Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Shaping the future of Australian multiculturalism: realising potential through multicultural youth participation

Submission to Multicultural Framework Review

October 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.

We work in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies at the national and state and territory levels to ensure that the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised and addressed in policy and service delivery.

MYAN's *National Youth Settlement Framework* guides a targeted and consistent approach to supporting newly arrived young people in Australia.

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

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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.

Contents

Introduction

MYAN considers that multiculturalism, as a public policy framework is the cornerstone of a meaningful social inclusion agenda.

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.[1] Multiculturalism is a central tenet of Australian national identity and an asset to the country in an era of globalisation. Multiculturalism has enabled our economy to become one of the world's strongest, and Australian society to become one of the worlds' most peaceful.[2]

Much of this success can be attributed to strong bi-partisan support for multicultural policy at the federal and state/territory levels, as well as investment in settlement policy and services and the significant and ongoing contributions of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Positive settlement outcomes for those arriving in Australia as migrants or refugees are inextricably linked to a sense of belonging amongst family members, peers, their own cultural community, and the broader community.[3] Government policy agendas around multiculturalism, where cultural and religious diversity is valued, welcomed, and fostered remains relevant in contemporary Australia.

Young people do however, caution against multiculturalism becoming 'tokenistic', and highlight a need for a commitment from government to respond to issues around inequity, racism, and discrimination within the context of multicultural policy; and a need for the diversity of the Australian community to be reflected across all levels of government institutions. This includes increasing leadership and decision-making roles and opportunities for young people that are reflective of all their diversities.

The issues being considered in this review in relation to the multicultural framework are critical issues for the young people we work with, their families, and communities. MYAN's submission provides a national perspective; drawing on our consultations with young people and our breadth of experience working with young people aged 12-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and multicultural sectors across Australia.

MYAN remains committed to ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism. A strong multicultural and socially cohesive Australia is particularly significant for young people,

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[1] Rajadurai, E 2018 Success in Diversity-The Strength of Australia's Multiculturalism The McKell Institute

[2] Ibid.

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

especially those who arrive in Australia as refugees and migrants and those born in Australia to refugee or migrant parents.

In this submission, MYAN highlights the importance of a comprehensive and contemporary multicultural framework for Australia. This framework should include several key factors that contribute to an inclusive and equitable society.

Firstly, it should provide a definition of multiculturalism that resonates with all members of the community, including young people. Additionally, a genuine acknowledgement of the history of colonisation and its impact on First Nations people must be made. Furthermore, a sincere commitment and targeted approach to addressing racism in Australian society is necessary.

A strategic approach must be taken to identify and overcome systemic equity and inclusion barriers that hinder young people from diverse backgrounds from fully participating in socio-economic opportunities. Additionally, young people should be given many opportunities to participate in leadership, decision-making, and advisory roles. Finally, institutions and policies should be reviewed to ensure they align with the framework's principles and goals. By incorporating these essential elements, Australia can create a strong and relevant multicultural framework that supports a diverse and inclusive society.

Young people and a contemporary multicultural framework

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 equitable opportunity.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have an essential role in shaping the future of multiculturalism in Australia. As of 2019, 25% of young people aged 15–24 in Australia were born overseas, and nearly half of all Australians had either been born overseas (first generation Australian) or one or both parents had been born overseas (second generation Australian).[4]

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, alongside their First Nations peers and more recently arrived young people will experience and actively influence the dynamics and narratives of multiculturalism over the next 10 to 20 years. They are the answer to the strength-based approach called for in this review, bringing with them the unique strengths, skills, and experiences necessary to maximise the full potential of the multicultural framework.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in particular bring with them strengths in international and cross-cultural knowledge, multilingual skills, adaptability, resilience, a strong sense

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[4] Australian Government (2021) *Demographics of Australian young people and their families* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023

of family and community, and a desire to enjoy and uphold the rights and responsibilities of Australia's democratic processes.[5] They are also ideally positioned to address the perennial complex challenges faced by Australia's refugee and migrant population, such as language barriers, cultural differences, limited social connections, unfamiliarity with Australian systems, and persistent and multifaceted racism and discrimination.

Moreover, they are the only people with the knowledge and experience necessary to address:

- the unique set of challenges they face as *young people* from migrant and refugee backgrounds including navigating unfamiliar education and employment paths, adapting to shifting family dynamics, and managing multicultural identities; and
- compounding cross cutting issues of intersectionality including gender, sexuality, disability, geography, cultural context, as well as the developmental complexities of adolescence.

Their inclusion in the development of multicultural policies is critical to creating a society that is cohesive, inclusive, and celebrates cultural diversity. Identity and belonging are central tenets of multiculturalism, and policies need to be designed to promote an authentic sense of belonging for all Australians, regardless of their cultural background or length of time in Australia.

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[5] MYAN (2019) Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy.

List of recommendations

Opportunities to define a modern shared Australian identity and strengthen public understanding of multiculturalism as a collective responsibility through education and public awareness raising

1. Define multiculturalism in a way that reflects contemporary Australia and resonates with everyone living in Australia. This must:

   - Centre First Nations voices, experiences, and history
   - Reflect the experiences and reality of multicultural people, including embedding the concept of 'third culture'.
   - Affirm racism as a central principle critical to inclusion, equity and social cohesion
   - Include young people's voices to guide the Framework into the future

2. Create initiatives for people (particularly newly arrived and older migrants and refugees) to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.
3. Invest in formal initiatives that facilitate opportunities for diverse young people to have their voices heard in political and civic domains to inform policy and decision-making, and Identify meaningful opportunities for diverse young people to participate in leadership and decision-making processes at local, state and territory and national levels.
4. Embed the principles of multiculturalism in the development and implementation of Australia's settlement and migration programs.

Identifying areas for reform to address any systemic barriers that prevent people from multicultural communities from fully participating in Australian society, including those barriers that exist due to racism and discrimination

1. Ensure that the goals of the Multicultural Framework align with the proposed National Anti-Racism Framework.
2. Enhance mental health and well-being services by cultivating a culturally responsive workforce, which can include incentivising the recruitment of bi-cultural mental health professionals.
3. Invest in data collection and analysis relating to education, employment, and well-being outcomes for CALD young people to provide a clear evidence-base to best understand, measure and direct current and future investment and program design.
4. Increase investment for programs in and outside school settings, including EAL/D support, and advocate for increased funding for programs and resources that support the education and well-being of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
5. Develop a strategic/coordinated approach between all levels of government and educational stakeholders, including consistent evidence-based laws and policies across states and consistent programs and policies across schools and sectors.

6. Invest in a National Multicultural Youth Employment Strategy to create pathways and support for sustainable employment for newcomers to Australia, providing opportunities for skills development and training, and ensuring the progression of reforms to qualification, accreditation, and skills recognition processes, including cost and timeliness, to acknowledge overseas qualifications and experiences during job-seeking through bridging courses/programs.

Effective settings for institutions, legislation, and policy to advance multiculturalism

1. Implement a Multicultural Act that provides a legal framework to promote and protect diversity in Australian society.
2. Elevate the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to Cabinet who has responsibility for the strengthening of intergovernmental coordination of and funding to support multicultural policy and programs at the state/territory level and reviewing and developing the Multicultural Access & Equity Policy.
3. Establish a coordinated federal mechanism that provides consistent funding to state and territory governments to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds nationwide. This should include a tailored multicultural youth-focussed strategy for settlement, employment, education, and well-being.
4. Identify new ways to promote and protect multiculturalism throughout Australia, such as investing in research to identify the needs and challenges of multicultural communities in Australia, developing policies and programs that promote and protect multiculturalism, and building partnerships with youth-led community organisations and stakeholders to promote diversity and inclusion.
5. Invest in robust local and national data collection on cultural, language and ethnicity data, research, and monitoring mechanisms to measure progress and direct future initiatives effectively.
6. Establish a national multicultural policy and monitoring agency and/or a multicultural research institute.

Section 1. Opportunities to define a modern shared Australian identity and strengthen public understanding of multiculturalism as a collective responsibility through education and public awareness raising

1.1 A multicultural framework must recognise and reflect the role of belonging and identity in creating a cohesive and inclusive society.

Australia's modern multicultural identity must reflect the intersectionality of multicultural youth identity and be defined in a way that young people feel connected to. Contemporary notions of multiculturalism in Australia have evolved to reflect the changing demographics of our society. To connect with diverse young people, we need to define multiculturalism as more than just a policy or a set of practices. It is about creating a space where everyone feels valued and respected, regardless of their cultural background. This means acknowledging and celebrating the contributions that different cultures have made to our society, and recognising the unique perspectives and experiences that diverse young people bring to the table.

Facilitating a sense of belonging for diverse young people is critical to their success and wellbeing in Australia. When young people feel like they belong, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and connected to their communities[6]. By defining multiculturalism in a way that resonates with young people, we can create a more inclusive and welcoming society for all. In doing so, we can help to foster a sense of pride in our cultural diversity and build a stronger, more unified Australia.

While Australia's national identify is not predicated on ethnicity or race which means our national identify is fluid and can change over time, identity and belonging are central to the success of multiculturalism. Thus, it is crucial to recognise the importance of creating a contemporary definition of multiculturalism that everyone can feel connected to, especially for young people, for whom a sense of belonging is fundamental to their development.

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

Thus, defining contemporary multiculturalism in Australia requires the inclusion of fresh perspectives and dynamic leadership, and a rejection of any stereotypes that are at odds with contemporary

Australia. Young people have the potential to drive the multicultural narrative forward and help shape a definition of multiculturalism that is relevant, inclusive and dynamic.

For many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their sense of identity and belonging is formulated via a complex interplay between their migration journey, their place in their families, communities, and broader Australian society, their national and cultural identity and notions of citizenship and nationhood.[7] Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group, and this is reflected in how they describe their identities. For some young people who were born overseas, they feel more closely identified to Australia than their country of origin, while others, including those born in Australia, speak of feeling connected to multiple countries depending on where their families are from, their country of birth or the countries they have spent an extensive amount of time living or travelling in.

Many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds speak of their capacity to identify with multiple identities at different times due to their migration experience and the impact of globalisation, which has influenced the way young people understand traditional notions of belonging and nationhood. For young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, belonging is flexible and complex. Many young people in contemporary Australia experience varying forms of belonging to the nation, to local and global communities, to networks of friends and family, and to different cultural spaces. Traditional concepts of nationhood and citizenship, particularly in western liberal democracies, are historically tied to notions of a nation-state bound by a common territory and its relationship to a territorially-bounded populace; a worldview that is not necessarily shared by, or relevant to young people in contemporary Australia.[8]

It is crucial that young people feel empowered to contribute to the development of our national identity and culture. This sense of empowerment comes from feeling included and valued, irrespective of their race or ethnicity. By creating a shared sense of belonging, we can build a society that celebrates diversity and fosters social cohesion. We must continue to provide young people with the tools and resources they need to lead the way towards a genuinely inclusive future for all Australians.

The feeling of belonging to a community is essential for active citizenship and a crucial element in the success of a multicultural society. National consultations conducted by MYAN have found that identity is one of the greatest challenges facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Young people have shared that choosing who they identify as can affect how they fit in society and can leave them feeling 'stuck' between cultures and torn between the pressures to fit in and the pressure to preserve their cultural identity. Their identities are produced through complex social networks and overlapping layers of diversity and for some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds,

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[7] MYAN (2019) Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy.
[8] Ibid.

cultural mobility requires significant personal effort to balance the expectations of different cultural worlds.

While young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds often need to negotiate multiple identities including that of their cultural heritage and broader mainstream culture, their sense of belonging and identity in multicultural Australia is critical to their social inclusion – the capacity to access economic and social opportunities and participate fully in Australian society.[9]

MYAN, and the young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds on whose behalf we advocate, consider that to serve and reflect a modern Australia, a shared Australian identity must be shaped by diversity; and meaningful opportunities for diverse young people to participate in leadership and decision-making processes and must consider the following:

1.2 First Nations Peoples

Centring First Nations voices, experiences, and history is essential for a contemporary multicultural framework.

MYAN considers that Australia's shared national identity must centre the self-defined identity, culture, and stories of First Nations peoples, including acknowledging Australia's colonial history and its continuing impact and ongoing injustices and discrimination on First Nations people.

For young people, particularly those more recently arrived to Australia, their understanding of, and connection with Australia is increasingly marked by an understanding of and connection to First Nations culture and history. For example, many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds stress the centrality of First Nations peoples' experience and identity to their own. As one young person observed, *"We're literally built on a racist, colonial state…as Australians, it's the way we talk, our speech and outlook of how we talk about multicultural people is connected to how we talk about First Nations People."*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a long and rich cultural history that predates the arrival of European settlers by more than 50,000 years; however, their voices have been continuously marginalised and excluded from mainstream Australian society. To ensure a more inclusive and equitable society, it is critical to centre Indigenous perspectives and experiences in a contemporary multicultural framework.

This includes greater representation of First Nations young people in decision-making processes, increasing the number of First Nations people in government, as well as giving them a greater say in policies that affect their communities. It can also involve providing more funding for First Nations-led

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

initiatives, such as community-led health programs, cultural heritage projects, and programs and resources to support the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of First Nations youth.

Another important aspect of centring First Nations people is to acknowledge and address the ongoing impacts of colonialism and systemic racism. This can involve reparations for past injustices, such as the Stolen Generations, as well as ensuring that First Nations people have access to the same opportunities and resources as non-Indigenous Australians. It also means listening to and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being, rather than imposing Western values and ways of thinking on Indigenous communities.

Finally, a key element of centring Indigenous people is to promote greater awareness and understanding of Indigenous culture and history among non-Indigenous Australians, including to young people more recently arrived to Australia. This can involve initiatives such as mandatory cultural awareness training for government employees, incorporating Indigenous perspectives into school curriculums, and co-designing an information package with young First Nations leaders to educate newly arrived young migrants to Australia about First Nations history and contemporary issues, and the achievements and contributions of First Nations people to Australian society.

1.3 Diversity in leadership

It is important that a contemporary multicultural framework reflects and celebrates the diversity of our society by actively promoting and encouraging diversity in all aspects of Australian society. Actively recruiting and promoting people from diverse backgrounds in leadership positions and ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard and valued in decision-making processes contributes to this.

Australia's policy of multiculturalism means that Australia's national identity is not defined in ethnic or racial terms, but one that reflects its composition (which also means it can be fluid).[10] If the modern Australian identity is to be truly inclusive, it must wholeheartedly embrace diversity. This is acutely the case for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds for whom a sense of belonging and identity in multicultural Australia is critical to social inclusion.

In reflecting and accommodating this diversity in identity, it is essential not to homogenise the experience and identity of young people who vary widely in myriad different ways. For example, data from the Multicultural Youth Australian Census Status Report 2017-2018 (MY Australia Census) suggests that young people are not bound by simple ethnic categories and that identity is 'intersectional, multi-layered, place-based and influenced by a range of ethnic, religious and cultural attachments'.[11]

10 Dr Tim Soutphommasane (2016) "The success of Australia's multiculturalism" Speech to the Sydney Institute, 9 March 2016

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

Some of the multiple intersecting factors that underlay the diversity of this cohort include 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.[12] This heterogeneity can translate into high variations in the sense of belonging to the nation, to local and global communities, to networks of friends and family, and to different institutional and cultural spaces.

To take just one example, several young people consulted by MYAN described the phenomenon of 'visa bonding'; where migrant and refugees' sense of belonging reflect the legal framework, they had to navigate to settle in Australia. As one young person shared:

> *"I felt comfortable talking with people based on visa category. In 2013, I was ashamed of being asylum seeking. Now I am proud of it."*

It is important to note that these young people are not just the future of multiculturalism in Australia, but they are also present architects of our multicultural identity. Representation is also an important aspect of contemporary multiculturalism and important to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In a country where 28 per cent of the overall population was born overseas and 49 per cent of Australians have one or both parents born overseas, young people expressed frustration that this diversity is not reflected in leadership, particularly in Australian politics. They spoke of feeling alienated, concerned that that the issues that are important to them and to their communities are not well represented, leading to a sense of disconnection and exclusion from mainstream discourse.

It is imperative that these young leaders are given the necessary support and opportunities to hold key decision-making roles across various sectors including government, business, and community. As one young MYAN consultant participant shared:

"We need to see multicultural youth people at the forefront of decision-making arenas. Multicultural young people have so many skills and are so talented, but they don't have the opportunity to share them… they need the right backing, including government backing."

This way, they can shape policies and implement programs that reflect the diverse society they represent and help to contemporise multiculturalism in Australia. This is a consistent call to action we hear from the young people we work with, who identify both the benefits that come with diversity among decision-makers and the risks of inaction when young people are consulted but not *actively involved* in decisions that affect them.

MYAN suggests that supporting and creating opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to meaningfully participate in civic activities and processes builds a strong sense

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[12] MYAN (2019) Bright futures spotlight on wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds: https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/bright-futures-spotlight-on-the-wellbeing-of-young-people-from-refugee-and-migrant-backgrounds.pdf

of agency and belonging and contributes towards a stronger, more socially cohesive society – one that is built upon inclusion, equity and a robust, dynamic multicultural society.

MYAN is well positioned to support the youth leadership approach needed to address this and other critical issues. One of our core functions is to build the leadership capabilities of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and create and support meaningful leadership opportunities for them. . A timely example is our forthcoming national youth conference being in held in Canberra in November 2023. This conference will bring together a diverse range of young people, service providers, and government and community leaders from across the country and provide a platform for meaningful conversations and collaborative solutions to support the successful settlement and active participation of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

1.4 Third culture

One important youth led approach to contemporise a shared multicultural identity that considers intersection and diversity is creating space for and fostering a third culture. As articulated in our consultations with young people, a third culture is "*not one or the other, it's everything. It is not subtractive. It's additive to identity*". It is a response to the core challenge faced by many young multicultural people of how to 'reconcile' their cultural heritage with the broader mainstream Australian culture. For many young people this cultural mobility requires significant personal effort to balance the expectations of different cultural worlds.

As young people have shared, choosing who they identify as can affect how they fit in society and can leave them feeling 'stuck' between cultures and torn between the pressures to fit in and the pressure to preserve their cultural heritage. For example, one young person describes the cultural confusion they can feel when people from the country they have migrated from no longer accept them because they are *"not like them anymore."* She describes this cultural confusion as a constant battle requiring extensive emotional energy. Another young person described the "push-pull" she felt from her parents to, on the one hand, assimilate, and, on the other, retain their culture and religion.

These individuals often develop a unique blend of their own culture and the cultures they have been exposed to, creating a third culture that is both distinct and diverse. Embedding the concept of third culture into a multicultural framework can be beneficial in several ways. Firstly, it can help individuals understand and appreciate the complexities of cultural identity. By recognising that people can have multiple cultural identities, we can better understand and respect the diversity within our communities. Secondly, it can promote cross-cultural communication and collaboration. When individuals are aware of their own third culture, they are better equipped to communicate and work with people from different backgrounds, leading to more inclusive and effective collaboration. Overall, embedding the concept of third culture into a multicultural framework can promote diversity, understanding, and inclusion.

Section 1 Recommendations:

1. Define multiculturalism in a way that reflects contemporary Australia and resonates with everyone living in Australia. This must:
- Centre First Nations voices, experiences, and history
- Reflect the experiences and reality of multicultural people, including embedding the concept of 'third culture'.
- Affirm racism as a central principle critical to inclusion, equity and social cohesion
- Include young people's voices to guide the Framework into the future

2. Create initiatives for people (particularly newly arrived and older migrants and refugees) to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.
3. Invest in formal initiatives that facilitate opportunities for diverse young people to have their voices heard in political and civic domains to inform policy and decision-making, and Identify meaningful opportunities for diverse young people to participate in leadership and decision-making processes at local, state and territory and national levels.
4. Embed the principles of multiculturalism in the development and implementation of Australia's settlement and migration programs.

Section 2. Identifying areas for reform to address any systemic barriers that prevent people from multicultural communities from fully participating in Australian society, including those barriers that exist due to racism and discrimination

2.1 Racism and discrimination

Racism and discrimination leads to exclusion, marginalisation, and conflict, which undermines the very foundations of a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism is a key component of Australian national identity. However, racism and discrimination continue to pose significant barriers to successful multicultural frameworks and policies. Racism and discrimination is deeply ingrained in Australian society and has a profound impact on diverse young people and their socio-economic inclusion in Australia.

Place based belonging is essential to a successful multicultural society.[13] Racism and discrimination presents a direct challenge to this and thus, must be at the forefront of any conversation about multicultural policy. Racism in Australia is widespread, multifaceted, and harmful, posing a significant barrier to the concept of a shared Australian identity. As one young participant in a MYAN consultation said:

 "The diversity that exists makes us feel that we belong to Australia but the discrimination and difficulties that get laid upon us pretty much makes us feel we do not belong to Australia and attacks our sense of belonging."

Many young Australians experience discrimination and racial injustices in their every-day lives,[14] with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds facing everything from police profiling to micro-aggressions and discrimination in schools and workplaces.[15] In one recent Australian study, one in every three Australian school students from non-Anglo or European backgrounds were found to experience racial discrimination from peers and the wider community.[16] This is further compounded by the intersectionality of other factors such as gender, age, and sexual orientation, which can exacerbate the effects of discrimination.

We know from our work with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds that racism and discrimination remain significant issues for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia, and a barrier to a cohesive contemporary multiculturalism. Young people have shared with

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[13] Understanding place based racism and fostering local interculturalism
[14] Tiller, E, Filders, J, Hall, S, Hicking V, Greenland, N, Liyanarachi, D and Di Nicla, K. 2020. Youth Survey Report 2020. Sydney. NSW. Mission Australia.
[15] MYAN (2022) Multicultural Youth Perspectives on Racism and the Draft Anti-Racism Framework: 2022 Consultation findings p8-9.
[16] N Priest et al (2019) Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys.

MYAN their experiences of racial abuse, prejudice and discriminatory behaviour across multiple areas of their everyday lives. This ranges from negative and stereotypical representation in the media and micro-aggressions in social and educational settings, to discriminatory hiring practices in workplaces and physical and verbal racial attacks in public places. [17] Despite its prevalence, however, young people express frustration at the fact that racism is rarely acknowledged or discussed openly.

National research demonstrates that racism is an everyday reality for young people from migrant backgrounds. For example, Mission Australia's Youth Survey Report 2020 highlights that young Australians 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 that 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] In addition, the Scanlon Foundation's 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Report, a report that provides vital insight into contemporary social cohesion and population issues in Australia, found that one significant change in the survey was a major increase in people's perception of how big a problem racism is. The report shows a dramatic 20% increase in people who believe that racism in Australia is a very big or big problem - from 40% in 2020 to 60% in 2021.[20]

In all its forms, racism and discrimination have significant detrimental impacts on a young person's engagement in the community and their mental health, and can contribute to feelings of anger, depression, and heightened fear and for young people from refugee backgrounds, flashbacks to trauma experienced prior to arriving in Australia.[21]

Multiple studies across Australia report a relationship between racism and health and wellbeing outcomes, and the American Academy of Paediatrics has called racism a "core social determinant of health" and "a driver of health inequities. Racism also adds unnecessary costs to the workplace and the economy. One recent study revealed that the annual cost of racism results in more than 3% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product, adding unnecessary costs to the Australian workplace and economy. [22]

Racism works against Australia's goal of building a fair and inclusive society. By contributing to marginalisation and isolation, racism is a key barrier to social inclusion. Experiences of racism diminish

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[17] MYAN (2022) Multicultural Youth Perspectives on Racism and the Draft Anti-Racism Framework: 2022 Consultation findings p8-9.
[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://csrm. 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] MYAN (2020) Covid-19 and Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds: Policy Platform Available at: https://myan. org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020- 26.5.20-final.pdf
[22] Trent, M. Dooley, D.G. and Dougé, J (2019) The impact of racism on child and adolescent health. Pediatrics, 144(2)

a young person's sense of connection and belonging to multicultural Australia and diminish their participation in education, employment, and recreational activities.[23]

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 contemporary multicultural society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia.[24] 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. [25]

Young people have an interest in having topics like race and racism become more widely discussed and assert that anti-racism work should be the responsibility of all levels of society (individuals, media, industry, etc.), not only those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. For young people, a National Anti-Racism Framework is an opportunity to champion equality through promoting education, engaging with industry, facilitating pathways to justice and addressing systemic issues, so that people from all backgrounds can feel welcome in a more inclusive, equal and harmonious Australia.[26]

Racism and discrimination are major barriers to social cohesion, integration, and multiculturalism, and a successful multicultural framework in Australia requires significant investment in addressing these structural barriers and a genuine commitment to addressing racism and discrimination in all its forms. Investment in addressing racism and discrimination requires a comprehensive approach that includes education, awareness raising, policy development, and enforcement. It also requires the active involvement and participation of all stakeholders, including young people along with government, civil society, and the private sector.

2.2 Well-being, education and employment barriers

For young people, the opportunity to access equitable socio-economic opportunities is critical to their social inclusion and well-being and their sense of belonging and identity in multicultural Australia, particularly in the areas of well-being, education and employment.

[23] Elias. A (2015) Measuring the economic impacts of racial discrimination Available at http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30079135/eliasmeasuringthe-2015A.pdf
24 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
[25] Holton. R (1997) *Immigration, Social Cohesion and National Identify* Available at:
https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/rp/rp9798/98rp01
[26] MYAN (2022) Multicultural Youth Perspectives on Racism and the Draft Anti-Racism Framework: 2022 Consultation findings p8-9.

In the last five years alone, MYAN has identified persistent issues of concern and consistent areas for reform relating to mental health and well-being in eight national submissions; education in seven national submissions and employment in 10 national submissions.

More work needs to be done to ensure that local governments, local businesses and community organisations promote participation and encourages bridging social capital by actively taking on work to overcome barriers to inclusion and find common interests and shared value. A co-ordinated tailored approach to mainstream services is essential to improve wellbeing and social inclusion, education and employment outcomes for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who face well-documented barriers including racism and discrimination and often inadequate and uncoordinated services.

Wellbeing

With one in four young people in Australia from a refugee or migrant background, targeted support and cultural responsiveness in the mental health system is no longer an option, but a necessity.

Adolescence is a time of particular vulnerability with regard to mental health, with 50% of all mental illnesses appearing before the age of 14, and 75% by a person's mid-twenties.[27] Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds understandably experience particularly significant mental health risks:

- From a national survey of more than 2,000 refugees, two thirds found social integration and economic problems to be significant post-migration stressors. All experienced an average of two pre-migration traumatic events (e.g., religious persecution, sexual violence).[28]
- Racism and discrimination worsen mental health and wellbeing, and lower sense of belonging after resettlement.[29]

Despite the prevalence of mental illness among refugee and migrant-background youth, not enough people from this cohort access mental health services. For example, national data shows that young people from humanitarian backgrounds have much higher levels of psychological stress-31% of young men and 37% of young women compared with 5% of men and 12% of women from the general youth population of Australia[30], however there are lower than expected numbers of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds presenting to mental health services.[31]

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27 Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. (2005). Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. Archives of General Psychiatry, 62 (6) pp. 593-602. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593

28 Chen W, Hall BJ, Ling L, Renzaho AM. Pre-migration and post-migration factors associated with mental health in humanitarian migrants in Australia and the moderation effect of post-migration stressors: findings from the first wave data of the BNLA cohort study. Lancet Psychiatry. 2017 Mar;4(3):218- 229.

29 Correa-Velez I, Gifford SM, McMichael C. The persistence of predictors of wellbeing among refugee youth eight years after resettlement in Melbourne, Australia. Soc Sci Med. 2015 Oct;142:163-8.

30 NMHC Report 2019, p.35

31 Colucci, E. Minas, H. Szwarc, J. Guerra, C. & Paxton, G. (2015). In or out? Barriers and facilitators to refugee-background young people accessing mental health services. Transcultural Psychiatry, 52(6):766-90

This shortfall is due to structural barriers. For instance, racism and discrimination, both interpersonal and institutional, deter help seeking; and limited mental health literacy, fear of stigma, and cultural differences hinder access. Insufficient culturally competent mental health services and professionals exacerbate these issues.

Recent findings suggest younger refugees and migrants who are receiving less emotional support when they initially arrive and resettle in Australia are displaying worse mental health after three years.[32] While the Australian Government has made significant investments in youth mental health support, this is not reaching all young people who need it, including young people from CALD backgrounds.[33]

Untreated mental illness can result in impaired social functioning, poor educational achievement, self-harm, suicide and violence. Mental health issues are also estimated to cost the Australian economy $12 billion annually, due to workplace disengagement.[34]

Providing early, targeted, accessible, and youth-focused mental health services is therefore critical to circumvent the short term detrimental effects of mental health disorders, and safeguard young people from longer term, ongoing cycles of dysfunction and disadvantage.

Co-health's bi-cultural work program provides a useful case study of an effective program that has helped build capacity of the health services sector and deliver health and wellbeing projects in refugee and asylum seeker communities. Bi-cultural workers (BCWs) use training provided by Cohealth, alongside their cultural/language skills, lived experience, and community connections, to promote community voices and deliver programs. From 2017-2022, the Bi-Cultural Work Program has engaged more than 200 BCWs, with 141,500 community members taking part in BCW-led projects.[35]

MYAN recommends the following areas for reform:

- Build a culturally responsive mental health workforce that includes incentives to increase the number of bi-cultural mental health professionals and funding for professional phone interpreters and mental health services.
- Develop mental health initiatives that address the unique needs of refugee and migrant young people in consultation with these young people and their communities and made available in multiple languages. These initiatives will require recurrent funding and long-term research to measure and ensure efficacy.

[32] Doma, H., Tran, T., Rioseco, P. et al. Understanding the relationship between social support and mental health of humanitarian migrants resettled in Australia. BMC Public Health 22, 1739 (2022).

[33] Tomasi AM, Slewa-Younan S, Narchal R, Rioseco P. Professional Mental Health Help-Seeking Amongst Afghan and Iraqi Refugees in Australia: Understanding Predictors Five Years Post Resettlement. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2022 Feb 8;19(3):1896

[34] Roxburgh, N (2018) Youth Mental Health And The Impact On Australia's Economy: https://nycinquiry.org.au/youth-mental-health/#:~:text=The%20cost%20of%20mental%20health%20on%20Australia's%20economy%3A&text=Estimates%20place%20the%20cost%20of,annually%2C%20up%20from%202009%20estimates.

[35] MYAN (2023) Meet us where we're at: MYAN policy brief on mental health of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds: https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/mental-health-policy-brief.pdf

- Address social determinants that contribute to mental health, including racism, by adopting the National Anti-racism framework.

Education

Students from migrant and refugee backgrounds are highly motivated to succeed in education, which is crucial for their future opportunities, transitions to higher education, training, and employment, as well as for personal well-being.[36] To succeed however, these students require additional tailored support to meet:

- their unique educational and well-being needs stemming from their migration journey, language spoken at home, culture, and pre-arrival experiences
- challenges of adapting to a new country, language, culture, and educational environment while navigating the developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence and establishing their identity in an unfamiliar setting
- Issues resulting from low language proficiency, limited prior schooling, family support responsibilities, and experiences of racism/discrimination.

Without this support, there is an increased risk that these students will disengage from their education, which can in turn lead to further negative consequences, including lower economic growth, higher public service costs, and increased welfare expenses. Insufficient research currently exists to establish evidence-based best practices for supporting migrant and refugee students in Australian schools.[37]

MYAN considers that reform is needed to ensure a targeted, sustained, systemic approach is taken to addressing the education and training needs of these students.[38]This approach should include:

- Providing adequate access to English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) support for students. This could include investing in EAL/D teachers, resources, and programs to ensure that students have the language skills they need to succeed in school.
- Developing targeted approaches to parent and carer engagement in and outside of the school setting. This could involve providing resources and support for parents and carers to better understand the education system and how to support their children's learning.
- Engaging multicultural workers in schools to provide support and guidance to students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. This could involve hiring multicultural liaison officers, community workers, or other staff who can help bridge the gap between schools and families.

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[36] Foundation House and MYAN, National Education Roundtable: Education and students from refugee and migrant backgrounds: Briefing paper, p10
[37] Ibid at p6.
[38] Ibid at p12.

- Offering bridging courses to tertiary study for students who arrive later in childhood. This could involve providing additional support and resources to help students catch up on missed education and prepare for further study.

Employment

Too many young migrants and refugees in Australia (around 20% from non-English speaking households aged 15 to 29) are not engaged in education, employment, or training. Closing this gap could boost the economy by $44 billion and create approximately 54,000 jobs.[39]

MYAN acknowledges the Australian Government's recent white paper on employment, which highlights the discrimination, employment barriers, and exploitation faced by young people, migrants, and international students. We also welcome the steps taken to improve outcomes for international students and realise the employment potential of migrants. The Migrant Workers Taskforce recommendations, including new enforcement tools to combat migrant worker exploitation, are also a positive step.

However, it is essential that any reform agenda include a tailored strategy and programs to meet the unique needs, circumstances, and challenges faced by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Unfortunately, the white paper does not commit to mitigating the double disadvantage faced by those who are both young and from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

One effective program that addresses this issue is the Centre for Multicultural Youth's (CMY) Employment Empowers program. The program supports newly arrived young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds between the ages of 18 and 25 to connect with volunteer mentors who help them develop job-readiness skills and find meaningful employment in Australia. The CMY partners with organizations that employ program participants in placement roles, which benefits employers by building diversity in their own workplaces and provide opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Program participants have reported increased self-confidence, created professional networks, and built a foundation for their working lives in Australia.

Section 2 Recommendations:

1. Ensure that the goals of the Multicultural Framework align with the proposed National Anti-Racism Framework.
2. Enhance mental health and well-being services by cultivating a culturally responsive workforce, which can include incentivising the recruitment of bi-cultural mental health professionals.

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[39] Deloitte Access Economics (2021) Covid-19 and young migrants – Impacts and solutions: https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/DAE-MYAN-COVID-impacts-FINAL-report-9.8.21.pdf

3. Invest in data collection and analysis relating to education, employment, and well-being outcomes for CALD young people to provide a clear evidence-base to best understand, measure and direct current and future investment and program design.
4. Increase investment for programs in and outside school settings, including EAL/D support, and advocate for increased funding for programs and resources that support the education and well-being of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
5. Develop a strategic/coordinated approach between all levels of government and educational stakeholders, including consistent evidence-based laws and policies across states and consistent programs and policies across schools and sectors.
6. Invest in a National Multicultural Youth Employment Strategy to create pathways and support for sustainable employment for newcomers to Australia, providing opportunities for skills development and training, and ensuring the progression of reforms to qualification, accreditation, and skills recognition processes, including cost and timeliness, to acknowledge overseas qualifications and experiences during job-seeking through bridging courses/programs.

Section 3. Effective settings for institutions, legislation and policy to advance multiculturalism

3.1 To realise the reforms necessary to drive multiculturalism forward and improve outcomes for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, effective institutional and policy settings are imperative. MYAN consider that these settings must include:

- A coordinated federal mechanism to fund state and territory governments
- A whole of government approach including a tailored youth-focussed strategy to settlement, employment, education and mental health
- Elevating the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to Cabinet
- A Multicultural Act
- Robust data including research and monitoring
- A national multicultural policy and monitoring agency and/or a multicultural research institute.

To advance multiculturalism and improve outcomes for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, effective institutional and policy settings are crucial. The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) has identified six key settings that are necessary to realise these reforms.

Firstly, MYAN calls for the establishment of a coordinated federal mechanism to fund state and territory governments to deliver the services necessary to advance multiculturalism. Many programs intended to address the challenges faced by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are delivered at a state and territory level, but often lack sufficient funding. Sustained, coordinated funding would scaffold a whole of government approach to multiculturalism including a tailored youth-focussed strategy to settlement, employment, education, and health and well-being.

Secondly, MYAN recommends a whole of government approach that includes a tailored youth-focused strategy to address the diverse lived experiences of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This approach would involve further developing the existing Multicultural Access & Equity Policy for all publicly-funded programs and services, as well as stronger inter-governmental and community leadership and coordination.

Thirdly, MYAN believes that elevating the position of Minister for Multicultural Affairs to Cabinet is necessary to address the needs of Australia's increasingly diverse society and action the government's commitment and leadership to supporting and advancing multiculturalism in the coming decades. This would position the government to most effectively coordinate the necessary sustained federal mechanism to fund state and territory governments, communicate and action that multiculturalism is mainstream and central to Australia's national identity and economic and social wellbeing, and be responsive to point-in-time issues such as COVID-19.

Fourthly, MYAN recommends the enactment of a federal Multicultural Act. Such an act would establish a necessary framework to truly bolster multiculturalism in Australia, and signify collective support for Australian multiculturalism and demonstrate political commitment at the highest level to endorse and embrace the multicultural ethos.

Finally, MYAN calls for robust data including research and monitoring to inform policy and practice. By integrating the multicultural framework with the commitment to voice, treaty and truth telling, relevant human rights frameworks, gender equity strategies and proposed anti-racism framework, MYAN believes that progress can be made in addressing the complex perennial challenges faced by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

To better understand the experience and barriers facing migrants and refugees and to empirically assess whether the policies, programs and strategies are working as intended to realise the strengths of this cohort and address the barriers that they face, MYAN also recommends establishing a national multicultural policy and monitoring agency and/or a multicultural research institute. MYAN considers that young people from diverse backgrounds must be front and centre in the establishment and administration of these institutions to ensure that the data measured captures the diversity of this cohort, and the heterogeneous issues they face and effect of government policy on them.

3.2 Supporting youth settlement and delivering effective programs, co-designed with young people

Inclusion in the broader community and a sense of belonging is crucial for successful multiculturalism, and also essential for young people to successfully navigate settlement in a new country. Both newly arrived young people and resettlement communities benefit from finding opportunities to engage with, and learn from one another.

For Australia to make genuine progress in multiculturalism commitments must be matched with tangible action and investment and MYAN welcomes the federal government's initiatives and projects that empower and include young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Important youth initiatives in settlement services in recent years include the youth focus in the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program; funding for MYAN as one of three peak bodies in settlement services (a globally unique model); the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Program; and investment in youth focused-approaches.

However, MYAN remains deeply concerned about the persistent issues faced by young people from these backgrounds, which have not been effectively addressed in a coordinated manner. Settlement services are often geared towards adults and family groups, making it challenging for young people to access services that meet their unique needs. In addition, funding for these services is usually ad hoc and limited, leading to the cessation of effective services and missed opportunities.

These issues are exacerbated because funding is usually ad hoc and limited, with adverse consequences including the cessation of effective services, false economy when new programs are funded (including from 're-inventing the wheel', start-up costs etc.), and opportunity costs.

As a strategic partner for government, MYAN urges the government to tailor multicultural policies and services to meet the diverse needs of young migrants and refugees, collaborate with young people to design youth-specific policies and programs, and offer targeted support for them to access vital services and opportunities for community engagement. Research supports this approach, showing that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) youth engage more effectively when the information comes from peers with lived experiences. MYAN, representing all young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, is uniquely positioned to support this youth-targeted and led approach.

An important part of MYAN's mission is to help to fill this gap, providing programs that extend from services provided to people immediately on their arrival, and then over time to foster their successful integration into the Australian culture, society and economy. For instance, MYAN's National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) is Australia's first and only evidence-based national guide to benchmark good practice with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The framework is designed to equip policymakers and service providers with the skills and knowledge to best support young people from these backgrounds to thrive in Australia.

MYAN calls for sustained investment to continue and develop this crucial work, as mainstream services are often inadequately tailored to young people's needs, and multicultural service providers are not sufficiently funded to service young people who arrive through all visa streams, including international students.

Section 3 Recommendations:

7. Implement a Multicultural Act that provides a legal framework to promote and protect diversity in Australian society.
8. Elevate the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to Cabinet who has responsibility for the strengthening of intergovernmental coordination of and funding to support multicultural policy and programs at the state/territory level and reviewing and developing the Multicultural Access & Equity Policy.
9. Establish a coordinated federal mechanism that provides consistent funding to state and territory governments to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds nationwide. This should include a tailored multicultural youth-focussed strategy for settlement, employment, education, and well-being.
10. Identify new ways to promote and protect multiculturalism throughout Australia, such as investing in research to identify the needs and challenges of multicultural communities in Australia, developing policies and programs that promote and protect multiculturalism, and building partnerships with youth-led community organisations and stakeholders to promote diversity and inclusion.
11. Invest in robust local and national data collection on cultural, language and ethnicity data, research, and monitoring mechanisms to measure progress and direct future initiatives effectively.
12. Establish a national multicultural policy and monitoring agency and/or a multicultural research institute.

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