4.5  Opposite ends of the spectrum—participation of young people in education and work

There is considerable policy interest in the engagement of young people in work and study—from those who are fully engaged, to those who are completely disengaged.

Fully engaged in education or employment

Full engagement in education or employment is defined as participating in full-time education or training leading to a recognised qualification or employment, or a combination of full-time and part-time education or employment.

- In 2014, 80% of young people aged 15–24 were fully engaged in education and/or employment. The proportion was higher for 15–19 year olds (87%) than for 20–24 year olds (74%), reflecting the high proportion of 15–19 year olds attending secondary school full-time (Figure 4.5.1, Table S4.5.1) (ABS 2005; AIHW analysis of ABS 2015).

- The proportion of young people fully engaged was similar in 2014 (80%) to 2005 (82%) among 15–24 year olds; however, there was an increase in the proportion engaged in full-time study only (from 25% to 31%) and a decrease in full-time work only (from 26% to 20%).

- Some young people combine paid employment with secondary or tertiary study to support themselves financially and to develop skills for long-term employment. In 2014, 29% of young people aged 15–24 combined study and work compared with 30% in 2005.

(See Chapter 4 ‘Transitions to independence’ for further information on youth education and employment.)

Figure 4.5.1: Participation in education and/or employment among young people aged 15 to 24, by age group, 2005 and 2014

Not in employment, education or training

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (often referred to as ‘NEET’) are considered to be completely disengaged from work and study. This non-participation among young people has been linked to future unemployment, lower incomes and employment insecurity (Pech et al. 2009), placing young people at risk of social and economic disadvantage, and social exclusion.

- In 2014, 10% of 15–24 year olds (312,900 people) were not in employment, education or training (NEET) (7% of 15–19 year olds and 13% of 20–24 year olds). This was the same proportion as in 2005 for 15–24 year olds overall (8% of 15–19 year olds and 12% of 20–24 year olds) (Figure 4.5.1) (ABS 2005; AIHW analysis of ABS 2015).
- Internationally, in 2012, the proportion of Australian 15–19 year olds not in education or employment was similar to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (7.2% compared with 7.5%), with Australia ranked 19th out of 32 OECD countries with available data.
- Among 20–24 year olds, the Australian non-participation rate in 2012 (12%) was better than the OECD average (18%), and ranked ninth out of 32 OECD countries with available data (OECD 2014). (See Chapter 4 ‘Transitions to independence’ for a comparison of Australian and OECD average youth unemployment rates.)

According to the 2011 Census, some groups of 15–24 year olds were over-represented in the NEET group compared with their representation in the total youth population. These groups included:
- Indigenous youth (12% in the NEET group compared with 4% in the total youth population)
- youth who do not speak English well or at all (14% compared with 5%)
- youth needing assistance with core activities (such as self-care, body movements or communication) (6% compared with 2%)
- those living in Inner regional and outer regional areas (31% in NEET compared with 25% in the total youth population) and Remote and very remote areas (5% in NEET, 2% in total youth population) (AIHW analysis of the 2011 Census).

People who are not in employment are considered unemployed if they are looking for work. Otherwise they are considered ‘not in the labour force’ (NILF). Data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) indicate that, in 2011, among those in the NEET group who were unemployed, 80% were looking for full-time work while 20% were looking for part-time work. Among those who were NILF, a high proportion of young women (71%) were undertaking home duties and/or looking after children, whereas young men were most likely to be undertaking ‘other (unspecified) activities’ (53%) or travelling or on holidays (24%) (Stanwick et al. 2013).
Other forms of participation

Young people may participate in activities other than employment and study. Social and community participation may provide social and psychological benefits that contribute to health and wellbeing. Volunteering can provide social contact and learning opportunities, and makes a valuable contribution to community and welfare organisations. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2010 General Social Survey:

- more than two-thirds (68%) of young people aged 18 to 24 were involved in one or more social or community groups in the 12 months prior to being surveyed
- around 1 in 4 young people aged 18 to 24 (27%) were involved in unpaid voluntary work in the previous 12 months.

Many young people combine participation in these activities with study and employment; however, some do not: around two-fifths (39%) of young people aged 18 to 24 who were not engaged in study or employment (NEET) were involved in one or more social or community groups and an estimated 12% were involved in unpaid voluntary work in 2010 (AIHW analysis of the ABS 2010 General Social Survey).

What is missing from the picture?
Regular and comprehensive data on the participation of young people in education and employment are available from ABS Surveys of Education and Work, the Census and the LSAY. International comparisons are also available.

Where do I go for more information?

References


