

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Submission to Department of Home Affairs on ‘Australia’s 2021-22 Migration Program’

February 2021

About 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. Our vision is that all young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are supported, valued and thriving in Australia.

MYAN works in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies across the youth, settlement and multicultural sectors at the state and territory and national levels to ensure the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised in policy and service delivery. MYAN provides expert policy advice to government, delivers sector development activities, and supports the development of young people's leadership and advocacy skills so they can have their voices heard at the regional, state, and national levels.

We have also developed the *National Youth Settlement Framework*, which is the first and only framework to guide and measure integration and settlement support for young people. The framework benchmarks good practice, and using practical tools, builds the capacity of government and non-government sectors to best respond to the needs of young people in the settlement context. Since the release of the Framework in 2016, MYAN has worked with a range of government and non-government stakeholders to support its implementation in policy and service delivery through a range of sector capability building activities.

About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to make a submission into to the Department of Home Affairs' discussion paper on '*Australia's 2021-22 Migration Program*'. This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on our breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. It has a focus on the rights and interests of young people (12 to 24 year olds) from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the Australian Migration and Humanitarian Programs.

The current pause on migration in response to COVID-19 presents an important opportunity to reflect on Australia's Migration Program and plan for a program that equally: (i) meets the economic needs of Australia, (ii) upholds our global commitments to providing resettlement through the Humanitarian program, and (iii) ensures that economic benefits are balanced with adequate support to migrants and investment in social cohesion.

The considerations raised in the *Discussion Paper*, particularly in relation to regional settlement, social cohesion and the attractiveness of Australia as a migrant destination country, are important issues for the young people we work with, as well as their families and communities. There are a number of important intersecting issues arising from these topics in the *Discussion Paper*, and this submission responds to these key areas more broadly, namely:

- An overview of young people, migration, and settlement
- Young people and the Humanitarian Program
- Family reunion

- Economic opportunities
- Regional settlement
- Social cohesion
- Racism and discrimination

MYAN is available to discuss this submission in further detail.

1. Background

Young people, migration and settlement

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group, due to multiple intersecting factors including country of origin, cultural background, migration stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, and age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures, and workforce experience.¹

Each year young people aged 12-24 make up significant arrival numbers under each Migration Stream. As outlined in *Appendix 1*, in the 2019-2020 financial year:

- 9,474 young people received permanent visas to Australia under one of three migration streams: Humanitarian, Skilled, and Family
- Young people arriving under the family stream made up 43% of all youth arrivals to Australia
- 29.5% of all humanitarian arrivals were young people

There was a decrease in numbers from 2018-19, where 13,759 young people arrived under all three migration streams, and is reflective of the impact of COVID-19 on Australia's migration program in the last 12 months.

This group of young people have enormous strengths and capabilities, including broad international and cross-cultural knowledge, multilingual skills, adaptability, a strong sense of family and community, high educational aspirations, and a desire to enjoy and uphold the rights and responsibilities of Australia's democratic processes². They also play an important role in supporting the successful settlement of their families.

1.1 Settlement support

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have particular needs that are distinct from those of adults and children, and commonly face more barriers to youth development than those faced by their Australian born, non-immigrant peers.³

¹ VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO and MYAN (2017) *Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

² MYAN (2019) *Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity, and Democracy* Available at:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Nationhood

³ MYAN (Australia), 2020, *National Youth Settlement Framework*, MYAN Australia, 2nd Edition

Some of these barriers are structural; some relate to the challenges associated with forced migration and settling in a new country and others relate to increased vulnerability to social exclusion at key transition points during adolescence and young adulthood.

These barriers add a layer of complexity to the fundamental transitions that take place during adolescence and young adulthood⁴. Compounded by the developmental tasks of adolescence⁵, and in addition to gender, sexuality, disability, geography, and cultural context, these barriers commonly include:

- Limited or low English language skills
- Different cultural norms and values surrounding help-seeking or accessing government support
- Different cultural values/norms in relation to concepts of youth and adolescence
- Lack of social and cultural capital in the Australian context (e.g. information, networks and conceptual and practical knowledge of the service system or youth-focused programs)
- Racism and/or discrimination—explicit, implicit, structural, or individual
- Settlement pressures -i.e. practical demands of building a new life in a new country and responsibility for supporting parents and family members in the settlement journey)
- Lack of culturally competent or responsive practice within organisations (in the mainstream or generalist youth sector, services are commonly designed around the experiences of Australian-born, non-immigrant young people, neglecting the cultural and migration/settlement experiences of those from refugee and migrant backgrounds and how these impact on their rights and support/service delivery models)⁶
- Limited or lack of digital literacy
- More limited services/opportunities in regional /rural areas⁷

These barriers mean that young people can face particular challenges in accessing the support and opportunities they need to navigate the demands of settling in a new country, and to which they are entitled. Settlement services play a central role in assisting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds adjust to life in Australia, and a targeted approach in settlement support is the most effective way to capitalise on their strengths, address their particular needs, and ensure they are able to realise their potential⁸.

Australia is recognised globally as a leader in settlement and integration services. Delivering strong settlement services equips Australia to continue meeting the needs of our diverse population and to respond in ways that support social cohesion, inclusion, and respect.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Including but not limited to: identity development and formation; negotiating interdependence with/within family, peers, community and broader society and major social role transitions; emotional, physical, and cognitive development, and sexual maturation. MYAN (Australia) 2016, *National Youth Settlement Framework*, 2nd Edition, pg. 15.

⁶ MYAN (Australia), 2020, *National Youth Settlement Framework*, MYAN Australia, 2nd Edition

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

1.2 Young people and the Humanitarian Program

Although the number of refugees resettled to Australia decreased in 2019-2020 due to a suspension on the granting of offshore Humanitarian visas, young people aged 12-24 continued to represent a significant percentage of humanitarian entrants to Australia. In 2019-20, young people made up 29.5% of this group.

MYAN advocates for the Humanitarian Program to recommence as soon as is feasibly possible and continue to work with UNHCR to process applications for resettlement. While COVID-19 has caused enormous disruption, the motivating factors behind forced migration remain. Supporting the most vulnerable during this crisis should extend to those waiting for humanitarian visas, in situations of protracted and intensified vulnerability and insecurity. Additionally, we recommend government maintain the flexibility to offer further places in response to emerging and escalating conflicts and unforeseen events.

Although COVID-19 has affected all sectors, Australia has managed to rise above these challenges admirably, with many services finding new ways to respond and provide support.

Continuing our long history of accepting humanitarian entrants, and supporting them through the provision of our world renowned globally settlement services must remain a priority for Australia's migration program.

1.3 Family reunion

When planning for migration to Australia, we urge the Australian Government to consider the role of the family. Parents are a critical and valuable support for young people during their settlement journey and family reunification is one of nine internationally accepted goals for successful settlement of refugees.⁹

Research shows that access to family reunion is an important protective factor and migrants' families are an important resource, supporting members to adjust and settle into their new environment¹⁰. Family reunion migration also brings additional economic and social benefits that including, additional childcare which allows sponsors to go from one income to two income houses¹¹, additional care for ailing family members, and additional emotional support including counsel, advice, and spiritual guidance.

A lack of family reunion options can have implications for young peoples' physical and mental health and impact on their capacity for a long-term view of settlement in Australia or motivation to build connections to support settlement, including engagement in education, training, and employment.¹² Policies that deny or delay access to family reunion for young people from refugee backgrounds have

⁹ UNHCR (2002) cited in CMY (2006) *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*, p. 11. Available from www.cmy.net.au

¹⁰ Kenny and Mojtahedi (2012) 'Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children and Family Reunion in Australia' p. 14, in Crock (ed.) *Creating New Futures: Settling Children and Youth from Refugee Backgrounds*. Federation Press; Annandale, NSW.

¹¹ Red Cross (2015) *Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Migration Intake*

¹² MYAN (2013) *Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs) in Australia: an overview of national support arrangements and key emerging issues*, p.12. Available from <http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20UHM%20Policy%20Paper%20Sept%202012.pdf>

been found to have negative psychosocial, economic, and social consequences,¹³ and can negatively affect migrants' ability to settle successfully and participate in Australian life.

Current immigration policy favours skilled over family migrants, significantly underestimating the importance of family for the well-being and potentially the productivity of new migrants. Prohibitive costs and inflexible conditions significantly impede young migrants' access to family reunion.

MYAN is concerned that current protracted wait times, prohibitive costs, and increasingly inflexible requirements for family reunion mean that many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in Australia today will be permanently separated from their parents and families.

1.4 Upskilling young migrants to respond to skills shortages

The pause on high levels of migration, combined with the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, presents an opportunity for Australia to invest in, and maximise the strengths and skills of migrants-including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds-who have already arrived to Australia. There is already a pool of highly skilled international students and temporary migrants in Australia who could help resolve shortages in industries commonly filled by international skilled migrants. This presents a valuable opportunity to invest in skills and training to skill up migrants. For example, there has been an increase in regional jobs since June 2020 due to shortages of backpackers and workers from Pacific Islands, who arrive in Australia under special labour schemes. This presents an opportunity to fill these skills shortages in regional Australia by supporting migrants and refugees, including asylum seekers, who express an interest in working in regional communities through upskilling and relocation support.¹⁴

Recommendations:

MYAN makes the following key recommendations to the Department of Home Affairs.

1. Continue to ensure young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have opportunities to benefit from the Migration Program, and provide support for young people from refugee-like backgrounds arriving under the Migration Program.
2. Continue to invest in long-term, coordinated, and targeted settlement services and ensure these are available to all young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
3. Reinstatement of the Humanitarian Program as soon as possible, and maintain the flexibility to offer further places in response to emerging and escalating conflicts and unforeseen events.
4. Recognise the importance and value of Family Migration, alongside Skilled Migration as part of the Migration Program, especially the importance of family for young people in a new

¹³ Kenny and Mojtahedi (2012) *Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children and Family Reunion in Australia* p. 14, in Crock (ed.) *Creating New Futures: Settling Children and Youth from Refugee Backgrounds*. Federation Press; Annandale, NSW

¹⁴ Momand, M (2020) *Australia's post-COVID-19 economic recovery: What is the role of migrants and refugees?* Available at <https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/publication/australia%E2%80%99s-post-covid-19-economic-recovery-what%E2%80%99s-role-migrants-and-refugees>

settlement country and increase access of young people to family migration pathways to reunify with their family

5. Ensure the processing of family reunion applications is timely, and remove unnecessarily burdensome or unreasonable requirements. Recognise the broader definition of family for refugees and plan for a dedicated humanitarian allocation of family visas.

6. Investigate employment and training opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are currently residing in Australia, so they have access to meaningful employment opportunities and are equipped to address the skills gaps caused by a pause in Australia's migration program.

5. Regional settlement

Successful settlement is a long-term process and requires meaningful contributions not just from migrants themselves, but also from receiving communities, local organisations, service providers, and government.

Migrant settlement in regional areas, including skilled workers, temporary migrants, and refugees, has the potential to provide multiple benefits, both economic and social. These include the stimulation of local economy and ease of pressure on urban infrastructure and services, improved acceptance of diversity resulting in improved social cohesion, and help to offset the impacts of ageing populations.¹⁵

Realising these benefits however, requires careful planning, an understanding of what works, and depends on the capacity of local settlement services to respond, particularly within the domains of employment, education and training, housing and health and well-being. As the settlement experience is unique to each person, services will be most effective when they are tailored, flexible, and responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of migrants.¹⁶

In order to best support regional migration outcomes, migrants should be placed in towns where:

- There are opportunities for meaningful local work and business opportunities
- There is adequate stable accommodation available
- Schools are equipped to respond to the diverse learning needs of migrant children
- They are able to maintain links to their culture and community alongside opportunities to participate in civic life
- Service gaps and response strategies have been identified
- There are flexible and responsive English language supports available
- Settlement services are available and have the capacity to provide targeted and flexible support
- Local community organisation are involved in the planning and delivering of support services

¹⁵ Rural Australians for Refugees (2017) *Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*

¹⁶ Musoni, E. (2019). *Understanding regional settlement in Australia: Key learnings from past experiences*. Canberra, The Regional Australia Institute.

- Local communities are engaged and informed about the migration program, and community concerns have been gauged.¹⁷

It is important to take into consideration that the settlement needs of young people will differ from those of adults and children, and young people will need targeted, specialised supports to assist in their navigation of their settlement journey. ***Migrant’s skills, experience, and resilience make valuable contributions to their host communities. Supporting regional migration means ensuring that new migrants have access to the tools and support required to successfully transition into a new country and region.***

Recommendations:

MYAN recommends that when planning for regional migration, the Department of Home Affairs:

1. Thoroughly assess regional settlement locations to determine local workforce needs, assess availability of appropriate housing, and to identify service gaps, response strategies, measure community attitudes, and concerns towards migrants.
2. Fund regional settlement service providers to provide analysis on settlement outcomes of migrants and refugees in suggested migration locales, to ensure that settlement support and programs in regional towns are prepared for new migrant settlement and are as effective, responsive and efficient as possible

3. Racism and Discrimination

Despite the diversity of the Australian community, national research demonstrates that racism is an everyday reality for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Mission Australia’s *Youth Survey Report 2020* highlights that young Australian’s see discrimination as a major issue and are experiencing and seeing racial injustices in their day-to-day lives.¹⁸ A recent study of racism in Australian schools found young people are facing ‘confronting’ levels of racism, with one in three students from non-Anglo or European backgrounds experiencing racial discrimination by their peers and experiences of racial discrimination in wider society.¹⁹ Racial abuse towards Asian Australians increased during the pandemic, with one third of all racism-related complaints received by the Australian Human Rights Commission since the start of February 2020 relating to COVID-19.²⁰

Multiple studies across Australia report a relationship between racism and health and wellbeing outcomes,²¹ and the American Academy of Paediatrics has called racism a “core social determinant of

¹⁷ SCoA (2017) *Regional Settlement Policy Paper* Available at: <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SCoA-Regional-Settlement-Policy-Paper.pdf>

¹⁸ Tiller, E., Fildes, J., Hall, S., Hicking, V., Greenland, N., Liyanarachchi, D., and Di Nicola, K. 2020, *Youth Survey Report 2020*, Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia.

¹⁹ N Priest et al (2019) *Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys* Available at https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2019/9/CSRM-WP-SOAR_PUBLISH_1_0.pdf

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission (2020) *Where’s all the data on COVID-19 racism?*, accessible at <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/opinions/wheresall-data-covid-19-racism>

²¹ See for example Correa-Velez, I, Gifford, SM & Barnett, AG (2010) *Longing to belong: social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia* *Social Science and Medicine*, 71(8); Mansouri, F., Jenkins, L. and Walsh, L., 2012. *Racism and its impact on the health and wellbeing of Australian youth: Empirical and theoretical insights*. *Education and Society*, 30(1),

health” and “a driver of health inequities”, the stress of which can take a lifelong toll on adolescents.²² Experiences of racism and discrimination can have significant detrimental impacts on mental health, contributing to feelings of anger, depression, heightened fear, and flashbacks to trauma experienced prior to arriving in Australia. Experiences of racism and discrimination 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.²³ Racism is even affecting the Australian economy, with one recent study discovering that the annual cost of racism²⁴ results in more than 3% of Australia’s Gross Domestic Product, ²⁵adding unnecessary costs to the Australian workplace and economy.

Racism works against Australia’s goal of building a fair and inclusive society. While racism affects settlement outcomes, it also has repercussions for temporary migration. Negative public discourse around asylum seekers and immigration and/or experiences of racism and discrimination risks tarnishing Australia’s international reputation as a safe, supportive, and welcoming destination and may appear a less attractive destination to skilled migrants and international students. Temporary migrants take their experiences in Australia home with them, and relaying negative experiences of racism and discrimination can affect those migration markets and impact future relationships with these regions.²⁶ Although halted by the COVID-19 pandemic, international education is a major export earner for Australia, and there will be dire economic impacts and risks to universities, TAFE, and private education providers should Australia be perceived as an undesirable destinations.

3.1 Social cohesion

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.²⁷ In 2019, every single country from around the world was represented in Australia’s population.²⁸ Multiculturalism is a central tenet of Australian national identity and an asset to the country in an era of globalisation and our migration program brings enormous social, cultural, and economic benefit to this country.

Social cohesion asserts that greater benefits, satisfaction, and security are achieved when community or society ‘sticks together’, and welcomes diversity, rather than focusing on differences. Investing in social cohesion is vital to achieving this and creating the conditions for a productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia.²⁹

However, recent findings from the Scanlon Foundation’s *2020 Mapping Social Cohesion Report* has found that while support for multiculturalism remains high in Australia (84% across all demographics), discriminatory attitudes towards particular minorities persist.³⁰ Almost half of respondents reported negative feelings towards people of Iraqi and Sudanese backgrounds, and 47 per cent felt the same

²² Trent, M. Dooley, D.G. and Dougé, J (2019) *The impact of racism on child and adolescent health*. Pediatrics, 144(2).

²³ MYAN (2020) *Covid-19 and Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds: Policy Platform* Available at: <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf>

²⁴ Racism contributing to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychological disorders

²⁵ Elias. A (2015) *Measuring the economic impacts of racial discrimination* Available at <http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30079135/elias-measuringthe-2015A.pdf>

²⁶ Brown, L. and Jones, I., (2013) *Encounters with racism and the international student experience*. Studies in Higher education, 38(7),

²⁷ Rajadurai, E (2018) *Success in Diversity-The Strength of Australia’s Multiculturalism*

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) *Australia’s Population by Country of Birth* Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au>

²⁹ M. Grossman (2020) *Against retrotopia: Young people, social futures and a resilience to extremism* Available from

<https://www.crisconsortium.org/cris-commentary/against-retrotopia-young-people-social-futures-and-resilience-to-violent-extremism>

³⁰ Markus, A.B., (2020) *Mapping social cohesion: The scanlon foundation surveys 2016*. ACJC Monash University.

towards Chinese-Australians. Thirty per cent of Asian born participants reported increased racism during the pandemic, highlighting the rise in racism against Asian people in Australia due to negative connotations linked to the origins of COVID-19.³¹

Public perception of immigrants is one of the contributing factors that migrants consider when deciding on destination countries.³² While there is often scrutiny of the ability of migrants to successfully integrate and participate in Australian society as quickly as possible, we know this a two-way process. A safe and welcoming community is crucial for positive settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and is vital to creating the conditions for a cohesive, productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia.³³

Migration planning 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. 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. To continue to benefit from the economic, social, and cultural contributions of migration to Australia, any discussions of how to boost Australia's attractiveness of a destination country must include considerations on how to combat racism and discrimination.

For social cohesion to flourish in Australia political leaders on all sides of government, must address structural racism and discrimination and recognise it as a critical threat to social cohesion. They must also 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 values will contribute to stronger and better-informed communities and improved settlement outcomes for migrants.

Recommendations:

In order to foster social cohesion, and increase Australia's attractiveness as a destination for migrants, MYAN recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Implement a National Anti-Racism Strategy.
2. Consult with young people on anti-racism initiatives and invest in innovative strategies to combat racism and build social cohesion, including:
 - a. an online campaign led by young people and coordinated by MYAN,
 - b. local level, community building activities utilising sports and arts
 - c. programs that give young people the knowledge and support they need to challenge intolerant and extremist attitudes

³¹ Ibid.

³² Brown, L. and Jones, I., (2013) *Encounters with racism and the international student experience*. Studies in Higher education, 38(7); Iredale, R., 2001. *The migration of professionals: theories and typologies*. International migration, 39(5), pp.7-26.

³³ Holton. R (1997) *Immigration, Social Cohesion and National Identity* Available at: https://www.apf.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/rp/rp9798/98rp01

3. 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.
4. Avoid misrepresentations and stereotyping of refugee and migrant young people in public narratives and ensure strong leadership to support rather than undermine social cohesion.
5. Implement a national framework for guiding migration policies based on optimal social cohesion outcomes.