

Young Australians' employment and education

Insights from *Growing up in Australia*, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*

Spotlight series | August 2026

***Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)** is an ongoing study that follows the lives of children and their families from all over Australia. In 2004, around 5,000 0–1 year olds (B cohort) and 5,000 4–5 year olds (K cohort) and their families were recruited and have been surveyed every 2 years since.

This research is based on Wave 10 self-reported data collected in 2023–24, at which time the B cohort was aged 19–20 years and the K cohort 23–24 years. Information on the study design, questionnaires, statistical considerations, data files and other data resources are available via the LSAC [Data user guide](#).

Young people's work and study arrangements

For young people in their late teens and early twenties, pathways to adulthood are often marked by key milestones such as completing education, entering the workforce and achieving financial independence. However, these pathways have become increasingly complex, with many young people moving between study, part-time work and full-time employment in non-linear ways.¹ This reflects broader shifts in education and labour markets, where diverse education and work arrangements play a growing role.²

Understanding how young people combine education and employment, and the conditions they experience along the way, is central to supporting long-term workforce participation, wellbeing and social mobility.

Work and study are becoming less linear and more overlapping

LSAC Wave 10 data show that the transition from education to employment is rarely a straightforward progression from study to full-time work. Many young people combine education and employment as they build qualifications, income and work experience.

- Work and study often overlap rather than being undertaken in separate stages. More than half (55%) of 19–20 year olds and around 30% of 23–24 year olds combined work and study (Figure 1a).
- The balance between study and employment differed across age groups. Young people aged 19–20 were more likely to be studying with or without work (64%), while young people aged 23–24 were more likely to be employed only (59%).
- Employment arrangements became more stable with age, particularly among those combining work and study. Among those employed, casual work was more common than permanent or ongoing work where work and study were combined (37% vs 23%), while the reverse was true for those only employed and not studying. By ages 23–24, permanent or ongoing work was more common than casual work among both those only employed and those combining work and study (20% vs 11% for the latter group) (Figure 1b).

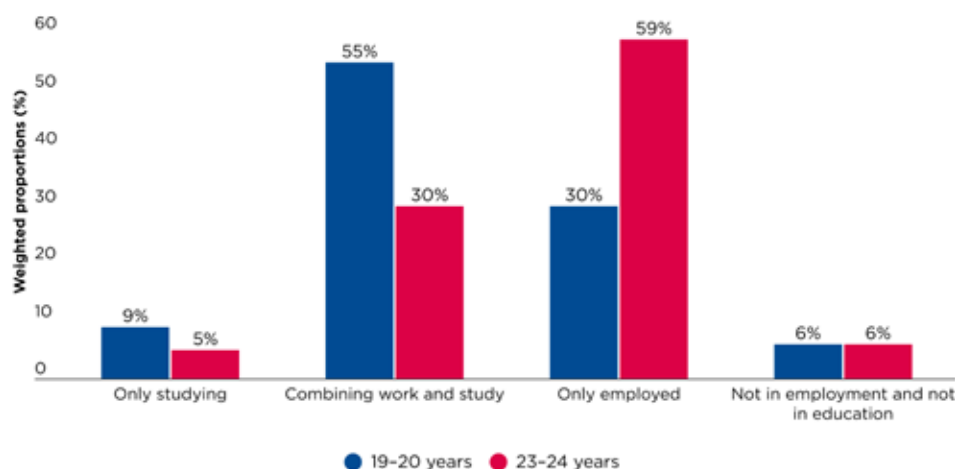
This suggests that policy settings designed around a single, sequential move from education into full-time work may not reflect how many young people now build qualifications and work experience together.

Around 6% of young people in both age groups were not engaged in either education or employment at the time of interview. This group may benefit from targeted support to engage in education, training or work opportunities, while recognising that reasons for non-participation vary.

1 Fu, J. (2024). Rethinking education and work relationships in youth transition: An alternative metaphor. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(10), 1510–1527.

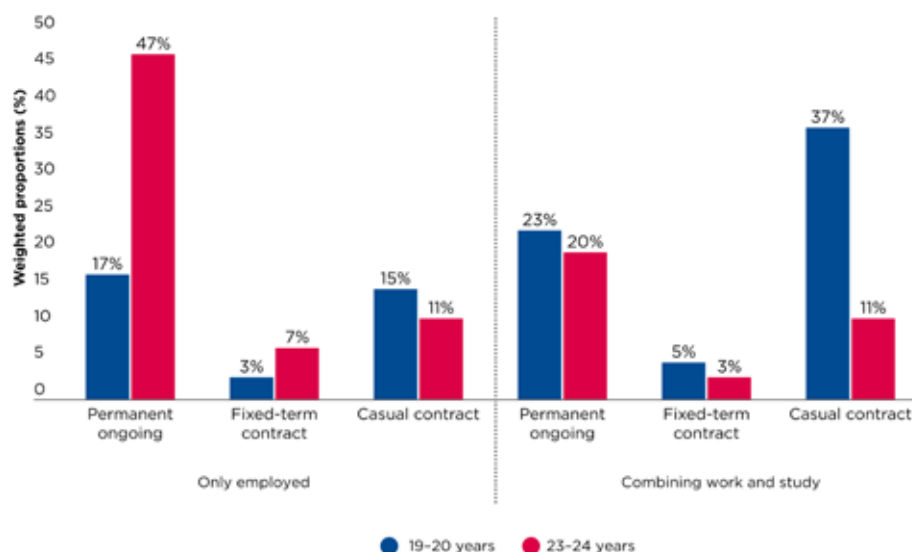
2 Varsik, S. (2025). *Transitions through education and into the labour market: Exploring educational outcomes and equity gaps using international surveys*. OECD Education Working Papers.

Figure 1a: Employment and education status of young people aged 19-20 and 23-24 years in 2023-24



Notes: 19-20 years ($n = 2,046$) and 23-24 years ($n = 1,790$)
Source: LSAC Wave 10

Figure 1b: Type of employment contract by work-study status among young people aged 19-20 and 23-24 years in 2023-24



Notes: 19-20 years ($n = 1,713$) and 23-24 years ($n = 1,518$)
Source: LSAC Wave 10

Young people’s employment

The rest of this report focuses on young people’s employment. The analysis looks at a small set of objective indicators – occupation, hours worked and income – that describe young people’s early position in the labour market. We also look at job satisfaction and barriers to employment.

We acknowledge that employment experiences are complex and multifaceted, encompassing not only those job characteristics listed above but also dimensions such as job quality and workplace conditions. Examining these factors is beyond the scope of the current analysis but are important areas for future analysis.

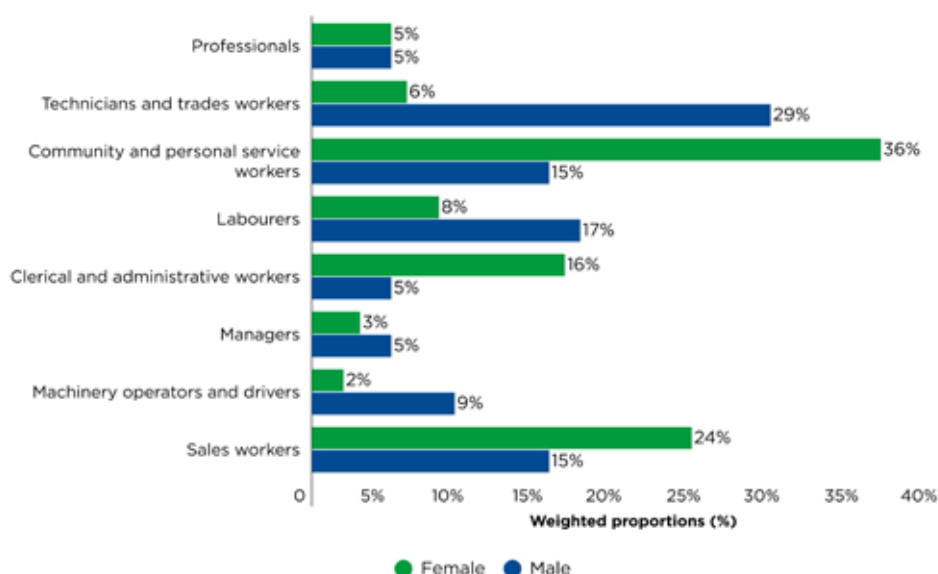
Gender differences in employment

Gender differences in employment are evident from an early age, with young women and young men concentrated in different types of occupations. The findings here should be interpreted as evidence of early gendered patterns in employment characteristics, rather than a complete account of all the factors that may shape young women’s and men’s work experiences.

- Among young people aged 19–20, young women are more likely to be employed in service-oriented and administrative roles, while young men are more concentrated in technical, trade and manual occupations (Figure 2a).
- Among the older cohort aged 23–24, there is a shift towards professional roles for both genders, with a larger increase for young women (Figure 2b).³

These early gendered patterns matter because they appear before careers are firmly established, suggesting that interventions to broaden occupational pathways may be needed early in the transition from education to work.

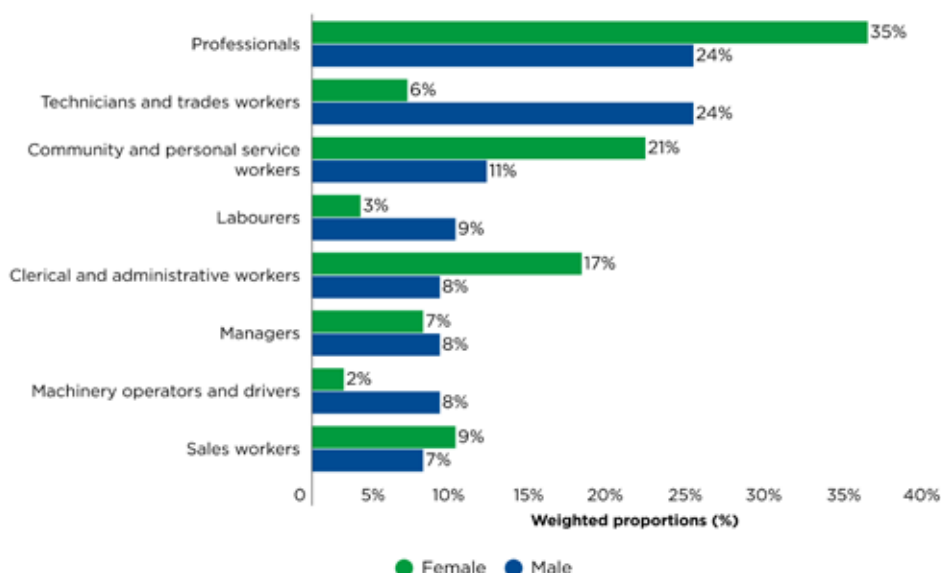
Figure 2a: Occupations among young men and women aged 19–20 years in 2023–24



Notes: Males (*n* = 981) and females (*n* = 985)

Source: LSAC Wave 10

Figure 2b: Occupations among young men and women aged 23–24 years in 2023–24



Notes: Males (*n* = 919) and females (*n* = 934)

³ One plausible explanation is that women are more likely to participate in tertiary education, and the benefits of educational attainment may become increasingly apparent as young women transition to professional careers during their early twenties ([Employment in the 2021 Census](#) | Australian Bureau of Statistics). However, we were unable to test this interaction in the present analysis because information on respondents' highest level of educational attainment was not available in LSAC at the time of the study. Future waves, incorporating higher education and VET data linkage as well as self-reported measure on highest level of qualification completed, are expected to provide these data and allow further investigation.

Source: LSAC Wave 10

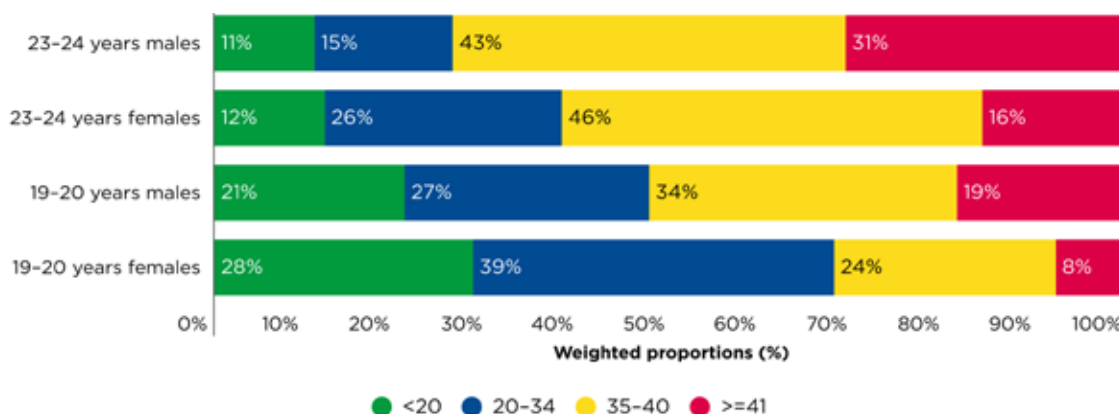
Occupational differences translate to differences in income and hours

Differences in the types of jobs held by young women and young men are also reflected in the hours they work and the income they earn.

- Young women were more likely than young men to work fewer than 35 hours per week at both ages, while young men were more likely to work longer full-time hours. Full-time work increased with age for both groups but gender differences in working hours remained evident (Figure 3a).
- These patterns contribute to emerging income differences, with young men more likely to reach higher income brackets in their mid-twenties, even as incomes rise for both groups overall (Figure 3b).

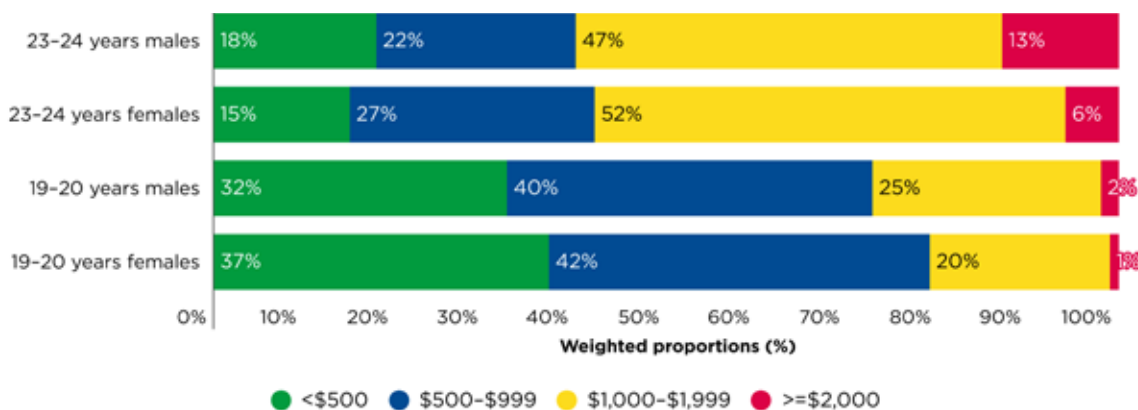
These results show that gendered patterns in occupations, hours worked and income may contribute to inequalities in income and career progression if they persist. Policies and workplace practices that promote equitable career opportunities and reduce occupational segregation may help improve labour market outcomes for young people.

Figure 3a: Distribution of hours worked per week in all jobs among young men and women aged 19–20 and 23–24 years, in 2023–24



Notes: Males 19–20 years ($n = 981$), females 19–20 years ($n = 985$); males 23–24 years ($n = 915$), females 23–24 years ($n = 936$)
Source: LSAC Wave 10

Figure 3b: Total before-tax weekly income of young men and women aged 19–20 and 23–24 years, in 2023–24



Notes: Males 19–20 years ($n = 1,094$), females 19–20 years ($n = 1,068$); males 23–24 years ($n = 1,004$), females 23–24 years ($n = 1,019$). Total before-tax weekly income includes sources of income such as wages and salary; profit or loss from own unincorporated business or share in partnership; any government pension, benefit or allowance; and any other regular source.

Source: LSAC Wave 10

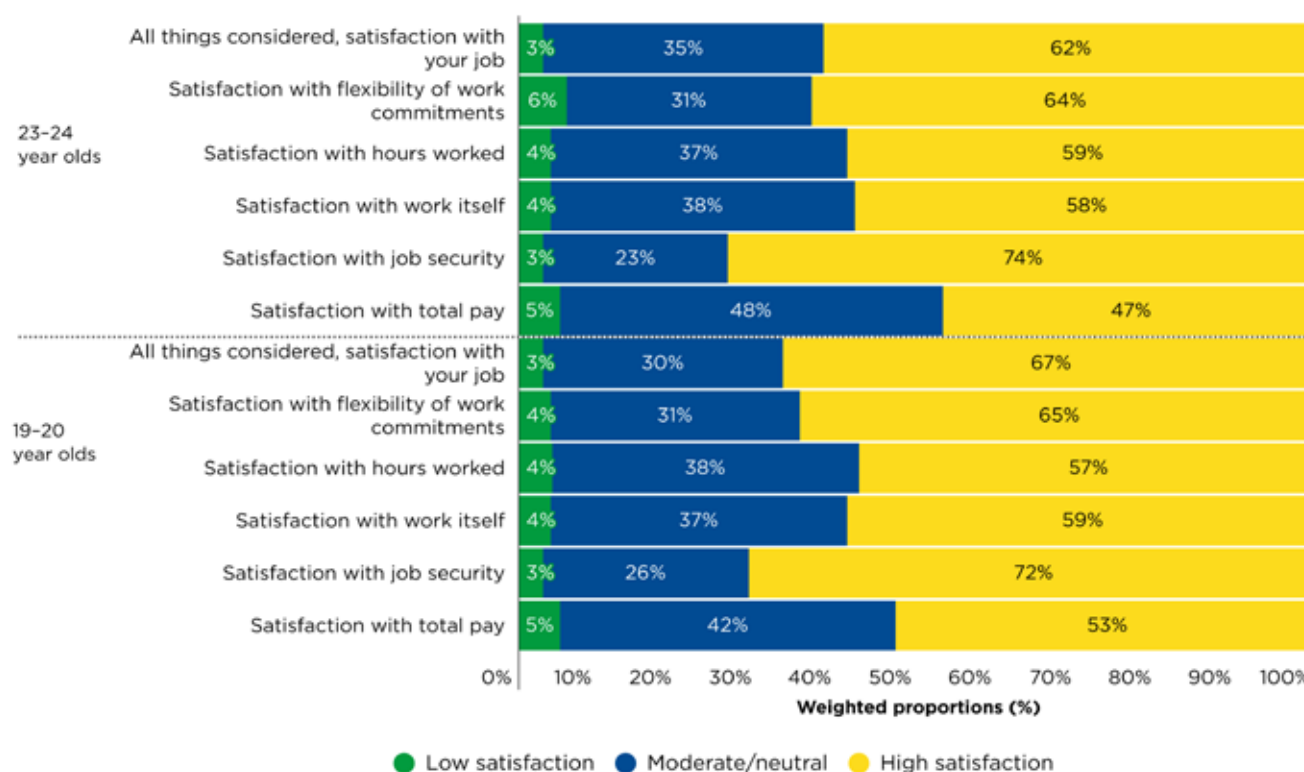
Job satisfaction is generally high – but not uniform

Young people are generally positive about their work but less positive about their pay.

- Most young people reported high job satisfaction overall (67% of 19–20 year olds; 62% of 23–24 year olds).
- Satisfaction was consistently highest for job security, with around three-quarters of young people (~72%–74%) reporting high satisfaction.
- Pay was the area where satisfaction was weakest, with many young people reporting only moderate satisfaction (~42%–48%) (Figure 4).

These findings suggest that young people are largely satisfied with their jobs overall. However, the lower satisfaction with pay points to a gap between positive work experiences and perceived financial rewards.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with different aspects of job among young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years, in 2023–24



Notes: 19–20 years (*n* = 1,968) and 23–24 years (*n* = 1,849)

Source: LSAC Wave 10

Barriers to employment are varied

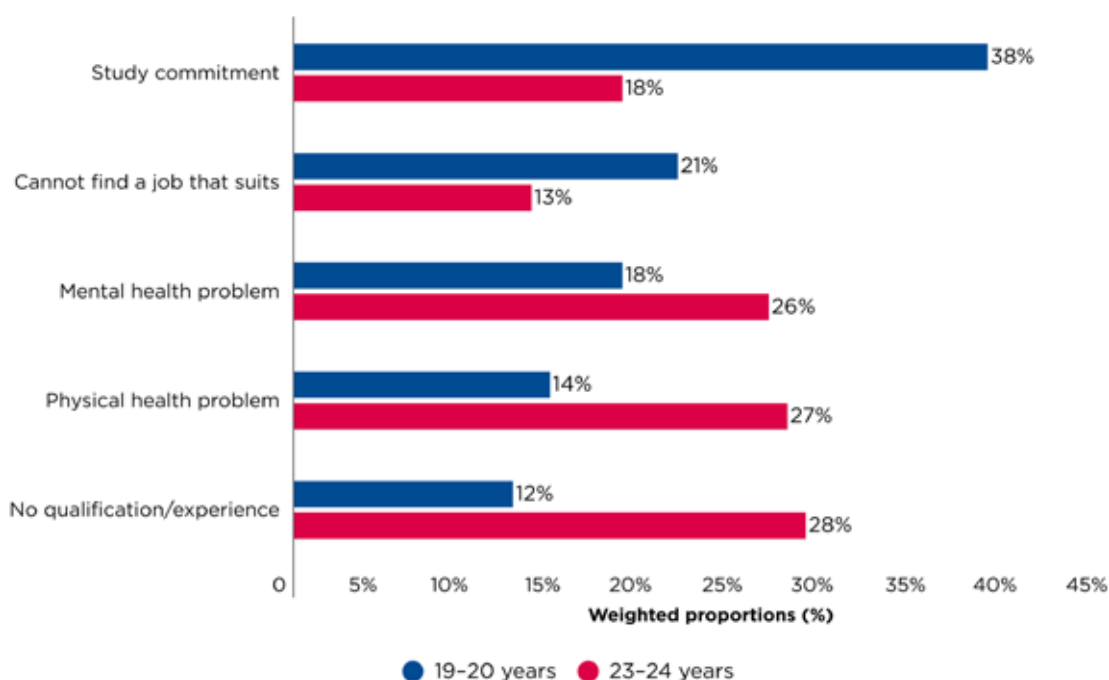
Among young people who were not in paid work — including those who were unemployed and those not in the labour force — reported reasons for not working differed by age group. Because there were no statistically significant differences between unemployed young people and those not in the labour force, results are presented for the combined group.

- For 19–20 year olds, study commitments were the most common reason for not working, reported by 38% of this group. Other common reasons included difficulty finding suitable jobs and mental health challenges.
- For 23–24 year olds, the common reasons pointed to a broader mix of barriers, with the most common being:
 - not having enough qualifications or experience (28%)
 - physical health challenges (27%)

- mental health challenges (26%)
- study commitments (18%).

These findings suggest that some young people who are not in paid work in their mid-twenties face barriers affecting both their capacity to participate in employment and their access to suitable jobs. This means employment supports may need to address health, skills and access to appropriate work as well as job search assistance.

Figure 5: Top 5 reasons for currently not in paid work among young people aged 19-20 and 23-24 years, in 2023-24



Notes: 19-20 years (*n* = 321) and 23-24 years (*n* = 230). Respondents could choose multiple options.
Source: LSAC Wave 10

What this tells us

Together, these data show that young people’s transitions to employment are diverse and often overlapping, with many combining education and work to move towards financial independence. Experiences are not uniform: differences in occupations, hours, income and barriers to employment can emerge before careers are firmly established.

- **Education and employment pathways are becoming longer and less linear:** Young people move gradually from education to stable employment, often combining studies with casual jobs to achieve flexibility. This supports a flexible ‘education-to-work’ pathway.
- **Work does not always translate to financial security:** Most young people are satisfied with their jobs, but lower satisfaction with pay sits alongside broader evidence of financial stress, debt and housing pressure during the transition to adulthood (see the accompanying spotlights on [financial stress](#) and [housing](#)).
- **Differences in opportunity and participation emerge early:** Emerging gender differences in occupation, working hours and income are already evident, while some young people face barriers related to health, qualifications and labour market inclusion.

Why this matters

Early adulthood is a critical period for establishing educational, employment and financial foundations that can shape later opportunities. Even when young people are engaged in study, work or both, the quality, stability and accessibility of those opportunities can shape how confidently they move into adult working lives.

- Early differences can compound over time: Differences in hours, income, job type and access to suitable work may influence later career progression, financial security and workforce attachment.
- Gendered employment patterns can shape later inequality: Early differences in occupation, working hours and earnings may affect young women's and young men's access to career progression and financial security if these patterns continue. These early patterns may also suggest that broader gender and traditional breadwinner norms may be established early, which could influence the extent to which parents share caring responsibilities and take up parental leave later in life.
- Support needs to match non-linear pathways. Because many young people combine work and study, support needs to accommodate movements between education, casual work, training and more stable employment.
- Timing matters. Early adulthood offers an opportunity to reduce barriers before they become entrenched, particularly for young people whose participation is affected by health challenges, caring responsibilities, limited experience or difficulty finding suitable work. This matters because successful transitions are not only about whether young people are working or studying but whether they can access pathways that are stable, inclusive and responsive to their circumstances.

Considerations for policy

The findings highlight that the transition from education to employment is diverse and can extend into the mid-twenties and beyond. While most young people are participating in education, employment or both, a smaller group faces barriers or inequities that may require more targeted support. Policy makers, educators and employers all have a role in shaping pathways that support young adults and build the workforce of the future.

The evidence points to the importance of considering how policy settings:

- reflect that education and employment often overlap, with many young people combining study and work while building qualifications, income and experience
- support pathways that help young people translate qualifications into employment, including through inclusive opportunities to build work experience
- enable recruitment and workforce practices that value skills as well as prior experience, particularly in occupations facing workforce shortages.
- recognise that, for some young people not in paid work, barriers extend beyond job search and may include health challenges, limited qualifications or experience and limited access to suitable work
- address the early emergence of gender differences in occupation, working hours and earnings.

These findings suggest that successful transitions into employment depend not only on young people's skills and aspirations but also on whether employers, education providers and support systems create opportunities that help young people build experience, manage study and work, and access suitable employment.

Potential next steps with LSAC data

This study examined young people's education and employment using Wave 10 data. However, many important related questions could be investigated with current and future waves of LSAC, including:

- How does receiving financial support from parents at ages 19–24 shape later outcomes in labour force participation, financial wellbeing and mental health?
- How does financial stress in early adulthood affect later health care use, work pathways and social participation?
- What are the intergenerational factors that shape young people's education and employment choices and pathways?

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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