

What's important to YOUth from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

Consultations with young people and families from migrant and
refugee backgrounds: Final Report

November 2015





The Centre for Multicultural Youth

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. Our purpose is to ensure that young people have every opportunity to succeed in Australia. Through a combination of specialist support services, training and consultancy, knowledge sharing and advocacy, we are working to remove the barriers young people face as they make Australia their home.

Our work focuses on young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, 12-25 years old, with a particular priority on those who are newly-arrived to Australia.

Young people can encounter significant barriers as they try to settle in Australia. Alongside the challenges of growing up, they are figuring out how things are done and adjusting to unfamiliar cultural, academic and social expectations. Their sense of wellbeing and belonging can be considerably diminished by factors such as racism and discrimination. These barriers are often compounded and magnified by services and systems that are ill-equipped to provide the specialist support needed.

Despite these complex issues, we know that young people have the enterprise, resilience and optimism to contribute to the continued prosperity of Australia. By engaging them as experts in their own lives and focusing on their strengths, they can be empowered to adapt and thrive. At CMY young people are at the centre of what we do. What we learn from them helps us develop stronger communities, support other service providers and lead positive change at local, state and national levels. For more about our approach please visit our website www.cmy.net.au.



Recommendations

Employment

Recommendation 1: That pre-employment programs targeting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds include:

- Volunteering opportunities and meaningful work experience
- careers counselling, advice and support in schools that encompass job readiness activities such as resume development, interviewing techniques and familiarisation with the Australian workplace
- Parent engagement in schools to provide information to young people and parents on employment and training pathways and options

Recommendation 2: That incentives be offered to employers to create paid internships and/or work experience for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to allow them to gain valuable work experience. Furthermore, Education providers should accredit these opportunities into existing courses to allow young people to undertake this as part of their studies.

Recommendation 3: That young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who are in the workforce be supported as mentors for CALD young people who are about to make the transition into the workplace. It would not only offer guidance and support for those about to transition into employment, but also offer positive role modelling for migrant and refugee young people. These mentors could also be used to share their experiences with students from all backgrounds to promote the experience and achievements of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Recommendation 4: That initiatives be established to build and extend the social networks of young people and families from migrant and refugee communities as they often lack the necessary links to those who can support and facilitate entry into the workforce. For those who are newly arrived in particular, their networks are often confined to other migrant or refugee communities, or confined simply to their own cultural communities who may not know where the jobs are or are themselves unemployed.

Recommendation 5: That programs be targeted at employers to understand and manage diversity in the workplace and to promote the value of diversity to Australia's economic future.

Recommendation 6: That young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds be involved in the design and implementation of initiatives to combat racism particularly racism in the workplace.

LGBTIQ young people

Recommendation 7: That information and awareness raising programs focusing on issues facing LGBTIQ young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds be tailored to migrant and refugee communities particularly for parents and community leaders. These programs must:

- Provide information and advice to families and friends of young people who identify as LGBTIQ
- Focus on reducing stigma and discrimination
- Facilitate linkages with existing LGBTIQ services and supports
- Mediate safe and confidential conversations between young people and families and community leaders



Mental Health

Recommendation 7: That initiatives to strengthen the protective factors for mental health and wellbeing include elements that:

- 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
- Provide opportunities for youth leadership development.
- Information for young people and their families that are available in a range of formats and mediums, including online
- Are youth lead, including peer-to-peer models and youth friendly spaces for social engagement

Recommendation 7: That resources be increased to proven models that support the mental health and wellbeing of young people and families from refugee backgrounds, and expand these programs to areas where they don't exist particularly in regional/rural Victoria.

Recommendation 8: That families and community leaders in refugee and migrant communities are provided with information on youth mental health and culturally sensitive parenting programs to assist them in understanding adolescence in the Australian context.

Social Cohesion

Recommendation 9: That government invest in programs and initiatives to strengthen engagement across migrant and refugee communities and the broader community, especially in rural and regional Victoria. This includes:

- Supporting youth lead events and initiatives
- Supporting affordable and accessible activities that encourage families and young people's participation
- Building families' and cultural communities' confidence in mainstream programs and activities (e.g. proactive CALD parent engagement by sporting clubs and associations)
- Engaging young people in the design, development and implementation of events and activities that encourage cross-cultural interaction

Recommendation 10: That the stories and achievements of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds be promoted to address negative stereotypes and perceptions.

Gender and intergenerational conflict

Recommendation 11: That refugee and migrant young people are engaged in the development of interventions and programs that address ongoing and complex matters such as gender and intergenerational conflict.

Recommendation 12: That relevant and inclusive opportunities are created for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to actively engage them with decision makers at the community, local and state levels.



Methodology

CMY undertook focus groups and an online survey to consult with young people and parents/family members from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In total, CMY staff and members of CMY's Youth Advisory Groups (YAG) held 11 focus groups with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

CMY staff facilitated four of the consultations with parents/family members of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and three of the youth focus groups. In addition, CMY staff supported our YAG members to facilitate an additional 4 consultations directly with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In addition to focus groups, CMY also hosted an online survey for six weeks during the consultation period. The survey was open to young people aged between 16 and 24 who are from a refugee or migrant background.

Participant selection and recruitment

CMY targeted young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, aged 16 to 24 years, and the parents/guardians or other family members of young people with refugee and migrant backgrounds, who live in rural, regional and metropolitan areas of Victoria. Participants were engaged through a snowball sampling method, with recruitment based on word-of-mouth. Young people fitting the target cohort and already known to/engaged with CMY or its local service provider partners in the target areas were invited to participate in focus groups and/or to undertake the online survey via CMY's website. In addition, participants were asked to invite peers to participate in either consultations or the online survey. Similarly, the parents/guardians and family of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds were identified through their engagement and contact with CMY or its local partners in the target areas.

Data collection

Led by CMY staff and by young people, a total of 11 focus groups were held during the consultation period.

7 youth focus groups were held:

- 2 x metropolitan Melbourne – Epping and Carlton
- 3 x Ballarat
- 2 x Inner Gippsland

4 parents/guardian and family member focus groups were held:

- 2 x metropolitan Melbourne – Reservoir and Carlton
- 1 x Ballarat
- 1 x Inner Gippsland

Data collected from these consultations has been supplemented by an online survey open for young people aged between 16 and 24. CMY received ten responses from young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds via the online survey.

Youth focus groups

Phase one of the consultations consisted of focus groups with each of our three Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) based in Melbourne, Ballarat and Inner Gippsland. They were led by a combination of CMY staff and young people, with an average of seven young people participating in each.



CMY subsequently provided training to members of the three YAGs, with a focus on developing the group facilitation and communication skills needed to lead the next phase of youth consultations. YAG members interested in facilitating the focus groups were supported by CMY staff to develop an action plan and to host consultations with young people in their regions. All the focus groups addressed the same core questions, but the setting and/or format by which the facilitator's engaged focus group participants varied according to individual session. (See Attachment 1: *Discussion Questions – Young People.*) The four focus groups that were held in phase two involved an average of 8 participants per session.

Parent/Guardian Consultation

The four focus groups with parents/guardians and family members of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds were led by CMY staff with an average of ten parents/guardians and family members participating in each. These consultations followed a similar format to the youth consultations, with the same four key themes used to structure the sessions. (See Attachment 2: *Discussion Questions – Parents/Guardians and Families*)

Online survey

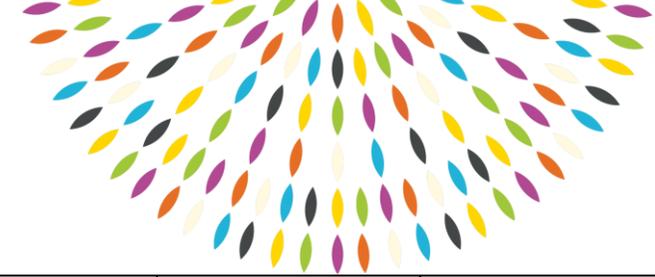
The online survey took the format of a web-form that was posted for six weeks on the CMY website. Utilising the same core questions developed for the face-to-face consultations, the survey also collected basic demographic information from participants. The latter is de-identified to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

CMY drew on existing networks to invite young people to respond to the survey and promoted the survey more widely through social media, e-newsletters and other online networks. CMY was aiming for 40 respondents to the online survey, and while it was open throughout the consultation period (15 September to 27 October 2015), and was promoted widely, there was poor uptake of this data collection method with ten surveys completed.



Demographics of participants

	Number of Participants	Age range	Gender	Self-identified cultural backgrounds		Location	Length of time in Australia
Focus groups – young people	51	12 to 16 = 7* 16 to 19 = 31 20 to 24 = 13	M – 28 F – 23	Italian – 1 Aboriginal/Irish – 1 Anglo-Australian – 1 Dinka – 1 Diverse – 1 Eritrean – 1 Hazara / Afghan – 1 Iraqi-Christian – 1 Korean – 1 Nuer – 1 Somali – 1 South Sudanese/Dinka – 1 Sudanese – 1	Thai – 1 American – 2 British – 2 Chinese – 2 Indian – 2 Palestinian – 2 NA – 3 Afghan Hazara – 3 Assyrian – 4 Filipino – 4 South Sudanese – 6 Togolese – 7	Metropolitan – 9 Rural/Regional – 42	Less than 1 year – 7 1 to 5 years – 21 5+ years – 17 Born in Australia – 3 NA – 3



	Number of Participants	Age range	Gender	Self-identified cultural backgrounds		Location	Length of time in Australia
Focus groups – parents /guardians and /or family members	48 ^no data provided for 5 participants	25 to 29 = 2 30 to 39 = 8 40 to 49 = 16 50 to 59 = 6 60+ = 10 NA = 6	M – 8 F – 34 NA – 1	Bangladeshi – 1 Eritrean – 1 Ethiopian – 1 Iraqi – 1 Kuwaiti – 1 Muslim – 1 Nuddin Mountain – 1 Nuer – 1 South Korean – 1 South Sudanese – 1	Sudanese Dinka – 1 Sudanese Indogo – 1 Togo – 1 China – 2 Islam – 2 Vietnamese – 2 Sudanese – 5 Chinese – 6 Somali – 6 NA – 12	Metropolitan – 15 Rural/Regional – 33	Less than 1 year – 5 1 to 5 years – 10 5+ years – 25 Born in Australia – 2 NA – 6
Online surveys	10	16 to 19 = 6 20 to 24 = 4	M – 6 F – 4	African – 1 Hazaragi – 1 Australian – 2 Afghan – 3 Hazara – 3		Metropolitan – 6 Rural/Regional – 4	Less than 1 year – 0 1 to 5 years – 4 5+ years – 4 Born in Australia – 2



Outcomes – Key findings

CMY focused the consultations on four topics, identified through past experience, research and consultations, as areas of concern to refugee and migrant young people. These four areas are:

- Employment and education
- Mental health
- LGBTIQ
- Social cohesionⁱ

The following section provides an overview of the feedback provided by young people and parents/guardians and/or family members of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Regional/Rural and metropolitan voices are specified where there is a significant difference in their lived experience of the issues.

Employment and education

“there are ideas somewhere, but they are hiding...”

– young participant, male, regional Victoria

Overall feedback across metropolitan and regional Victoria

Across all the focus groups, young people and families identified the following as areas to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in their transition from study to work:

- Information on pathways and options

Schools were identified as needing better supports and partnerships to improve the consistency and range of information provided to students about transitioning to further study, training and/or work. This focus should be on making the information more consistent across all schools and regions, so that *all* young people have equal access to the same depth and breadth of options available to them. Additionally, the information should be tailored to the various needs and circumstances of young people. For example, international students, who cannot access HELP places or apprenticeship schemes, will have different pathways to newly arrived refugee young people who may instead require pathways to further English language courses that can prepare them for the workforce. Similarly, information for those young people who do not wish to head straight into university could be tailored to entry-level career pathway opportunities or gap year work experience options.

“it’s not my situation, but I know other people who think university is not their pathway, what are they to do?”

– young participant, regional Victoria



- Pre-employment training and advice

Practical pre-employment support, such as resume writing, job interviewing, job searching and network development could be offered by schools in partnership with community agencies. Such school-based programs must be flexible to accommodate for the needs of students who require assistance with practical English as well as those requiring advice on the Australian education system and labour market, and support to build networks that can facilitate finding employment. Schools, in partnership with services, could be better resourced to recognise and support students with disrupted education and/or for whom English is a second language, providing them with additional support to help them prepare and feel confident to enter the labour market.

- Generating opportunities to gain experience

Young people also noted that schools and other training and education providers, should be working more closely with employers and industry to ensure that information on current industry standards and requirements are provided, so as to ease the transition into work from study. Young people noted that leaving study to enter the workforce is challenging, but can be made worse when education providers do not provide information (or training) around necessary requirements and industry standards (for example, certain license requirements, skill/certificate levels, or minimum hours of practical experience). This is exacerbated by a lack of practical learning opportunities, work placements or hands-on experiences and is a frustrating barrier to successful transition to work for young people, particularly for those who may not have other means of accessing this essential information or experience before they leave study to look for work.

- Opportunities to gain valuable work experience

Linked to the above, young people also suggested that incentives are needed to encourage employers to offer paid internships and work experience opportunities across a diverse range of potential career pathways. These incentive schemes would look to open up alternative pathways to education (for example, from work to study and back again) and provide young people, particularly in rural and regional areas, with an opportunity to engage in different roles and professions before they invest in further study. For those in higher education, more diverse and interesting work experience opportunities would give young people the much needed experience they require when they complete their studies and look for paid employment.

Higher education providers should be encouraged to integrate paid internships and work placements into existing courses and programs for credit, so that students can undertake this as part of their studies and, importantly, alongside existing paid employment responsibilities.

- Promoting the value of diversity in the workforce

Participants identified the importance of promoting the value of diversity to Australia's economic future and to support employers to understand and welcome diversity in their workplace and businesses. This was seen as a positive way to tackle discrimination and racism in the workplace. In addition to this, young people would like to see employers supported to understand and access information about refugee and



migrant young people, including information about work and study rights for non-citizens, the benefits of engaging young people from diverse backgrounds in their business, and how they can support young people to build their careers.

- Mentoring

The young people consulted recommended that funding to support programs that engage with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds that have recently entered the workforce as mentors could be a positive support for other young people transitioning to work. Pairing early career mentors with soon-to-be school or higher education graduates would provide not only positive role modelling for refugee and migrant young people, but would also offer relevant guidance and support at the point when young people are attempting to make this transition themselves. Further exploration of alternative role modelling and mentoring programs is needed that focus on promoting the experiences of refugee and migrant background people, for example, programs where education providers promote the experiences and success of former students and engage them to return and share their stories and experiences with young people.

- Barriers to work and study for young people on temporary or non-permanent visas

Young people facing additional barriers to workforce participation, such as international students, asylum seekers and holders of certain other visa types, should not be excluded or disadvantaged because of their visa status. Many young people live in Victoria as non-permanent residents or non-citizens. For many of these young people, circumstance and often the decisions of adults have brought them to live for extended periods in Australia where they are required to forge relationships and continue building the foundations for their lives in a new, different and potentially impermanent context. For some of these young people, Australian laws and policies place additional barriers to their meaningful participation in study and work. For example, young people in Australia on temporary visas (even where these are for long periods of time and/or are in the process of being reviewed to become permanent) are often unable to participate in further education and training because of the prohibitive costs and many may not have work rights.

Regional voices

In addition to the barriers explicitly reported by young people in regional Victoria, such as a lack of jobs in regional areas and inaccessible transport, a number of the young people we spoke to had very little knowledge of available supports or reported provision of support as insufficient. This included in-school career counselling and employment advice.

“We have one period per week for 2 or 3 weeks to learn about employment stuff. That’s just 30 minutes each time. How are we supposed to go out and get a job from doing that?”

– young participant, regional Victoria



In their reporting on the challenges of finding work after study, young people told us there is a need for more opportunities to access pre-employment information and training that could lead to jobs. Beyond opening up more opportunities for engagement in part-time work, work experience placements and/or volunteering, young people highlighted a specific need for more job-preparedness activities, such as resume development and interviewing techniques.

Metropolitan voices

Dissatisfaction and disillusionment with Jobactive was strongly evident among participants from northern metropolitan Melbourne. This was particularly true for young people who were looking for assistance in finding part-time work that they could balance with their study and for those looking for work for the first time.

“They (Jobactive) need to take us seriously.”

– young participant, metropolitan Melbourne

Parents’ and families’ voices

In consultations with the parents, guardians and other family members of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds a number of challenges were identified by families in trying to support young people transitioning into employment. In particular, families highlighted their own English language capacity as a significant barrier to the support they are able to provide young people searching for employment and post-study pathways. This is reportedly compounded when families are also unable, due to a lack of social capital, to provide practical guidance and support to their young people. A number of the parents, guardians and family members highlighted their desire to receive more support on how they could assist young people in successfully navigating Australia’s education system and labour market.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds confirmed that often their parents and other traditional support networks don’t have the experience, knowledge or established links to provide them with the guidance and help they are seeking in regards to further education and employment. This highlighted a need for programs and/or services to build the capacity of young people’s traditional support networks, including parents, families, teachers, community leaders and peers, to be able to help young people pursue and stay engaged in meaningful career pathways and to balance this with other significant demands in their lives.

Added to this, many participants in the family consultations highlighted a range of barriers contributing to poor employment rates for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds leaving study. Discrimination was one obstacle identified across the groups that is believed to be impacting high school leavers and university graduates alike. Families also reported a lack of opportunities, in entry-level



employment and for graduates, as well as in accessible further education and training opportunities tailored to growth industries and local employment market needs.

“If you finish studying (at university) it’s no good to get a job at Safeway... It’s not good, I feel bad for him.”

– parent/family participant, metropolitan Melbourne

On this point, the young people identified a need to also ensure information and supports are equally accessible for young people not currently engaged in study. To do this, information programs must also be delivered outside the school environment and should provide advice and support that is specific to refugee and migrant young people and their families.

LGBTIQ young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The young people consulted believe there is a general misunderstanding and lack of awareness about LGBTIQ young people in Australia and noted that this is perhaps more pronounced within refugee and migrant communities. It was also suggested that existing negative sentiment was being encouraged, or at least not discouraged, by the Federal Government’s stance on same-sex marriage. The young people consulted would like to see a youth policy that champions the removal of discrimination against LGBTIQ people from all legal and policy frameworks in the country. Short of this, the policy should actively promote and reinforce the rights and equality of LGBTIQ young people Victoria.

There were no significant differences in the responses of young people across metropolitan and regional Victoria on this topic. However, the views of young people we consulted with differed quite significantly from parents and/or family members. This difference in views and attitudes was an identified issue for young people:

“In my country... people are jailed for being like this. My personal view now is that it’s a free world, people can do what they want. My mum says that they shouldn’t do this, it is not what the bible says.”

– young participant, regional Victoria

Some of the parents and families we spoke to reported quite strong negative opinions on this topic, including expressing discontent with recent pushes to legalise same-sex marriage. It was reported that such views were related to religious and cultural beliefs and teachings, including attitudes and norms established in countries of origin. Some participants in the family consultations shared the subsequent view that while this is an issue impacting the wider Australian community, it was not considered an issue in their own ethnic, cultural and/or religious community. This, some participants reported, meant that families often have very little knowledge of or exposure to issues facing LGBTIQ young people, thus making talking to young people about this topic very challenging.

“This is hard to talk about for us... our culture, our religion cannot accept them”

– parent/family participant, regional Victoria



The majority of the young people we spoke to confirmed that such views were representative of some in their cultural and/or religious communities, highlighting that people who identified as LGBTIQ were often not accepted, reportedly on religious grounds, or were considered taboo. Young people also reported that they are in receipt of conflicting messages coming from parents and religious or community leaders and those from other sources, including school and the broader Australian media, and their own experiences. Conflicting messages were reported by the young people we spoke to specifically in regards to bullying and discrimination against members of the LGBTIQ community and concepts of equality. One young participant shared a story about a male friend confiding in them about their sexuality and their own feelings about the friend coming to them for support:

“when you are in that situation it’s different, your views can be changed because you see that he is still the same person. I didn’t really know what to do or what to say, or who else to talk to... some people stayed away from him after they found out, not me though, I don’t really care what he is.”

– young participant, regional Victoria

In contrast to the parent and family groups, many of the young people who participated in our consultations advocated for the legalising of same-sex marriage, suggesting that such a move would go a long way to addressing negative community attitudes and promoting equality for all. The young people we consulted with recommended that the Victorian Youth Policy should support a broad campaign to raise awareness and promote understanding of LGBTIQ young people in the various communities within which young people live across Victoria. Awareness and educational campaigns should not just take place in forums targeted at young people, but must include young people’s families, ethnic communities and religious networks. In addition, young people believed there is a specific need for safe places for LGBTIQ young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to come together and share their experiences safely and with support of their peers.ⁱⁱ

Mental health

“services need to be approachable... they need to understand me...”

– young female, metropolitan Melbourne

Overall feedback across metropolitan and regional Victoria

The following areas have been identified in the consultations in relation to the area of mental health and wellbeing:

- Social spaces for mental health promotion and wellbeing

The young people consulted were quick to highlight stress as one of the major contributors to mental health concerns for themselves and their peers. While they reported that they learn about the links



between stress and mental health at school, including strategies for dealing with this, they also noted a major source of support for young people is their peers. Opportunities to get together outside of their homes and schools were identified as particularly valuable for dealing with stress and for maintaining positive mental health. However, young people reported challenges to accessing safe and comfortable places and a lack of opportunities (outside structured, specifically sporting activities) and venues. As one focus group discussed, it seems to be common in Australia for young people to live a more disconnected or individualist lifestyle outside of structured activities such as sports or religious gatherings. This can be especially challenging for newly arrived young people, who can experience feelings of social isolation and disconnectedness due to a lack of opportunities to informally gather with their peers and share their experiences with others who understand and can relate to them.

- Alternative support measures and resources

“making friends is really important”

– young participant, metropolitan Melbourne

Young people reported feeling that often their traditional supports, such as family, community leaders, and siblings, do not always know about or understand the stresses and concerns they are experiencing. Peer-to-peer support, not limited to same cultural, linguistic or religious community, was highlighted as a helpful strategy for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Education and awareness raising programs should be complemented by more general opportunities for young people to socialise and engage.

- Flexible, services for young people

“I am aware of services like headspace, but I don’t really feel confident to go directly in there”

- young participant, online survey, metropolitan Melbourne

Young people noted that as refugee and migrant communities become more aware of mental health issues and impacts, the need for services increases. Young people believe that more innovative ways to meet these needs should be explored, with options that incorporate young people’s need for culturally and linguistically appropriate staff (and training for staff) in mental health and wellbeing services. Additionally, they highlighted the need for more accessible opportunities for engagement and accessing information for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This would include for example, discussing with young people the design and implementation of multi-service hubs located in regional and rural areas and development of more accessible online platforms and alternative service delivery models that are attractive to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Such services and programs would ensure young people are able to access information and services when they need them, but can do so in a comfortable environment where they feel understood and where they feel their privacy is secure.

“we don’t like to read stuff”



– young participant, regional Victoria

- Promotion of mental health issues among young people’s families and communities

Young people suggested that sometimes their stress is actually a result of mental health or wellbeing issues of someone in their family or broader social network. It can be exacerbated or caused by a misunderstanding or lack of awareness among their family or social networks about the challenges the young person is facing. This highlights the need to continue to promote the importance of relationships, wellbeing and mental health awareness among refugee and migrant communities. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are negotiating adolescence, a recognised turbulent time for many, while also managing the challenges associated with settlement in a new country. Young people felt that this led to additional stressors for them and that the Victorian Government should consider how it could best work with young people and their families and communities to ensure that families (especially parents) can understand, identify and engage with not only young people’s mental health concerns, but also their own, in positive and productive ways.

“Not many people will openly speak on drugs, violence, alcohol or issues like that. Families may discuss it, but there is no community dialogue.”

– parent/family participant, metropolitan Melbourne

- Parental and community expectations (and misunderstanding)

Young people noted that the pressure of the ‘weight of expectations’ is a factor that impacts on their mental health. They reported that often there are great expectations placed upon them by their families and communities to do well and not waste the opportunities afforded to them in Australia. Additionally, many young people noted that their own experience of growing up in Australia can be often compared to their parents’ or other family and community members’ experiences in their country of origin, with the suggestion that young people’s experiences in Australia are somehow less challenging or ‘big’. Consequently, young people can feel that their issues are downplayed, burdened with expectation and potentially unsupported to share and engage with family supports. Young people believe there is thus a need to engage families and communities, as much as with young people, in campaigns and programs promoting mental health and wellbeing and the challenges of being a young person in Australia. Additionally, young people believe the Government needs to provide young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with alternative sources of support that are relatable, accessible, private and responsive.

Regional voices

The most striking contrast between the responses of young people in regional and metropolitan consultations was the identified need in regional Victoria for more targeted and specialised services for



refugee and migrant young people in the area mental health. They reported a lack of knowledge and information available about mental health in their areas and identified a lack of flexible, targeted supports that were accessible for refugee and migrant young people and that they could relate to.

“access to services that may even specialise in assistance for young people with migrant or refugee backgrounds may be a big help”

– young participant, online survey, regional Victoria

In addition to this, young people from regional Victoria more readily connected mental health concerns with social isolation and feelings of disconnectedness than their metropolitan Melbourne peers. While connectedness is explored in more detail in Section 4 - Social Cohesion, it is important to highlight that the young people from regional Victoria linked their feelings of isolation, marginalisation and discrimination, lack of diversity in their community, and intergenerational conflict to mental health in more direct and concrete ways during these consultations than their metropolitan peers. They also focused on the lack of services and information, as well as education and awareness, as key barriers to engagement and support for young people experiencing issues with mental health.

Metropolitan voices

As noted above, young people in metropolitan areas were less likely to report issues of accessibility to services or information around mental health as an issue. Indeed, at both of the consultations we held in metropolitan Melbourne the young people we consulted with, were able to identify by name, a number of specialist mental health and wellbeing programs and service providers offering support to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Participants from metropolitan areas focused instead on the connections between work, and other forms of meaningful participation such as studying, and mental health.

“If we first work, other problems will be solved...”

– young participant, metropolitan Melbourne

“The tension of not having a job, not having the right or can’t afford to study, and the people who don’t feel that they (sic) belong creates MENTAL HEALTH for the people from refugee background”ⁱⁱⁱ

- young participant, online survey, metropolitan Melbourne

Parents voices

Many of the parents and family members of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds highlighted how their own experiences of mental health impact on their capacity to support and engage positively with young people. In particular, consultations with parents and families reinforced reports from



young people that different cultural understandings of mental health directly impact on their help seeking behaviour and accessibility of traditional supports, such as family. Importantly, in regards to this, families and parents reported the need for multi-lingual and online resources to support parents and families of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds experiencing mental health issues.

“people suffer by themselves”

– parent/family participant, metropolitan Melbourne

Social cohesion

Overall feedback across metropolitan and regional Victoria

The following areas have been identified by young people to address social cohesion.

- Connecting with other young people

The way social cohesion and multiculturalism are understood and the prevalence of negative views about refugees and migrants were important issues to the young people we spoke with. Raising awareness of positive stories and highlighting the lived experience of being a young person in Australia today, through campaigns and targeted programs, were some of the suggestions offered by young people. Other suggestions included starting a national conversation among young people (perhaps online as well as within local forums) about what it means to be a young person living in Australia today, which can include citizens and non-citizens. It would allow young people to conceptualise themselves across their many identities and share this with others in a safe, supported and positive environment.

- Connecting with other refugee and migrant communities and the broader community

Young people also noted the importance of their family and broader religious, cultural and social networks to their sense of connectedness and identity. Ideas for supporting connections focused on working to promote engagement across existing refugee and migrant community networks throughout Victoria, with a specific focus on engaging communities outside of metropolitan Melbourne. Parents and families we spoke with supported this, noting that greater engagement was something young people needed. However, they highlighted that parents and families are not always capable of providing support for young people to build relationships and networks as they themselves (particularly if they are newly arrived to Australia) may have poor networks and have financial barriers to participation. Young people suggested that this might be addressed through the establishment of forums or other structured opportunities for communities to connect across Victoria, where experiences could be shared and friendships fostered. Such efforts should purposefully target young people and their families.

Young people also felt that a new Victorian Youth Policy should look beyond the young people and their families, and into the broader community and specifically at perceptions of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the broader community. Young people identified opportunities for themselves to be directly engaged perhaps in public forums or campaigns that allow them to positively promote



themselves and their stories in the community. Young people felt that sometimes attitudes and perceptions of young people in general, and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in particular, failed to reflect the reality, and that by them sharing their stories and lives with the broader community this could challenge stereotypes and negative perceptions in a positive way. Importantly, for African and Arabic-speaking young people who made up a large number of participants in our consultations, direct experience of racism has been reported as the greatest single factor for social withdrawal.^{iv} Thus strategies and programs aimed at promoting social inclusion and nurturing participation and engagement should foster networks for young people beyond their own cultural and community networks.

Regional voices

While a vast majority of the young people we consulted said they would like to see more opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-community engagement, young people from regional Victoria linked this need directly to feelings of isolation, specifically the lack of diversity and understanding of diversity in their communities and their feelings of belonging, as well as to experiences of discrimination and exclusion.

“No-one knows anything about our culture or where we come from. They think my life is just what it looks like in those poor people ads on tv.”

- young participant, African background, regional Victoria

Metropolitan voices

While young people from metropolitan Melbourne were equally ardent about opportunities for more social engagement outside of their cultural and ethnic community networks, this desire appeared to be less directly related to an overt sense of exclusion or isolation. Many of the young people, and some of the parents and family members, discussed the importance of social connectedness in terms of breaking down barriers and highlighted employment as an important facilitator to social engagement across cultures.

“My friends are all from my culture. I don’t know any other Aussies... I don’t think it is a problem, if we worked we’d mix with other Aussie people.”

- young participant, metropolitan Melbourne

Parents’ and families’ voices

For parents, supporting young people’s social engagement and participation was considered a challenge as they themselves often feel socially isolated and often do not have links or contacts with broader social networks. For those who are particularly newly arrived, financial stress is a barrier to participating in social and sporting events that can give their children opportunities to create important social connections/networks with the broader community. Parents/family members also commented on the need to include a broader world focus in education in schools. The school setting is seen as an opportunity for all young people to learn about diversity and multiculturalism, different religions, cultures and different ways of living.



Gender and intergenerational conflict

“my hope is that young Muslim women are accepted as they are”

- parent/family participant, metropolitan Melbourne

In addition to the four themes discussed above, gender and intergenerational conflict were two issues that emerged during these consultations that cut across a number of areas. In relation to gender, young women in particular highlighted the differential experience they have in areas as diverse as social connectedness, economic participation and mental health. Young women we spoke to in metropolitan and regional Victoria reported discrimination based on their gender as a barrier to participation in employment and sense of belonging. They also reported having problems gaining support or understanding from their parents in relation to their participation in personal and social networks.

“Our parents feel that Aussie kids are bad influences, they have too much freedom.”

- young participant, female, regional Victoria

In some of the consultations with parents and family members this sentiment was echoed, with participants expressing a strong desire to keep young people safe and some suggesting there was a need for more culturally appropriate activities for young women from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

For some of the young people we consulted with, their desire to have the freedom to participate conflicted with their parents' anxiety often resulted in intergenerational tension and/or conflict that created a feeling of distance between young people and their parents. Similarly, differing views and experiences between young people and their parents emerged in the discussions around LGBTIQ young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Recent research suggests that “misunderstandings and different ways of association cause migrant youth to experience difficulties in accommodating their own wishes and plans with the plans and wishes that their parents have for them.”^v

Despite these findings, young people continue to report parents and families, along with friends, as their most valued supports.^{vi} Parents, guardians, broader family members and religious, cultural and ethnic communities are thus essential participants in efforts that target the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.



Conclusion

Educational transitions are a vulnerable and critical time for young people from refugee backgrounds, with the ability to make smooth transitions influenced by the length of time a young person has lived in Australia and their experiences and level of education prior to arriving. Important components to making effective transitions to employment for young people include: individualised support/case management; relevant work experience embedded in education and training programs; and, mentoring with an employment focus.^{vii} While mentoring can assist young people from refugee backgrounds to make effective transitions from education to employment, successful mentoring programs require strong organisational support and resourcing, and goals must be clear from the outset.^{viii} In their feedback to CMY, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds specifically highlighted the need for greater opportunities to engage in pre-employment programs, meaningful work and training, and access to mentoring. In their recommendations, young people provided specific ideas on how such measures could work, including the introduction of incentive schemes and the need to promote the valuable contributions young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds make to Victoria.

In their 2014 report, Noto, Leonard and Mitchell report that very little is known about the lived experiences of LGBTIQ young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia. In addition to a dearth of research into issues affecting LGBTIQ young people, the authors identify a lack of long-term support programs for people from a refugee or migrant background who identify as LGBTIQ and that what little dedicated work exists in this field is, “at best, time-limited, poorly funded and under resourced”.^{ix} This reality was clearly reflected in the feedback CMY received from young people, and parents and guardians of young people, from refugee and migrant backgrounds during these consultations. In particular, community attitudes, based on religious and cultural norms and values, were identified as factors impacting community engagement and embracement of young people who identify as LGBTIQ. Young people who we spoke to were particularly vocal on how their own attitudes did not necessarily reflect those of their parents or communities, but that as a result they did not have any access to appropriate supports or information to help them navigate and understand this complex issue. Unsurprisingly however, young people identified their family and cultural community as a primary support.

Refugee children and young people have lower rates of utilisation of mental health services compared with young people more broadly.^x While it is evident that there is much work to be done in order to strengthen young people from refugee backgrounds’ engagement with mental health services, the young people and families we spoke to have highlighted some important areas where this new youth policy could start. In particular, CMY heard that young people would like to see more awareness raising programs and education that reaches beyond schools and young people to provide guidance and access to information for young people’s traditional supports, their families and close friends. We also heard that there needs to be stronger resourcing of culturally relevant youth support services in regional areas, particularly in areas with high levels of settlement growth. Additionally, resources must be targeted towards building the capacity of mainstream services in regional areas and areas of high settlement to meet the needs of these young people.



A sense of inclusion and belonging was also identified as of critical importance to young people of refugee and migrant background's mental health. Having opportunities for positive influence and being involved in the local community are important influences on young people's overall wellbeing - in terms of making new friends, developing new skills, and being able to make a positive contribution to their new home.^{xi} Supporting and creating opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to meaningfully participate can build a strong sense of agency and belonging. Not only this, but the broader community benefits from the rich diversity of experience and skills such young people can offer. On a broader level, the involvement of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is not only beneficial for the individuals concerned - it is also a crucial measurement of the depth and vigour of multiculturalism within Victoria. However, despite this and the diversity of the Victorian community, racism is an everyday reality for young people of migrant and refugee background. Against this backdrop, young people have told us they would like to be more active in designing and implementing strategies to address discrimination and racism in their everyday lives.

Much of the feedback from CMY hosted *What's important to YOUTH?* consultations with young people, and the parents, guardians and family members of young people, from refugee and migrant backgrounds reinforced what CMY know and are often told by refugee and migrant young people living in Victoria. As such, many of the recommendations from young people outlined here are supported by vast range of further consultations, research and reports produced by CMY and our partners over the last 25 years. For further insight into any of the topics raised by young people in this report, including further detailed findings of consultations directly with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in Victoria, please visit our website www.cmy.net.au.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Discussion Questions – Young People

Attachment 2: Discussion Questions – Parents/Guardians and Families



Endnotes

ⁱ The wording of each topic was re-framed from CMY's initial proposal for the consultations and survey. This was to ensure questions were clear and accessible for the target audience. See Attachment 4 for reference.

ⁱⁱ Noto, Loenard and Mitchell make a raft of recommendations regarding the support needs of LGBTIQ young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, some of which reflect suggestions made by young people in the consultations we held. See, Noto, Leonard and Mitchell (2014) *Nothing for Them Understanding the support needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds*. ARCSHS, La Trobe University, Melbourne. Available at http://www.glhv.org.au/files/Nothing_for_them_report.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Emphasis from original.

^{iv} Mansouri and Skrbiš (2014) *Social networks, belonging and active citizenship among migrant youth in Australia*. CMY, Melbourne. Available at <http://cmy.net.au/publications/social-networks-belonging-and-active-citizenship>. p.6

^v Ibid. p.83

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} CMY (2015) *The Education State: CMY response to The Education State consultation paper (July 2015)*. CMY, Melbourne.

^{viii} CMY(2014) Transitions & Ollif, L. 2010b. *What Works: Employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants*. Surry Hills: Refugee Council of Australia, Sydney.

^{ix} See, Noto, Leonard and Mitchell (2014) *ibid*.

^x 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* 0 (0): 1 – 25.

^{xi} CMY, 2014b, *Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging: Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria*. CMY, Melbourne.



Attachment 1

Discussion Questions – Young People

Framing: Imagine if there were no barriers/challenges – what would that look like? How can that be achieved? Ask them to think of their own experiences or the experiences of friends and family. Consider specifically the needs of migrant and refugee young people.

ROUND 1 CORE QUESTIONS	Additional prompts to ask/explore
<p>Transition to Employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your vision for young people in relation to this topic? • What can the Vic Government do to better support young people in this area?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What would support of young people in this transition look like?○ Are there examples of good supports that you know of?○ Any experiences that could/should have been different? ○ How can the government include young people in the process?
<p>Feeling Connected with Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does a “connected community” look like for you? • What can the Vic Government do to better support young people to feel connected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Describe some of the attitudes and behaviours of a your ideal connected community.○ Which aspects of your existing communities are working well? ○ How can the government include young people in the process?



ROUND 2 CORE QUESTIONS	Additional prompts to ask/explore
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LGBTIQ

- **What is your vision for young people in relation to this topic?**

- **What can the Vic Government do to better support LGBTIQ young people?**

- How important is this issue to you?
- What are some of the experiences – positive or negative – of support for LGBTIQ young people?

- How can the government include young people in the process?

Mental Health

- **What is your vision for young people in relation to this topic?**

- **What can the Vic Government do to better support young people in this area?**

- How is “mental health” understood in your communities?
- What are some examples of experiences you or others have had where support has worked well?

- How can the government include young people in the process?



Attachment 2

Discussion Questions – Parents & Families of Young People

CMY has spoken to many young people to understand the issues important to them. These topics are some of the most important. They have told us the challenges they sometimes face. We want to hear ideas from you – the parents and families of young people – about how your children and young relatives can be supported to live a successful life, and how you can help as well.

ROUND 1

Transitioning from education to work

Young people have told us that the move from education to work can be really challenging, even if they have studied at university. Some of the challenges are:

- an over-emphasis on qualifications;
- lack of flexible post-school education pathways;
- information and advice around employment or further study options is inaccessible or unhelpful;
- not enough support to hear about and access opportunities or supports to succeed in work.

Feeling Connected with Community

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have told us that it can be hard to feel like they belong and make connections with people from Australia. The key points include:

- addressing lack of sense of belonging and community connectedness among refugee and migrant young people;
- understanding and responding to the impacts of discrimination and racism;
- Social exclusion and social inclusion in sport, education, employment and the justice system;
- and, effective strategies that engage with the broader community.



ROUND 1 CORE QUESTIONS	Additional prompts to ask/explore
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Transition to Employment

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your vision for young people in relation to this topic? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What would support of young people in this transition to work look like?○ What are some good examples you know of young people being supported to find and keep work? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What can the Vic Government do to better support young people in this area? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How can the government include you and your children/young relatives in the process? |

Feeling Connected with Community

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does a “connected community” look like for you? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Describe some of the attitudes and behaviours of your ideal community.○ What are some of the current strengths of your local community (or communities)? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What can the Vic Government do to better support young people to feel connected? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How can the government include you and your children/young relatives in strengthening local communities? |

ROUND 2

Different Relationships

In Australia, families and relationships can be different. Relationships can be between a man and woman, but they can also be between two men, or two women. Some young people, of a variety of cultural backgrounds, have told us that they have been in relationships with the same gender, but can find it difficult to talk about this with their community.

Whether you believe this is an issue in your own community or not, we would like to hear your opinions.

Mental Health

Mental health is about how a person is feeling and coping with life. Stress is a big part of mental health, and most people feel stressed or worried sometimes. Young people have told us that they often feel stressed because of study, work, and other responsibilities. If someone feels sad or worried all the time, or feels that life is too hard to handle, they might need some help with mental health.

Whether you believe this is an issue in your own community or not, we would like to hear your opinions.



ROUND 2 CORE QUESTIONS	Additional prompts to ask/explore
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Different Relationships

- **What is your vision for young people in relation to this topic?**
- **What can the Vic Government do to better support LGBTIQ young people?**

- How are “different relationships” understood in your communities?
- What are some of the experiences – positive or negative – of people in different kinds of relationships that you know of?
- How can the government help young people and their families understand or talk about these issues?

Mental Health

- **What is your vision for young people in relation to this topic?**
- **What can the Vic Government do to better support young people in this area?**

- How is “mental health” understood in your communities?
- What are some examples of experiences you or others have had where support has worked well?
- How can the government include you and your children/young relatives in the process?