been provided over four years under the COVID-19 Response Package – additional funding for domestic and family violence support package. This funding is for 1800 RESPECT and to provide COVID-specific advertising over the Christmas period, and to meet increased demand (Budget Paper No 2, p. 151, 2020).

## Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

In Australia, women aged 18 to 24 are at the highest risk of experiencing sexual violence compared to women in older age groups and men. Data from the [ABS Personal Safety Survey](#) found that approximately 1 in 20 women in this age group reported experiencing sexual assault in the last 12 months. [Research has shown](#) that 24 per cent of young women aged 18-24 have had a nude or sexual photo/video posted online or sent on without their consent.

Workplace sexual harassment is a significant issue for young people. 53 per cent of women aged 18-29 years, [have experienced](#) workplace sexual harassment. The national inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces found that young people aged between 18 and 29 were more likely than those in other age groups to have experienced sexual harassment in the last five years, and that young women were significantly more likely than young men to have been sexually harassed. These high rates are influenced by workplace power imbalances and the higher likelihood that young people are employed on a casual basis; experiences of sexual harassment by young women are compounded by their lower awareness of workplace rights and access to support.

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

Violence against women remains a key concern for Australian women, with high prevalence prior to COVID-19, and [emerging data](#) and [service experiences](#) revealing an increase in the frequency and severity of domestic and family violence during the pandemic.

The establishment of the Respect@Work Council, development of a dedicated online platform, and national survey on workplace sexual harassment to be conducted in 2022 are welcome



announcements. These commitments support the fulfilment of recommendations 14, 48 and 2 from the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work* national inquiry report.

However, sexual harassment is endemic and particularly so for young women. Further action is needed to address all recommendations from the *Respect@Work* report which would support primary prevention, legal and regulatory reform, improved responses by in workplaces, and much-needed support, advice and advocacy.

### Recommendations

1. The Government should commit and take action to implement all of the remaining recommendations from the *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*

For further analysis and recommendations, see the reducing violence against women and their children section of the Gender Lens on the Budget.