

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)

Submission to the inquiry into the extent and
nature of poverty in Australia

February 2023

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About this submission

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into *the extent and nature of poverty in Australia*.

This submission has a focus on young people (aged 12-24) from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Australia's multicultural youth population is an integral and important contributor to the social and economic fabric of the Australian community who make up almost half (47%) of Australia's youth population.

Economic shocks and structural barriers to economic participation impair healthy adolescent development, disrupts settlement, and risk individual long-term financial exclusion and disadvantage. We call on the government to address longstanding inequalities and pre-existing barriers for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds that contribute to experiences of poverty and financial hardship to ensure that all of Australia's young people can thrive and access meaningful and equitable opportunities for social, economic and civic participation. We believe that failing to invest in young people will result in substantial economic, social, and political costs.

The expertise and particular needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are not always reflected in policies and programmes at the national level. National poverty reduction efforts must include a focus on youth if they are to be successful. Against a backdrop of COVID-19 recovery, rising costs of living, low wages and major housing issues, this is a crucial time to work with young people to install a vision of a future that they feel hopeful and confident in.

This submission provides recommendations for targeted socio-economic and policy responses to address the causes and impacts of poverty for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, their families and communities. The recommendations in this paper are based on consultations we held in 2022 with young people in the MYAN network and from previous MYAN submissions.

This submission responds broadly to *the impacts of poverty amongst different demographics and communities*, in particular highlighting how socio-economic barriers and eligibility for services both increase the risk of poverty and financial hardship and compound its impacts for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly concerning employment, education, health and housing outcomes. The submission also addresses the relationship between income support payments and poverty.

This submission does not attempt to outline the multiple causes and impacts of poverty on youth in Australia overall, rather our submission has an intentional focus on the lived experiences of the young people we consulted with on this issue. If more details regarding specific issues are desired, relevant MYAN submissions can be accessed below:

[MYAN response to social services legislation amendment strengthening income support bill 2021](#)

[MYAN submission to the senate select committee on job security](#)

MYAN would like to thank and acknowledge the young people in our networks and our partner organisations across Australia who contributed to the development of this submission.

About MYAN

MYAN is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people aged 12-24 from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We work to ensure they are valued for their expertise, engaged in decision-making, and supported by a strong settlement sector.

MYAN works in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies across the youth, settlement, and multicultural sectors at the state and territory and national levels to ensure the experiences and particular needs of these young people are recognised in youth and settlement policy and service delivery. We provide expert policy advice to the government, deliver sector development activities, and support the development of young people's leadership and advocacy skills so that their voices are heard at the regional, state, and national levels.

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

Acknowledgment

MYAN acknowledges the traditional custodians upon the lands on which we work and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge that Sovereignty was never ceded and recognise that this land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal Land. We work towards reconciliation with, and self-determination for the First Peoples of this country.

For further information on this submission please contact:

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

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

1. The impacts of poverty amongst different demographics and communities-young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The many negative and lasting impacts of poverty are extensively researched and well-known, not least the link between poverty and domestic violence and the negative effects productive potential of the workforce.¹ Poverty results in poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, and physical safety), isolation from the community, poor settlement outcomes, barriers to accessing health care and social services, and negatively impacts on emotional and psychological well-being. Extensive research tells us that children growing up in poverty can experience developmental delays, reduced academic success, and impaired lifelong physical and mental health outcomes.²

Not only is poverty devastating for the individuals and families experiencing it, but poverty also detracts from the Australian economy's productive potential and economic growth, contributes to asset bubbles and leads to an overreliance on debt which can have disastrous implications for the economy³. Young people are at risk of poverty for multiple reasons including disconnection from the labour market, inadequate income support safety nets, insecure housing, and rising unemployment.

Economic hardship and poor employment, educational, health and housing outcomes are mutually reinforcing. Risks are compounded for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly those who are more newly arrived, leaving them more vulnerable to the negative impacts of poverty than their Australian-born non-migrant peers due to particular socio-economic barriers.

Why focus on young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds?

Each year young people aged 12-24 make up significant arrival numbers under each Migration Stream in Australia, and one in four **young people living in Australia aged 15 to 24 years were born overseas**.⁴ **Young people** from refugee and migrant backgrounds are an incredibly diverse group, due to multiple intersecting factors including country of origin, cultural background, migration stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, and age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures, and workforce experience.⁵

They are a diverse population group with a range of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in education and employment and embrace the opportunities available to them. However, they commonly face particular challenges and structural barriers in accessing these

¹ Holmes, Anne (n.d) *Some economic effects of inequality* Parliament of Australia <https://www.aph.gov.au>

² Johnson SB, Riis JL, Noble KG.(2016) State of the Art Review: Poverty and the Developing Brain. *Pediatrics*. 2016 Apr;137(4):e20153075. doi: 10.1542/peds.2015-3075. Epub 2016 Mar 7. PMID: 26952506; PMCID: PMC4811314.

³ Holmes, Anne (n.d) *Some economic effects of inequality* Parliament of Australia <https://www.aph.gov.au>

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2021 *Australia's youth*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth>

⁵ MYAN (2019) *Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity, and Democracy* Available at:

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

opportunities, services, and supports including the migration experience, visa restrictions, culture, language, racism and discrimination, and lack of cultural competency within the service system.

The confluence of age, the life stage of adolescence, the migration experience, and structural access and equity barriers mean that this group of young people are at heightened risk of economic exclusion. Adolescence is a critical period, and what happens during these years has profound and long-lasting implications for young people's future - employment and career paths, economic security, health, and well-being. While the implications of poverty for Australia's youth population are significant, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly asylum seekers and more recently arrived refugees are at heightened risk of financial hardship and the multiple negative impacts of poverty given pre-existing access and equity barriers.⁶

A critical point to note in any conversation about poverty and financial hardship and young people is that young people arrive in Australia on a variety of visa sub-classes, and those who are more newly arrived and live in Australia as Temporary or Permanent Residents do not automatically have full access to welfare entitlements and other services, which compounds the many intersecting impacts of poverty for these young people.⁷ Thus, even though they may share many experiences similar to other young Australians experiencing financial hardship who have access to income support, their situations and experiences are different due to multiple additional barriers, particularly concerning employment, education, housing, health and income support.

Depending on the visa that they hold, they may experience restricted access to Youth Allowance, to a Health Care Card and therefore concession rates, to employment assistance or subsidised education. In particular, some young people who arrive in Australia with refugee-like experiences may have fewer entitlements or longer waiting periods for support, depending on their visa status, than do young people who arrive through the Humanitarian Program.

As a result of these discrepancies, services are often confused, and young people are frustrated. Many agencies have reported a lack of clarity about the various visas and entitlements. It is our position therefore that any policy and programming responses to poverty must have an intentional focus on the distinct and diverse experiences of young migrants and refugees to be effective.

Common themes raised in the context of poverty at MYAN consultations by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds from across Australia

In November 2022, MYAN held national consultations on poverty and its impacts on young people from diverse migrant and refugee backgrounds across Australia. This is a snapshot of the common themes that arose during those consultations.

⁶ MYAN (2019) *COVID-19 and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds-policy platform* Available at: <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf>

⁷ CMY (2011) *The Impact of Visa Restrictions and Entitlements for Young People who Come to Live in Victoria* The Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2011.

Support

- Visa conditions, including extensive visa processing delays and eligibility for services, make people vulnerable to poverty and overly reliant on charitable support.
- Individuals and families are often financially disadvantaged in the first few years of re-settlement but face challenges with employment and accessing support.
- Limited or no access to services and social security benefits increases the risk of young people experiencing family breakdown/ intergenerational conflict, homelessness, possible exploitation and/or disengagement from the wider community.
- Income support is inadequate; even more so in the current cost of living crisis.
- More newly arrived young people often are not aware of what support is available and/or how to access it, or how to access emergency support. This is particularly challenging for those who have low/no English language.
- Many young people who were ineligible for government support during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are still dealing with the consequences this had on their mental health and their financial situations.
- There needs to be some flexibility regarding eligibility criteria for support for people in financial hardship, including for International Students and people on Bridging Visas including waiting periods for income support, childcare support, and maximum working hours.
- It's important to understand shame in different cultures there can be a sense of shame in seeking help when experiencing financial hardship; a sense of 'failure'. Men in particular can struggle to seek support for counselling, financial relief and food relief,
- Service providers are overstretched, not adequately resourced and not always aware of the particular experiences of young migrants and refugees and/or confused about different eligibility requirements.
- Critical services e.g., Centrelink often lack translations and/or interpreters including sign language.
- There is a lack of culturally appropriate financial literacy education and support available—especially for girls.

Emergency relief

- The Emergency Relief sector is overwhelmed.
- The waiting period can last a few weeks, which compounds the crisis for people who need immediate assistance.
- Language can also be a barrier when clients are not fluent in English - looking for an interpreter adds to the waiting times.
- Because teams have been inundated with requests, they are providing more one-off support payments to support more people, which limits their ability to provide repeat payments.
- It's hard to imagine how people live day to day.
- This makes people very vulnerable to debt, getting involved in illegal activities or cash-in-hand jobs where they get exploited at work and face harassment.

- Bigger organisations are reaching out to smaller organisations for help, as they too are inundated with requests they cannot meet.
- More than one person per household would be applying, but multiple payments cannot be done to the same household which is harmful to big families.
- This is a short-term crisis strategy designed for one-off, limited payments to alleviate critical needs, and cannot effectively provide ongoing support for people in need of continuing support, yet for many people, this is one of the very few options for help.
- The length of time for visa status resolution visa status can last for years, which makes it difficult to improve their situation and contributes to entrenched poverty.

Employment

- Structural barriers to meaningful employment for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds contribute to experiences of poverty and financial disadvantage (explored in detail below).
- More newly arrived women with young children often need to stay at home due to childcare costs, which impacts their ability to participate in the labour market.
- Young people who were ineligible for support during the COVID-19 pandemic (due to their temporary visa status) were extremely vulnerable to exploitative and unsafe labour practices.

Education

- The cost associated with education is causing significant financial stress and worry
- Many young people living in Australia on temporary visas including TPVs, SHEVs and Non-protected Special Category (444) visas (SCV) face significant barriers to tertiary education including their exclusion from HELP loans and the requirement to pay full international student tuition fees, which is vastly unaffordable.
- They are excluded from government support such as Austudy so lack a critical safety net when they find themselves in financial hardship or distress which can also place additional pressure on family and community support.
- Studies are negatively impacted as the need to earn more income becomes a priority.
- Due to the cost of activities and the need to work in between studies, students are foregoing school and social activities.

Health/Wellbeing

- Financial stress is negatively impacting mental health and well-being.
- Family violence is often a by-product of poverty.
- 'Health poverty' is a critical issue for people who are not eligible for Medicare. Many services will not see clients without a healthcare card/Medicare.
- Lower socio-economic neighbourhoods have less access to quality healthcare which leads to health impacts and there should be more incentives for medical professionals to move into or work in underserved areas.

- Vulnerable migrants can be affected by distinct health concerns that arise from their experiences both before arrival in Australia and after arrival.
- Everyone should have access to medical support while waiting for their visa outcomes- without it, people are forced to forgo doctors' appointments and medicine due to financial constraints.
- Upfront payments and changes to bulk billing are a deterrent to GP visits for young people who are experiencing poverty and financial hardship.
- Many people who are newly arrived in Australia are 'starting from scratch' which can negatively impact mental health and well-being.

Housing

- People are struggling to meet their rent and bills which increased homelessness; there is a feeling that there is no support for renters.
- Rent assistance is inadequate in the current rental market.
- Shelters are not always safe and accessible.
- Unaffordable housing increases the risk of young people remaining in home situations that are unsafe as they cannot afford to move out or may not be eligible for housing support.
- Centrelink eligibility starting at 22 instead of 18 also contributes to young people staying at home in situations that are not safe or supportive.
- Young people feel no hope in the prospect of eventual home ownership.
- Experiences of homelessness increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Inflation and the cost of living are significant sources of stress for the young people we consulted with. It is causing financial strain, limiting the ability of young people to participate in social activities and budget for anything other than basic necessities. It is also resulting in increased mental health stress, inability to move out of challenging or dangerous home situations, disassociation from friends/social life, and inability to meet the costs of school which means many full-time students are looking for full-time work to try and make ends meet.

Addressing the impacts of poverty for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is possible through preventative measures that focus on what leads to disadvantage and marginalisation, which includes addressing systemic socio-economic participation barriers, eligibility requirements associated with particular visa types and a lack of targeted services that are equipped to and resourced to respond to these issues.

2. Additional information re: impacts of poverty on individuals concerning employment, education and housing.

Employment

Employment is seen as a way out of poverty however poverty and entrenched financial hardship make it more difficult for young people to access meaningful employment which contributes to an ongoing negative cycle. Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds also face additional challenges and barriers to securing meaningful employment than their non-migrant peers, increasing their risk of exclusion from the labour market.

Many effects of poverty are well known, not least that it negatively impacts the productive potential of the workforce.⁸ Aside from an actual lack of jobs, if people are not healthy or are not able to access basic goods and services, they cannot work to their full productive capacity. **The impacts of living in poverty are far-reaching but have significant consequences on people's job readiness and ability to access secure and meaningful employment opportunities.** When people are living below the poverty line, this is a barrier to meaningful employment due to:

- homelessness, (including secondary homelessness)
- insecure and unsafe housing
- declining mental and physical health
- prohibitive costs of transportation
- lack of appropriate clothing to meet dress code requirements
- lack of appropriate educational opportunities and inability to pay for training courses
- costs of childcare.⁹

Additionally, the intersection of being both young and from a migrant or refugee background means that this group of young people face additional barriers than their Australian-born, non-immigrant peers, leaving them particularly susceptible to labour market exclusion, economic shock and long-term poverty or financial hardship.¹⁰ These barriers include:

- lack of social/professional networks
- lack of culturally appropriate mental health support
- no/limited local work experience
- lack of recognition of qualifications obtained overseas
- lack of experience and knowledge in how to apply for jobs
- experiences of racism and discrimination and unconscious bias in hiring practices
- limited digital literacy/access
- level of English language proficiency
- minimal or disrupted schooling because of their migration journey

⁸ Holmes, Anne (n.d) *Some economic effects of inequality* Parliament of Australia <https://www.apf.gov.au>

⁹ Community Affairs References Committee (2020) *Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia* Report. Commonwealth of Australia 2020

¹⁰ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2020), *Locked down and locked out? The impact of COVID-19 on employment for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Victoria*, Melbourne, CMY

- the reluctance of employers to hire newly arrived young people or those whose visa status is uncertain or needs to be renewed regularly
- unfamiliarity with Australian workplace laws and greater risk of workplace exploitation.

As a result, Australia has high levels of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who are not engaged in employment, education and training. Young people born into non-English speaking households account for almost 20% of the total group aged 15 to 29, not in employment, education, or training.¹¹ Additionally, young people who arrive in Australia as refugees are more likely to have never attended school, have had their schooling interrupted and are less likely to have a university degree, meaning this group of young people are further disadvantaged when attempting to enter the employment market.¹²

Being unemployed, underemployed or Not in Education or Training (NEET) affects the financial security and ability of young people to plan for their future and engage in civic life fully. It is likely to result in poor settlement outcomes, inadequate living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, and physical safety), isolation from the community and barriers to accessing health care and social services, and negative impacts on emotional and psychological well-being.

Living in or being at risk of poverty and financial hardship combined with the aforementioned employment barriers also leaves young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds vulnerable to protracted insecure work and exploitative labour practices including wage theft, emotional, physical and sexual harassment and intimidation, further exacerbated by experiences of racism and discrimination.¹³ In particular, due to the limitations on their working ability, eligibility for income support services, limited employment opportunities, fears of losing their job and the possible impacts on their visas, more newly arrived young people including international students and holders of Bridging Visas are particularly vulnerable to coercion into exploitative working relationships and are often reluctant to report.

The lack of visa options for people being exploited presents a risk to them staying in the exploited situation and reinforces unlawful labour practices. MYAN has heard directly from young people that they have experienced exploitation through unfair working hours, bullying and discrimination, dangerous conditions, cash-in-hand payments below industry award, and are often compelled to work for free to keep their job.

Young people particularly susceptible include young people from Pasifika backgrounds who are holders of Non-protected Special Category (444) visas (SCV) with little or no eligibility for income support and other social security benefits, and young people on Temporary Protection Visas (subclass 785) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (subclass 790) who do not have the same access to social services, rights and residency or citizenship pathways as refugees who hold a (permanent) Protection

¹¹ OECD (2016) *Investing in Youth: Australia*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

¹² Rioseco, P & Liddy, N (2018) *Settlement outcomes of humanitarian youth and active citizenship Economic participation, social participation and personal wellbeing*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at: https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804_bnla_settlement_outcomes_of_humanitarian_youth_research_summary.pdf

¹³ Young Workers Centre (2021) Spotlight report: young migrant workers in the ACT. Available at: <https://youngworkerscbr.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-10-Young-Migrant-Workers-Report.pdf>

Visa (PV) and international students experiencing hardship who have limitations on the number of hours they can work.

The economic, social, and health consequences are significant. Insecure work and labour exploitation results in:

- poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, and physical safety)
- isolation from the community and exclusion from social life, unable to enjoy cultural and recreational activities
- obstacles to accessing health care and social services when needed
- negative impacts on emotional and psychological well-being¹⁴
- unpredictable earnings and being underpaid
- an increased likelihood to be in debt¹⁵
- increased risk of losing one's home due to serious rent arrears¹⁶
- reduced access to resources, such as housing and food, which are essential for meaningful participation in the community.¹⁷

This is a critical social and economic issue. Being unemployed and of working age remains the greatest poverty risk factor.¹⁸ Further, the lack of job availability or the lack of secure work for young people delays the typical milestones of adulthood, and the potential to become independent, including the need to delay moving out of home, taking on more debt than previous generations by staying in school longer, and being less likely to secure home loans than previous generations.

Policy responses are needed that are informed by and respond to the particular employment challenges experienced by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Deloitte Access Economic found that policies that successfully create parity of labour force participation between young migrants and the Australian-born population could increase the size of the Australian economy by \$44 billion from 2022-23 to 2031-32 and create 54,000 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE

Investment in reforms, supports and services that address the employment barriers faced by young people from migrant backgrounds, and facilitates their economic participation has positive implications for their meaningful and long-term participation in the labour market, for their own settlement experiences and futures and the Australian community and economy more broadly.

Recommendations:

1. Invest in a national Multicultural Youth Employment Strategy that maps out pathways and supports that lead to more sustainable employment outcomes for people settling in Australia

¹⁴ Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) (2013) *Youth Social Exclusion and Lessons from Youth Work* Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/eurydice-study-social-exclusion-2013.pdf>

¹⁵ Beyond Blue (2011) *Submission into the Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia* Available at: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/policy-submissions/bw0088-policy-submission---insecure-work-in-australia.pdf?sfvrsn=ab4fa9e9_4

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ : Davidson, P., Bradbury, B., and Wong, M. (2020), *Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 2, Who is affected?* ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 4, Sydney: ACOSS.

2. Remove employment barriers for young people who have sought asylum and are currently in Australia and identify meaningful opportunities to invest in skills and training to skill up young people who are already living in Australia.
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3. Implement changes to qualification, accreditation, and skills recognition processes including cost and timeliness, and ensure recognition of overseas obtained qualifications, skills and experiences in job-seeking processes through the provision of bridging courses/programs.

Education

Limited pathways to further education and training are another financial risk factor for young people living in Australia long-term on temporary visas including TPVs, SHEVs and non-protected SCV visas. Barriers to future study options for young people on temporary visas make it difficult for high school-aged young people to remain motivated, and plan for their futures.¹⁹ Succeeding in mainstream education and training can be challenging for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who already experience educational challenges, including:

- limited understanding of and familiarity with Australian education and training systems and pathways²⁰
- highly disrupted/minimal/no previous formal education²¹
- experiences of racism and discrimination, which affects student confidence, well-being and learning²²
- limited opportunities to develop interpersonal skills with peers until sufficient English is learned²³
- lack of support for learning at home due to family members having limited English skills.²⁴

One of the key benefits of addressing barriers to education is improved employment and financial outcomes. Obtaining or upgrading qualifications broaden career options for young people. For young people who are exiting secondary school and have not yet had the opportunity to undertake further education or skills training, access to tertiary study will be particularly important.²⁵ However, many young people living in Australia long term on temporary visas face additional barriers to tertiary education. This includes their requirement to pay full international student tuition fees, which is vastly unaffordable, and their exclusion from government support such as Austudy and HELP loans. This effectively excludes these young people from higher education and training opportunities, in turn

¹⁹ Refugee Council of Australia (2015) *Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum And Refugees in Temporary Visas* Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

²⁰ CMY (2018) *State of the Sector: Out-Of-School-Hours Learning Support 2018*. CMY: Carlton

²¹ Ibid.

²² The Multicultural Youth Australia Census 2017-18 found that almost half of multicultural young people had experienced some form of discrimination or unfair treatment over 12 months (48.7%)

²³ CMY (2018) *State of the Sector: Out-Of-School-Hours Learning Support 2018*. Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ MYAN Australia (MYAN), BSL, MDA, ACS, CMRC, LMA, Foundation House (2018) *English Language Acquisition for Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds: Reflections from Youth Transition Support Providers*. Carlton: Melbourne.

diminishing their employment prospects and undermining positive settlement outcomes and contributes to growing levels of unemployment amongst this group of young people.²⁶

Limiting pathways to further education and training for young people has significant consequences on future employment outcomes and feeds intergenerational disadvantage. As well as being an important investment in the future of young people, increasing their education and skills enables them to contribute more productively to the Australian economy. Young people on long-term temporary visas require the same access as their Australian-born, non-migrant peers to quality learning opportunities that will expand their future opportunities, unlock their full potential, and result in improved social and economic benefits for both the individual and the broader Australian community.

Recommendations:

1. Fund the TAFE/VET sector adequately to ensure that there are appropriate and accessible programs nationally for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, including SCV and TPV/SHEV holders.
 2. Grant young people on unprotected SCV visas and TPV/SHEV holders' full access to Commonwealth Supported Places, HELP loans and income/study support.
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Housing

Insecure housing and homelessness are both a cause and a result of poverty. Access to safe and affordable housing is a critical issue for many of the young people MYAN works with. Housing is currently facing a nationwide crisis, with asylum seekers and newly arrived refugee communities hit hardest.²⁷

Safe, affordable and appropriate housing is central to a young person's ability to settle successfully in Australia. While not all young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience poverty or ongoing financial hardship, refugees and asylum seekers in particular face an increased risk of housing insecurity and homelessness compared to the general population.²⁸

While parallels can be drawn with the mainstream community, where limited financial resources impact all young people, for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds this is a significant obstacle - particularly when combined with the additional housing barriers they encounter compared to their non-migrant, Australian-born peers. The lack of financial resources is often due to low employment (as outlined above), income support below the poverty line and in some cases, visa conditions including no or limited eligibility for income support. Additional barriers that exacerbate refugee young people's vulnerability to homelessness and insecure housing include:

²⁶ CMY (2018) An Overview Of Key Issues Facing Pasifika Young People in the Casey And Wyndham CMY: Carlton.

²⁷ RCOA (2021) Submission to DHA Discussion Paper: Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/next-steps-discussion-paper/>

²⁸ Khan BM, Waserman J and Patel M (2022) Perspectives of Refugee Youth Experiencing Homelessness: A Qualitative Study of Factors Impacting Mental Health and Resilience. *Front. Psychiatry* 13:917200. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2022.917200

- Lack of culturally/gender-responsive youth housing services
- Ineligibility for public housing
- Ineligibility for rent and bond assistance schemes
- Frequent changes in work rights regulations and possible resulting lack of income
- Uncertain visa length/status considered undesirable for long-term leases
- Referral back and forth to services that are overstretched, or not suited to meet the specific needs of individuals
- Crisis accommodation often requires a person to hold a Health Care Card or be in receipt of Centrelink payments, which many asylum seekers are not entitled to
- Unfamiliarity or lack of awareness of available services
- Limited family or social networks to fall back on
- Lack of local rental history
- Lack of finances for a bond, rent in advance and moving costs
- Racial discrimination by real estate agents and landlords

While poverty is an underlying cause of homelessness and insecure housing, these difficulties in obtaining appropriate housing can also *result* in a serious risk of poverty or destitution. Young people in situations of housing stress or experiencing homelessness are also at risk of exploitation or safety concerns. Many people live in overcrowded conditions, informal arrangements, or in houses that do not meet basic standards. The cumulative health and welfare consequences of homelessness impede the process of settlement in Australia, which is detrimental to the individual and/or family settling and living in Australia; and has far-reaching economic, social and civil costs.²⁹

The impacts of homelessness and housing insecurity include:³⁰

- Disrupted settlement
- Social isolation
- Limited access to medicine, treatment and basic hygiene
- Exposure to sexual exploitation, violence and social isolation
- High levels of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, behavioural problems and alcohol and drug misuse
- Limited access to basic amenities, clean conditions and exposure to disease and illness
- Disruption to education and employment
- Exploitation by landlords
- Remaining in unsafe housing situations or situations of domestic abuse

Young people require various housing and support options to ensure their basic needs and longer-term well-being needs are met. Policy responses need to take an intersectional approach to address the link

²⁹ RCOA (2013). *Housing Issues for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia: A Literature Review*. Available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/1309_HousingLitRev.pdf

³⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2021, *Homelessness and overcrowding*, Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/homelessness-and-overcrowding>

between poverty and housing and ensure that responses reflect the experiences and needs of all young people including young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Recommendations:

1. Design a National Youth Housing Strategy that reflects the diverse needs and experiences of all young people in Australia, including young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

2. Grant access to income and housing and homelessness services to all young people on temporary visas.

3. Increase Rent Assistance in line with the current market rents.

4. Increase investment in specialist homelessness services for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

5. Increase the provision of funding to homelessness services for interpreters and other multicultural services

3. The relationship between income support payments and poverty

Income support has a crucial role in modern societies by providing critical safety nets to prevent chronic destitution and is an important avenue to strengthen a weakening economy.³¹ The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both the benefits and challenges, in Australia's existing social security system. With rental prices, energy bills and inflation all climbing, and wage growth stagnant, the cost-of-living crisis is a critical issue for young people from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds who face additional barriers to meaningful employment and access to income support.

MYAN believes that financial assistance should be based on need, regardless of what stage a person is at in their visa determination process. We saw during the COVID-19 pandemic that a well-funded and accessible social security policy can change lives. We also saw the extensive negative impact it has on people who are not entitled to access it.

In no circumstances should people be deliberately left without the economic safety nets afforded to others on low incomes. We recommend an immediate review of income support policies, a review of eligibility criteria, and an investment into increasing income support to above the poverty line. The government must provide basic income support for people during those times people are unable to work and support themselves, including people on temporary visas and people seeking asylum who are seeking protection.

MYAN was pleased to see the recent announcement that young people, carers and students will have their income support payments boosted by up to \$20 a week in recognition of the cost-of-living crisis. However, while we acknowledge that this increase is the most substantial indexation since the welfare measure was brought in in 1998, the increase means that a single person living away from home

³¹ ACOSS (2020) *Next Steps for Income Support* Available at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-security-next-steps-JUL-UPDATED-2-9-copy.pdf>

receiving Austudy will receive \$281.40 per week-**\$207.60 below the current Australian poverty line.**³²

Poverty and protracted financial hardship have detrimental and long-lasting impacts in terms of settlement, integration and mental health. MYAN remains concerned that income support payments across the board, including the level of income support available to asylum seekers living in the community on Bridging Visas, remain insufficient to ensure the adequate standard of living needed to mitigate the current cost of living crisis and ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can meet the costs of basic necessities like food and toiletries, utilities, rent and the costs associated with looking for work.

Multiple reports indicate that lowering income inequality is a sound investment that will improve economic growth and measures. For example, accounting firm KPMG has noted that income support payments are too low and that an increase in income support would boost the economy by stimulating spending, particularly in regional areas, as income support recipients "spend, rather than save, almost all they receive."³³ Economists at Deloitte Access Economics estimate that increasing Newstart by just \$75 per week would boost GDP in Australia by \$4 billion.³⁴

Recommendations:

1. Lift social security payments to above the poverty line and by at least \$73 in line with recommendations put forward by the Australian Council of Social Services.
2. Provide all temporary protection visa holders and SCV visa holders with access to settlement services on the same basis as permanent refugee and humanitarian visa holders.
3. Establish an advisory committee to report on the adequacy of Centrelink payments before each federal budget.

3.1 SRSS eligibility

Bridging visas are complex and come with considerable restrictions which have a direct impact on the ability of people to obtain and/or sustain a viable level of income. We remain deeply concerned about the thousands of individuals and families, including children and young people who remain impacted by changes to the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) brought in by the previous government. SRSS exists to assist people seeking asylum who are waiting for the government to assess their refugee application from becoming destitute, as people seeking asylum do not have access to Centrelink and associated social support.

³²ACOSS (2022) *Poverty in Australia: A snapshot* Available at: <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au>

³³ KPMG (2019) *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia* Available at: https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Newstartrelatedpayments

³⁴ Deloitte Access Economics (2018) *Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates* Available at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DAE-Analysis-of-the-impact-of-raising-benefit-rates-FINAL-4-September>

The changes, which saw the SRSS budget cut by 85%, have left thousands of asylum seekers who have been waiting years for the government to resolve their immigration status living in protracted financial hardship and poverty as they are no longer eligible for the program.³⁵

While we welcome the government's investment into processing the historical visa backlog, and acknowledge a record number of visas have been processed since the new government took office, thousands of people remain wholly dependent on under-resourced charities just to survive, exposing them to homelessness, poor mental and physical health, and poor settlement outcomes.³⁶

Recommendations:

4. Direct the Department of Home Affairs to review and expand the eligibility criteria that restrict access to SRSS for people seeking asylum who are at risk of destitution and homelessness.
 5. Align payment rates for income support under the Status Resolution Support Services program with the standard Centrelink payment rates.
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3.2 Concessions

Permanent Australian residents on low incomes or in receipt of Centrelink payments generally receive discounts for essential items and services like utilities and public transport. They are also able to access concession schemes for adult education and training through the issue of a concession card ('health care card', 'low-income health care card' or 'concession card'). These concessions are provided in specific recognition of the individual's economic constraints; however, many people are living in Australia on or below the poverty line who are not entitled to concessions.

Though many asylum seekers receiving financial support subsist on just 89% of the Centrelink unemployment benefit³⁷ they are not entitled to the same concession benefits as Australian residents on low incomes. This means they must, in many parts of Australia, pay full price for essential commodities like electricity and public transport and other vital services, which contributes to acute financial distress.³⁸ While many concession schemes are legislated through states and territories we recommend a national concession card scheme commensurate with other low-income concessions across Australia be implemented for asylum seekers in Australia while their visa applications are being processed to provide some financial relief and relieve pressure on the emergency services and charitable sectors.

Recommendation:

³⁵ RCOA (2022) *Thousands of people seeking asylum living in poverty* Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/thousands-of-people-seeking-asylum-living-in-poverty/>

³⁶ Keck, M (2019) *30,000 Asylum Seekers in Australia at Risk of Homelessness and Poverty: Report* Global Citizen, July 23rd. Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/asylum-seekers-in-australia-at-risk-of-poverty/>

³⁷ Australian Red Cross (2017) *Falling through the gaps: the experiences of people living in Australia on uncertain visa pathways*. Red Cross.

³⁸ Ibid.

6. Grant people seeking asylum a national concession card equivalent to those of Low-Income Health Care Card holders.

3.3 Waiting periods

MYAN remains concerned about the social and economic impacts of the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period (NARW). We know that the take-up rates of social security benefits by newly arrived migrants are low³⁹ but, like anyone else in the Australian community, newly arrived migrants are vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances like a death in the family, ill health, increased caring commitments or the economic fallout from inflation and rising costs of living and must have access to safety nets when the need arises.

The two-year waiting period for income support for migrants and refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) adds greatly to the group's risk of poverty and homelessness. Access to social safety nets should only and always be determined based on need. Failure to provide adequate support for migrants increases the risk of poverty, destitution and exploitation in the labour market.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have enormous potential to contribute to and be engaged in Australian society. However, they can face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities, including language, culture, limited social capital, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the service system), racism and discrimination. These factors can place them at higher risk of social and economic isolation, requiring more targeted support in the early stages of settlement.

Many young people arriving through the Family stream of the Migration Program are arriving in Australia to unite with their families who have been humanitarian arrivals in the past and who may not be in a position to support them⁴⁰. Others who arrive under the Family Stream are from the same country of origin as many young people arriving under the Humanitarian Program and may have experienced similar vulnerabilities relating to their pre-migration experiences, including exposure to trauma.

Despite this, they are not eligible for the same services provided to humanitarian arrivals, including an exemption from these waiting periods. MYAN urges the Committee to consider the specific circumstances of young people arriving from the same country of origin as Humanitarian Arrivals from refugee-like⁴¹ backgrounds who may arrive in Australia under complementary pathways of protection, such as the Family stream, and extend the NARW exemptions to this group. Applying an arbitrary waiting period and denying assistance to people when they need it affects the settlement process and marginalises migrants in our communities.

³⁹ Productivity Commission (2016) *Migrant Intake into Australia, Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, No.77*. Available at <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/migrant-intake/report/migrant-intake-report.pdf>, p.316.

⁴⁰ MYAN (2018) *Submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Encouraging Self-sufficiency for Newly Arrived Migrants) Bill 2018* Available at: myan.org.au

⁴¹ People from refugee-like backgrounds are likely to have experienced disruption of basic services, poverty, food insecurity, poor living conditions and prolonged uncertainty; and may have experienced significant human rights violations.

Recommendation:

Remove or reduce the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting period to ensure newly arrived migrants avoid falling into protracted financial hardship during unexpected and unavoidable circumstances and experience a more equitable system in line with community standards