



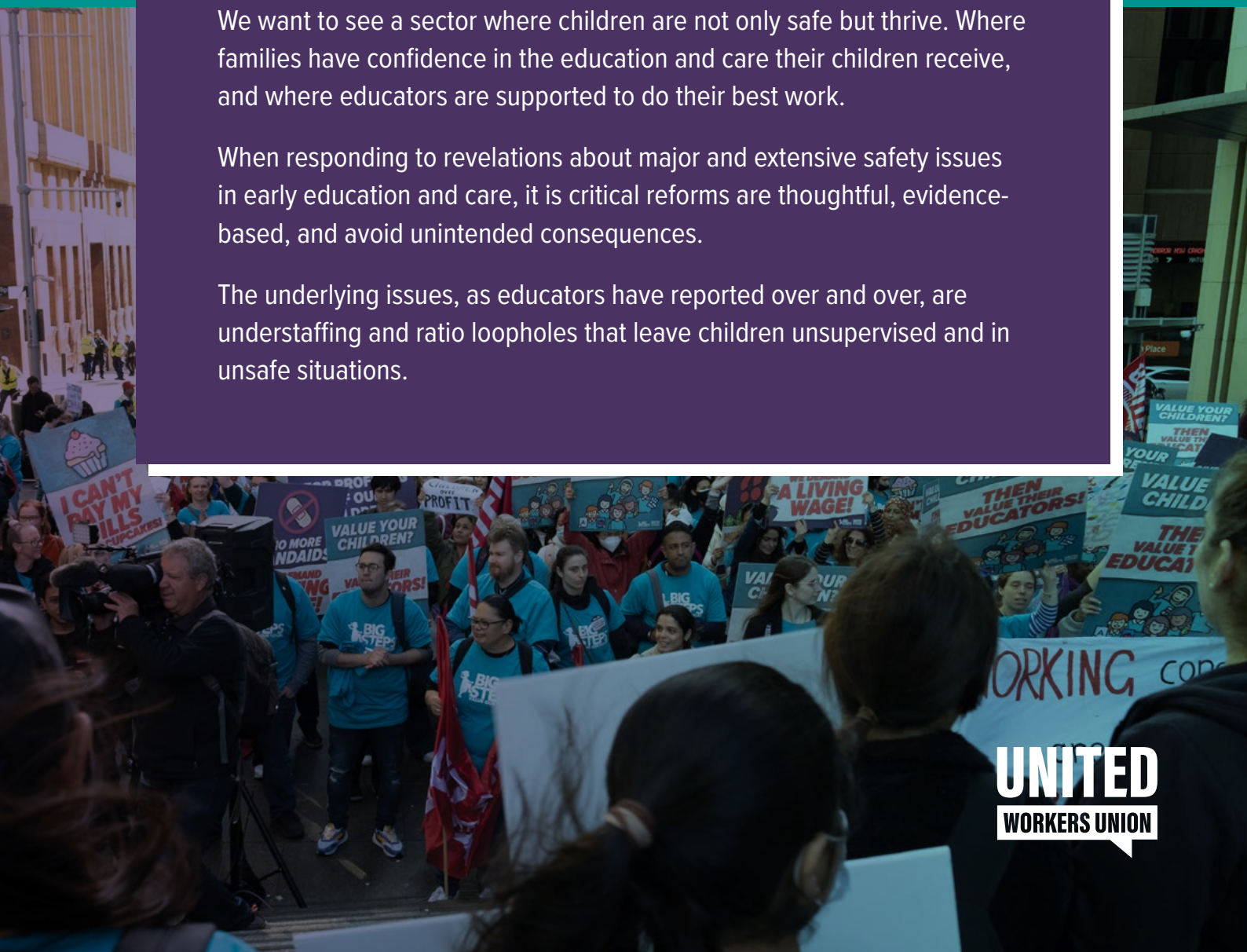
Safer staffing action plan

for a stronger early childhood education sector

We want to see a sector where children are not only safe but thrive. Where families have confidence in the education and care their children receive, and where educators are supported to do their best work.

When responding to revelations about major and extensive safety issues in early education and care, it is critical reforms are thoughtful, evidence-based, and avoid unintended consequences.

The underlying issues, as educators have reported over and over, are understaffing and ratio loopholes that leave children unsupervised and in unsafe situations.



UNITED
WORKERS UNION

The challenge:

The urgency of addressing staffing is underscored by United Workers Union's recent survey of 3000 educators, who raised:

Serious concerns about staffing:

77% of educators say they are operating below minimum staffing requirements at least weekly, and

42% say it is happening daily.

83% of educators strongly agree a common staffing loophole known as "under-the-roof" ratios used by centres compromises the safety and wellbeing of children.

When asked to identify the issues that had occurred due to falling below minimum staffing levels (top four):

“Staff are constantly walking in and out of our sector and we always have no staff so it becomes a mad rush to work out the day and no amount of planning or caring can account for not having enough staff members.

Educator, Queensland

75% said understaffing meant children were left without emotional support.

72% said understaffing led to an increase in children hurting themselves or others.

69% said education standards were compromised.

64% said children who need additional support were neglected.

Serious concerns about regulation:

75% of educators say regulators should not allow centres to avoid their legal minimum staffing requirements by issuing waivers.

Serious concerns about staffing for children who need additional support:

78% said they had children who needed additional support in their rooms.

79% said there was not enough inclusion support educators to meet the needs of children who need additional support.

77% said the lack of support led to more safety incidents.

“We always work with the correct ratio, but the increase of children with higher needs is making current ratios completely inappropriate.

Educator, Western Australia

The solution:

Children deserve consistent, high-quality care from familiar, trusted educators. Children thrive in environments where they are known,

understood, and supported by educators who have the time, training, and stability to build meaningful relationships.

That kind of trust and continuity simply cannot be built when services rely heavily on casual or agency staff who rotate frequently and may not know the children, families, or other educators well.

Addressing this fundamental issue requires significant reforms across staffing, enhancing the role of educators, regulation and accountability.

Safer Staffing

- ☒ Ratios must be met in every room, and the “under-the-roof” loophole must be closed.
- ☒ Staffing waivers can only be used as a last resort and are strictly time limited.
- ☒ Every child with additional needs, whether diagnosed or not, is fully supported through additional staffing and other required resources.
- ☒ The same best practice ratios apply across all states and territories.
- ☒ There are never less than two educators with children at all times.

Transparency and accountability to ensure safer staffing

- ☒ A national registration system that stops workers with serious issues.
- ☒ A strong, nationally consistent penalty regime for centres, including powers to de-fund non-compliant services.
- ☒ No second or third chances for centres – mandatory action must follow serious breaches.
- ☒ Timely assessment of new services, and regular reassessments at mandated intervals.

Safer staffing at the heart of funding and regulation reform

In regards to the sector’s funding and regulatory settings, it is necessary to:

- ☒ Prioritise safe and high-quality outcomes for children.
- ☒ Implement the role of a Child Safety and Quality Officer in every centre (see Page 4).
- ☒ Prioritise well paid and high-quality educator jobs, which will encourage retention and improve consistency of education and care, leading to better outcomes for children.
- ☒ Restrict profiteering off a sector intended to support children’s wellbeing and development.





Safer staffing through empowering educators

Recent reporting shows there are too many providers that are failing to ensure children's safety.

It is deeply concerning that in United Workers Union's recent survey, over half of educators told us they did not feel comfortable raising issues of concern at their centre, and when they did raise issues, two-thirds felt unheard.

Educators must be supported and empowered to act on safety.

It is necessary to introduce a Child Safety and Quality Officer in every centre, with the information and skills to support educators to raise safety concerns, and the power to hold providers accountable on staffing.

Child Safety and Quality Officers must have access to training and strong protections from reprisal so they can support educators without fear.



Raising safety and staffing issues ultimately results in hostility and bullying from management.




Educator, South Australia



Safer staffing impacted by profit motives

Educators reported in the recent United Workers Union survey sharp differences between their perceptions of for-profit providers' commitment to education and care compared to not-for-profit providers.

There were also worrying signs that a commitment to safety mechanisms – such as raising safety issues with directors – were substantially lower among workers at for-profit providers than not-for-profit providers:

-  53% of workers said for-profit providers either placed a low priority on quality education, safety and care of children, or did not consider it at all.
-  26% of educators in for-profit centres said they “rarely” or “never” felt comfortable raising issues with their centre director compared to 21% in large not-for-profit centres.
-  48% of educators in for-profit centres said they “rarely” or “never” felt heard when they raised issues about being understaffed or under-resourced compared to 34% in large not-for-profit centres.



Our company DOES NOT CARE or listen unless you are discussing occupancy and profit.

Educator, South Australia

Given these are systemic issues raised about safety by educators at a greater rate in for-profit providers, there is an urgent need for a funding model that limits excessive profit-taking and ensures that public investment is directed toward quality care, educator wellbeing, and workforce stability – not executive bonuses or shareholder returns.