



COVID-19 and Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds

Policy Platform

May 2020

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people aged 12-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds. MYAN works in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies at the state and territory and national levels to ensure that the particular rights and needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised and addressed in policy and practice. MYAN provides expert policy advice to government, undertakes a range of sector development activities, and supports young people to develop leadership and advocacy skills.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of everyone in the Australian community in acute and unpredictable ways, and disproportionately so the lives of those most disadvantaged in our community - including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing disadvantage faced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds across all aspects of their lives - in education, employment, health and well-being, housing, and income support.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have also demonstrated their resilience, adaptability, and resourcefulness at this time, and many are leading initiatives in their communities in response to the COVID-19. MYAN affirms the importance of recognising and building on young people's strengths and capabilities, and working with them as partners in service planning and delivery – particularly in times of crisis. They are keen to explore diverse responses to COVID-19 challenges, and best placed to guide service planning, adaption and delivery. They have a critical role to play in both responding to and reimagining a post-COVID 19 world.

MYAN has been working to ensure that the safety, rights, and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are protected and upheld in COVID-19 pandemic, and recognised in policy and service delivery responses, in the short, medium, and longer term.

In addition to our ongoing conversations with the youth and settlement sectors, we have initiated regular national meetings with young people and the sector to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on young people's lives and on youth and settlement service delivery, with over 250 participants from diverse sectors across Australia. Young people and service providers have highlighted their concerns and challenges (in the immediate and longer term), as well as innovative responses to addressing these.

Many of these are not new issues and have been consistently raised by MYAN in our policy and advocacy over many years - pre-existing and longstanding structural barriers to economic, social and civic participation, and personal well-being that have been magnified by COVID-19 with more acute implications in the immediate and longer term.

MYAN has developed this Policy Platform to share these key concerns, provide recommendations for addressing them, and to inform our ongoing advocacy work and the advocacy work of others in the sector (at the national state/territory levels). It draws on MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities, and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia.

Why a focus on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

The 2016 census revealed that 46% of Australia's young people were first or second-generation migrants and that one in four Australians aged 18 to 24 years were born overseas. Young Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a diverse population group with enormous potential to be active contributors to and participants in Australian society.

They have a range of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in education and employment, and embrace the opportunities available to them. However, they commonly face particular challenges and structural barriers in accessing these opportunities, services, and supports including: the migration experience, culture, language, racism and discrimination, lack of cultural competency within the service system, racism and discrimination, and responsibilities for supporting their families to navigate access to services and supports.¹ The confluence of age, the life stage of adolescence, the migration experience, and structural access and equity barriers means that this group of young people are at heightened risk of social and economic exclusion.

Adolescence is a critical period, and what happens during these years has profound and long-lasting implications for young peoples' future - employment and career paths, economic security, health, and well-being.

While the implications of the pandemic for Australia's youth population are significant, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are at heightened risk of short-term social and economic exclusion and longer-term entrenched disadvantage, given pre-existing access and equity barriers - unless targeted interventions are implemented in policy and programming.

Additionally, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 are likely to be further compounded for specific subgroups of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, including: those more newly arrived in Australia, young people experiencing homelessness, LGBTIQ youth, those on temporary visas, young women, those living with a disability, those with existing health issues, and young people living in regional/rural areas. They are facing increased stressors, including additional challenges in accessing resources, networks, and supports.

National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF)

MYAN developed the National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) in 2016 to support and measure good practice in the successful settlement and integration of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The NYSF focuses on four key "domains" and indicators to promote active citizenship - *Social Participation, Economic Participation, Civic Participation, and Personal Well-Being* - and includes a set of Good Practice Capabilities and practical assessment tools.

This Policy Platform uses the NYSF to frame how the Federal Government can support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds during this crisis, and throughout the recovery period. This support requires leadership, targeted policy and programming, investments based on sound evidence, and direct engagement with young people and youth services in service planning and delivery.



Recommendations

Broadly, MYAN advocates for targeted and responsive approaches in policy and service delivery to address the impact of COVID-19 on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds – in the short, medium, and longer-term recovery. Targeted, specialist approaches are essential to ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are safe, healthy and connected throughout this pandemic, and are supported to navigate the massive disruptions to economic, social, and civic engagement into the future.

We call on the Federal Government to design socio-economic responses to this crisis with an intentional focus on the experiences and futures of young people, who will bear the economic brunt of COVID-19 into the future. We encourage the government to account for pre-existing barriers and disadvantages in these responses to avoid further entrenchment of longstanding inequalities and disadvantage for particular groups of young people. Failing to invest in young people will result in substantial economic, social, and political costs, and risks individual long-term exclusion and disadvantage.ⁱⁱ

Right now, we have an opportunity to address longstanding socio-economic inequities – to meet both immediate needs and to rebuild a fairer, better society. There is a significant opportunity in the face of this crisis to build new partnerships and capitalise on the goodwill and cooperation across sectors and all levels of government.

MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Convene a national taskforce to focus efforts on mitigating the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on Australia's young people. This work would involve establishing mechanisms to consult with, and meaningfully engage young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the development of educational, economic, social, and health interventions.
2. Ensures that all federal relief packages are accessible to all young Australians, including those from refugee and migrant backgrounds on temporary visas.
3. Ensures that all socio-economic and health responses to COVID-19 (short, medium and longer-term) include targeted interventions for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, with particular attention paid to those facing heightened vulnerabilities including young women, homeless youth, LGBTIQ youth, young people with disabilities, asylum seekers and young people on temporary visas, and regional and rural youth.

DOMAIN: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

1. EMPLOYMENT



CONTEXT

Physical distancing measures introduced to contain the virus have resulted in extensive business shutdowns. There has been a swift and dire impact on the labour market as a result, with an estimated 1.4 million people in Australia out of work, and unemployment levels projected to reach at least 10%^{iiiiv}.

With many in the casualised labour force, the gig economy, and other precarious employment situations, younger Australians have been affected disproportionately by COVID-19-related job losses and reductions in hours, and many have had apprenticeships, work placements, or pending job offers withdrawn indefinitely.

Current estimates predict that 40% of teenagers and 30% of 20-29 olds will lose their jobs because of COVID-19^v. The long-term impact on youth employment is likely to be severe given that young people aged 15-24 in Australia are already three times more likely to be unemployed or underemployed^{vi} than adults aged 25 and over^{vii}, representing a significant underutilisation of this group. The national unemployment rates for those aged 15 to 24 years are consistently double that of the average national rate for 15 to 64-year-olds.^{viii} Past financial downturns have shown that young Australians bear the brunt of economic downturn and take far longer than other age groups to recover in terms of employment outcomes, particularly those without a degree, due to structural factors including: a move towards casualisation of the labour market, stagnating wages, a reduction in development and training budgets, an aging workforce, and a greater demand for higher skilled positions.^{ix} ^x Young people are often the least experienced members of the workforce, they are often the first to be let go or stood down by their employers, and usually the last to be re-hired.^{xi}

The experience of unemployment harms a young person's financial and psychological well-being, with the length of time spent unemployed critically influencing their future prospects of securing employment.^{xii}

Young people are also overrepresented in the 'gig' economy^{xiii} in sectors with the highest rates of workforce casualisation, including those most immediately affected by the COVID-19 fallout, including retail, hospitality, and tourism. For example, 45% of young people in Australia work in retail, accommodation and food services, meaning they are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus related job losses.^{xiv} Young people are also less likely to be beneficiaries of the Australian Government's historic JobKeeper initiative, given the significantly higher rates of casual employment for 15-24 year olds compared with the adult population. Young people face acute financial hardship and housing insecurity if they lose their jobs, lose hours, or are unable to go to work due to ill health. MYAN has deep concerns for the more than one million Australian casual workers – a large proportion of whom are young people – who are not eligible for JobKeeper due to their visa status or do not qualify for this support as they have been with their employer for less than 12 months.

Being unemployed, underemployed or Not in Education or Training (NEET) affects the ability of young people to plan for their future, and engage in civic life to the fullest extent and can result in: poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, physical safety) isolation from the community, barriers to accessing health care and social services and negative impacts on emotional and psychological well-being.^{xv}

Further, the lack of job availability or the lack of secure work for young people delays typical milestones of adulthood, impacting on young people's transition to adulthood and potential to become independent, including the need to delay moving out of home, taking on more debt than previous generations by staying in school longer, and being less likely to secure home loans than previous generations.^{xvi}

DOMAIN: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

1. EMPLOYMENT (CONT'D)



CONTEXT

The current crisis presents additional challenges to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, who are commonly highly motivated to engage in education/training pathways and employment. Young people already faced multiple challenges in entering and maintaining secure employment before the pandemic, and the intersection of being both young and from a refugee or migrant background means that this group of young people face additional barriers than their Australian-born, non-immigrant peers, leaving them particularly vulnerable to labour market exclusion and economic shock.

These include:

- Lack of social capital, including social networks to help them 'get ahead'
- Experiences of racism and discrimination, including unconscious bias
- Unfamiliarity with Australian workplace laws and greater risk of workplace exploitation
- Unfamiliarity with employment options, pathways and the labour market in Australia
- Lack of recognition of qualifications obtained overseas
- Lack of local work experience
- Interrupted education, and
- Low/no-English language skills.^{xvii}

The rise in insecure work due to COVID-19 also increases concerns about the health and safety and exploitation of young people at work, including wage violations and pay cuts, lax health standards and discrimination in the workplace. The heightened precariousness of employment at this moment may make young people (particularly those ineligible income support who are anxious about losing what work they do have) reluctant to exercise their work rights, ask for help, or seek employment elsewhere. The indefinite postponement of work experience placements and internships presents an additional challenge.

Work experience is an integral part of the school to work transition, providing students with opportunities to develop and demonstrate employability skills like communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative, and self-management. Work experience is also an essential first step in building a network of professional contacts in Australia. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds already have comparatively limited networks to draw on, and those without existing professional connections are likely to be disadvantaged if work experience opportunities continue to decline in response to COVID-19.

Regardless of their visa status, or length of time in a job, young people need support to maintain existing connections to the labour market to avoid further entrenchment of employment disadvantage and to secure their future employability, physical and mental well-being, and current and future socio-economic contributions to Australian society.

Targeted support for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is the most effective way for this group of young people to access and remain engaged in employment. It is imperative that this targeted support is provided in a timely manner in order to have a substantive impact. Steps to rebuild a competitive economy and flourishing society post COVID-19 is dependent on a skilled and capable workforce, and early intervention is needed to maintain and boost workforce skills and capabilities.



DOMAIN: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

1. EMPLOYMENT (CONT'D)

CONTEXT

We already know of key elements of good practice in employment programs that can assist young people from refugee backgrounds into employment, including:

- Individualised, holistic support/case management
- Education initiatives that help young people & families to understand career options, pathways and expose young people to a variety of opportunities
- Targeted programs that support a young person's transition from education to employment
- Access to paid work experience and internships
- Providing support in the workplace (to both young people and employers)
- Mentoring programs with an employment focus
- Programs that build 'bridging' social capital (links with industry, employers, professional mentors), and
- Cultural competency amongst services/employers^{xviii}.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to focused measures, including structural responses, to address youth unemployment and underemployment, MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Expand JobKeeper to cover all casuals employed less than 12 months, regardless of their visa status, to stabilise connection to the labour force, and prevent long-term youth unemployment and poverty post-COVID-19.
2. Continue to invest in Active Labour Market Programs that demonstrate positive outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and ensure that investment in (generalist) youth employment programs include targeted approaches and specialist services for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
3. Invest in community-based employment programs to include a mentoring component to help young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds build employability skills, gain work experience, and connect with employment opportunities.
4. Invest in wage subsidy programs that incentivise businesses to employ those who face disadvantage in the job market – including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
5. Explore opportunities to fund paid 6-12 month internships for more marginalised young people, including those who are NEET, in a variety of industries, to prepare them for job-readiness in the absence of jobs – including a targeted focus on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
6. Invest in developing an (empirical) evidence base to guide policy and service delivery for this group of young people, including examining the impact of existing government-funded (youth) employment programs.



CONTEXT

Everyone in Australia should be able to meet their basic needs, including access to food, housing, and healthcare. The unprecedented economic impacts of COVID-19 will disproportionately affect people already living on low incomes or with insecure work, including casual employees and migrant workers, and others who are not eligible for income support. Inclusive socio-economic measures are vital in protecting young people who are already at a higher risk of social and economic exclusion.

While the Federal Government responded relatively quickly to the economic impact of COVID-19 with specific economic stimulus packages, including new and increased income support payments, many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are receiving misinformation about their eligibility for this support and subsequently not accessing the support to which they are eligible. While barriers to accessing income support pre-existed COVID-19, the implications are more acute in the current context.

MYAN also holds significant concerns for the more than 1 million vulnerable people who remain excluded from this support. Temporary visa holders, including migrant workers, international students, Bridging visa holders, and asylum seekers living in the community remain ineligible for any form of income support, or access to Medicare. They are critically vulnerable to the health and socio-economic fallout from the pandemic and the widespread disruption to essential social services, including food insecurity, homelessness, ill health, and destitution.

When financial hardship is unexpected or protracted, people are at immediate risk of:

- Homelessness, with secondary homelessness common^{xix}
- Insecure and unsafe housing
- Exploitative labour practices
- Exclusion from vital crisis supports due to their temporary visa status
- Falling below the poverty line
- Accumulating debt
- Declining mental and physical health, and
- Long-term dependency on emergency relief and charitable support.^{xx}

The health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 will exacerbate disadvantage, as the most disadvantaged in our communities are the least able to cope with the crisis, or are facing increased or new vulnerabilities. Young asylum seekers and their families, including those on a Bridging Visas, who are already socially and economically vulnerable, are not eligible for any income support initiatives even when they have lost their jobs. Prior withdrawal of government payments, services, and work rights for those seeking asylum means they were already acutely vulnerable to poverty and entirely dependent on charitable support to meet their basic needs even prior to COVID-19.

The risk of poverty is also heightened for temporary migrant workers and international students who have been excluded from income support payments or other government safety nets. To survive, temporary visa holders will have to run down savings if they have any, access superannuation if they can, sell their possessions, or rely on charity to meet their basic needs. Temporary visa holders have been encouraged to return home if they are unable to independently support themselves throughout the crisis. However, with borders closed across the globe, returning 'home' is logistically impossible for most, and for those who have lived in and contributed to Australia for many years, Australia is home.

DOMAIN: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

2. INCOME SUPPORT (CONT'D)



CONTEXT

People on temporary visas have friends, family members, colleagues, peers, neighbours and communities here in Australia, and have been making valuable contributions to the Australian economy and the communities in which they live. Those who are living in our communities on temporary visas, including young people, need to be treated equally in the current context, and failing to do so undermines efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, and will have long-term impacts on for social and economic recovery.

We know that Australia's migration program has significant social and economic benefits to our nation - offsetting Australia's ageing population, improving labour productivity, helping businesses to source skills that are difficult to find at short notice, and addressing the needs of regional areas and industries.^{xxi} International students make a significant contribution to the Australian economy - \$34 billion in 2018 - directly boosting Australian jobs and wages.^{xxii} Excluding people on temporary visas from COVID-19 stimulus packages and income support risks tarnishing Australia's international reputation as a safe, welcoming destination and may appear a less attractive destination to future skilled migrants and international students.

MYAN welcomes the Federal Government's announcement of \$100 million funding to charities to provide emergency relief and support across Australia,^{xxiii} and funding to ensure that those on temporary visas can also access this relief.^{xxiv} However, these are fundamentally short-term crisis response strategies. Emergency relief is designed for one-off, limited payments to alleviate critical needs and is not a substitute for targeted, ongoing income support for vulnerable people in need of continuing assistance.

In the absence of adequate, regular income support, declining household income, or no income increases the risk of poverty leading to an overwhelming reliance on community organisations (specifically, material aid organisations) for emergency relief- food, clothing, accommodation support, and household goods.

Maintaining the health and well-being of everyone living in Australia is critical, and has never been more critical than right now. Young people cannot survive the extensive and far-reaching health and socio-economic repercussions of COVID-19 if they have no income or access to basic income support. Failing to protect people's basic needs, risks undermining efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus, and places the broader community's health at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent long-term, entrenched disadvantage and poverty, mitigate public health risks, and preserve Australia's international reputation, MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Extend the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payment to cover all casual employees and temporary visa holders, as a social and public health imperative and to minimise the risk of people falling into debt, exploitation, and financial hardship and ease the pressure on emergency relief providers.
2. Restore access to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program for all people seeking asylum, including young people, until a resolution of their status is complete so that they can have access to Medicare, PBS, and a financial safety net.
3. Work with Services Australia to establish a dedicated helpline (with interpreting services) for those who cannot navigate online services concerning JobSeeker or JobKeeper, and increase resources for Multicultural Services Officers (MSOs) and social workers.



CONTEXT

The nationwide closure of educational institutions has had an enormous logistical and emotional impact on young people and their families as they navigate significant disruptions in the transition to online education. Education is a critical factor in successful settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and school closures pose a profound risk of widening educational inequality.^{xxv} Many young people and their families are concerned about how this will affect skills acquisition and learning in both the short and long term - particularly for more vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

School closures are placing unprecedented challenges on governments, teachers, students, and families to ensure learning continuity. While transitioning to online learning may be a significant inconvenience for young people and their families who are well equipped to meet the challenge, for others, the transition will further magnify their educational disadvantage. Research proposes that current remote learning arrangements have the potential to result in poorer educational outcomes for almost half of Australian primary and secondary students if continued for an extended period. Students identified as being at particular risk of poorer learning outcomes include those from low socio-economic backgrounds, those with English as a second language, those with special learning needs and young people living in rural and remote areas.^{xxvi}

Education is a significant development milestone and pathway to economic and social participation for all young people and a key priority in the settlement journey for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This group of young people are commonly highly motivated to learn, but many face specific challenges in navigating and engaging in education pathways, including: age on arrival to Australia, literacy in their first language, highly disrupted/minimal/no previous formal education, limited practical support for learning at home due to limited English and digital literacy of family, and a limited understanding of and familiarity with Australian education and training systems and pathways.

There is significant diversity within and between the experiences of refugee and migrant students in Australian schools regarding their educational outcomes and experiences, however there is a lack of research into what is working to best support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in educational settings.^{xxvii} We know that young people are able to navigate these challenges more successfully when there is adequate and targeted support and investment in addressing structural barriers – including the engagement of multicultural workers in schools, and adequate access to English as an Additional Language (EAL) support.

Some of the specific issues that are increasing education challenges for young people and their families during this period include:

- The closure of many educational support programs (such as homework clubs) and loss of access to additional in-school supports and services (such as Multicultural Educational Aids), or barriers to accessing these if they have shifted online
- Limited or no digital access and digital literacy in the home
- Overcrowding, lack of privacy and inadequate housing to support home learning
- Missing classes due to increased caring responsibilities in the home, particularly for young women
- Financial stress through loss of income, including limited access to safe and secure housing, food, and clothing
- Increased pressure to find work in order to support themselves/their families
- Prioritising the educational needs of younger siblings and parents before their own, and
- The nature of online interaction affecting the capacity for young people to improve English language skills, or receive more personalized attention.

DOMAIN: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

3. EDUCATION (CONT'D)



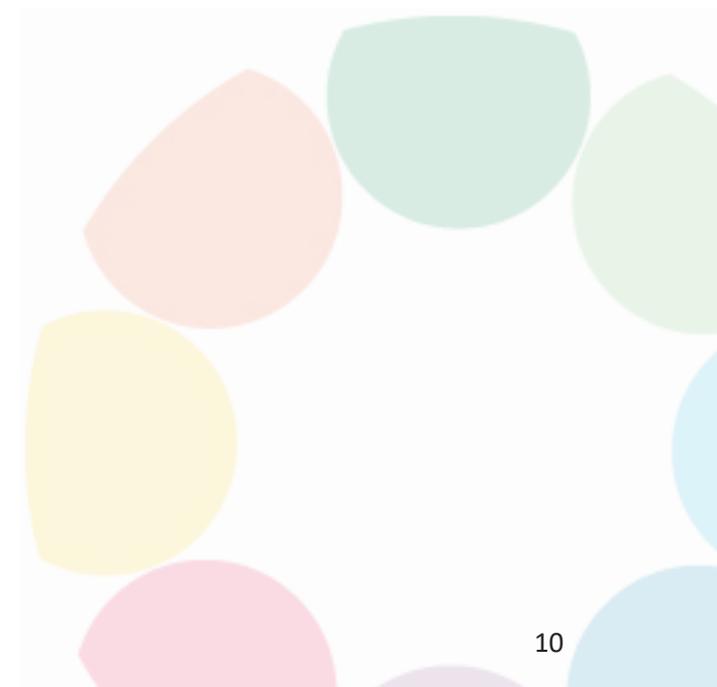
CONTEXT

Rapid transition to online learning has been challenging for both staff and students, and has required innovative and flexible learning approaches – some of which may become important initiatives into the future, particularly for cohorts with more limited mobility (including young parents and those with a disability).

Due to the high number of students facing educational challenges in the context of COVID-19, MYAN is concerned that many of the most vulnerable young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds are falling through the gaps and not engaging in any education/learning at all.

When the learning needs of young people are not adequately supported, or when their education is significantly disrupted, they are at increased risk of disengagement or withdrawal from education and training. Disengagement from school, and early school leaving, has significant consequences for a young person's future social, economic, and civic participation and well-being, and settlement outcomes more broadly. These include lower economic growth, higher costs of public related services including health care and employment services support and increased welfare (income support) costs.^{xxviii} Conversely, long-term savings can be made from investments in reducing early school leaving by investment in targeted educational strategies that are responsive to the unique barriers faced by young students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The provision of education to students from refugee and migrant backgrounds during this period, and beyond, must ensure that their participation in the Australia education system is inclusive and contributes to equitable educational outcomes and opportunities comparable with that of their Australian born, non-immigrant peers.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Well-planned, responsive educational strategies that address the impact of COVID-19 now and in the future require a well-developed understanding of the challenges facing all student cohorts, teachers, and the education sector more broadly. This will best ensure that strategies are developed to meet specific needs and resources are strategically and accordingly directed - giving young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds more equitable educational opportunities and successful outcomes in the long term.

MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Ensure AMEP embeds youth specific approaches in service planning and delivery, including flexible approaches and incentives for providers to deliver youth-specific classes and teaching methods, building on existing and emerging good practice approaches.
2. Ensure that young people are accessing the EAL/S support they need to build their English Language skills, including:
 - a. Direct and monitor funding allocations for English language learning in schools.
 - b. Increase funding transparency, accountability, and utilisation for schools with an EAL/D cohort.
 - c. Develop nationally consistent definitions, measurements and cost structures that (re)direct EAL funding to the education needs of students who need it most.
 - d. Removing restrictions on the maximum period young people can attend English Language Schools (ELSs) or Intensive English Language Centres (IELCs).
3. Fund and work with state and territory governments and the telecommunications industry to offer a package of essential telecommunications equipment and data for households without functional equipment, or for those who require additional equipment to meet the needs of school-age children.
4. Invest in community-based initiatives/programs that build all young people's digital literacy.
5. Invest in community-based initiatives that build the digital literacy skills of parents/carers to better to support children's education.
6. Work with the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) or the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to create online and broadcasted resources which can assist young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in their educational learning experience, especially for those with limited internet and computer equipment and resources.



CONTEXT

COVID-19 has resulted in a radical and unprecedented reliance on digital technology. As essential education, government, and community services move online, digital access and inclusion is critical to every young person staying safe, connected, and healthy during the COVID-19 crisis, including school-aged children, tertiary students, English language students, and young people engaging with employment and training opportunities. Those without the resources to effectively access and use digital technologies have found it immediately and increasingly difficult to participate in economic, social, cultural, and civic life.

COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing disadvantage in relation to digital access/inclusion and digital literacy, placing many young people from refugee and migrant at further risk of digital exclusion, with more pronounced (detrimental) health implications and risk of socio-economic and civic exclusion. For young people, this is a particularly critical issue as they navigate significant life stage transitions and milestones - education and training pathways, civic engagement, and mental and physical health issues.

Contrary to popular opinion, not all young people have access to technology/devices/smartphone or data, or are sufficiently digitally literate, particularly if they are more newly arrived in Australia from refugee backgrounds or experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. More recent arrivals under the humanitarian program have lower levels of digital access than the Australian national average, mainly due to limited technical skill and the cost of equipment and services - key barriers to digital inclusion.^{xxix}

Lower incomes mean young people and their families are less likely to have access to the hardware and data needed to support active digital participation. Most families and young people do not have access to a fixed-line or NBN internet connection in the home, with reports suggesting many families are relying on pre-paid mobile data, which is proving inadequate to meet connection needs. Family size and composition, including living with extended family members or sharing accommodation with more than one family, places additional strain on hardware and data in many refugee and migrant households, which also means many young people may have less physical space that is quiet and private to study, work, or socialise online.

Before COVID-19, young people could mitigate household technology limitations by using schools (including homework clubs), libraries, community centres, and other public spaces or by visiting friends and relatives - options that are impacted due to physical distancing directives.

DOMAIN: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

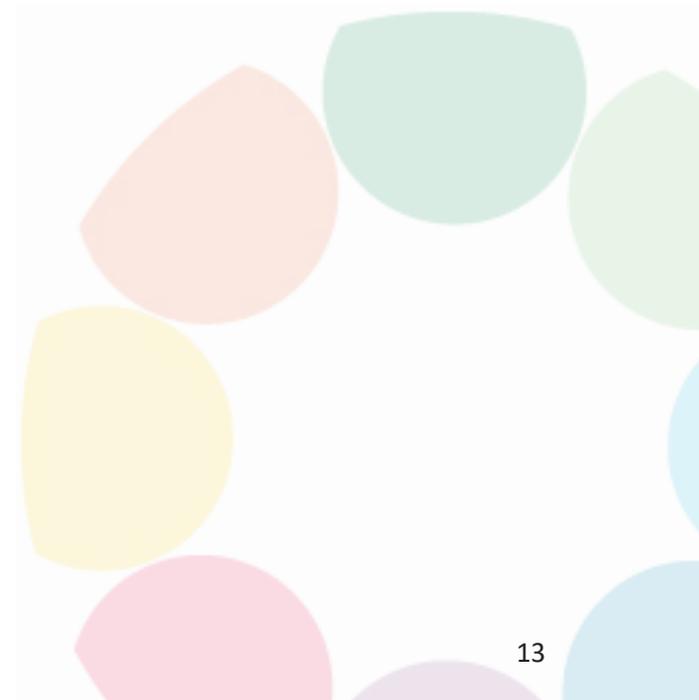
4. DIGITAL ACCESS



RECOMMENDATIONS

COVID-19 has highlighted the digital inequity that persists in Australia. Strategies that make internet access available for all must be part of the COVID-19 response and recovery. MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Work with telecommunication providers to implement a free telephone service that allows young people and their parents with low digital literacy to receive direct technical and skills support (including interpreting options).
2. Work with telecommunication companies to develop a targeted Multicultural Digital Inclusion program with a focus on access, affordability, and digital ability to mitigate the disproportionate barriers to digital inclusion that many multicultural communities experience.
3. Fund and work with settlement service providers to develop new programs that address the digital literacy requirements of more newly arrived young people and their families.
4. Work with telecommunications providers to provide free or low-cost mobile data packages and telecommunication subsidies for students from low-income families for the duration of school closures.
5. Invest in national research into the depth of the digital divide experienced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and the impact on social, economic, and civic participation. Research should investigate the category CALD (LBOTE) to explore the intersection of factors such as EAL, length of time in Australia, visa and/or refugee or refugee-like background, with known indicators of digital inclusion.





CONTEXT

All young people should have access to the mental health support that they need when they need it. Three-quarters of all mental-health vulnerabilities begin before age 25, and the social and economic insecurity and uncertainty generated by COVID-19 is intensifying those vulnerabilities.^{xxx} Mental health support services are reporting an increase in young people contacting their services, including Kids Helpline who have already reported a 40% increase in demands for their counselling service since the same time last year,^{xxxi} making targeted support for young people a key health priority.

Other areas that intersect with mental health and well-being have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, including housing and homelessness, family conflict and violence, loss of household income, and engagement in employment and education. At a time when access to social and support networks have dramatically decreased, these factors are compounding the mental health risk factors of young people.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face additional risk of mental health deterioration during the COVID-19 crisis due to the intersection of many developmental, social, cultural, and psychological factors. Access to mental health support was a priority issue for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds prior to COVID 19, with research indicating that young people from refugee backgrounds experience much higher levels of psychological stress than the general Australian youth population.^{xxxii} Despite this, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are consistently underrepresented in mainstream youth mental health services data.^{xxxiii}

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds already face barriers to accessing youth mental health support, including stigma, limited English language, lack of information about mental illness and mental health services in appropriate and accessible formats, lack of culturally responsive services, and the compounding of pre-existing trauma. All these factors may stop them from accessing preventive or early forms of support during this time.^{xxxiv}

While MYAN welcomes the Federal Government's investment in youth mental health supports in response to the pandemic, targeted interventions are needed to reach and engage young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, to minimise the risk of mental health deterioration during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are concerned that specific groups, including those from refugee and migrant backgrounds, are not recognised as needing more targeted approaches and will therefore not access this additional youth-specific mental health support. Similarly, while we are particularly pleased that the recently announced *National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan* includes assistance for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, including those of refugee background, we note that young people are not specifically identified, despite having support needs distinct from adults.

Initiatives to boost much needed mental health support must reach those who need it when they need it. Mental health services receiving COVID-19 funding need to work in close partnership with communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds – including young people, community leaders, and the services that work with these groups - to build on the already established and trusted networks that exist. Investing in targeted youth mental health support and prevention now will mitigate the immediate and long-term negative impacts of the pandemic on young people's mental health - leading to enhanced well-being, increased productivity, and positive social and civic engagement.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to tailor mental healthcare to the needs of refugee and migrant youth, and ensure that young people have access to critical mental health support to manage the impacts of COVID-19, policy makers need to better understand the structural access they face, and the reasons behind low utilisation of existing mental health resources. MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Ensure that recipients of additional government funding invest in targeted, tailored strategies that address identified barriers to service accessibility faced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds by:
 - a. Designing programs that respond to the cultural, social and health disparities experienced by refugee and migrant communities in collaboration with trusted (multicultural youth) services with expertise and networks with this youth cohort.
 - b. Implementing mental health literacy strategies with communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds to reduce stigma.
 - c. Implementing culturally responsive approaches in assessment and service delivery.
 - d. Budgeting for professional phone interpreters for mental health sessions with young people who have English as an Additional Language.
2. Provide additional funding for online mental health training, such as Youth Mental Health First Aid, for refugee and migrant community members, including young people, to support community-based and peer-to-peer support, and to facilitate referrals where appropriate.
3. Extend access to Medicare and PBS to everyone living in Australia, including those on temporary visas, so that all young people have equitable health support and can manage their health during this pandemic and mitigate long-term health implications.
4. Encourage engagement with mental health services by increasing the number of psychologist and psychiatrist appointment covered by Medicare (bulk billed).
5. Invest in long-term research around the efficacy of mental health policies and mainstream youth mental health in meeting the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, specifically identifying the factors that help or hinder their use, to ensure the appropriateness of mental health services beyond COVID-19.

DOMAIN: PERSONAL WELLBEING

6. FAMILY VIOLENCE



CONTEXT

Rates and severity of family violence and conflict increases significantly following natural disasters and periods of isolation. Home is not always the safest place for young people, and COVID-19 has exacerbated this vulnerability due to physical distancing and self-isolation directives. This is further compounded by reduced community support services and access to safe public spaces.

For some young people, job losses and insecure housing will force them to move in with family or friends or return to hostile family environments, which can be highly conflictual due to current or existing socio-economic stressors, expectations of caring responsibilities (including the care of younger siblings and elderly family members), limited privacy, education/training demands and overcrowding.

Young people already living at home in similar circumstances may find these dynamics heighten existing pressures. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, young people could mitigate challenging family dynamics/tension by participating in activities outside the home, including employment, sport and recreation, and education and training. Restrictions on accessing public spaces risks increased household tension and conflict. The refugee/migration and settlement process commonly has a significant impact on refugee and migrant family units, with intergenerational conflict compounded by factors including being in a new country, economic stress, the impacts of trauma, learning a new language and cultural and legal norms, and distance from extended families, friends and community support networks.^{xxxv} These factors can place young people at increased risk of family conflict, violence and breakdown, isolation, and homelessness. We know that the additional stressors of COVID-19 are exacerbating these risks.

Young people who have limited English language may lack knowledge or access to translated information about the legal and support services available in Australia, which provide housing, income, and help to young people impacted by family violence. There is limited eligibility for temporary visa holders to access

crisis services and other essential services they need to live independently, including healthcare, public housing, and income support, leaving temporary visa holders at risk of family violence vulnerable and reliant on charities and emergency relief to survive.

MYAN welcomes the Federal Government's announcement of \$150 million to support Australians experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence because of COVID-19, and notes a targeted strategy is required to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in response to their particular vulnerabilities and experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Ensure that additional investment in family violence support at the federal levels include targeted approaches and specialist services for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
2. Investigate the extent of and (targeted) initiatives to address adolescent violence in the home among CALD communities.
3. Ensure that any public communication campaigns about family violence include a multicultural communication strategy, to improve information flow to communities with diverse language needs, and are available on a range of platforms including online, radio, and television.
4. Provide funding for the establishment of a national protocol on specialised training for interpreters in family violence contexts and the development of youth-only and women-only interpreting services for use in family violence-related settings.



CONTEXT

Racism and discrimination

Racism and discrimination are an ever-present reality for many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Experiences of racism and discrimination can have significant detrimental impacts on mental health, are a key barrier to social inclusion, diminish a young person's sense of connection and belonging, contribute to marginalisation and isolation, and diminish participation in education, employment, and recreational activities.^{xxxvi} It can also contribute to feelings of anger, depression, heightened fear, and flashbacks to trauma experienced prior to arriving in Australia.

Experiences of racism and discrimination are exacerbated during a crisis when fear and scarcity lead to scapegoating and targeting of minority and marginalised communities. There have been persistent reports of racist abuse and discrimination across the globe since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. Since the virus has reached Australia, people of Chinese and other Asian backgrounds there is evidence of escalations in racially motivated abuse towards people from Asian backgrounds occurring across Australia amid COVID-19^{xxxvii}^{xxxviii}. Young people have also reported that they are experiencing or witnessing racialised physical, verbal, and online harassment linked to COVID-19 misinformation, fear, and panic.

A safe and welcoming community is vital for positive settlement outcomes. Public perception of migrants can influence the settlement experience and affects the cohesion of the Australian community. Governments and media outlets play a crucial role in during this time by sharing accurate health information, challenging COVID-19 misinformation, condemning racism, and rejecting any link between immigration and COVID-19.

Effectively addressing racism and discrimination requires:

- Responses that strengthen and promote community participation and engagement.
- Laws that condemn and actively discourage racism and discrimination of all kinds.
- Leadership that actively promotes inclusion and condemns racism and discrimination.
- Measures that address structural and systemic barriers to access and participation.

Youth justice

Laws restricting movement introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have given police the authority to fine people who leave their homes without a reasonable excuse. We are concerned that this new public order legislation is too discretionary and will result in unwarranted targeting of more marginalised members of society – including young people, the homeless, and people from migrant backgrounds. Other concerns include: use of the new restrictions as a basis for more readily obtaining police attendance at people's homes, 'visa policing,' or excessive harassment of people from particular communities who are outside for legitimate purposes. Since the introduction of social distancing orders, thousands of fines have been issued to people in Australia due to police compliance checks. Human rights advocates, public health experts, and lawyers have highlighted concerns over the discrepancies of fines across jurisdictions and racial / ethnic bias.

DOMAIN: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION & CIVIC PARTICIPATION

7. SOCIAL COHESION



RECOMMENDATIONS

Social cohesion is vital to creating the conditions for a healthy and productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone. A safe and welcoming community is crucial for positive settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. MYAN recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Encourage political leaders to publicly counteract media reports that conflate public health/social restrictions with rhetoric and stereotypes around particular migrant communities.
2. Support additional efforts to monitor incidents of discrimination and xenophobia and ensure that responses are expedient and well publicised.
3. Avoid using the COVID-19 pandemic as a foundation for conversations about Australia's immigration program.
4. Implement a national response to racism arising from COVID-19, e.g. a National Anti-Racism Strategy.
5. Invest in local level social cohesion and community-building activities.
6. Work with states and territories and community police initiatives to ensure those enforcing new laws/restrictions apply penalties appropriately and proportionately, with consideration to minimising any risk of young people's engagement in the youth justice system.
7. Disseminate public messages with assurances that no-one taking a test for COVID-19 will be at risk of arrest or detention.

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