Bright Futures
Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Disclaimer

Forewords

In just two years, VicHealth's 2015 *Bright Futures: Megatrends impacting the mental wellbeing of young people in Victoria over the coming 20 years* has become a seminal report on the future challenges for young Victorians over the next two decades.

Developed in partnership with Data61, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), it has proved a powerful framework for engaging VicHealth's partners and young people themselves in how to build their resilience, mental wellbeing and social connection to meet the megatrends that will impact how they live, work and play.

We were really delighted to partner with Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) to explore what this work means for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. With Data61, CSIRO, we have taken the five original megatrends and applied the lens of their impact on young people living in Australia but born overseas.

Fostering the mental wellbeing of young people is a shared responsibility for all Victorians, regardless of where they come from or their cultural heritage. This report contributes to our 'mental wellbeing' priority – to create more opportunities to build resilience and social connection for young people and women.

The emerging questions for each megatrend in this report seek to facilitate new thinking and inform future policy and research to drive positive change for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Jerril Rechter
CEO, VicHealth

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) is Australia's national voice for the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. These young people face unique challenges in beginning a new life in Australia, which if left unsupported can lead to damaging health and wellbeing outcomes. Targeted new research and responses in policy and service delivery are required.

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

To make this a reality, MYAN relies on having the best evidence and data with which to generate meaningful conversations that influence policy, research and practice decisions at local, state and national levels.

This report raises a number of important questions about how we can best support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to become active participants. In particular, how to promote a sense of agency and belonging in society, and facilitate access to the social capital and resources necessary to promote full and equal participation in society.

Collaborations such as this one with VicHealth and Data61, CSIRO are fundamental to MYAN's role in thought leadership about the best future outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia.

Carmel Guerra
Chair, MYAN

Introduction

In 2015, VicHealth and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) published the *Bright Futures* report, which identified five megatrends that will impact the health and wellbeing of young Victorians over the next 20 years.

These five megatrends are:

- **The rising bar:** Rising education and skill levels are creating a more competitive job market.
- **Global reach:** Digital technology and globalisation are changing all facets of society.
- **Life's richer tapestry:** Culture and society are increasingly diverse.
- **Overexposure online:** The virtual world has changed relationships and ideas about privacy.
- **Out of the shadows:** Scientific research will improve understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and service delivery models will change.

Extending this previous work, VicHealth has partnered with Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) to produce this report, exploring what the *Bright Futures* megatrends mean for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Informed by consultations with representatives from key organisations, experts and young people, this report details opportunities and risks for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in areas such as education, employment, cultural diversification and digital participation.

For example, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may face extra barriers to the opportunities available to Australian-born young people, which may lead to negative health outcomes such as stress, anxiety and depression. Conversely, many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds arrive in Australia with skills and global networks that can contribute greatly to our Australian community.

This report also highlights emerging questions for future policy and research to promote better mental and physical health and wellbeing outcomes for all young people, regardless of their cultural background.

Definitions

A *young person* is defined as someone aged 12–24 years. The phrase *refugee and migrant background* is used in this report to denote both first- and second-generation migrants and refugees, unless otherwise specified. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group, due to country of origin, cultural background, migration stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures and workforce experience.

A *first-generation migrant* is someone born overseas but who lives primarily in Australia, regardless of nationality, citizenship or legal status. A *second-generation migrant* is someone born in Australia, but who has one or more parents who were born overseas. In line with the United Nations definition, a *migrant* has come to a country by choice (e.g. for educational, employment or other opportunities) whereas a *refugee* has been forced to migrate to seek protection from persecution (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation). *Refugee background* includes young people on temporary protection visas and those seeking asylum in Australia.

A 'young person born in Australia' is used broadly to refer to someone who was born in Australia, regardless of their heritage or culture. Under some comparisons in this report, this can include second-generation migrants (e.g. for comparisons between young people born overseas and all young people born in Australia).

Methodology

This project consisted of a workshop, focus groups and individual interviews, as well as a literature review and data analysis. A total of 19 people were consulted, including young people and representatives from government, not-for-profit organisations, service providers and universities. The workshop was designed to scope the project and identify main factors impacting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The focus groups and individual interviews aimed to test and validate emerging implications identified in earlier consultations. All consultations went for 30–60 minutes and were conducted using the convergent interviewing technique (Dick 1990; Williams & Lewis 2005), via phone or teleconference. Please refer to the *Bright Futures* report for further details on this methodology (VicHealth & CSIRO 2015). The CSIRO Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee approved this research protocol.

Snapshot of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Just under half of young people in Australia in 2016 were either first or second-generation migrants.
(Source. ABS 2016b)

**55%** Australian born, both parents born in Australia

25% Australian born, at least one parent born overseas

20% Overseas born

In 2016, one in four Australians aged 18-24 years was born overseas and the gender ratio of young people born overseas was split almost equally.
(Source. ABS 2016b)

% YOUNG PEOPLE	12–15YRS	16–17YRS	18–24YRS
AUSTRALIAN BORN	86	85	76
OVERSEAS BORN	14	15	24

■ AUSTRALIAN BORN   ■ OVERSEAS BORN
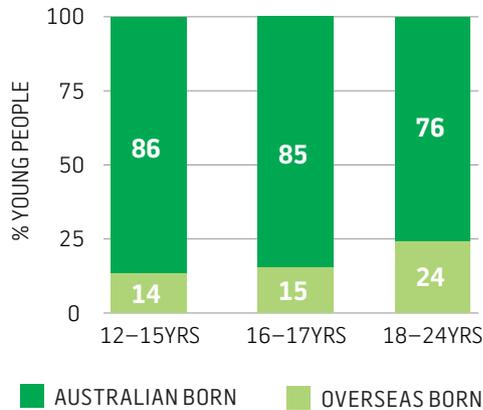
Overseas born young people

FEMALE **49%**

MALE **51%**

A large proportion of young people in Australia who were born overseas migrated from English-speaking and Asian countries.
(Source. ABS 2016b)

	% YOUNG MIGRANTS
Hong Kong	2
Republic of Korea	2
Vietnam	3
Malaysia	3
South Africa	4
Philippines	4
India	7
England	9
New Zealand	10
China	16
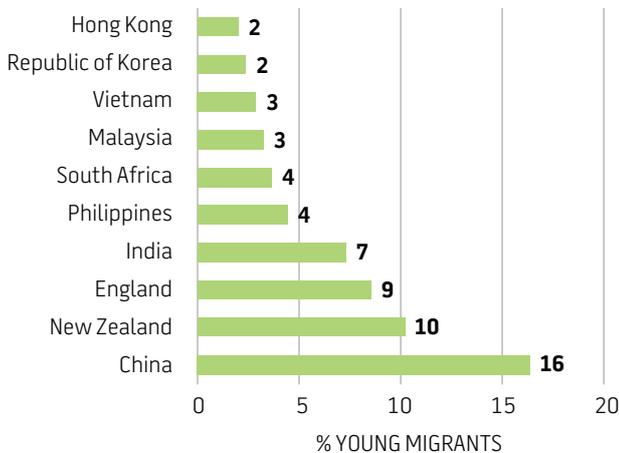
Just under two-thirds of young people who migrated to Australia live in New South Wales or Victoria.
(Source. ABS 2016b)

% YOUNG PEOPLE	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
AUSTRALIAN BORN	32	25	21	10	7	2	2	1
OVERSEAS BORN	30	29	18	13	6	1	2	1

■ AUSTRALIAN BORN   ■ OVERSEAS BORN
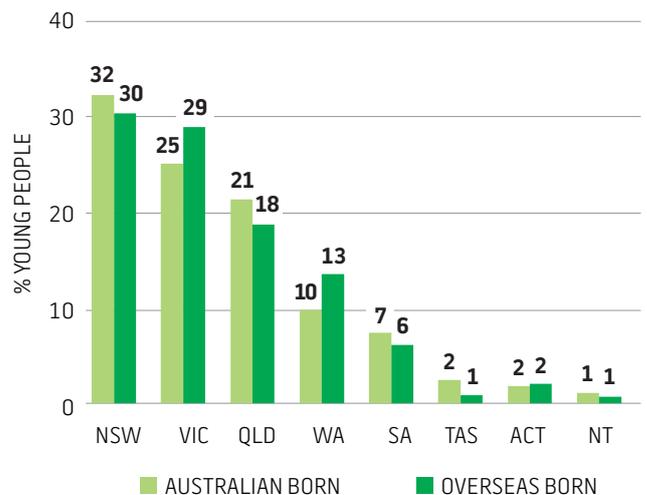
First-generation migrants aged 15-24 years are more likely to be employed in part-time work than full-time work.
(Source. ABS 2011b)

	AUSTRALIAN BORN			OVERSEAS BORN
% YOUNG PEOPLE	BOTH PARENTS BORN OVERSEAS	ONE PARENT BORN OVERSEAS	BOTH PARENTS BORN IN AUSTRALIA	
EMPLOYED FULL-TIME	22	28	29	20
EMPLOYED PART-TIME	24	29	28	29

■ EMPLOYED FULL-TIME   ■ EMPLOYED PART-TIME
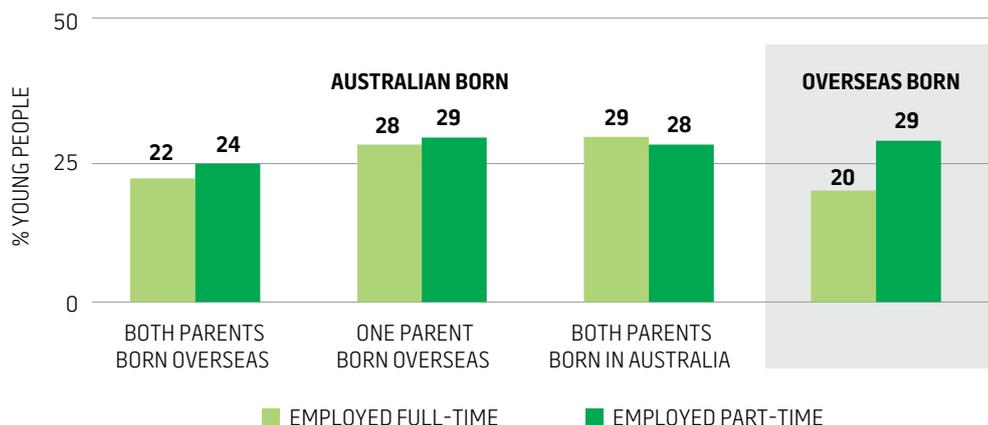
Second-generation young migrants are more proficient in English than first-generation young migrants.
(Source. ABS 2016b)

AUSTRALIAN BORN   **OVERSEAS BORN**

% YOUNG PEOPLE

Category	Value
BOTH PARENTS BORN OVERSEAS	49 / 51
ONE PARENT BORN OVERSEAS	91 / 8
BOTH PARENTS BORN IN AUSTRALIA	97 / 3
OVERSEAS BORN	33 / 60 / 6

- ONLY SPEAKS ENGLISH
- SPEAKS ENGLISH WELL OR VERY WELL
- DOES NOT SPEAK ENGLISH WELL, IF AT ALL
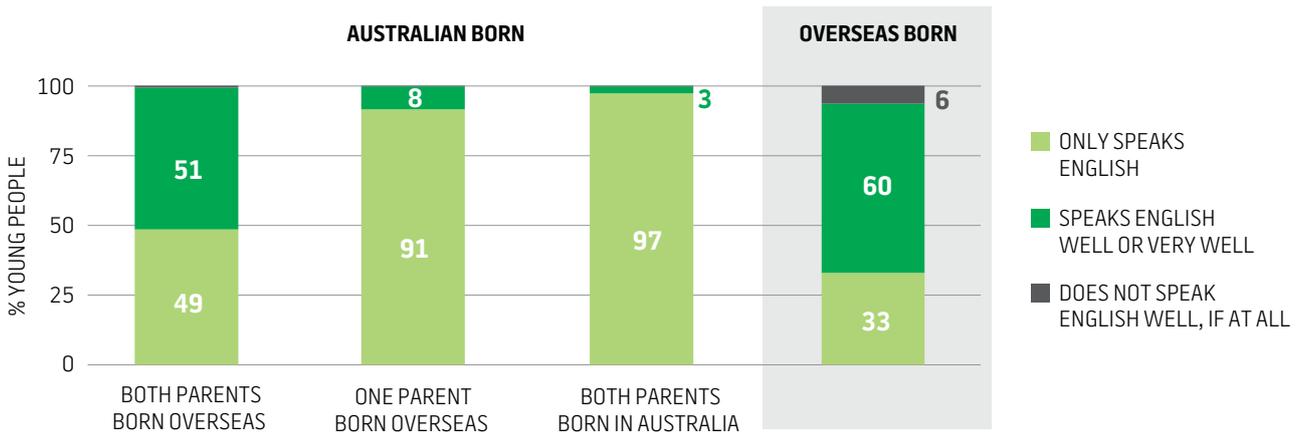
First and second-generation young migrants are more likely to be engaged in a technical, tertiary or other form of further education institution than young people born in Australia.
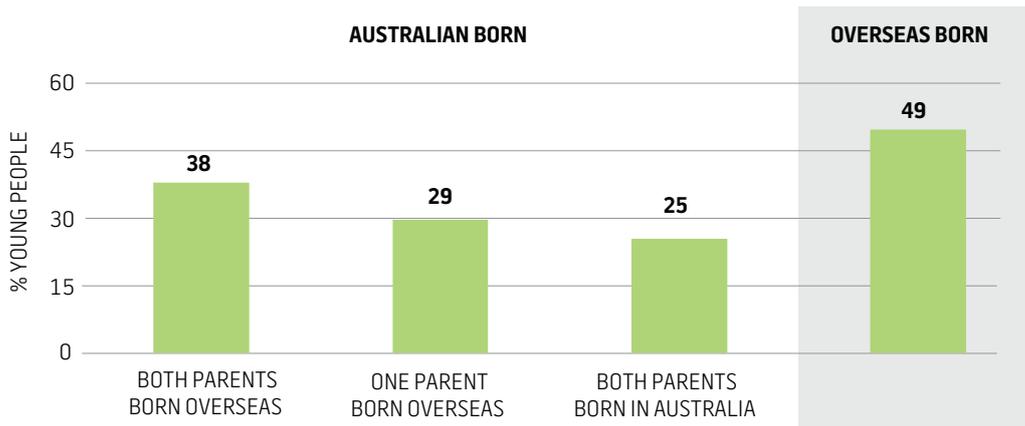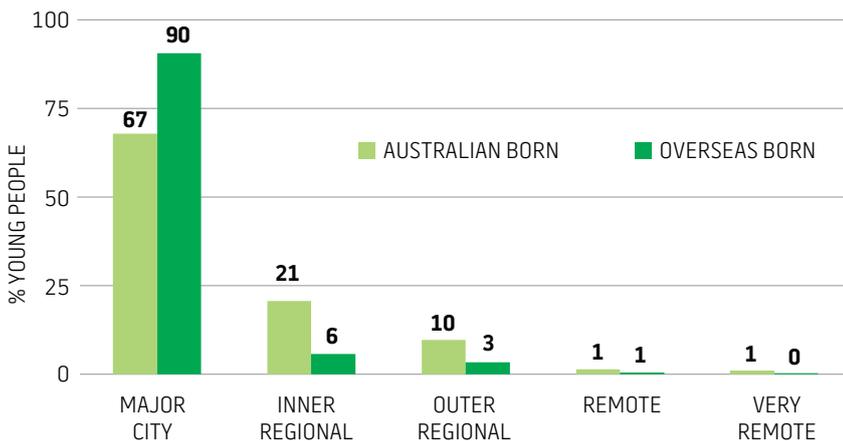(Source. ABS 2016c)

AUSTRALIAN BORN   **OVERSEAS BORN**

% YOUNG PEOPLE

Category	Value
BOTH PARENTS BORN OVERSEAS	38
ONE PARENT BORN OVERSEAS	29
BOTH PARENTS BORN IN AUSTRALIA	25
OVERSEAS BORN	49

Young people who are first-generation migrants tend to reside in major cities.
(Source. ABS 2011a)

% YOUNG PEOPLE

Region	AUSTRALIAN BORN	OVERSEAS BORN
MAJOR CITY	67	90
INNER REGIONAL	21	6
OUTER REGIONAL	10	3
REMOTE	1	1
VERY REMOTE	1	0

Note.
Data61's estimates were based on data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 and 2016 Census of Population and Housing. This data is a census of all people currently in Australia on Census night and usual residents who are out of the country. Cases where data were not stated or of an unknown category were excluded from population estimates. Because the Census data does not distinguish between young people who came to Australia as migrants or refugees, the term 'migrant' is used in this Snapshot to denote trends for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The rising bar

Learnings from *Bright Futures*

Rising skill and educational levels across the population, and advances in digital technology have made it increasingly challenging for young people to enter the Australian labour market. On the one hand, young people in Australia are increasingly likely to hold tertiary-level qualifications: the number of young people with a Bachelor degree or higher has risen from 20 per cent in 2006 to 25 per cent in 2016 (ABS 2016e). But on the other, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to gain employment. The proportion of young people in full-time employment has been declining, down from 38 per cent in 2006 to 28 per cent in 2016, alongside rising levels of young people in part-time employment (ABS 2016e). Other factors, such as changing skill demands from employers and task automation, have heightened the importance of soft skills, such as social and emotional intelligence, for young people in the workforce (FYA 2015).

Significance for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Lifting the bar even higher. Fewer university graduates with a Bachelor degree were able to find full-time employment within six months of graduating in 2015, relative to graduates in 2008 (GCA 2015). It is even tougher for students born outside Australia, who are less likely to be in full-time employment after graduation (45 per cent) than domestic students (69 per cent) (GCA 2015). Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds also face extra barriers to entering the labour market due to racial discrimination (Derous et al. 2016), which may cause some young people to conceal their race or ethnicity when applying for a job. Finding a job requires time, digital access, helpful networks and an understanding of how the Australian job market works (Van Kooy 2017). Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may not have this knowledge or established local networks (Beadle 2014; CMY 2016). These problems are significant, given that finding employment is an important milestone into adulthood, and when building a secure life in a new country (Colic-Peisker 2009).

Barriers to education. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds commonly experience more pressure to gain an education relative to young people born in Australia to non-immigrant parents. Some may struggle due to limited work experience or disrupted schooling prior to coming to Australia, particularly those from a refugee background (Brown et al. 2006). Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds often come from families that place a strong emphasis on education, and report that they can be under immense family pressure to excel academically. Others may experience pressure to prioritise family or cultural responsibilities over education. These factors can exacerbate existing pressures on young people to gain tertiary-level qualifications and be competitive in the job market.

Lost in translation. Young people who have migrated to Australia might struggle to find career options that use the skills they acquired overseas. This could be because their skills are not formally recognised by Australian institutions or because there are not enough jobs in niche markets for which their skills are necessary (Syed 2008). Indeed, one in seven young people who had recently migrated in 2016 was unsuccessful in having an overseas qualification recognised in Australia (ABS 2016f). As a result, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may find their skills underutilised in the workforce, and they may need to undertake further education and training with an Australian institution to be eligible for employment. Extended periods of unemployment or underemployment negatively impact mental health and wellbeing and warrant support to prevent or ameliorate problems (Paul & Moser 2009).

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may find their skills underutilised in the workforce.

The burden of international student fees. Non-citizens of Australia do not have access to Australian Government support for higher education and training (e.g. HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP or Commonwealth Supported Places) and must pay international fees to attend university and TAFE (Refugee Council of Australia 2016). This can place significant added financial strains on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and can act as a barrier to them seeking further education and training (Refugee Council of Australia 2016). To ease this financial burden, some universities in Australia now offer partial or full-fee scholarships to people from refugee backgrounds who are not eligible for government concessions for higher education (Refugee Council of Australia 2016).

EMERGING QUESTIONS

- How can we raise awareness of cultural biases and develop a culture of inclusion that realises the full potential of all in the workforce and the positive impact that diversity can have on organisations?

- What actions should we take to ensure ongoing support for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to learn about the job market, develop networks and manage competing education, work, family, community and cultural priorities?

- How can we better enable young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to successfully transition their skills to the Australian workforce?

- How can we better support the mental health and resilience of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds experiencing periods of unemployment or underemployment?

Global reach

Learnings from *Bright Futures*

Digital technology and globalisation mean that businesses and societies must now operate in a global, 24/7 environment. International flows of people, culture and goods have increased: the frequency of people travelling in and out of Australia, for example, has more than doubled from 2003 to 2016 (ABS 2017b). Education has become a significant driver of global mobility: in Australia, the number of international students studying in higher education institutions has risen from almost 180,000 students in 2006 to 340,000 in 2017 (Austrade 2017). New freelancing employment models, enabled through the peer-to-peer economy, have also emerged. While these future models of work may provide more flexibility, variety and autonomy for workers, the majority of 'millennials' (people born after 1982) still prefer the security of more traditional permanent full-time roles (Deloitte 2017).

Significance for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

A diverse group. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group, due to country of origin, cultural background, migration stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures and workforce experience (MYAN 2015). These factors add variability to the types of support services that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds require and are eligible for. A one-size-fits-all approach is therefore not appropriate in meeting the diverse needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Maintaining and growing networks. Online video calls, instant messaging and social media platforms provide ways for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to maintain communications and ties with friends and family from their country of origin (Komito & Bates 2011). They provide continuity of relationships with family and friends overseas, which is critical to a sense of belonging and identity for young people living in Australia.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds also tend to be globally oriented and are motivated to develop broad social and professional networks (Mansouri & Mikola 2014). These professional connections, combined with the entrepreneurial mindset present in many migrant communities, can provide new work and business opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia (Collins 2003). While digital technology can enable young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to grow professional networks outside their main cultural and social group/s, concerns around trust and racism can limit these opportunities (Mansouri & Skrbiš 2013). Forging your own business and work pathways also depends on specific knowledge and a degree of 'savvy' about Australian culture and its business environment, which young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may need to build. This reinforces the importance of bridging networks in facilitating employment opportunities.

Dissolving traditional barriers to collaboration. International collaboration between researchers, service providers, community groups and government can generate the greater knowledge essential for ensuring young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are supported to thrive in Australia. Deeper understanding of the experiences of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and that their needs are very diverse, can be useful for informing the design of services and programs for them. While good practice exists, the monitoring and evaluation of this learning and its wider dissemination need to be improved, including through greater collaboration.

Winning or losing in the 'gig economy'. The peer-to-peer employment market can offer alternative work opportunities for young people, although recent concerns have been raised about the downsides of non-standard forms of work. Temporary migrants may be inclined to take up jobs in the 'gig economy'[1] as a way of earning income without breaching their visa conditions (Goods et al. 2017). But the prospect of extra work hours can come at the cost of lower wages, reduced workforce rights, tax obligations and lost productivity spent waiting for work tasks (Goods et al. 2017). This emerging trend signals the potential for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to be exploited by employers if they do not know their rights (Goods et al. 2017).

EMERGING QUESTIONS

- How might we better use digital technologies to assist young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to settle and develop a sense of belonging in Australia?

- What role could cultural and age-relevant mentors or role models play in guiding and supporting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to navigate Australian society and culture?

- How can Australia develop a peer-to-peer labour market that breaks down traditional barriers to work for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and minimises their potential risks?

- How can digital technologies be better used by government, research institutions and service providers who work with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to collaborate and share information?

Professional connections, combined with an entrepreneurial mindset, can provide new work and business opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

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[1] The 'gig economy' is defined as the subset of the labour force who work as contractors rather than employees, and are paid based on their work outputs as opposed to the hours worked (Goods, Veen & Baratt, 2017).

Life's richer tapestry

Learnings from *Bright Futures*

Australian society is becoming increasingly diversified in terms of people, cultures and lifestyles. The proportion of people in Australia who were born overseas has steadily risen, with almost a third of people born overseas in 2016 (ABS 2016d). Australian society has also seen a rise in non-traditional family structures, with couple families without children projected to be the dominant family type by 2026 (AIHW 2011). There has also been a rise in the proportion of women participating in the workforce (ABS 2017e), along with a declining ratio in the number of people in Australia of working age relative to those aged 65 years or over (ABS 2017a). With these changes comes the need to shift away from mainstream models of service to ones that are more personalised and that cater for the needs of people from different backgrounds.

Significance for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Easier to belong. Living in a multicultural society can make it easier for some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to feel like they 'fit in' (Bansel et al. 2016). The rising number of people from diverse cultures is reshaping Australian society, making less clear what is mainstream and what is not. Young people tend to be more accepting of immigration and cultural diversity than other age groups in Australia (Markus 2016), and therefore may be more accepting of peers from other cultural or ethnic backgrounds. A multicultural society can also provide more spaces for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to find a sense of belonging, whether in their neighbourhood, school, community groups or online (Mansouri & Kirpitchenko 2016).

Social cohesion remains a challenge. Incidences of racial discrimination in Australia have steadily risen from almost one in ten to one in five from 2007 to 2016, with young people aged 18–24 years most likely to be impacted (Markus 2016). While the level of social cohesion in Australia has remained relatively stable from 2012 to 2016, there have been consistent, significant declines in positivity towards immigrants and in government support for ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions (Markus 2016). People of the Muslim faith are viewed more negatively than other religious groups in Australia (Markus 2016). Persistent challenges to social cohesion are concerning, given that experiences of racism can lead to mental health and wellbeing problems, including anxiety, stress, depression and poor quality of life (Pascoe & Smart Richman 2009; Williams & Mohammed 2009; Correa-Velez et al. 2010).

Wearing many hats. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds often need to negotiate multiple identities, including that of their cultural heritage and broader mainstream culture (Giguère et al. 2010). Intergenerational conflict can arise if there are discrepancies between a young person's and their parents' values, expectations or rate of integration into a new culture (Dennis et al. 2010). The incidence of intergenerational conflict is associated with the level of family cohesion, family control and acculturation into Australian society (Dennis et al. 2010). Young people report that intergenerational conflicts can be particularly problematic for young second-generation migrants who might not fully understand or appreciate their cultural heritage and practices, may reject this heritage, or not identify with it in ways expected by other family or community members.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have valuable insights into the design of policies, programs and services that can create a more inclusive Australia.

Skills in navigating multiculturalism. Migrants possess unique cross-cultural skills (e.g. multilingualism) (Cline et al. 2011) and can be highly adaptable, which can assist them in functioning in a multicultural society. The lived experience of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may therefore be able to provide valuable insights into the design of policies, programs and services that meet their needs and create a more inclusive Australian society.

EMERGING QUESTIONS

- How can we better involve the lived experience of young people in the design and delivery of policy and programs that utilise their skills and knowledge, and that address issues of identity, social inclusion and belonging?

- How can we better support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their families and their communities to manage conflicting cultural and societal perspectives?

- What role can businesses and the media play in promoting positive success stories about culturally diverse communities and helping the wider community understand the issues affecting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

Overexposure online

Learnings from *Bright Futures*

Young people are spending more time online, which presents both new challenges and opportunities. More than half of young people aged 15–17 years and around 45 per cent of those aged 18–24 years spent 15 hours or more online per week in 2014–15, making them the two highest age groups for internet use (ABS 2016g). Young people increasingly rely on social media as their main source of news and current affairs and at a much greater rate than all other age groups (Watkins et al. 2016). Spending time online can come with its risks though, with more than half of young people reporting that they have seen violent, racist or hateful comments online (Mason & Czapski 2017). Cyberbullying is another potential risk, with reports that one in five young people aged 8–17 years in Australia has experienced cyberbullying (ACMA 2013).

Significance for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Underexposure rather than overexposure. Issues with being online for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are in part characterised by underexposure, rather than overexposure. Some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are very technology-savvy and digitally literate but may struggle to access or afford internet services (Alam & Imran 2015). Other young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may have limited skills in using digital technologies (Alam & Imran 2015). This can place them at risk of multiple threats including bullying, exposure to pornography, and debt due to the cashless economy and personalised online marketing. The digital literacy skills of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds depend on factors such as country of origin and age of arrival to Australia (CMY 2016). Digital inclusion is closely tied to social inclusion, whereby a lack of digital connectivity can limit young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds from participating in the community, accessing education and employment, and maintaining contact with loved ones (Alam & Imran 2015).

Cyber-racism is a key online threat. The internet has provided new avenues for racism and discrimination to occur. While perpetrators don't necessarily make direct reference to a young person's skin colour, ethnic origin or religion, being a member of a disadvantaged or minority group makes young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia more vulnerable to cyber-racism and other forms of cyberbullying (Mason & Czapski 2017). Young people in Australia encounter harmful race-based online content in which the most common targets are Muslims (53 per cent), asylum seekers (37 per cent), refugees (35 per cent), Asians (33 per cent), Africans (20 per cent) and Jews (17 per cent) (Office of the eSafety Commissioner n.d.). International research found that young people from a migrant background are both more likely to be bullied and to bully others online than mainstream youth (Li et al. 2015). Such online behaviours can have significant negative effects on the mental health and wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds (Smith 2015).

Young people often rely on their parents, teachers and peers as support networks for navigating risks online.

Awareness of online risks. Navigating online risks can be a problem for young people (regardless of their migrant status) if they lack awareness of the potential dangers and protective mechanisms for engaging online. Young people often rely on their parents, teachers and peers as support networks for navigating risks online, but this support may be lacking for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are commonly more digitally competent than their parents (CMY 2016). To ensure their digital safety, young people need to be educated in how to recognise and respond to online hate content and to exercise their rights to privacy, access to information and freedom from harassment and discrimination in both the real world and the digital world (Johnson 2016).

From face-to-face to digital. With the proliferation of the internet and other digital technologies, products and services are increasingly being offered over the internet. In the university sector, course content is increasingly delivered online, expanding the number of students who can complete a course (Fischer 2014). As a result, young people now require sufficient technical and digital literacy skills to participate in some parts of higher education. Learning online could present problems for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds if they lack digital skills, literacy and/or have limited access to the internet.

EMERGING QUESTIONS

- What good practice examples exist to close the digital divide between young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and other Australians?

- Is there an appropriate investment in the delivery of high-quality programs that equip young people, regardless of their cultural background, with skills to recognise and respond to online threats?

- How can we better empower young digital citizens to build positive online communities that foster social cohesion, acceptance and inclusiveness?

Out of the shadows

Learnings from *Bright Futures*

The wealth of scientific research into mental illness is likely to have a positive impact on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of youth mental illness and disorders in the future. There has been significant investment in mental health, with expenditure on mental health services in Australia showing an average annual increase of about 5 per cent from 2010 to 2015 (AIHW 2015). Advances in medical technologies – such as brain stimulation and imaging, wearable devices, genome sequencing and others – have provided new ways to understand the underlying biological causes of mental illness. With the number of suicides (ABS 2016a) and the prevalence of mental illness symptoms (Bailey et al. 2016) on the rise for young people, youth mental health and wellbeing still requires significant attention.

Significance for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Barriers to accessing support. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds appear to be hesitant to use mental health services due to cultural beliefs around mental illness or a lack of awareness of the need for professional help and the services on offer (Gorman et al. 2003). These factors may stop them from accessing preventive or early forms of support (Hilferty et al. 2015), which may result in more severe mental problems at a later stage. Representatives from key organisations commented that the apparent low demand for mental health support services can act as a disincentive to the development of more specialised services for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Tailoring for cultural background and age. The mental health and wellbeing needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may differ from that of young people born in Australia to non-immigrant parents (de Anstiss et al. 2009). For example, they may require an interpreter to communicate with their health care provider, or have limited understanding of the scope or complexity of the health care system in Australia. Diversifying mainstream mental health services to suit different cultural and age perspectives can help make services more accessible to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and support early diagnosis and treatment for mental illness.

Building an evidence base for best practice. Scientific research has identified a range of social, cultural and psychological factors that impact the mental health and wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

For instance, a lack of social connections, low socioeconomic status, experiences of trauma and discrimination, poor English proficiency and the stress associated with adapting to a new culture place them at greater risk of developing depression, anxiety and other mental health issues (Fenta et al. 2004; Ayers et al. 2009; Choi et al. 2009; Zhang & Ta 2009; John et al. 2012). More research is required around the efficacy of mental health policies and programs for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and the factors that help or hinder their use (de Anstiss et al. 2009; Colucci et al. 2014).

Expanding the focus of physical and mental health research.
While young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are at greater risk of mental health difficulties, these difficulties can be avoided. When it comes to physical health, research into the 'healthy immigration effect' shows that people who migrate to a developed country can have better health than native-born populations, even when controlling for education and age (Kennedy et al. 2015). Research has also found that many young refugees cope well in the face of adverse events and trauma (Hodes 2000). This points to the importance of research into resilience and other protective factors that promote better physical and health outcomes in young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds (Colucci et al. 2014).

EMERGING QUESTIONS

- How can we improve access to mental health services and mental health literacy for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

- What new thinking is required to ensure that mental and physical health models of service can cater to diverse groups of refugee and migrant young people?

- What best practice evaluation frameworks are available to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and programs designed for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

- How can we draw on the lived experience of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to better understand the socioeconomic, political and cultural factors that enable them to flourish in the face of adversity? How can we foster and build on these findings?

Conclusions

The *Bright Futures* report (2015) identified five megatrends that will impact the mental health and wellbeing of young Victorians over the next 20 years. This report explored the significance of these megatrends for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia. It found that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have enormous skills, capabilities and potential to enrich and thrive in Australia. However, they commonly face challenges that may limit their full opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to society.

Informed by consultations with young people and representatives from government, not-for-profit organisations, service providers and researchers, the report found:

- **The rising bar.** The bar seems even higher for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, as they face extra social, financial, family and educational barriers to gaining employment. These factors point to the need for targeted support for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to access the Australian workforce.

- **Global reach.** Digital technologies and globalisation present new opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to expand their social and professional networks and employment options, and to maintain ties with overseas friends and family. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds require better support to develop their networks and understanding of Australia's business environment.

- **Life's richer tapestry.** A more diverse Australian society makes it easier for some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to fit in, but they can also face discrimination, exclusion and intergenerational conflict. In dealing with these issues, it is important to involve those with lived experience when researching and designing policy and programs.

- **Overexposure online.** Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face two distinct kinds of digital risk: exclusion from the online world if they lack digital access or skills, or, if they make it online, being subjected to cyber-racism or other online threats. Overcoming barriers to digital inclusion while empowering young people as online citizens should be key areas of focus.

- **Out of the shadows.** There are still significant cultural, demographic and linguistic factors that limit access to specific health care for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, particularly mental health care. Yet they can also be quite resilient. Future efforts should focus on maintaining the resilience demonstrated by many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and building protective factors that promote more positive mental health outcomes for them.

New research, policies and approaches that aim to understand and promote pathways for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds will be critical in enabling future generations of all cultures and heritages to flourish in Australian society.

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