

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)

Response to the Department of Home Affairs

‘Australia’s Humanitarian Program 2023-24 Discussion Paper’

May, 2023

About 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 provides expert policy advice, undertakes a range of sector development activities, and supports young people to develop leadership skills.

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. We are also a committed member of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRNN).

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.

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

MYAN is available to work with the Department of Home Affairs to provide further information in relation to this submission. For further information on this submission please contact:

Rana Ebrahimi, MYAN National Manager
rana@myan.org.au

Shannon White, National Policy & Advocacy Lead
shannon@myan.org.au

MYAN acknowledges and pays respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which MYAN partners operate across the country, and pay our respects to all Elders past, and present.

About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Home Affairs' discussion paper 'Australia's Humanitarian Program 2022-23.' This submission has a focus on the rights and interests of young people (12 to 24 year olds) arriving in Australia through the Humanitarian Program and provides a national perspective. MYAN would like to acknowledge the young people in our networks, especially those with lived experience of forced migration, who generously share their experiences and their insights with MYAN and help to inform our policy work.

The considerations raised in the *Discussion Paper*, particularly in relation to regional settlement, settlement assistance, and assistance to particularly vulnerable cohorts 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:

- The Humanitarian Program
 - Vulnerable cohorts within refugee populations
 - Women at Risk
- The Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP)
- Program size
- Regional settlement
- Settlement assistance to Humanitarian Program entrants

1. Young people arriving via the Humanitarian Program

Children and young people are among the most vulnerable groups within the vast population of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide. These individuals are often forced to flee their homes due to conflict or physical violence inflicted by parents, caregivers, or local authorities. As a result, refugee children and young people face a multitude of protection risks, including gender-based violence, exploitation, and abuse, smuggling, and trafficking.

Moreover, refugee children and young people often experience significant disruptions to their education and may struggle to self-advocate or navigate the complex process of seeking refuge and applying for resettlement. These challenges can have long-lasting effects on their physical, emotional, and mental well-being, as well as their future prospects. It is crucial to recognize the unique needs and vulnerabilities of refugee children and young people and to provide them with the necessary support and protection. This includes access to education, healthcare, and legal assistance, as well as

safe and secure living conditions. By prioritizing the well-being of these individuals, we can help them rebuild their lives and contribute to the communities in which they reside.¹

Australia has a well-established and well-regarded resettlement program that has consistently included large numbers of children and young people (including unaccompanied and separated minors). Over the past five years, the number of young people arriving through the Humanitarian Program has gradually increased, from 12% in 2015-16 to 29.5% in 2019-20. During this period, Australia resettled 19,311 young people aged between 12 and 24 via the Humanitarian Program. (Numbers decreased overall in the two years of travel restrictions due to COVID-19). Young people aged 12-24 arriving through the Humanitarian Program made up 24% of arrivals in the 2021-22 financial year period.

The Australian Government's continued investment in, and support of settlement services has ensured that Australia delivers some of the world's best settlement practice. A noteworthy evolution in Australia's settlement service system is the development of youth specific settlement programmes to support positive settlement outcomes for young people; a response made in recognition of the complexity of adolescent development.

2. Young people and settlement

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.

For many it is a time where there are new or additional responsibilities and increased expectations from family, peers and the broader society. It is also a time where decisions are made about education and employment pathways and where risk and protective factors (family, peers, community, culture, and faith) are commonly tested and acutely influence a successful transition through adolescence.

Navigating adolescence is made more challenging by the refugee and migration experience and the settlement journey, specifically:

- cultural dislocation
- loss of social capital and established community, social and peer networks
- the impact of the refugee and migration experience on family structures and pressures on family/intergenerational dynamics
- the practical demands of settlement, and
- the traumatic nature of forced migration.

This means that young migrants and refugees are navigating multiple, and more complex transitions

¹ MYAN (2017) *Submission- Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2017/18 humanitarian program*. Available at myan.org.au

than their Australian-born non-migrant peers. 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 adulthood². Compounded by the developmental tasks of adolescence, and in addition to gender, sexuality, disability, geography, and cultural context, these barriers commonly include:

- Limited or low English language skills
- Racism and/or discrimination—explicit, implicit, structural, and individual
- 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)
- Limited or lack of access to digital literacy
- More limited services/opportunities in regional /rural areas³

Response to the Discussion Paper

3. The Humanitarian Program

MYAN welcomes a focus on vulnerable cohorts within refugee populations, including women and children, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ and other identified minority groups. We recommend extending this to explicitly include people with disabilities. This requires responsive and targeted settlement support to ensure these groups are appropriately supported on arrival. I.e. 'one size settlement does not fit all.' Despite the inherent and gender-specific pre-arrival trauma and vulnerability for this cohort, there is a distinct absence of support that specifically target those arriving through these streams⁴ and MYAN would like to highlight the need for a more specialised gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach to settlement for these groups. The unique backgrounds, cultures, and needs of refugees require tailored solutions for resettlement that cater to their specific requirements.

There is no uniform approach that can account for the different challenges that each refugee within these particular cohorts face, but taking into consideration individual histories of persecution, cultural expectations and social integration could help address some of the significant barriers faced by refugees from vulnerable cohorts in new environments.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ MYAN & MCA (2021) *Women at Risk Visa Holders (Subclass 204) Consultation Report Available at: myan.org.au*

For example, there is a growing recognition of the unique challenges faced by LGBTQI+ refugees who are often forced to flee persecution in their home countries. Recent research undertaken by MYAN found that LGBTQI+ young people from asylum seeker and refugee backgrounds face additional challenges in their migration and settlement journey compared to their non-LGBTQI+ peers due to additional safety risks, lack of family/community social support, and multiple layers of discrimination and face additional barriers to accessing services including health care services, housing, and meaningful employment. As a result, LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers require specific settlement supports that ensures their privacy, safety, and health needs are met and to help them settle without experiencing discrimination and stigma.

Recommendations:

1. Expand the definition of vulnerable populations to explicitly include people with disabilities.
2. Review existing HSP and SETS policies (including needs assessments) to ensure that considerations for the needs and safety of vulnerable groups including LGBTQI+ young people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds and vulnerable women and children are embedded.
3. Work with settlement service providers to better recognise and respond to the specific settlement challenges faced by vulnerable cohorts of young people, and include opportunities for program and service co-design with young people.
4. Work with MYAN to identify and respond to the specific settlement needs of young people in more vulnerable cohorts.
5. Support tailored service provision for LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers by improving national data collection practices regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and funding research on the specific experiences of (and barriers faced by) this group.

4. Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) and SHP (subclass 202) Category

MYAN would like to highlight the need for a more specialised gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach to settlement for people arriving via the WaR and SHP streams. Despite the inherent and gender-specific pre-arrival trauma and vulnerability for this cohort, there is a distinct absence of support that specifically target those arriving through these streams.⁵

For example, while all young people arriving in Australia can face similar challenges during the resettlement process, WaR visa holders share common pre-arrival vulnerabilities, including exposure to physical and sexual violence, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which contributes to the heightened vulnerability of this cohort, leading to additional settlement challenges, including for young people. These challenges include increased adult responsibility due to single headed households which impacts on their education and employment prospects, housing insecurity, and limited sexual health knowledge. This group of young people can also experience particular social

⁵ MYAN & MCA (2021) *Women at Risk Visa Holders (Subclass 204) Consultation Report* Available at: myan.org.au

challenges, including exclusion from their communities due to their mother's, or their own experiences prior to arrival in Australia.⁶

A strengths-based approach that empowers WaR and SHP clients is critical for optimal settlement outcomes, including for young people. A focus on early, targeted, youth-specific support will maximise the strength of the WaR program and ensure local providers are aware of the particular service needs of this group and better equipped to implement the necessary resources and programs at the time of arrival.

Ordinarily, SHP proposers are expected to cover the costs of travel for sponsored 202 visa holders, whether directly or with the assistance of IOM who provide travel loans. The costs of travel are prohibitive, with the potential for financial distress or long term debt for proposers.

Recommendation for HSP providers:

1. Conduct targeted needs assessments either pre-arrival or soon after arrival to identify the particular settlement needs of WaR and SHP visa holders in order to guide the delivery of tailored gender-responsive and youth-specific supports to this group.

Recommendations for the government/DHA:

2. Prioritise family reunification for WaR visa holders given the significance of family reunification to successful settlement outcomes and, more specifically, so that WaR visa holders and dependants may be better supported by extended family.
3. Adopt a broader definition of 'family' to prioritise the reunification of older siblings and extended family members so that WaR visa holders and dependants can be supported by extended family.
4. Invest in a national evaluation of the WaR and SHP programs to develop stronger empirical evidence about how the program is meeting the settlement needs of this specific cohort, which would help policymakers and service providers in achieving successful settlement outcomes for this group.
5. Provide travel support for SHP proposers.
6. Strengthen pre-arrival induction by undertaking a review of the Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) program, including the development of more specialised modules that have a youth, gender, and trauma responsive lens and identify where other changes could be made to improve settlement outcomes.
7. Strengthen early arrival settlement outcomes by providing short English language courses via AUSCO where practical.

⁶ Ibid.

5. The Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP)

The CRISP program needs to be able to meet the specific needs of young people and have a good understanding of the services available to support them. It is important to provide early and targeted settlement support, and volunteers should be trained to consistently respond to these needs. To achieve this, MYAN recommends that CRISP volunteers should receive specialized youth training using resources like the National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) and local MYAN training providers. MYAN and other partners can also be a helpful resource throughout the pilot to ensure that the settlement needs of young people are taken into account from the beginning.

6. Program size

MYAN reiterates our position the Humanitarian Program numbers must be returned to, at minimum, the pre-pandemic target of at least 18,750 as soon as practicable, and should further increase over time-without any limitations on countries that people are resettled from. The Humanitarian Program numbers should also increase our capacity for additional humanitarian intakes in response to crises and emergencies such as those seen recently in Afghanistan and the Ukraine.

7. Regional Settlement

MYAN welcomes the recent decision to reduce the intake of refugees in regional areas by 50%. This decision recognizes that successful settlement outcomes are more important than meeting arbitrary numerical targets. However, it is crucial that we continue to work towards better preparing regional areas to ensure a seamless transition for both incoming refugees and existing residents. Failure to address regional settlement issues risks creating a division between two separate settlement entities. Ensuring adequate specialist services for newly arrived refugees is critical to the sustainability of regional settlement.

MYAN agrees that migrant settlement in regional areas, including skilled workers, temporary migrants, and refugees, has the potential to provide multiple benefits to individuals and communities, 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.⁷

MYAN reiterates that realising these benefits requires careful planning and 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.⁸ We know that

⁷ Rural Australians for Refugees (2017) *Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*

⁸ Musoni, E. (2019). *Understanding regional settlement in Australia: Key learnings from past experiences*. Canberra, the Regional Australia Institute.

when young people settle in areas experiencing persistent issues around housing affordability, high rates of youth unemployment and low numbers of humanitarian migrants, settlement challenges are exacerbated for these young people.⁹

However, it is important to note that young people living in rural and remote areas face unique challenges due to their geographic location and often have poorer health outcomes than young people living in metropolitan areas.¹⁰ When young people settle in areas experiencing persistent issues around housing affordability, high rates of youth unemployment and low numbers of humanitarian migrants, settlement challenges are exacerbated for these young people.¹¹ Some of these challenges include:

- Difficulties in building local social networks, particularly in communities with little diversity
- No established support networks due to low numbers of humanitarian entrants
- Limited or no knowledge from the community around the refugee and settlement experience
- Limited cultural competency/antiracism training offered to local teachers
- Newly-arrived migrants, particularly young people may not be immediately eligible for a licence or have access to funds to purchase a car. This, combined with limited public transportation in regional areas impacts access to education and employment opportunities
- Limited meaningful employment options available for young people, with youth unemployment at higher rates in regional and rural Australia¹²
- Lack of facilities or programs to engage local youth may hinder long-term settlement objectives and short term funding cycles of those programs.
- Lack of rental properties and stable long term housing options available in many regional towns, and lack of crisis support for young people at risk of, or facing homelessness.

To mitigate these issues, and realise any benefits of regional settlement in the long term requires:

- Thorough review and assessment of regional settlement areas and capacity of local settlement services to respond to the needs of newly arrived families and individuals, including young people particularly within the domains of employment, education and training, English language services, affordable long-term housing, and health and well-being.
- Meaningful long-term opportunities and prospects for young people to continue to live, work and study locally, including pathways to set up businesses.

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.

⁹ MYAN & MCA (2021) *Women at Risk Visa Holders (Subclass 204) Consultation Report* Available at: myan.org.au

¹⁰ AIHW (2021) *Australia's youth* Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth/contents/introduction>

¹¹ MYAN & MCA (2021) *Women at Risk Visa Holders (Subclass 204) Consultation Report* Available at: myan.org.au

¹² Ibid.

Recommendations for government/DHA:

1. Thoroughly assess regional settlement locations to determine local workforce needs, educational opportunities, assess availability of appropriate housing, and to identify service gaps, response strategies, measure community attitudes, and concerns towards migrants.
2. Work with MYAN to facilitate a national consultation of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds living in regional areas to highlight some of the gaps, challenges and solutions with regional settlement.
3. Develop a common set of criteria for optimal youth resettlement sites by:
 - Thoroughly assessing regional settlement locations to determine availability of stable and affordable housing, and schooling and employment opportunities.
 - Identifying service gaps and response strategies.
 - Measuring community attitudes, and concerns towards refugees and migrants.
4. 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

8. Settlement assistance to Humanitarian Program entrants

MYAN acknowledges the Australian Government's commendable efforts in addressing global resettlement needs through its Humanitarian Program. We appreciate the government's commitment to supporting successful settlement and integration outcomes for newly arrived individuals in Australia through this program. Australia's settlement services system is internationally recognized for its strength, particularly its unique investment in youth settlement support. We are pleased to hear that the government is currently reviewing and improving the design of this world-leading settlement services model to enhance settlement outcomes.

Australia's settlement service system has been built on the lessons learned from each successive wave of new migrants. As a result, a range of settlement supports and services have been developed that not only assist new arrivals in settling in but also promote community connectedness and drive the national narrative on social cohesion.

Despite Australia's advanced settlement service system, there is always room for improvement. The system has the capacity and resourcefulness to continuously improve by practically applying lessons learned and meeting contemporary challenges through new and innovative approaches. It is essential for all service providers to build their knowledge and skills for engaging meaningfully with refugee and migrant young people and to work collaboratively to meet their unique and intersectional needs. This includes working with settlement service providers to better recognise and respond to the specific settlement challenges faced by particular cohorts of young people, such as those arriving on the Women at Risk Visa and LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, and providing opportunities for co-design.

Youth-specific settlement services are critical in addressing youth-specific barriers and supporting positive settlement outcomes. We believe that by working together and utilising shared knowledge and insights, we can continuously improve Australia's settlement services system and ensure that all newly arrived individuals have the support they need to successfully integrate into Australian society.

Youth participation is essential in this process, as it provides valuable insights and opinions that can inform decision-making at all levels. Engaging young people in decision-making processes also has significant benefits for the young people themselves, as well as for the organizations and communities that support them. Therefore, it is crucial to empower these communities and facilitate pathways to self-agency.

Please refer to our submission to 'Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees' for fuller detail. We look forward to reforms to settlement programs to ensure services are as best placed as possible to meet the needs of young people.

Recommendations to government/DHA:

1. Work with MYAN to identify opportunities for co-design with young people for the purpose of service improvement.
2. Work with MYAN and others in the sector to develop a national youth settlement strategy to support a more targeted, consistent and coordinated approach to meeting the settlement needs of young people.
3. Improve nationally consistent data collection to monitor and measure settlement outcomes for young people – to allow comparative analysis across sites and over time and build a robust evidence-base.
4. Invest in research that examines the factors that contribute to and support successful settlement outcomes for young people.

