

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) Federal Election 2016 Policy Platform

The MYAN is Australia's national peak body representing multicultural youth issues.

This election platform presents the key issues and recommendations for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the context of the 2016 Australian federal election. The MYAN are calling for more attention to strategies and policies that will address disadvantage, social cohesion, access to education and employment, and opportunities for youth leadership.

Almost one in four young Australians were born overseas or had a parent born overseas at last census and our diversity continues to grow. Australia's migration program will see almost 200,000 new Australian's arrive each year from 2017, one in every three of whom will likely be aged under 25 years. Diversity is not only our reality, it is also our strength.

Australia's multiculturalism is unique and the success of social cohesion in this country has made our settlement program one of the most recognised across the world. But such success can be easily undone. Fear, intolerance and isolation are real threats to social cohesion that require careful investment and nurturing to continue to grow and support a successful multicultural society that affords all its members opportunities to participate fully and meaningfully.

The MYAN's recommendations are designed to build on Australia's successes and to address identified issues. They are based on the understanding that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, despite demonstrating high levels of resilience and resourcefulness, often face additional and more complex transitions than their Australian-born counterparts. These include barriers to accessing services and opportunities such as language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes, racism, and discrimination. These factors can place young people at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation and impact on their participation.

The MYAN believes targeted or specialist approaches are essential to supporting the social, cultural and economic participation of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia. MYAN Australia recently launched the National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF), which provides support for the kind of targeted and consistent service and policy approach young people need to settle well. While tools help, the government of the day holds ultimate responsibility for also investing in programs and strategies that advance a strong, cohesive multicultural community. This requires leadership, targeted programs, investments based on sound evidence, as well as direct engagement with young people in the planning and delivery supports that address their needs and encourage them to realise strength in their diversity.

For further information please contact the MYAN National Coordinator, Nadine Liddy, on nadine@myan.org.au

EDUCATION

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p>Access to appropriate education is commonly noted as the most significant factor influencing the settlement process.</p> <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can face specific disadvantage in learning English and achieving sustained engagement in education and training pathways, as they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are often required to learn a new language in an unfamiliar educational or learning environment • Often have limited, interrupted or no formal schooling prior to their arrival in Australia. <p>The current temporary visa system sees young people on SHEVs and TPVs experiencing limited access to further education, despite study being promoted as a potential pathway to permanent residency for people on SHEVs.</p> <p>Both major parties have made commitments to continue funding the Gonski, needs-based, model to at least 2018. This is a model that if used as intended can address inequity in our school system and provide the necessary support students from refugee and migrant backgrounds need to reach their potential.</p> | <p>All young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted resources for EAL support in schools • Supports in and outside the classroom to support EAL learning and sustained engagement in education and training pathways <p>Schools and other education providers require support to engage parents in their children's education.</p> <p>Education funding allocations must ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loading for students with limited English skills is targeted to those students who are most vulnerable • The current loading for all students of Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) sufficiently targets English as an Additional / Second Language (EAL/ESL) students who are vulnerable and more likely to experience disadvantage. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That the Australian Government supports all young people equally in education engagement and transitions, and funds specialist programs that meet the specific needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. ○ That the Australian Government develop a national measure of English language proficiency to direct loadings to the most vulnerable students. ○ That the Australian Government establishes school accountability mechanisms to ensure that loadings for students with limited English skills are firmly tied to the educational needs of this cohort. ○ That funding for state education includes dedicated resources for support services and programs (e.g. peer/ mentor support) to supplement teachers awareness regarding issues of pre-arrival trauma and settlement complexity. This includes resources to support engagement with family members. ○ That data collation mechanisms be developed to accurately measure school engagement levels of newly arrived young people. |

Employment and Training

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can face additional disadvantage in terms of employment, earning, and occupational attainment due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited English language skills Lack of understanding about post compulsory training options/pathways Lack of awareness about Australian workplace culture and expectations Lack of familiarity with employment services and Australian systems Negotiating family expectations regarding training and career options Experiences of racism and discrimination in looking for work Limited (or no established) social capital Limited exposure to a range of career options – particularly for young people who have spent many years living in refugee camps Lack of recognition of prior learning and/or training when accessing employment opportunities Access often to only unskilled or low paid employment. <p>The SHEV temporary visa scheme incentivises humanitarian arrivals to locate to regional areas where youth employment and educational attainment levels are below those in major cities.</p> | <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds need targeted support to overcome barriers to employment and training that addresses their particular needs and capabilities - including building their understanding of and links with potential employers and skills in job searching.</p> <p>Targeted support should include consideration of the value of quarantined access to TAFE – recognising that the VET sector and TAFE system play a vital role in supporting this group of young people to navigate training and employment pathways.</p> <p>Young people from humanitarian backgrounds require additional supports to make the most of opportunities offered in regional Australia where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist service infrastructure, experience and expertise are less established compared to major cities and metropolitan areas. Regional settlement support must be well-planned and resourced to support successful migrant settlement and to manage cultural diversity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> That the Australian Government develop a coordinated employment strategy to ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are appropriately and effectively targeted in any future employment programs. That the Australian Government increase the accessibility of mainstream services and programs supporting training and employment pathways to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds (e.g. Transitions to Work, Empowering YOUTH, jobactive, PaTH or any alternative). That all Australian Government-funded youth providers are expected to implement cultural competency – reflected in incentives or other contractual obligations/responsibilities/accountability measures. That in any review to the TAFE system or VET sector the Australian government ensure accessibility for young people from refugee, asylum seeker, and migrant backgrounds. That settlement options in regional location be carefully considered with regard to work and vocational pathways to ensure the long-term viability of these communities. |

Youth Settlement

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p>Young people consistently comprise a significant proportion of Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Programme. In the last financial year, approximately 16% of all arrivals through Australia's Humanitarian program were aged between 12 and 24.</p> <p>3 in 5 recipients of HSS between 2011 and 2014 were under 29 years old.</p> <p>The increased intake through Australia's resettlement program in response to the Syrian refugee crisis is likely to include a large number of children and young people.</p> <p>Young people have particular settlement needs and face particular barriers in accessing the support they require to ensure their full participation in Australian society.</p> <p>Young people experience settlement in ways distinct from adults and commonly face additional and more complex transitions to their Australian-born counterparts.</p> <p>Unaccompanied or separated young people (UHMs) are a particularly vulnerable group. In 2014, 51% of the world's refugees were under the age of 18, more than 34,300 new individual asylum applications were lodged by unaccompanied and separated children, and less than 1% of those resettled were children or adolescents at risk.</p> | <p>Adequate targeted support in the early stages of settlement is critical to ensuring that young people receive the support they need to navigate the settlement process and build a successful life in Australia.</p> <p>UHMs require additional coordinated support to ensure their diverse and complex needs are addressed as they navigate the challenges of settlement in a new country as adolescents without the immediate support and care of family and/or significant others.</p> <p>Settlement services require greater investment in service system strengthening and resourcing to effectively identify and address the needs of young refugee and humanitarian entrants.</p> <p>Australia is well-placed to support the resettlement of UHMs with established and existing infrastructure previously invested in by the Australian Government.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That HSS and CCS programs are supported by clear guidance and resourced to effectively tailor supports to the needs of young people ○ That the Settlement Services Program (SSP): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expands its youth focus to 12 to 25 ● Receives increased funding and scope for more long term support for young people ● Meets the particular needs of UHMs. ○ That the Government of Australia investigates the inclusion of children at risk, including unaccompanied and separated minors, within the offshore component of Australia's Humanitarian Programme ○ That a national framework to guide the support and care of unaccompanied and separated young people is developed, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guidelines for carer recruitment, responsibilities and support ● A targeted approach (with exit/transitions plans) to supporting young people transitioning out of the UHM program at 18.* <p><i>*This should be consistent with the kind of support provided to young people leaving state care, and include intensive support with a focus on addressing settlement and housing needs.</i></p> |

Housing and Homelessness

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p>On any given day in 2015, there were 100,000 homeless people in Australia – 40% of who were under 25 years old. While there are no current figures on homelessness among young people from refugee or newly arrived backgrounds, it is recognised that this group face a complex mix of factors that mean they are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenges understanding and accessing service systems and support often impacted by disrupted education, managing language acquisition and cultural adjustment • lack of family and/or extended social support networks, including adult support • lack of financial and material resources • the challenges of changed family composition / family reconfiguration • increased likelihood of experiencing overcrowded housing (e.g. financial or other issues may lead to housing arrangements that are already strained by overcrowding) | <p>There is currently no adequate data collection system under the Specialist Homelessness Services to capture the prevalence of homelessness among young people from refugee or newly arrived backgrounds.</p> <p>Given their vulnerability to social exclusion and homelessness, it is vital young people from refugee, asylum seeking or newly arrived backgrounds are explicitly recognised and responded to in the development and implementation of any policies or programs within federal or state/territory implementation plans (e.g. in the negotiation of a new National Housing or Homelessness Agreement.)</p> <p>In addition to those factors that can precipitate homelessness, young people from refugee, asylum seeking or newly arrived backgrounds can also experience barriers that prevent their equitable access to adequate housing and housing support – one of the most significant barriers being a lack of cultural competency within mainstream housing and homelessness services.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That the Reconnect Specialist Newly Arrived program is expanded in high settlement areas. ○ That cultural competency accountability measures are incorporated into funding guidelines for specialist and mainstream homelessness agencies funded under national housing and homelessness agreements. ○ That data collection (e.g. the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection) be improved to ensure more accurate assessment of accessibility of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to Specialist Homelessness Services. ○ That the specific needs of young people from refugee, asylum seeking and migrant backgrounds are recognised and responded to in the future policy and program delivery of homelessness services. |

Mental Health

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face a number of mental health risk factors in addition to those of the general population.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experiences of racism and discrimination • negotiating issues of belonging and identity in a cross-cultural context • pre-settlement experiences of trauma or torture and/or trauma experienced through periods spent in immigration detention in Australia. <p>Building a young person's sense of social connection and inclusion in the Australian community is an important component of building resilience in relation to mental health.</p> | <p>Lack of cultural competency in mainstream youth mental health services resulting in inadequate service utilisation – in a context of nationally funded youth mental health services (e.g. <i>headspace</i>).</p> <p>Lack of data regarding access by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to mainstream mental health services.</p> <p>Lack of coordination between mental health and other support services to support referral into youth mental health services.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That accountability measures in relation to cultural competency are incorporated into funding guidelines for youth mental health services (e.g. <i>headspace</i>.) ○ That improved measures of accessibility by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to youth mental health services are developed. ○ That the Australian Government invests in initiatives for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds that strengthens the protective factors for mental health and wellbeing, including initiatives that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen young people's sense of belonging, social connectedness, resilience and coping skills • Create meaningful and supportive opportunities in education and employment • Reduce racism and discrimination. ○ That Federal funding for services working with refugee and migrant young people includes dedicated resources for support services and programs to build workers' understanding and expertise to identify and respond to issues of pre-arrival trauma and settlement complexity and make appropriate and timely referrals. |

Racism and Participation

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p>Despite the diversity of the Australian community racism and discrimination are an ever-present reality for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.</p> <p>In 2013, nine out of ten 13 to 17 year olds in Australia experienced some form of racism or saw it happen to someone else.</p> <p>The experience of racism and discrimination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatens personal and cultural identity, and can have a detrimental impact on mental health, wellbeing, psychological development and capacity to negotiate the transition to adulthood. • Can be a key barrier to social inclusion, as it can diminish a young person's sense of connection and belonging to their community and broader society, reinforce the experience of marginalisation and isolation and inhibit participation in education, employment or recreational activities. <p>Australia benefits from the economic, social and cultural advantages gained from a diverse, socially cohesive society. Disengagement and disadvantage of individuals and communities in our society directly threatens social cohesion and the benefits diversity brings.</p> | <p>Where racism occurs matters: 43 per cent of young people report experiencing or witnessing racism at school, while 33 per cent say they have experienced or witnessed it on the Internet.</p> <p>Effective responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and school-based programs are critical to addressing racism and discrimination • Youth-led models are significant in this context. <p>Settlement specific policies and programs are only effective when embedded within a broader socially inclusive society. Focusing only on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds will not address the structural barriers they face to participation.</p> <p>What is required is investment in programs and policies that not only discourage discrimination but that promote social cohesion and cultural diversity.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That the Australian Government expand grants programs that promote social cohesion and include a particular focus on youth-led initiatives and programs for young people. ○ That investment continues into the national Anti-Racism Strategy and public campaign led by the Australian Human Rights Commission and related programs targeting schools. ○ That young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are encouraged and supported to lead programs and devise new ideas for building social cohesion in non-school settings, including in all levels of government, the workplace, sports, and the arts. |

Asylum seekers

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p><i>Minors</i></p> <p>Young people who are seeking asylum in Australia, in particular those who are unaccompanied (UAMs), are a vulnerable group with complex and diverse needs.</p> <p>Young people seeking asylum commonly experience high levels of stress and a complex mix of mental and physical health issues (that often continue beyond the granting of a permanent visa).</p> <p>1,679 people are being held in detention in Australia and 1,373 people are in detention on Nauru (468) and Manus Island, PNG (905). While current figures suggest 67 children are currently in held detention in Australia and Nauru, many of those in held detention are likely to be under 30 years old.</p> <p>Of the 4,050 young people living in the community on bridging visas, most would have experienced some form of ‘held’ detention since seeking asylum in Australia.</p> | <p><i>Unaccompanied minors</i></p> <p>Under the IGO Act, the Minister for Immigration has guardianship responsibility for UAMs. This presents a number of well documented concerns.</p> <p>There is currently no national framework to guide care and support of UAMs.</p> <p><i>Detention</i></p> <p>The detrimental impact of detention is well documented and can have a devastating impact on a young person’s physical and mental health.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That the Australian Government meet all obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) in relation to the care and support of young people seeking asylum. This includes reviewing current guardianship arrangements and access to family reunion. ○ That the Australian Government establish independent guardianship arrangements for UAMs. ○ That the Australian Government end mandatory ‘held’ detention in Australia and offshore. |

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Asylum seekers (cont.)

| Context | Issues | Recommendations |
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| <p><i>Policy context</i></p> <p>Offshore processing (and detention) of all asylum seekers, including children and young people, arriving by boat after 19 July 2013.</p> <p>The reintroduction of temporary protection, including the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV).</p> <p>Changes to family reunion mean that under which family members of protection visa holders receive the lowest priority for processing and those who arrived by boat after 19 July 2013, have no options for family reunification.</p> | <p><i>Temporary protection</i></p> <p>Under current policy, young people aged over 18 on bridging visas arriving on or after 13 August 2012: are not entitled to work rights; have limited access to health care and English language tuition; and are commonly living in unstable and overcrowded accommodation.</p> <p>The likely detrimental effects of the reintroduction of temporary protection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compounding the effects of trauma and impeding recovery, • hindering capacity to establish long term goals, and • inhibit sense of security and belonging. <p>The MYAN are especially concerned about the likely impacts this policy is to have on the long term health and wellbeing of young people.</p> <p><i>Family reunion</i></p> <p>Separation from family can add significantly to the challenges of settlement with negative impacts on settlement outcomes, health and wellbeing, as well as motivation to build connections and skills to support participation, including engagement in education, training and employment.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That the Australian Government grant rights for those on bridging visas to access education and employment, as well as opportunities for participation in activities in the broader community. ○ That the Australian Government review the eligibility requirements for SHEV holders to apply for permanent residency, considering the feasibility and practicality of such requirements being achieved and how they will likely impact upon potential permanent residents' capacity to make a 'good start' settling into life in Australia. |