

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Submission to Review of the Melbourne Declaration

June 2019

About the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. MYAN works in partnership with young people, government and non-government agencies at the state and territory and national levels to ensure that the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised, and to support a coherent and consistent approach to addressing these in policy and service delivery. MYAN provides policy advice to government, undertakes a range of sector development activities, and supports young people to develop leadership and advocacy skills to influence the national agenda.

About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the review of the Melbourne Declaration. This submission has a focus on the rights and interests of children and young people and provides a national perspective, drawing on MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and multicultural sectors across Australia. MYAN understands that access to and engagement in education is a critical factor in young people's economic and social participation in Australian society¹.

Highlighting the specific context and challenges faced by students from refugee and migrant backgrounds in accessing and remaining engaged in the Australian education system, and the school to work transition, this submission responds to the following questions:

2. Who should the national declaration inspire and/or guide?

6. How could the concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in the Melbourne Declaration be updated to ensure they are still contemporary over the next decade?

8. Are new priority areas for action needed? And are there areas that should no longer be a priority?

MYAN is available to work with the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Education Council to provide further information in relation to this submission.

Profile of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia

45% of Australia's young people are from a refugee or migrant background.² Education, training and school to work transitions are areas consistently identified by both young people and service providers as the most significant issues facing youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds and are key policy areas in MYAN's work.

¹ MYAN (2016), *National Youth Settlement Framework*, available at <https://myan.org.au/our-work-with-the-sector/156/>

² VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO & MYAN (2017) *Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Young people aged between 12 and 24 comprise a sizable portion of Australia's Migration and Humanitarian Programs.³ In the 2016/17 financial year:

- 41% of all youth arrivals to Australia in 2016/17 were of school age (aged between 12 and 17 years).⁴
- 17,446 young people aged 12 to 24 years settled permanently in Australia.⁵
- Young people, aged 12 to 24 years, represented 15% of all permanent arrivals to Australia in 2016/17.⁶
- Young people continued to make up an important portion of arrivals under the Humanitarian Program (23%), and Family stream (21%) and Skill stream (16%) of the Migration Program.⁷
- Young people from refugee-like backgrounds also arrived in Australia under the Migration Program, which is utilised widely for young people to unify with their family members in Australia.⁸
- In addition to new arrivals, in 2016, 45% of young people in Australia were either first or second-generation migrants.⁹

This group of young people have enormous potential to be active participants in, and contributors to Australian society. Their engagement as active citizens in Australian society has significant and long-term individual benefits and benefits for, their families, communities, and for a diverse and socially cohesive Australia. They have a range of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in education and employment, and to embrace the opportunities available to them.

We know that schools can be a critical stabilising feature in the lives of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, often providing safe spaces for new experiences, the development of peer networks and interactions, a sense of belonging and learning opportunities. However, many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face particular challenges in accessing the support and opportunities they need to fully realise their potential. For those more newly arrived, barriers include:

³ Humanitarian Programme and Migration Programmes are managed separately by the Department of Home Affairs. While the Humanitarian Programme is made up of an offshore and onshore component the Migration Programme is made up of two predominant streams, i.e. Family and Skill streams and a small Special Eligibility stream. For more on the Migration Programme see, Department of Home Affairs (2018) *Managing Australia's Migrant Intake*. Available at <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/discussion-papers/managing-australias-migrant-intake.pdf>, p.2; and for more on the Humanitarian Programme see, Department of Home Affairs (2018) *Discussion Paper: Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2018-19*. Available at <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/discussion-papers/2018-19-discussion-paper.pdf>, pp. 3-5.

⁴ MYAN (2018) *Youth Settlement Trends in Australia: A Report on the Data 2016-2017*. Melbourne: Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), p. 10. Available at: [http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final\(2\).pdf](http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final(2).pdf).

⁵ MYAN (2018) *Youth Settlement Trends in Australia: A Report on the Data 2016-2017*. Melbourne: Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), p. 9. Available at: [http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final\(2\).pdf](http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final(2).pdf).

⁶ MYAN (2018) *Youth Settlement Trends in Australia: A Report on the Data 2016-2017*. Melbourne: Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), p. 6. Available at: [http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final\(2\).pdf](http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final(2).pdf).

⁷ MYAN (2018) *Youth Settlement Trends in Australia: A Report on the Data 2016-2017*. Melbourne: Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), p. 6. Available at: [http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final\(2\).pdf](http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Youth%20Settlement%20Trends_2016-2017%20Final(2).pdf).

⁸ MYAN (2018) *Submission to the Department of Home Affairs on 'Managing Australia's Migrant Intake'*. Available at: [http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Australia%20Submission%20for%20Discussion%20Paper%20on%20Managing%20Australia's%20Migrant%20Intake\(1\).pdf](http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20Australia%20Submission%20for%20Discussion%20Paper%20on%20Managing%20Australia's%20Migrant%20Intake(1).pdf), p. 5.

⁹ VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO & MYAN (2017) *Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, p. 6.

- Learning a new language in an unfamiliar learning environment
- Negotiating an unfamiliar culture Limited social capital in the Australian context, including knowledge of the Australian education and training systems
- Limited, interrupted or no formal schooling prior to arrival in Australia.
- Lack of or limited support in the transition to mainstream schooling (often in relation to their placement into the appropriate year level based on their chronological age or level of education).
- Experiences of racism and discrimination.

For young people and families more newly arrived to Australia, access to targeted and responsive education and training is one of the most significant factors influencing the settlement process. Most young people and their families arrive in Australia with high aspirations, and success in their education is a key goal.

Key recommendations:

1.	The Declaration replaces the term 'refugee' with 'young people or students from refugee and migrant backgrounds'.
2.	Ensure that schools and teachers are supported to provide additional English language supports commensurate with the student's need for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds
3.	Ensure schools are resourced to provide programs that support parent/carer engagement in young people's educational journey to ensure families are included in and informed about the Australian education system and training and employment pathways, both within and outside school.
4.	Ensure students have ongoing access to career counselling, mentor programs and industry work placement schemes.
5.	Ensure that teachers have adequate training and resources to understand and respond to pre-arrival trauma and the complexities of settlement experienced by students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This includes resources to support engagement with family members.
6.	Ensure there are opportunities in schools to increase teacher and student awareness and understanding of different cultures and refugee and migrant experiences to assist in creating a school environment that is supportive of and inclusive of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Question 2. Who should the national declaration inspire and/or guide?

MYAN believes that the Melbourne Declaration should inspire all Australia's children and young people, especially those who face particular disadvantage in accessing and remaining engaged in education. This includes young people from a diverse range of backgrounds, including students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their educators and their families and carers. The Declaration should guide the Department of Education, Australia's Education Ministers, statutory bodies working in conjunction with the Department, policy makers at all levels of government and schools and teachers across the education spectrum.

Question 6. How could the concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in the Melbourne Declaration be updated to ensure they are still contemporary over the next decade?

MYAN suggests that the Declaration be updated to include specific reference to students from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the declaration itself, and acknowledgement of the impact that additional barriers facing this group of students are likely to have in comparison to their Australian-born, non-immigrant peers.

The current Declaration makes specific mention of the term 'refugee' and MYAN recommends expanding this to specifically refer to students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The term 'refugee' is not inclusive of, and does not encapsulate the diversity of the lived experiences of all youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In 2016, 45% of all young people in Australia aged 12 to 24 were from refugee and migrant backgrounds, thus it is essential that the experiences, barriers and needs of this group of students are considered in the Declaration to ensure equity in access to opportunity and quality of education commensurate to that of their Australian peers. MYAN recommends:

- The Declaration replaces the term 'refugee' with 'young people or students from refugee and migrant backgrounds'.

Question 8. Are new priority areas for action needed? And are there areas that should no longer be a priority?

Priority areas for action are needed that recognise the particular context for and barriers facing students from refugee and migrant backgrounds in order to address/minimise disadvantage. The provision of education for these students is not just about guaranteeing physical access to the classroom, but also includes ensuring that their participation in the Australian education system is inclusive and contributes to equitable educational and employment outcomes and opportunities commensurate with that of their Australian born, non-immigrant peers.

In striving for both equity and excellence, supporting a diverse student population requires an understanding from schools and teachers of the barriers facing children and young people from

refugee and migrant backgrounds, as well as ensuring appropriate responses and supports are in place to minimise any inequities that arise for these students. A supportive school environment, with targeted/ specialised programmes provides the necessary support as well as security and stability for students, and helps them to become successful learners, confident individuals and active and informed participants in Australian society. Positive areas for action to minimise barriers faced by students from refugee and migrant backgrounds and continue the promotion of equity and excellence in Australian schools into the future, include:

English language support

Literacy is a key factor of educational success. We know that English language acquisition is a critical part of settlement for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Their access to education and employment is highly dependent on their being able to successfully acquire English language skills. As such, students may require specific interventions in order to improve English language learning, thus MYAN recommends the following priority areas for action:

- Ensure schools and teachers are supported to provide additional English language support commensurate with the student's need for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, especially those with disrupted or no previous schooling, in order to address inequity and ensure they develop the learning skills they need to succeed in Australian schools and the eventual school to work transition.
- Increased investment in programs that support student's transition from intensive English language programs into mainstream secondary schools or from AMEP into further training/higher education.
- Ensuring schools receive support for initiatives in and outside the classroom that help students from refugee and migrant backgrounds to remain engaged in education and English language learning (e.g. homework support groups).

Career guidance and support

Our work tells us that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds (and their families) are often less aware of possible education pathways (especially vocational education and training apprenticeships and traineeships) which could lead to employment pathways that suit their interests and desires. MYAN recognises the long-term value of career guidance in schools and recommends that:

- Schools are equipped with bridging programs that support educational transitions in every state and territory, targeted to the needs of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

- Schools are resourced to provide programs that support parent/carer engagement in young people's educational journey to ensure families are included in and informed about the Australian education system, and training and employment pathways, both within and outside school.
- Schools are resourced to expand existing models of multicultural youth workers based in schools to all states and territories to ensure students have support to address the barriers that can impact their full engagement in their education.
- Ensure students have ongoing access to career counselling, mentor programs and industry work placement schemes.

Additional support

- Ensure school funding is utilised for supports in schools to identify and respond early to the needs of students who are newly arrived to Australia, especially with a view to prevent early disengagement from education.
- Ensure that teachers have adequate training and resources to understand and respond to pre-arrival trauma and the complexities of settlement experienced by students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This includes resources to support engagement with family members.
- Ensure there are opportunities in schools to increase teacher and student awareness and understanding of different cultures and refugee and migrant experiences to assist in creating a school environment that is supportive of and inclusive of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

References

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