

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) Federal Election Policy Platform 2013

The MYAN is the nationally recognised policy and advocacy body representing multicultural youth issues.

This election policy platform presents the key issues and recommended responses for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the context of the 2013 Australian federal election. Recommendations are designed to address identified issues and are based on an understanding that this group of young people commonly face additional and more complex transitions to their Australian-born counterparts and have particular needs in their settlement journey. A targeted or specialist approach to policy and service delivery is essential to ensure their meaningful and sustained social, cultural and economic participation in Australian society. Recommendations also highlight the importance of evidence-based practice based on consistent data collection and evaluation mechanisms.

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EDUCATION

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<p>Access to appropriate education is commonly noted as the most significant issue in the settlement process.</p> <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face specific disadvantage in learning English and achieving sustained engagement in education and training pathways 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>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>The MYAN welcomes the recommendations of the <i>Better Schools Plan</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loading for students with limited English skills should be targeted to those students who are most vulnerable ○ The current loading for all students of Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) does not sufficiently target English as an Additional/ Second Language (EAL/ESL) students who are vulnerable and more likely to experience disadvantage. 	<p>That the Australian Government develop a national measure of English language proficiency to direct loadings to the most vulnerable students.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>That the Australian Government, in any future programs that support young people in education engagement or transitions, fund specialist programs that meet the specific needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.</p> <p>That funding for state education includes dedicated resources for support services and programs (e.g. peer/ mentor support) to supplement teachers regarding issues of pre-arrival trauma and settlement complexity. This includes resources to support engagement with family members.</p> <p>That data collation mechanisms be developed to accurately measure school engagement levels of newly arrived young people.</p>

Employment and Training

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds 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 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds need targeted support to overcome barriers to employment and training that addresses their particular barriers - including building their understanding of and links with potential employers, and skills in job searching. ○ Such targeted support would also include quarantined access to TAFE, in recognition that the VET sector and TAFE system plays a vital role in supporting this group of young people to navigate training and employment pathways. 	<p>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.</p> <p>That the Australian Government, in any future programs that support young people in training and employment pathways, fund specialist programs that meet the specific needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds (e.g. Youth Connections, Partnership Brokers and JSAs) similar to the Reconnect Specialist Newly Arrived program funded through FaHCSIA.</p> <p>That all Australian government-funded youth providers are expected to implement cultural competency – reflected in incentives or other contractual obligations/responsibilities.</p> <p>That in any proposed changes to TAFE funding, the Australian government ensure that the TAFE system remains financially accessible to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.</p> <p>That regional location options be considered with regard to work/ vocational pathways.</p>

Youth Settlement, including Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs)

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Young people consistently comprise a large proportion of Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian program. In the last financial year, approximately 42% of all arrivals through Australia’s Humanitarian program were aged between 12 and 24. Young people have particular settlement needs and face particular barriers in accessing the support they require to ensure their full participation in Australian society. ○ Young people experience settlement in ways distinct from adults and commonly face additional and more complex transitions to their Australian-born counterparts. ○ UHMS are a particularly vulnerable group, with diverse and complex needs. ○ UHMs need to navigate the challenges of settlement in a new country as adolescents without the immediate support and care of family and/or significant others. ○ The majority of the UHMs currently entering the UHM Program have sought protection after their arrival in Australia. This means that they have spent time in detention in Australia (either community detention or APODs) while awaiting a Protection visa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adequate targeted support in the early stages of settlement is critical to ensuring that young people, both unaccompanied or with family, receive the support they need to navigate the settlement process and build a successful life in Australia. ○ UHMs need additional coordinated support to ensure their particular needs are addressed. The MYAN recognises that a more coordinated framework for support and care for UHMs will be achieved through the current tender for support services to UHMs. 	<p>That a national framework to guide the support and care of UHMs is developed, including guidelines for carer recruitment, responsibilities and support, as well as exit/transitions plans.</p> <p>That a targeted approach to supporting young people transitioning out of the UHM program at 18 years is developed. 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.</p> <p>That an evaluation of the Youth Sub-Plans in the HSS program is conducted, to measure their effectiveness in meeting the needs of young people.</p> <p>That the Settlement Grants Program (SGP):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintains a youth focus in any future amendments to program guidelines. ○ Receives increased funding, with scope for more long-term support for young people. ○ Meets the particular needs of UHMs.

Housing and Homelessness

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<p>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 family conflict and homelessness. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family reconfiguration and/or lack of adult support ○ Unaccompanied Minors (young people under 18) arrive in Australia with no adult relative. ○ Settlement issues – e.g. separation from family members, cultural isolation and loneliness, lack of language and social networks ○ Overcrowded housing - young people may enter housing arrangements that are already strained by overcrowding. <p>In addition to those factors that can precipitate homelessness for young people from refugee or newly arrived backgrounds, they also experience barriers that prevent their equitable access to adequate housing and housing support. These barriers include a lack of cultural competency within mainstream housing and homelessness services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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. ○ Given their vulnerability to social exclusion and homelessness, it is vital young people from refugee or newly arrived backgrounds are explicitly recognised and responded to in the development and implementation of any policies or programs within Commonwealth or state/territory implementation plans e.g. in the negotiation of a new National Housing Agreement. 	<p>That the Reconnect Specialist Newly Arrived program is expanded in high settlement areas.</p> <p>That cultural competency accountability measures are incorporated into funding guidelines for specialist homelessness agencies funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>That the specific needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are recognised and responded to in the future policy and program delivery of homelessness services.</p>

Mental Health

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face a number of mental health risk factors in addition to those of the general population. These include experiences of racism and discrimination, negotiating issues of belonging and identity in a cross-cultural context; and, for young people from refugee backgrounds, pre-settlement experiences of trauma or torture and/or trauma experienced through periods spent in immigration detention in Australia.</p> <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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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. headspace). ○ Lack of data regarding access by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds into mainstream mental health services. ○ Lack of coordination between mental health and other support services to support referral into youth mental health services. 	<p>That accountability measures in relation to cultural competency are incorporated into funding guidelines for youth mental health services e.g. CAMHS and <i>headspace</i>.</p> <p>That better measurements of accessibility by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to youth mental health services, including CAMHS and <i>headspace</i>, are developed,.</p> <p>That government invest in initiatives that build young people's connection with and social inclusion into the broader Australian society.</p> <p>That funding for state education includes dedicated resources for support services/ programs (e.g. peer/ mentor support) to supplement teachers regarding issues of pre-arrival trauma and settlement complexity.</p>

Racism

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<p>Racism and discrimination is an ever-present reality for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, despite the diversity of the Australian community.</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, psychological development and capacity to negotiate the transition to adulthood. ○ Can also 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Importance of community and school-based programs to address racism and discrimination and the significance of youth-led models in this context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expand the <i>Diversity and Social Cohesion</i> grant program and include a particular focus on initiatives targeting young people. ○ That investment continue into the national Anti-Racism Strategy and public campaign led by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Asylum seekers

Context	Issues	Recommendations
<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. Many UAMs are living in community detention under the care of support agencies delivering this program. A large number of UAMs are also living in APODs in various locations around Australia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Young asylum seekers over the age of 18 are either living in closed detention (e.g. Christmas Island), in APODs or in the community on bridging visas. ○ The detrimental impact of detention is well documented and can have a devastating impact on a young person's physical and mental health. ○ Under the IGOC Act, the Minister for Immigration has guardianship responsibility for UAMs. This presents a number of well documented concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is currently no national framework to guide to care and support of UAMs. ○ 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). ○ Under current Commonwealth policy and legislation, young people aged over 18 on bridging visas: 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. ○ The MYAN is also concerned that Australia does not meet its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) in relation to young people seeking asylum. This includes the current guardianship arrangements. 	<p>That the Australian Government end mandatory 'held' detention.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>That the Australian Government meet its obligations under the CRC, in relation to the care and support of young people seeking asylum.</p> <p>That the Australian Government establish independent guardianship arrangements for UAMs.</p>