

Chapter 7: Participation in education, training and work

This chapter reports on the participation of young people aged 15 to 24 in education and/or work, as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Education and Work.

Key Facts:

Fluctuations in participation rates between 2020 and 2023 were closely related to the effects of COVID-19 on the employment of young people.

In Australia in 2023:

- The proportion of 15–19-year-olds who were fully engaged in education, training or work was 87.3% – down from 88.3% in 2022 and 90.3% in 2021. Despite this, the current rate is still higher than rates reported in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The proportion of 20–24-year-olds who were fully engaged in education, training or work increased to 77.4% – up from 76.4% in 2022. This is the highest rate since 2008.
- The proportion of 17–24-year-olds who had left school and were fully engaged in education, training or work increased to 75.4% – up from 75.0% in 2022. This represents a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels.

7.1 Participation in education, training and employment

Key Performance Measures (KPMs) 1(g), 1(h) and 1(i) measure the full-time participation in education, training, and employment of 3 groups of young people:

- 15–19-year-olds, including school students and those who have left school and have moved into tertiary study and/or the workforce
- 20–24-year-olds, who may be undertaking VET or university study, working, or a combination of these activities
- 17–24-year-olds who have left school and who may be undertaking further study and/or work.

Key Performance Measure 1(g)

Proportion of 15–19-year-olds in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training

Key performance measure 1(h)

Proportion of 20–24-year-olds in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training

Key performance measure 1(i)

Proportion of 17–24-year-olds who have left school that are in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training

Full-time participation is defined as participation in full-time education or training, or full-time work, or a combination of both part-time education or training and part-time work.

The annual measures of these KPMs are based on the ABS Survey of Education and Work (SEW), which is conducted in May each year. Five-yearly measures of the KPMs, based on data drawn from the Census of Population and Housing, are reported for census years.

KPMs 1(g) and 1(h) for the period 2012–2023 and for census years 2016 and 2021 are shown in Table 7.1. Figure 7.1 illustrates KPMs 1(g) and 1(h), as measured by the SEW, over the period 2013–2023.

Table 7.1: Proportions of 15–19-year-olds and 20–24-year-olds in full-time education, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education, Australia, 2013–2023 (%)

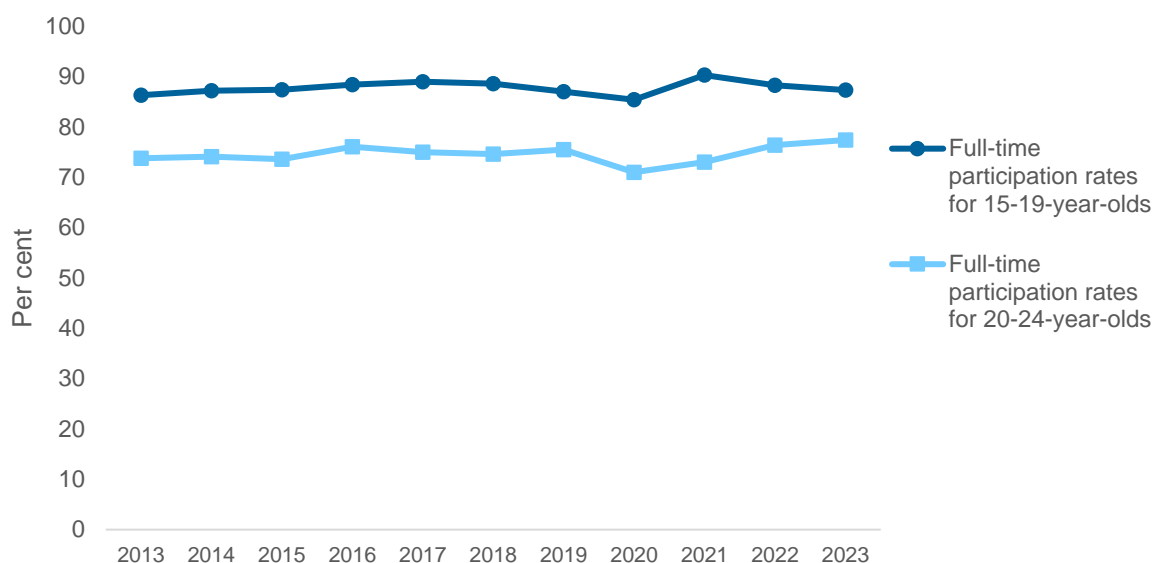
Calendar year	15–19-year-olds			20–24-year-olds		
	Full-time participation rate	CI±	Full-time participation rate (Census measure)	Full-time participation rate	CI±	Full-time participation rate (Census measure)
2013	86.3	1.2		73.8	1.1	
2014	87.2	1.1		74.1	1.6	
2015	87.4	0.3		73.6	1.7	
2016	88.4	1.3	86.4	76.1	1.5	72.2
2017	89.0	1.0		75.0	1.5	
2018	88.6	1.2		74.6	1.6	
2019	87.0	0.9		75.5	1.8	
2020	85.4	1.2		71.0	2.2	
2021	90.3	0.9	86.9	73.0	1.9	72.3
2022	88.3	1.4		76.4	2.2	
2023	87.3	0.9		77.4	1.8	

Notes:

CI = confidence interval. The percentages reported for SEW data in this table include 95% confidence intervals. Confidence intervals are a way of expressing the degree of sampling and measurement error associated with survey estimates. For example, an estimate of 80 with a 95% confidence interval of ± 2 means that if the total population was surveyed rather than a sample, there is a 95% chance that the result would lie between 78 and 82.

Sources: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2023; ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, 2021.

Figure 7.1: Proportions of 15–19-year-olds and 20–24-year-olds in full-time education, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education, Australia, 2013–2023 (%)



Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2023.

As shown in Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1, full-time participation rates for young people in their mid-to-late teens are consistently higher than for those in their early to mid-20s. This is to be expected, as the 15–19-year age group includes a high proportion of secondary school students for whom full-time participation in education, training or work is compulsory, at least until age 17.

From 2013 to 2019 there was a net increase in full-time participation for 15–19-year-olds (0.7 percentage points), and for 20–24-year-olds (1.7 percentage points). In 2020 both measures fell significantly – by 1.6 percentage points for 15–19-year-olds and by 4.5 percentage points for 20–24-year-olds – due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

For 15-19-year-olds, there was a significant increase in full-time participation rates, from 85.4% in 2020 to 90.3% in 2021. This more than reversed the fall in 2020, recording the highest participation level for this age group to date and above the long-term trend for this measure.² While there was a decrease in full-time participation rates for 15-19-year-olds to 88.3% in 2022 and a further decline to 87.3% in 2023, these rates remain higher than pre-pandemic levels.

For 20-24-year-olds, full-time participation increased by 2 percentage points between 2020 and 2021, and by 3.4 percentage points to 76.4% in 2022. The significant increase between 2021 and 2022 represented a full recovery to pre-COVID levels. With a one percentage point increase to 77.4% in 2023, full-time participation rates for 20-24-year-olds were at their highest recorded level since 2008, when they were 80.1%.

Trend data for the annual SEW measures of these KPMs for the period 2004–2023 is included in the Key Performance Measures data set in the National Report on Schooling data portal. This shows a

¹ The SEW is run during the first 2 weeks of May. During, and leading up to, this period in 2020, travel bans, community lockdowns and various other restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were in place, and these are likely to have impacted the survey results.

² Reasons for this increase may include provision of free courses through TAFE as a COVID measure, upskilling following pandemic changes, domestic and international travel restrictions, fewer school leavers taking a gap year, a significantly lower unemployment rate and increased job opportunities.

long-term upward trend in KPM 1(g) of 0.2 percentage points per annum, and a long-term downward trend in KPM 1(h) of 0.2 percentage points per annum over this period.

As a participation measure of 17–24-year-olds, KPM 1(i) includes people from the 15–19-year-old and 20–24-year-old age groups but excludes school students from both the numerator and the denominator. This measure is informative as an indicator of the transition of young people from school to post-school education and/or work, and the performance of schooling in facilitating this.

SEW data for this KPM is reported for the period 2013–2023 in Table 7.2, along with Census data for the years 2016 and 2021.

Table 7.2: Proportion of 17–24-year-olds who have left school that are in full-time education, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education, Australia, 2013–2023 (%)

Calendar year	Full-time participation rates for 17–24-year-olds who have left school	CI±	Full-time participation rates for 17–24-year-olds who have left school (Census measure)
2013	72.7	1.1	
2014	73.2	1.4	
2015	72.9	1.4	
2016	75.5	1.2	71.0
2017	74.7	1.3	
2018	74.3	1.6	
2019	74.0	1.6	
2020	69.3	1.8	
2021	73.9	1.6	73.4
2022	75.0	1.8	
2023	75.4	1.8	

Notes:

See notes for Table 7.1.

Sources: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2023; ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, 2021.

There was little change in KPM 1(i) between 2013 and 2019. However, like other groups of young people, 17–24-year-olds who had left school were affected by the impact of COVID-19. The fall in this measure of 4.7 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 and the subsequent increase of 4.6 percentage points between 2020 and 2021 were both statistically significant. The increase in 2021 is likely to reflect the policy initiative to provide free and subsidised training courses to school leavers and other young adults as a response to falls in employment due to the COVID pandemic.

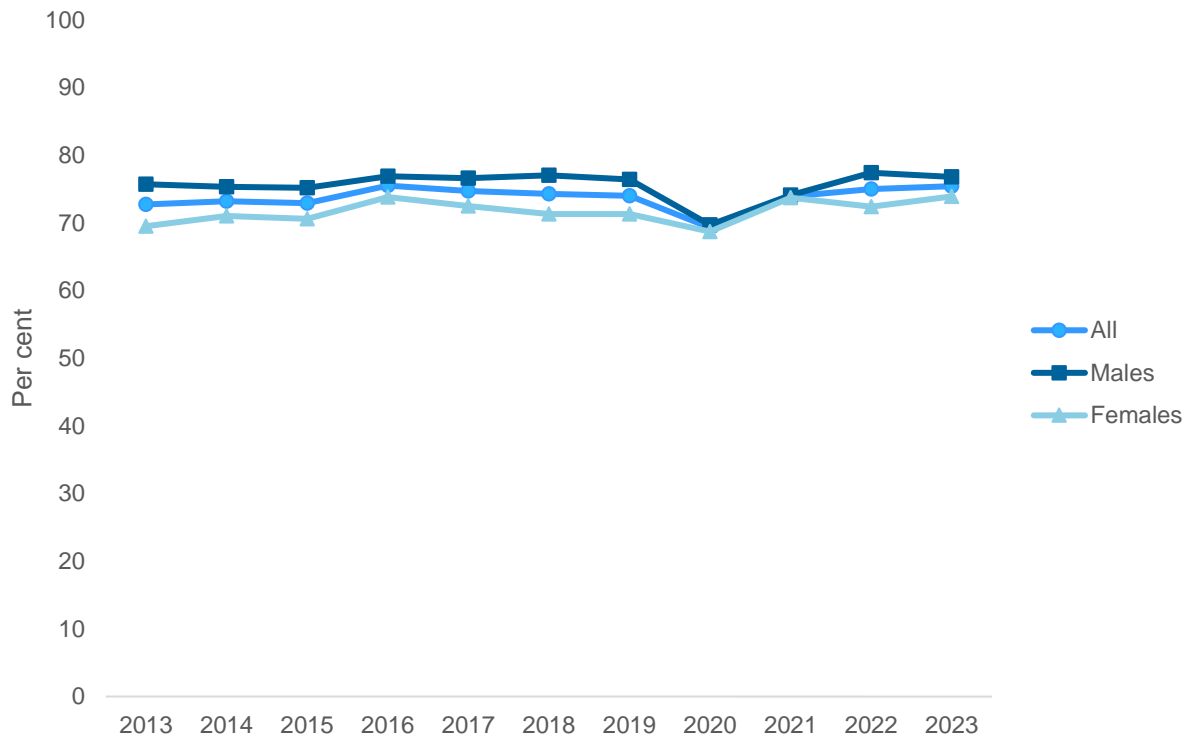
The Census reports KPM 1(i) as 73.4% in 2021. This is substantially up on the result of 71.0% from the 2016 Census. The KPM data set in the National Report on Schooling data portal reports no evident trend in the census measure for this KPM over the period 2011–2021.

While not statistically significant, the 1.1 percentage point increase from 73.9% in 2021 to 75.0% in 2022 represents a return to pre-pandemic levels. The 0.4 percentage point increase to 75.4% in 2023 was also not statistically significant, and there is a significant long-term downward trend of 0.2 percentage points per annum between 2004 and 2023.

Census data provides more robust measures by state and territory and can be disaggregated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status but is only available every 5 years. Census data for these KPMs by state and territory and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is also reported in the National Report on Schooling data portal. However, because of sample size and other factors, SEW data for particular age groups is less reliable when disaggregated by state and territory, especially for smaller jurisdictions. Because the survey is not conducted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in very remote areas, and because of sample size, SEW data cannot be disaggregated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.

SEW data for KPM 1(i), by gender, for the period 2013–2023 is presented in Figure 7.2. In 2023, full-time participation rates for 17–24-year-old males who had left school were 76.8%, compared to 73.9% for females. After falling to 69.7% and 68.7% respectively in 2020, rates in 2023 were above their pre-pandemic levels for both males and female, with a net increase between 2019 and 2023 of 0.4 percentage points for males and 2.6 percentage points for females.

Figure 7.2: Proportion of 17–24-year-olds who have left school that are in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training, by gender, Australia, 2013–2023 (%)



Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2023.