

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy

September 2019



Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

MYAN is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, and those who work with them.

MYAN works in partnership with young people, government and non-government agencies at the state and territory and national levels to ensure that the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised and addressed in policy and service delivery. MYAN provides expert policy advice, undertakes a range of sector development activities and supports young people to develop leadership skills.

MYAN has developed the *National Youth Settlement Framework* to support a targeted and consistent approach to addressing the needs of newly arrived young people settling in Australia.

MYAN's vision is that all young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can access the support and opportunities they need to be active citizens in Australian society.

About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee's Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy. We welcome a robust, evidence based conversation about these areas in the context of Australia's long history of migration, cultural diversity and multiculturalism as a public policy underpinning social cohesion. This includes recognition of the positive contributions that people from refugee and migrant backgrounds make to Australian society, and complex and dynamic notions of national identity in the contemporary world.

This submission provides a national perspective; drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people aged 12-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and multicultural sectors across Australia. The issues being considered by the Committee, particularly in relation to citizenship, multiculturalism, social cohesion, and national identity are critical issues for the young people we work with, their families and communities. We have drawn on consultations with young people and those working with them in preparing this submission. We have chosen to focus on: nationhood and national identity, citizenship and Global citizens, the relationship between citizen and the state, multiculturalism and the impact of racism and discrimination on young people and social cohesion.

MYAN looks forward to engaging with the Committee in relation to the issues presented in this submission. We also encourage the Committee to hear directly from young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and we are happy to coordinate participation of young people at hearings around Australia.

Key messages

1. Young people in Australia are living at a time of widespread and rapid social change. Globalisation- the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations- is a key factor influencing their lives. Globalisation is adding new layers to traditional notions of nationhood, citizenship and the nation state in the 21st century. These notions are critical to the way young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds shape their identities and sense of belonging and inclusion in Australia.
2. Gaining citizenship should be an enabling, positive and welcoming process for applicants and one which is seen to contribute to building a cohesive and dynamic nation. It is viewed by young people as a critical milestone in enjoying and exercising civic and political rights and a sense of belonging to the Australian nation. This is particularly so for people arriving through Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program.
3. Social cohesion is vital to creating the conditions for a productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia. A safe and welcoming community is crucial for positive settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. However, public perception of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can influence the settlement experience and can have implications on the level of cohesion among the Australian community.
4. MYAN remains committed to ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism. A strong multicultural and socially cohesive Australia is particularly significant for young people, especially those who arrive in Australia as refugees and migrants and those born in Australia to refugee or migrant parents. MYAN considers that multiculturalism as a public policy framework is the cornerstone of a meaningful social inclusion agenda.
5. In order to continue to maximise Australia's prosperity, multiculturalism must continue to be promoted. All levels of Australian government must demonstrate renewed support for multiculturalism, reinforced by national policy and funding frameworks. Contemporary discussion about multiculturalism must continue to celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity as a strength. It must reinforce the success of Australia as a multicultural nation, promoting the principles of mutual respect, equality and unity and denouncing racial hatred and discrimination as incompatible with Australian society.
6. Australia's history of implementing multicultural policies and delivering strong settlement services means we are equipped to continue meeting the needs of our diverse population and to respond in ways that support social cohesion, inclusion and respect.

Recommendations

1. That all levels of government Invest in initiatives that facilitate opportunities for young people to have their voices heard in political and civic domains to inform policy and decision making.
2. That all levels of government find ways to engage in dialogue with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to create opportunities to challenge the existing negative narratives around refugees and migrants.
3. That all levels of government avoid misrepresentations and stereotyping of refugee and migrant young people in public narratives and ensure strong leadership to support rather than undermine social cohesion.
4. That all levels of government create inclusive opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to interact with and gain a deeper understanding of formal politics and the civic processes in Australia. This includes investing in civic education support in schools to ensure all young people are supported to develop their knowledge of Australian society and culture, legal and political rights, laws, regulations, policies and political landscapes and the voting process.
5. The Australian Government continues to provide ongoing support for the National Anti-Racism Strategy.
6. That all levels of government identify new ways to promote and protect multiculturalism throughout Australia, in recognition that a public policy of multiculturalism underpins the social cohesion of the Australian nation.

Introduction

One in four Australian young people are from a refugee or migrant background.¹ Their engagement as active citizens in Australian society has significant and long-term benefits for each young person, their families, communities, and a diverse and socially cohesive Australia.²

Australia is one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world, and cultural diversity has become one of this country's most defining contemporary characteristics.³ Multiculturalism is a central tenet of Australian national identity and an asset to the country in an era of globalisation. Multiculturalism has enabled our economy to become one of the world's strongest, and Australian

¹ MYAN (Australia), 2016, National Youth Settlement Framework.

² Ibid.

³ Rajadurai, E 2018 *Success in Diversity-The Strength of Australia's Multiculturalism* The McKell Institute

society to become one of the world's most peaceful.⁴ Much of this success can be attributed to strong bi-partisan support for multicultural policy at the Commonwealth and state/territory levels, as well as investment in settlement policy and services and the remarkable contributions of refugees and migrants.

As at 2016, the Australian Census identified that 45 per cent of all young people in Australia aged 12 to 24 were from refugee and migrant backgrounds; 49 per cent of Australians had one or both parents born overseas and there were 300 languages being spoken in Australian homes.⁵

People from refugee and migrant backgrounds bring to Australia diverse skills, qualifications and interests, new ideas, and economic benefits. Most people from refugee and migrant backgrounds arrive in Australia with a strong desire to settle quickly into the Australian community, make positive community contributions and create better lives for themselves and their families. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have immense potential to be active participants in and contributors to Australian society.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a highly diverse group with enormous potential to be active participants in, and contributors to Australian society. They have a range of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in areas such as education and employment, and to embrace the opportunities available to them, including those afforded to them in Australia's democracy.. Young people experience settlement differently to children and adults due to their age, developmental stage and the various roles they play in helping their family to settle.⁶

Response to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

a. the changing notions of nationhood, citizenship and modern notions of the nation state in the twenty first century

"My experience of Australian nationhood: Australia is a country of multiculturalism and diversity. It welcomes people who come from other countries with love; it encourages you to work in the community and supports them. It is a good nation that foreigners feel welcomed to." – 23 year old, female, QLD

Young people in Australia are living at a time of widespread and rapid social change. Globalisation- the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations- is a key factor influencing their lives. Globalisation is adding new layers to traditional notions of nationhood,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 *The Census of Population and Housing (Census)*
<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/2016>

⁶ MYAN (Australia), 2016, National Youth Settlement Framework.

citizenship and the nation state in the 21st century. These notions are tied to the way young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds shape their identities and sense of belonging and inclusion in Australia.

Young people and citizenship

Citizenship is an important and integral part of the settlement journey, a culmination of what, for many, can be a very challenging transition to a new country.

Formal ideas of citizenship are often associated with the legal definitions of the rights and responsibilities attached with citizenship of a nation state such as voting or holding an Australian passport. Broader understandings of citizenship can incorporate more subjective concepts such as agency, identity and belonging, which are not necessarily restricted to those holding formal citizenship.⁷

For the purposes of this submission, MYAN adopts a broad view of ‘active citizenship’ as outlined in the *National Youth Settlement Framework*. We understand this as the optimal settlement outcome for young people, where they are ‘...supported to become active agents of change and in shaping their own futures.’⁸ This is understood to be inclusive, not just about formal citizenship status with associated legal rights and responsibilities, but a proactive approach to engagement and participation in Australian society. Active citizenship applies to all young people regardless of formal citizenship status in Australia.

Active citizenship encompasses concepts of participation, power, agency, identity and belonging, and includes activities such as community service and volunteering. It includes structured forms of engagement with political processes, as well as more day-to-day forms of participation in society. Active citizenship assumes the acquisition of social capital and agency, where young people are supported to become active agents of change and in shaping their own futures.⁹

Active citizenship also reflects one of the key developmental tasks of adolescence – negotiating identity, independence and interdependence with family and community.

Nationhood and national identity

For many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their sense of identity and belonging is formulated via a complex interplay between their migration journey, their place in their families, communities and broader Australian society, their national and cultural identity and notions of citizenship and nationhood.

⁷ Oliff, L. & O’Sullivan, K. 2006, *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*, Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth, p. 13 ; Holdsworth, R. Stokes, H. Blanchard, M. & Mohamed, M. 2006, , *Civic Engagement and Young people in the city of Melbourne*, Australian Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, p. 23

⁸ MYAN (Australia), 2016, *National Youth Settlement Framework*

⁹ Ibid.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group, and this is reflected in how they describe their identities. For some young people who were born overseas, they feel more closely identified to Australia than their country of origin, while others speak of feeling connected to multiple countries depending on where their families are from, their country of birth or the countries they have spent an extensive amount of time living or travelling in.

Many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds speak of their capacity to identify with multiple identities at different times due to their migration experience and the impact of globalisation which has influenced the way young people understand traditional notions of belonging and nationhood. For young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, belonging is flexible and complex. Many young people in contemporary Australia experience varying forms of belonging to the nation, to local and global communities, to networks of friends and family, and to different cultural spaces.¹⁰

Traditional concepts of nationhood and citizenship, particularly in western liberal democracies, are historically tied to notions of a nation-state bound by a common territory and its relationship to a territorially-bounded populace; a worldview that is not necessarily shared by, or relevant to young people in contemporary Australia.¹¹

In consultation with MYAN, some young people shared that they felt traditional notions of nationhood and national identity are framed by the Government and ignore the lived reality of young people in contemporary Australia. For some young people who feel closely connected to Australia and are actively engaged in civic processes, they can feel alienated from traditional concepts of Australian nationhood due to what they see as a reliance on stereotypes that are at odds with contemporary Australia. This is not to say that these young people do not feel a sense of civic duty and connection to Australia—rather that national identity should emphasise shared democratic values, rather than a person’s ethnicity or the length of time someone has lived in Australia.

Citizenship and global citizens

“Global citizen means to be a citizen around the world, and have equal rights as everyone and everyone has human rights, the right to live.” 18 year old, female, QLD

Many of the issues and networks that are important to young people are not anchored solely within national boundaries, but within global settings.¹² The internet and new forms of media are transforming traditional notions of citizenship which no longer restrict young people to traditional

¹⁰ Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18 (2018) by the Multicultural Youth Australia Project Team Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycrc

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¹² Wierenga, A. et al. 2008 Youth-led learning: Local connections & global citizenship Australian Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education

geographic boundaries.¹³ Young people in contemporary Australia, like young people the world over, are increasingly identifying with, and participating in, international issues or causes, such as protesting on global issues like climate change, joining on-line social movements and blogging on international issues.¹⁴ New technologies have brought increasing opportunities for global connection for young people in Australia which increases their awareness and experience of cultural, national, international and religious diversity, an awareness which strengthens social cohesion.¹⁵

Young people are more interconnected-economically, environmentally, politically, socially- than ever before. Due to the connections that young people are able to facilitate across borders, as well as the number of young people who are spending parts of their lives in different nation states, young people are acutely aware of their interconnectedness with people and environments around the globe and their contribution to a global society and economy.

As a result, many young people identify as ‘global citizens’, which enables them to cultivate multiple identities and connections beyond a physical connection to the nation state. As a concept, ‘global citizenship’ is a useful way of describing the multiple attachments that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can have while negotiating their position within local, national and global spaces.¹⁶

In our consultations, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds stated that contemporary conversations around citizenship need to consider the lived realities of young people who identify as global citizens-particularly those from refugee and migrant backgrounds who may have lived in multiple places- and recognise that young people are connecting via shared values that transcend traditional barriers associated with religion, ethnicity and location.

“For me, the concept of citizenship is moving away from a shared demographic to a shared set of values”. 22 year old, male, VIC

The value of developing a sense of ‘global citizenship’ is affirmed in several Australian educational goals, in recognition of the importance in contemporary world. For example, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians states:

‘Global integration and international mobility have increased rapidly in the past decade. As a consequence, new and exciting opportunities for Australians are emerging. This heightens the need to

¹³ Collin, P. 2008 (a), Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Literature Review, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, p. 7.
⁹ Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Council Australia (FECCA), 2011, A Message from the FECCA Chair, Australian Mosaic, Issue 28, June 2011, p. 2.

¹⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging. CMY: Melbourne

¹⁵ Wierenga, A. et al. 2008 Youth-led learning: Local connections & global citizenship Australian Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education

¹⁶ Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18 (2018) by the Multicultural Youth Australia Project Team Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr

*nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship.*¹⁷

Similarly, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) framework for the national curriculum recognises that Australian students need to '*...nurture an appreciation of, and respect for, social, cultural and religious diversity and a sense of global citizenship.*'¹⁸

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) framework *Preparing Our Youth for An Inclusive and Sustainable World* states that a sense of global connectivity is essential for young people, not just so they can learn to participate in a more interconnected world, but so they can also appreciate and benefit from cultural differences. The framework states:

'Contemporary societies call for complex forms of belonging and citizenship where individuals must interact with distant regions, people and ideas while also deepening their understanding of their local environment and the diversity within their own communities. By appreciating the differences in the communities to which they belong - the nation, the region, the city, the neighbourhood, the school – young people can learn to live together as global citizen.'

This framework identifies key benefits of young people identifying as global citizens as: to be able to live harmoniously in multicultural communities; to thrive in a changing labour market; to use media platforms effectively and responsibly and to support the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁹

Young people's views on Australian politics

This connection to global citizenship does not automatically translate into young people becoming disengaged or disinterested in the Australian political domain as has sometimes been portrayed. Global citizenship is said to involve three key dimensions — 'awareness (of self and others), responsibility and participation.'²⁰ This awareness is reflected in the young people we work with, who are politically aware, motivated and interested in Australian social and political issues. They feel strongly about participating in the democratic process and can articulate the rights and responsibilities between citizen and state. Research undertaken by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) has found that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are likely to be enrolled to vote if eligible and agree that voting is an important opportunity for young people to influence change and have a say in the issues that impact them.²¹

¹⁷ Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008)

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

¹⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum>

¹⁹ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (The OECD) *Preparing Our Youth For An Inclusive And Sustainable World: The OECD PISA Global Competence Framework* <https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf>

²⁰ Aktas, F. et al (2017). Institutionalizing Global Citizenship: A Critical Analysis of Higher Education Programs and Curricula. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(1), 65–80.

²¹ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) *Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging*. CMY: Melbourne

Indeed, in our consultations the symbolic link between citizenship and belonging for young people remains strong. Despite this, they have identified challenges with contemporary Australian politics.

Young people expressed a clear desire to see their rights and interests represented in Australian politics. Young people feel that their voices are not heard nor their perspectives represented in Australian political debates, highlighting a need for political leaders to find new ways to engage directly with young people.

Representation is also important to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In a country where 28 per cent of the overall population was born overseas and 49 per cent of Australians have one or both parents born overseas, young people expressed frustration that this diversity is not reflected in Australian politics.²² They spoke of feeling alienated, concerned that the issues that are important to them, and to their communities are not well represented.

'Like a lot of countries in the world, Australian politics is becoming really polarised.' 19 year old,
female VIC

Young people we spoke to are frustrated and disappointed by what they described as the increasingly polarised nature of current political debate. Some young people feel that major parties are more focused on denigrating each other's policies than working towards improved social outcomes based on what constituents actually want, causing them to feel sceptical about the motivations and sincerity of politicians. One young person described politics as a system of "mutual tolerance at best and divisive indecision at worst".

Australia is a signatory to international frameworks that affirm commitments to ensuring young people have opportunities to participate in their community and in decision making processes. Key principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) include the right of children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them and have their opinions considered (Article 12); to participate freely in the community by joining groups or organisations (Article 15); and have access to a wide range of recreational and leisure opportunities (Article 31).²³ MYAN suggests that supporting and creating opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to meaningfully participate in civic activities and processes builds a strong sense of agency and belonging and contributes towards a stronger, more socially cohesive society – one that is built upon inclusion, equity and a robust, dynamic multicultural society.²⁴

The successful emergence of all young people as fully participating Australian citizens is desirable both for our society and for the individuals concerned as it directly affects their permanent cultural, social and economic contribution to the nation at large and as such MYAN recommends the following.

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *The Census of Population and Housing (Census)*
<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/2016>

²³ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

²⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) *Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging*. CMY: Melbourne

b. Rights and obligations of citizenship, including naturalisation and revocation, and the responsibility of the state to its citizens in both national and international law.

"I feel Australian-I am Australian! Citizenship means the Government also recognises me as such." 19 year old, female, VIC

Gaining citizenship should be an enabling, positive and welcoming process for applicants and one which is seen to contribute to building a cohesive and dynamic nation. It is viewed by young people as a critical milestone in enjoying and exercising civic and political rights and a sense of belonging to the Australian nation. This is particularly so for people arriving through Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

Relationship between citizen and the state

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have the potential to be active civic participants in and contributors to Australian society. However, they can face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities, including language, culture, limited social capital and unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the service system), racism and discrimination. These factors can place them at a social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which can mean they are at higher risk of social and economic isolation. MYAN believes that a targeted approach to policy and service delivery is essential to addressing these barriers.

"I feel like our voices (young people) are not taken very seriously or are not a priority. It doesn't feel like young people have a reciprocal relationship with the government'. 22 year old, male, VIC

During our consultations, young people acknowledged and were able to clearly articulate the mutual obligation between the citizen and the state in relation to rights and responsibilities, but for some, the relationship between state and citizen does not feel reciprocal. Young people who are eager to engage with the government and political processes do not feel that politicians are listening to them, or representing their interests.

"I feel like the voices of citizens are not taken seriously and there is no system that really represents our interests on a national scale." 19 year old, male, Victoria

Young people believe that it is the responsibility of the state to represent the best interests of the Australian community and spoke of feeling frustrated at what they see as political inaction on issues of public concern, using examples such as inaction on climate change and holding the Marriage Equality plebiscite despite polls indicating that there was majority support amongst Australian citizens on representing the majority view of their constituents.

“To be an Australian Citizen will bring a sense of belonging to me, I would feel more included.” 19 year old, male Victoria

Exclusion

The feeling of belonging to a community is essential for active citizenship and the inclusive nature of Australian citizenship is a crucial element in the success of our multicultural society. Some young people feel there is a difference in the way that citizens are treated depending on whether they were born in Australia or migrated to Australia later in life, and that more recently arrived citizens are held to different standards of accountability.

Young people are very concerned about the impact of delayed citizenship and what they see as exclusionary and polarising public debate around such things like changes to existing requirements to become an Australian citizen and increasing Ministerial power to revoke citizenship. Young people feel this facilitates a two tiered system of citizenship at odds with the principles of multiculturalism.

MYAN remains opposed to any changes to the Migration Act or the Citizen Act that makes gaining citizenship harder, or expanding powers to revoke citizenship and which prolongs suffering, negatively impacts mental health and impacts productivity and contribution to Australian society. We reiterate that if any young person, including young people of refugee and migrant background breaks the law this must be addressed by the Australian youth justice system, rather than having their citizenship status questioned or removed.

c. Social cohesion and cultural identity in the nation state

“We need to be respecting everyone despite their colours because at the end of it, humanity is all that matters. Different religions, colours, different cultures; we are all one and deserve the same rights and responsibilities as those around us.” 23 year old, female, QLD

Achieving good settlement outcomes for young people benefits the whole of Australian society – individuals, families and communities – and supports cultural diversity, social cohesion and inclusion. Social cohesion is the responsibility of all and requires that organisations and governments and the broader community listen to, and act on what our whole community is saying, including young Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

More work needs to be done to ensure that local governments, local businesses and community organisations promote participation and encourages bridging social capital by actively taking on work to overcome barriers to inclusion and find common interests and shared values.

Political leaders on all sides of government must deliver balanced messaging about migration, highlighting that diversity is an opportunity for growth for both migrants and for Australia as a recipient country. Positive messaging that speaks to shared democratic values will contribute to stronger and better informed communities and improved settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Racism and discrimination and the impact on young people

A socially cohesive society is described as one which ‘...works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility.’²⁵ This definition reinforces that social cohesion is the responsibility of all members of the community.

Social cohesion is vital to creating the conditions for a productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia. A safe and welcoming community is crucial for positive settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. However, public perception of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can influence the settlement experience and can have implications on the level of cohesion among the Australian community.

The prevalence of negative views about refugees and migrants from politicians and the media and experiences of racism and discrimination are critical issues for the young people MYAN works with. Young people have identified that negativity towards young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the media and negative public discourse around immigration, is a challenge.

“The diversity that exists makes us feel that we belong to Australia but the discrimination and difficulties that get laid upon us pretty much makes us feel we do not belong to Australia and attacks our sense of belonging. I hope the media can better reflect the multiculturalism of Australia and let the minorities have a voice.” 22 year old, male QLD

Research conducted by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) reports that 21 per cent of respondents experienced racism in the media particularly with regard to generating concern over migrants and refugees. The media plays a critical role in shaping public debate issues of cultural diversity and racism, which can impact directly on the experiences of young people.²⁶

Negative media portrayals of refugee and migrant young people or misleading comments by influential personalities can result in adverse stereotyping which can incite acts of discrimination and racism. For example, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), the negative

²⁵ OECD, 2011 *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World*
www.oecd.org/site/devpgd2012/49067839.pdf

²⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) *Everyday Reality: Racism and Young People*. CMY: Melbourne.

portrayal of African Australians by mainstream media is perceived as a major obstacle to acceptance and integration within the broader Australian community.²⁷

Similarly, the language frequently used in political discourse to distinguish ‘genuine’ refugees and migrants from ‘illegal’ people seeking asylums can lead to a dichotomy between those who are seen to be a legitimate group, worthy of Australia’s assistance and support; and those who are underserving. Research finds that when people seeking asylum are referred to as ‘illegal’ immigrants, people’s attitudes towards them are generally less sympathetic. This is also true when the media makes causal links between race and crime, for example portraying certain young people as gang associated.

This contributes to a confusing and alienating environment, where some young people may be welcomed in the community and others are not, based purely on their mode of arrival into Australia or stereotypes based on their country of origin or religion.

Racism and discrimination and the impact on social cohesion

Inaccurate information about people from refugee and migrant backgrounds has a profound impact on social cohesion. Misperceptions that arise from stereotyping and the use of inaccurate terminology risk a rise in discriminatory sentiment, which can hinder young people’s potential and opportunity to contribute to Australian society. These misperceptions are known to contribute to the emotional harm of young people and do long-term damage to citizens' relationships with each other.²⁸

Though support for immigration remains high (see ToR *Contemporary notions of cultural identity, multiculturalism and regionalism*) incidences of racial discrimination in Australia have steadily risen, from almost one in ten to one in five from 2007-2016 with young people aged 18-24 years most likely to be impacted.²⁹ A national study conducted by Mission Australia in 2016 found a third of all young Australians surveyed experienced unfair treatment or discrimination based on their race in the last year, with rates of racial discrimination reaching up to 90% among respondents from some non-English speaking backgrounds.³⁰ This is an issue of significant concern and points to a major barrier in successful settlement and belonging for multicultural young people.

“My experience of nationhood is good because most of the people are friendly and welcoming. But they are still a lot missing especially when it comes to systematic discrimination it is everywhere in

²⁷ Hunter, F. Amato, D. Quek, S. & Kellock, W. (2015). *The people they make us welcome: A sense of belonging for newly arrived young people*, Carlton: CMY

²⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) *Everyday Reality: Racism and Young People*. CMY: Melbourne.

²⁹ Markus, A 2016, *Mapping social cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2016*, Monash University

³⁰ Bailey, V., Baker, A-M., Cave, L., Fildes, J., Perrens, B., Plummer, J. and Wearing, A. 2016, *Mission Australia’s 2016 Youth Survey Report*, Mission Australia

education, health and employment. Racism is also part of the things that we have to face every day.

When people decide to make fun of you because you look black and speak good English. In the systematic discrimination it is when you apply and have all the qualifications but not getting the job because of your family name.” 20 year old, female, QLD

Experiences of racism and discrimination, including physical violence, are issues young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have faced alongside challenges related to language barriers, social integration and cultural adjustment. This impacts directly on feelings of belonging to the wider community which damages social cohesion and has a negative impact upon the settlement outcomes of young migrants and refugees.³¹ Racism affects self-esteem and is often linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and anger. It can also undermine people’s ability to claim equal citizenship and develop a strong sense of belonging; factors that are particularly important for refugee and migrant young people as they develop a sense of identity and transition to adulthood in the Australian context.³²

A strong sense of belonging is generally understood to be protective against disengagement. Research suggests that the experience of racism can lead to withdrawal from mainstream society locking people out of social and economic opportunities which entrenches disadvantage. It adds unnecessary costs to the Australian workplace and economy and works against Australia’s goal of building a fair and inclusive society.³³

The link between social cohesion and racism has been highlighted in the Research into the *Current and Emerging Drivers for Social Cohesion, Social Division and Conflict in Multicultural Australia* report that was prepared by independent researchers for the Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee. The report emphasises that racism and discrimination disrupt all social cohesion dimensions, highlighting that “experiences of racism and/or discrimination denote a lack of recognition in the community and can disrupt belonging, inclusion and participation.”³⁴

All young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds must feel welcome in Australia. For social cohesion to flourish, political leaders on all sides of government should deliver positive and balanced messaging about migration, that speaks to shared democratic values will contribute to stronger and better informed communities and improved settlement outcomes for migrants

Cultural identity

³¹ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) and Refugee Council of Australia (2016) Global Refugee Youth Consultations in Australia, Preliminary Report

³² Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) Everyday Reality: Racism and Young People. CMY: Melbourne

³³ Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Anti-Racism Strategy and Racism. It Stops With Me Campaign*.

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/projects/national-anti-racism-strategy-and-racism-it-stops-me-campaign>

³⁴ Dandy, J. and Pe-Pua, R. 2013 *Research into the Current and Emerging Drivers for Social Cohesion, Social Division and Conflict in Multicultural Australia* https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/current-emerging-drivers-social-cohesion-division-conflict_access.pdf

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group who express their identities and attachments in a myriad of different ways.³⁵ For example, the Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017-18 (MY Australia Census) data reveals a rich and detailed picture of a mix of identities and affiliations amongst young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, not reflected in country of birth or ancestry data. The data suggests that young people are not bound by the simple ethnic categories often assumed by policies of multiculturalism, social cohesion and minority recognition and that identity for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is ‘... intersectional, multi-layered, place-based and influenced by a range of ethnic, religious and cultural attachments’.³⁶

National consultations conducted by MYAN and the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) found that identity is one of the greatest challenges facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Young people have shared that choosing who they identify as can affect how they fit in society and can leave them feeling ‘stuck’ between cultures and torn between the pressures to fit in and the pressure to preserve their cultural identity.³⁷ For some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, cultural mobility requires significant personal effort to balance the expectations of different cultural worlds.³⁸

While young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds often need to negotiate multiple identities, including that of their cultural heritage and broader mainstream culture³⁹ their sense of belonging and identity in multicultural Australia is critical to their social inclusion – the capacity to access economic and social opportunities and participate fully in Australian society. Young people can experience varying forms of belonging to the nation, to local and global communities, to networks of friends and family, and to different institutional and cultural spaces.⁴⁰

Data gathered from the MY Aus Survey found that overall, multicultural youth expressed a strong sense of belonging, both to Australia and more locally – more than three quarters (79.8 per cent) said they either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement, I feel like I belong in Australia, and a similar proportion felt belonging to their local area (80.2 per cent agreement). It appears that a localised

³⁵ Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18 (2018) by the Multicultural Youth Australia Project Team Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr

³⁶ Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18 (2018) by the Multicultural Youth Australia Project Team Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr

³⁷ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) and Refugee Council of Australia (2016) Global Refugee Youth Consultations in Australia, Preliminary Report

³⁸ Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18 (2018) by the Multicultural Youth Australia Project Team Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr

³⁹ Giguère, B, Lalonde, R & Lou, E 2010, ‘Living at the crossroads of cultural worlds: The experience of normative conflicts by second generation immigrant youth’, *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol. 4, no. 1

⁴⁰ Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18 (2018) by the Multicultural Youth Australia Project Team Youth Research Centre Melbourne Graduate School of Education web.education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr

sense of belonging and comfort correlates with a wider sense of belonging to the Australian community.

The survey also found that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have a strong sense of their own cultural identity and distinctiveness, but also take an interest in cultures other than their own. More than 4 in 5 of the sample said they sought out different cultural experiences (e.g., food and music) (83.8 per cent) and almost three quarters of the sample felt they belonged to more than one culture (73.3 per cent).⁴¹

Research such as this counters any suggestion made in debates about multiculturalism and social cohesion that young refugee and migrant people do not properly 'integrate'. Rather, it appears that multicultural young people are adept at moving flexibly through different cultural environments.⁴²

e. Contemporary notions of cultural identity, multiculturalism and regionalism

"To be Australian, it means to me that I'm part of the culture and the community" 19 year old, female
QLD

MYAN remains committed to ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism. A strong multicultural and socially cohesive Australia is particularly significant for young people, especially those who arrive in Australia as refugees and migrants and those born in Australia to refugee or migrant parents. MYAN considers that multiculturalism (as public policy framework) has a fundamental role to play in (is the cornerstone of) a meaningful social inclusion agenda.

Multiculturalism, immigration and settlement

Support for multiculturalism remains high in contemporary Australia. Australia is commonly characterised as a successful migrant and multicultural society, with residents from over 200 countries contributing to the development of the social, economic and cultural landscape of Australia. The 2018 Mapping Social Cohesion Report, produced by the Scanlon Foundation, Monash University and the Australian Multicultural Foundation found that, like previous years, 85% of Australians across all demographics agreed that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia'. 82% agreed that 'immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures' and 80% agree that 'immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy.'⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Markus. A (2018) Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2018 Available at <https://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Cohesion-2018-report-26-Nov.pdf>

'(Multiculturalism) be inclusive, be respectful, embrace differences, enjoy freedoms'. 19 year old, female, QLD

Australia's policy of multiculturalism is a dynamic way of recognising that culture is fundamental to a person's wellbeing, sense of belonging and identity, and by extension, broader national identity.

"My experience of being Australian is a wonderful experience. In Australia, I saw new people from different cultures and backgrounds and understanding them is really important because we are all human beings and we should respect every culture, because in Australia and everywhere else everyone is equal and should be treated equal. That's what it means for me and that's what my experience is of Australian nationhood!" – 25 year old, male, Persian

Positive settlement outcomes for those arriving in Australia as migrants or refugees are inextricably linked to a sense of belonging amongst family members, peers, their own cultural community and the broader community. Government policy agendas around multiculturalism, – where cultural and religious diversity is valued, welcomed and fostered remains relevant in contemporary Australia.⁴⁴ Young people do however, caution against multiculturalism becoming 'tokenistic', and highlight a need for a commitment from government to respond to issues around inequity, racism and discrimination within the context of multicultural policy; and a need for the diversity of the Australian community to be reflected across all levels of government institutions.

MYAN believes that any shift away from formal recognition of multiculturalism is a risk to social cohesion. Further watering down of multicultural policy would likely act as a barrier to the successful settlement outcomes of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and risks tarnishing Australians international reputation as a successful multicultural country.

Policy

In order to continue to maximise Australia's prosperity, multiculturalism must continue to be promoted. MYAN recommends that all levels of Australian government demonstrate renewed support for multiculturalism, reinforced by national policy and funding frameworks. Contemporary discussion about multiculturalism must reinforce the success of Australia as a multicultural nation, promoting the principles of mutual respect, equality and unity and denouncing racial hatred and discrimination as incompatible with Australian society.

While MYAN welcomed Former Prime Minister Turnbull's release of the "Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful" statement, we were disappointed along with many others, that it was a

⁴⁴ Hunter, F. Amato, D. & Kellock, W. (2015). The people they make us welcome: A sense of belonging for newly arrived young people, Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth

missed an opportunity to present a strong multicultural policy framework with a renewed commitment to multiculturalism in Australia.

A strong, clearly defined ongoing commitment to multiculturalism is necessary to address negative stereotypes and racial discrimination, to harness existing good will within the broader community, to celebrate diversity, to build trust across diverse groups, and to support each member of the community to fulfil their potential.

Promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion and multiculturalism is dependent on leadership at the political, business and community level along with a commitment to multiculturalism from a policy and legislative environment at all levels of government, to foster a culturally diverse, successful multicultural society.

g. Comparison between Australian public debate and policy and international trends

Public debate about migration is a growing and increasingly complex phenomenon as people continue to migrate or find themselves displaced and forge new connections between countries in rapidly evolving ways. Debate about immigration and cultural diversity has become increasingly politicised and polarising in countries like Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States who, in response, are introducing more restrictive immigration and citizenship measures. We have seen the negative impact on social cohesion that these increasingly nationalistic debates and policies are having. In many of these countries, multiculturalism is not affirmed (and has never been) in any constitutional, legislative or parliamentary instruments.

Australia, in contrast, is repeatedly recognised internationally and locally as one of the world's most successful examples of a multicultural society and we need to build on this strength. There is no need to compare ourselves to other countries that have a different history and have never had a history of robust multicultural public policy with bi-partisan support.

MYAN does not suggest that culturally diverse societies such as Australia are without current complexities and issues, but Australia's history of implementing multicultural policies and delivering strong settlement services means we are equipped to continue meeting the needs of our diverse population and to respond in ways that support social cohesion, inclusion and respect.

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