



February 2016

# **Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes**

## **Joint Submission**



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Youth Action and MYAN NSW acknowledge the research assistance of Sana Shaikh and Kathleen Herbert.

### **About the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW**

Our vision is that all young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in NSW can access the support and opportunities they need to be active citizens in Australian society.

MYAN NSW is the first state-wide multicultural youth specialist organisation. We engage, connect and build the capacity of the youth, settlement and multicultural sectors to effectively meet the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. We support the development of young people's skills and networks to engage in advocacy and influence the regional, state and national agenda.

MYAN NSW is a hub of networking, information and capacity building, supporting and strengthening the work of our large and diverse network. Our members, partners, services and young people benefit from a range of initiatives and events, including:

- Sector development forums;
- Networking meetings and events;
- Skills and capacity building workshops;
- Policy advice to government;
- Fact sheets, reports and resources;
- Contributions to research on key issues;
- Regular updates and information.

### **About Youth Action**

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

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#### **Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes: Joint Submission**

Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW)  
[youthaction.org.au](http://youthaction.org.au)



It is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth service sector.
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services.
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers.
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services.
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them.
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services.
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Fund MYAN NSW to address the growing need for coordination, sector development and capacity building within the youth settlement sector.

**Recommendation 2:** Adopt the National Youth Settlement Framework as part of government policy and funding guidelines to ensure services are able to deliver a consistent and coordinated approach.

**Recommendation 3:** Address the support needs of young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds to settle well by ensuring:

- A focus on more effective referral pathways, particularly in the transition from Humanitarian Settlement Services to Settlement Grants Program programs and to mainstream services to provide minimal disruption to young people accessing the support required to settle well.
- Extension of the accessibility of settlement services funded under the Settlement Grants Program beyond the five-year period.
- Accessible youth sub-plans, by lowering eligibility criteria for a youth sub-plan to from 15 years of age to 12 years of age in line with NSW state funded youth services and the universal understanding of adolescence.
- Extension of settlement support services to include those young people who are currently ineligible for support due to their visa status or mode of arrival.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensure both settlement and mainstream service providers are culturally intelligent and skilled in youth-focused, strengths-based, trauma informed approaches.

**Recommendation 5:** Implement a national funding strategy to ensure appropriate levels of funding to ethno-specific organisations.

**Recommendation 6:** Encourage Adult Migrant English Program service providers to offer youth specific classes.

**Recommendation 7:** Ensure mainstream services working in employment, health, mental health, education, domestic violence and disability contexts are skilled and culturally intelligent in working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.



**Recommendation 8:** The Inquiry seek to define what a 'gang' or 'gang' related activity is in the Australian context to guide its report and recommendations

**Recommendation 9:** The inquiry actively seek to make sure young people are part of defining their own narrative, that is true to their culture and place in Australia. The Inquiry should challenge stereotypes and assumptions regarding young people in its report, as well as ensure there is ample opportunity for young people to participate in policy decisions that impact their life, including in the inquiry process itself.

**Recommendation 10:** Improve access to youth specific and culturally intelligent early intervention programs that utilise the skilled youth workforce to counter anti-social behaviour.

**Recommendation 11:** Ensuring there is ample opportunity for young people to participate in policy decisions that impact their life, as well as in the inquiry process itself.



## INTRODUCTION

Youth Action and Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW (MYAN NSW) welcome the opportunity to provide a response to the inquiry. Youth Action and MYAN NSW commend the focus on young people in the inquiry, in recognition of their unique life and developmental stage, as well as their importance in the community more generally. Young people are distinctly different to children, and have different capacity to adults. So too is the settlement experience of young people unique and different. This is a core tenant of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a well-recognised principal throughout many of Australia's systems and institutions, including our criminal justice system.

One in four young Australians are from a refugee and migrant background. This group of young people have enormous potential to be active citizens in and contributors to Australian society. Young people's active participation and engagement in Australian society has significant and long-term benefits for each young person, their families, communities, and a diverse and socially cohesive Australia.

Each year almost 200 000 people are offered permanent visas to Australia under one of three migration streams: Humanitarian, Skilled and Family. Approximately one third of all permanent arrivals to Australia in the past five years settled in New South Wales.<sup>1</sup> In the 2015/16 financial year, 5980 young people settled in NSW via the three migration programs, accounting for 18% of total migration to the state. Approximately 13% of young migrants to NSW were admitted through the Humanitarian Programme.

Good youth settlement for young people requires building the skills, knowledge and networks of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the domains of economic, social and civic participation and personal wellbeing. It also requires supporting services to respond effectively to the specific needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics have been sourced from the Department of Social Services' Settlement Database (SDB), which is compiled from a number of sources including the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP), other Commonwealth agencies and service providers. This data was sourced on 12 July 2016 and is subject to a number of caveats that should be considered when reviewing this information. Details can be found at <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/settlement-reporting-facility>.



Further focus on settling well requires a view of social cohesion. Young people cannot be excised from their social contexts and communities. The inquiry must not focus solely on systems and individuals but include a view on the impact that community attitudes and community responses to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have on their settlement and belonging.

The social context of settlement for young people is crucial and directly linked to other indicators such as positive education and employment outcomes. Indeed, as Cauffman et al. state, it is part of the 'coming of age' process. 'This process of development toward psychosocial maturity is one of reciprocal interaction between the individual and his social context. Several environmental conditions are particularly important, such as the presence of an authoritative parent or guardian; association with prosocial peers; and participation in educational, extracurricular, or employment activities that facilitate the development of autonomous decision making and critical thinking.'<sup>2</sup> A holistic approach that considers the whole young person in their context underpins this submission.

Youth Action and MYAN NSW jointly contribute our expertise regarding young people, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, youth services and multicultural services in NSW. Mainstream and multicultural and/or settlement services play an important role in supporting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Youth Action and MYAN NSW refer to 'young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds' throughout, but strongly iterate that the experiences of young people with refugee backgrounds are different to those of migrant backgrounds, which are again different from those who are second- or third-generation migrants.

MYAN NSW and Youth Action broadly support the recommendations made by MYAN Australia and highlight pertinent recommendations throughout that are of particular importance in the NSW context.

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<sup>2</sup> E Cauffman & L Steinberg, 2012, 'Emerging Findings from Research on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice', *Victims & Offenders: An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice*, Vol. 7, No.4, pp.428-449.





## RESPONSE TO INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

### **The mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants**

Australia has a robust and well-regarded settlement services system that includes programs supported by all three levels of government (Federal, state and local), the not-for-profit sector, volunteers and community-based organisations, as well as growing contributions by business, industry, the public service and the broader community. There are four significant settlement programs in NSW administered by service providers on behalf of the Australian Government:

- Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS)
- Complex Case Support (CCS)
- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), and
- Settlement Grants Program (SGP).

These programs support young people settling at various times over the first five years of settlement, however it is primarily young people arriving under the Humanitarian Programme who are eligible for these services.

It is commendable that the Australian Government has recognised for some time that the needs of young people in settlement are unique and that addressing them requires a targeted approach. There have been some important youth initiatives in Australian settlement services in recent years, including:

- the introduction of Youth Sub-Plans in the Humanitarian Settlement Services Programme
- youth specific services in the Settlement Grants Programme
- the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Programme
- funding for a national multicultural youth peak body (MYAN Australia), and more recently,
- investment in the Youth Transitions Support Pilot.

At a state level, the NSW Government's announcement of an additional \$145.6 million



to support refugees living in NSW and the significant work of the NSW Joint Partnership Working Group led by Professor Peter Shergold is highly commended.

While efforts have been made to address gaps through investment in youth specific settlement tools and approaches, including the development of the National Youth Settlement Framework by MYAN Australia, these improvements will have limited impact if they are not accompanied by policy backing and investment over time to ensure they are adopted broadly and implemented well. MYAN NSW and Youth Action support the recommendations made by MYAN Australia and would like to highlight the following issues that are of particular importance in the NSW context.

MYAN NSW is the only state-wide multicultural youth specialist organisation in NSW, and sits at the intersection of the mainstream youth and broader settlement sectors – which is where good youth settlement occurs. Despite NSW hosting the largest number of refugee and migrants in Australia, MYAN NSW receives no government funding to meet the growing need for coordination, sector development and capacity building within the youth settlement sector in NSW. This has a particular impact on important national initiatives such as the National Youth Settlement Framework, and means there is limited local support for its implementation.

**Recommendation 1:** Fund MYAN NSW to address the growing need for coordination, sector development and capacity building within the youth settlement sector.

MYAN Australia's National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) is an invaluable tool for achieving good settlement outcomes for young people, understood as 'active citizenship'. The framework champions a consistent and coordinated approach to understanding and responding to the needs of young people, supporting them to become active and engaged members of our community. The NYSF is both a conceptual and practical framework that articulates youth settlement and provides a useful tool to measure how well young people are settling and how well the sector facilitates settlement. A set of eight good practice capabilities sit at the foundation of the framework, providing guidance on facilitating good settlement at a service delivery level.

**Recommendation 2:** Adopt the National Youth Settlement Framework as part of government policy and funding guidelines to ensure services are able to deliver a consistent and coordinated approach.

There are a number of gaps in young people's settlement journey which requires address. Issues include referral pathways, flexibility in eligibility criteria regarding age



and/or those who face more complex challenges in settlement, collaboration, and support for the workforce.

**Recommendation 3:** Address the support needs of young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds to settle well by ensuring:

- A focus on more effective referral pathways, particularly in the transition from Humanitarian Settlement Services to Settlement Grants Program programs and to mainstream services to provide minimal disruption to young people accessing the support required to settle well.
- Extension of the accessibility of settlement services funded under the Settlement Grants Program beyond the five-year period.
- Accessible youth sub-plans, by lowering eligibility criteria for a youth sub-plan to from 15 years of age to 12 years of age in line with NSW state funded youth services and the universal understanding of adolescence.
- Extension of settlement support services to include those young people who are currently ineligible for support due to their visa status or mode of arrival.

Both settlement and mainstream service providers have an important role to play in facilitating positive settlement outcomes for young people. It is essential that these service providers have a workforce that is culturally intelligent and skilled in youth-focused, strengths-based, trauma informed approaches.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensure both settlement and mainstream service providers are culturally intelligent and skilled in youth-focused, strengths-based, trauma informed approaches.

Ethno-specific organisations play a significant role in supporting migrant and refugee communities to settle and direct appropriate funding to these organisations. There are many examples of youth-focused ethno-specific organisations in NSW that play an important role in supporting young people to settle and often act as the pathway for young people into mainstream services.

**Recommendation 5:** Implement a national funding strategy to ensure appropriate levels of funding to ethno-specific organisations.

There are particular areas to target for investment in youth focused supports include:

- increased focus on health programs for humanitarian youth arrivals including



- sexual health and mental health
- support in education, with a particular focus on transitions, i.e. from IEC to high school and high school to post-secondary education or employment
  - specialised employment assistance
  - recreational and sporting opportunities, which provide an important context for engagement of young people in the wider community, and there is potential to extend settlement service activity in this domain.

**Recommendation 7:** Ensure mainstream services working in employment, health, mental health, education, domestic violence and disability contexts are skilled and culturally intelligent in working with young people from refugee and migrant

## **The importance of English language ability on a migrant's, or prospective migrant's, settlement outcome**

English language ability plays a key role in young people achieving full participation in society, however English language ability is not always the best predictor of settlement outcomes. While English language skills are important for young people to access employment, education, navigate systems and engage with the broader community, it is only one of many factors which facilitate young people to participate and achieve their goals and aspirations. We cannot predict success or failure of settlement on this one measure alone, there needs to be significant investment in English language acquisition to ensure young people do not face additional barriers.<sup>3</sup>

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is essential to supporting young people's acquisition of English language for whom high school is not an appropriate pathway. However, the program would be strengthened by a more youth-focused approach in program design and delivery. Offering youth specific classes has proven to be an effective way to address the unique learning needs of young people and AMEP providers should be supported to develop a differentiated youth curriculum with youth appropriate resources and learning experiences.

### **Case Study: The need for youth specific classes and strategies designed to meet the needs of and engage with young people**

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<sup>3</sup> MYAN Australia, 2017, *Submission to the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*, accessed via <http://www.myan.org.au/our-work-with-the-sector/161/>



Sydney's southwestern suburb of Fairfield has become the new home of a significant number of Iraqi and Syrian refugee families over the past ten or eleven months.

Navitas English AMEP College provides youth AMEP classes, and for many years used the same curriculum for young people as was used in adult classes. However, youth attendance at these classes was often poor and the outcomes less than optimal.

In an on-going process of improving learning outcomes for refugee young people attending dedicated youth classes at the Navitas College, staff trialled a different way to plan and deliver learning to this group. The teacher adopted a project-based learning approach which engaged learners in designing their project work and negotiating small groups to develop and deliver their project outcomes – in this instance around local sports. The project engaged learners in developing, planning, marketing (to other College learners) and implementing a sports activity at the local youth centre.

Embedded in the course design was cloud computing, Chromebooks and Google apps to enhance engagement and improve capability and autonomy with the learners.

Initial feedback from participants was outstanding and anecdotal evidence indicated that young people enjoyed learning and achieving improved language outcomes compared with previous students.

The combination of project-based learning focusing on technology use resulted in improved digital literacy skills, a focus on technology production rather than consumption, and greatly improved collaboration and negotiation skills. The learners most valued improvement in team work, planning skills, use of technology and communication skills and the focus on activities out of the classroom.

**Recommendation 6:** Encourage Adult Migrant English Program service providers to offer youth specific classes.

## **Social engagement of young people of migrant backgrounds**

The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Inquiry note that the Committee 'shall give particular consideration to social engagement of youth migrants, including involvement of youth migrants in anti-social behaviour such as gang activity, and the adequacy of the Migration Act 1958 character test provisions as a means to address issues arising from this behavior'. Social engagement is here explicitly linked with the character test



and exclusion from Australia. This undermines the inquiry purpose to find knowledge and outcomes in relation to young people's social engagement, as it limits the inquiry to focus on the character test as the solution to antisocial behaviour, despite the wealth of information and expertise available.

There is a necessity to take a balanced approach in inquiring into the social engagement of young people from migrant backgrounds. We reiterate evidence provided by the Refugee Council of Australia, that an enormous focus has been given to the ethnicity of young people engaging in anti-social behaviour, contrary to the evidence:

The statistics show that young people born outside Australia commit a disproportionately low number of crimes. Data obtained from Victoria Police, for example, shows that from 2012–2016, the majority of young people aged 10-18 involved in crime were Australian born. Likewise, a report by the Centre for Multicultural Youth used current police data to show that 'young people born overseas are less than half as likely to be alleged offenders compared with other young people.' Studies in NSW have also revealed that 'contrary to common belief, young people who spoke a language other than English at home were less likely to be involved in crime than their English speaking counterparts.' It is disappointing to see media and some politicians drawing attention to a small minority of offenders and ignoring readily available statistics.<sup>4</sup>

Youth Action and MYAN NSW further caution against the false labelling of the actions of some young people as 'gang' related. This raises issues of definition, which appear to be largely based on assumptions and presumptions, somewhat driven by sensationalised media.<sup>5</sup> The word 'gang' is often falsely 'used to cover any group and any kind of activity engaged in by young people, such as "hanging out" together.'<sup>6</sup> At the core is a need to distinguish 'gangs' from 'gang-related behaviour' and again from youth subcultures.

Research conducted into youth gangs, violence and anti-social behaviour reported a typology of visible groups, which are clearly not all negative nor criminal, and even

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<sup>4</sup> Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission on the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*, 2017, p. 7, accessed via

[http://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Submissions](http://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Submissions)

<sup>5</sup> R White, 2007, 'Youth gangs, violence and anti-social behaviour', Evidence into Action Topical Paper, April 2007, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, Canberra.

<sup>6</sup> R White, S Perrone, C Guerra & R Lampugnani, 1999, 'Ethnic Youth Gangs in Australia: Do they exist?' Overview Paper, Australian Multicultural Foundation, accessed via [http://amf.net.au/library/uploads/files/Ethnic\\_Youth\\_Gangs\\_Overview.pdf](http://amf.net.au/library/uploads/files/Ethnic_Youth_Gangs_Overview.pdf)



when criminal, are not 'gang' related. As indicated below, there are a range of activities that are often referred to as 'gangs', and not all are negative neither are all are related to anti-social or criminal actions.<sup>7</sup>

**Youth movements** – which are social movements characterised by a distinctive mode of dress or other bodily adornments, a leisure time preference, and other distinguishing features (e.g., punk rockers).

**Youth groups** – which are comprised of small clusters of young people who hang out together in public places such as shopping centres (e.g., sometimes referred to as 'mallies').

**Criminal groups** – which are small clusters of friends who band together, usually for a short period of time, to commit crime primarily for financial gain (may contain young and not so young adults as well).

**Wannabe groups** – which include young people who band together in a loosely structured group primarily to engage in spontaneous social activity and exciting, impulsive, criminal activity including collective violence against other groups of youths (e.g., territorial and use identifying markers of some kind).

**Street gangs** – which are groups of young people and young adults who band together to form a semi-structured organisation, the primary purpose of which is to engage in planned and profitable criminal behaviour or organised violence against rival street gangs (e.g., less visible but more permanent than other groups)

**Criminal business organisation** – which are groups that exhibit a formal structure and a high degree of sophistication, comprised mainly of adults, and which engage in criminal activity primarily for economic reasons and almost invariably maintain a low profile (e.g., may have a name but rarely visible).

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<sup>7</sup> R White, 2007, 'Youth gangs, violence and anti-social behaviour', Evidence into Action Topical Paper, April 2007, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, Canberra, p.11.





Source: 'Youth gangs, Violence and Anti-social Behaviour', ARACY<sup>8</sup>

Youth Action and MYAN NSW would therefore endorse and reiterate the evidence provided to the inquiry by MYAN Australia who assert that there is no evidence of a 'gang' issue, as confirmed by Victorian police: 'They don't have a club house, they don't have colours. These are a group of young people committing these offenses, engaged in thrill seeking behaviour.'<sup>9</sup>

False labelling of visible groups of young people will have a negative impact on social networks and hence a sense of 'belonging', which has been demonstrated as an important part of settling well. This is particularly important in light of research undertaken in 2013 which demonstrated the visibility and public nature of migrant social networks. Data gathered from over 500 young people in Brisbane and Melbourne demonstrated that the social networks of migrant young people were situated in 'Shopping Centres' (56.8% of the sample liked to go there the most), followed by the 'Park' (47.9%) and 'Movie Theatre' (45.9%). Church, mosque or place of worship followed after that (40.3%), preceding 'Sports Facilities', 'Library', 'Community Centre' and 'Other'.<sup>10</sup> These networks for young people from migrant backgrounds were particularly important in fostering feelings of belonging.

**Recommendation 8:** The Inquiry seek to define what a 'gang' or 'gang' related activity is in the Australian context to guide its report and recommendations

In taking a balanced approach, an acknowledgement of anti-social and/or violent behaviour is important to provide the best support, prevention, and early intervention for young people. It is important to note that anti-social behaviour is not unique to refugee and/or migrant young people. We further support an approach that recognises

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<sup>8</sup> R White, 2007, 'Youth gangs, violence and anti-social behaviour', Evidence into Action Topical Paper, April 2007, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, Canberra, p.11.

<sup>9</sup> R Hill, Assistant Commissioner Victoria Police, as quoted in 9News, 2016, *Apex gang filmed violently ambushing teenager in Melbourne car park*, published online 28 April 2016, accessed via <http://www.9news.com.au/national/2016/04/28/18/58/apex-gang-filmed-violently-ambushing-teenager-in-melbourne-car-park>

<sup>10</sup> F Mansouri & Z Skrbis, 2013, *Migrant Youth in Australia: Social Networks, Belonging and Active Citizenship (Summary Report)*, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Deakin University, Melbourne, p. 7, accessed via [http://www.deakin.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/91307/Migrant-Youth-in-Australia.pdf](http://www.deakin.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/91307/Migrant-Youth-in-Australia.pdf)





culture as a strength, not a 'problem', and that takes a culturally intelligent approach to addressing risk.

Young people who engage in anti-social behaviour often compel a justice frame, spurring a security, or a law and order response. Community safety is important but it is important to note that they are children and young people first and foremost. This invokes different considerations, as children and young people are different to adults. Affirmed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development, and their emotional and educational needs.'<sup>11</sup>

Defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are those under the age of 18. Young people, on the other hand, are often defined as those aged 12 – 25, and also require unique consideration because, like children, they have different needs and capacities to adults, but their needs and capacities are again very different from children and are at a specific life stage. 'Youth' is a critical period in which young people experience increasing levels of independence, coupled with ongoing development of their capacity. This heightened independence often changes the role of family in their lives, shifting it from a central protective factor to one alongside several other factors, such as friends, partners, other adult role models, self-identity and more. It is now well established that young people experience a key period of rapid and extensive psychological and biological growth, 'second only to early childhood in the rate and breadth of developmental change'.<sup>12</sup> This provides an enormous opportunity for young people to rehabilitate and get back on track.

Children and young people have a right to care and protection, and we submit that this should be the first response engaged when considering the outcomes of young people, not solely a justice frame. In many circumstances we should be viewing anti-social behaviour or disengagement as a child protection issue, rather than a justice or security issue. This invokes a different response that is characterised by support and protection for the child and young person.

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<sup>11</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2007, 'Children's Rights in Juvenile Justice', p.5 (III: 10). accessed via <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.GC.10.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organisation, 2014, 'Health for the World's Adolescents: A second chance in the second decade', p. 3, accessed via [http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/files/1612\\_MNCAH\\_HWA\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/files/1612_MNCAH_HWA_Executive_Summary.pdf)



Self-exploration and identity formation is central to a young person's growth and development. As the UNHCR states: 'The process of identity formation which is part of adolescence may be particularly complex for young people being affected by the overlay of the refugee experience, cultural adjustment and the practical demands of resettlement.'<sup>13</sup> At this stage of significant growth, largely due to neurological changes, there are heightened circumstances for risk as a result of cognitive, psychological and behavioural factors.<sup>14</sup> Risk and protective factors can either increase or decrease the likelihood of young people engaging in anti-social or violent behaviours. Risk and protective factors occur at the individual, family and peer relationships, the community, and societal level. As stated by the World Health Organisation, 'the more risk factors that accumulate in an individual or in a particular setting, the higher the likelihood that the individual will become involved in youth violence or that violence occurs in a certain setting'.<sup>15</sup> There are many factors which contribute to the social marginalisation and disengagement of young people, irrespective of whether they are Australian-born or from a refugee or migrant background. Some risk factors include:

- Socio-economic disadvantage
- Exposure to family violence and family breakdown
- Unemployment
- Poor housing
- Exposure to crime
- Poor health, including mental health
- Disability
- Social isolation and poor relationships with adults.<sup>16</sup>

Australian research on violent and anti-social behaviour in young people highlights the importance of not only individual beliefs or behaviour but broader influences on young people, specifically that 'their beliefs and behaviours are influenced by things that

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<sup>13</sup> N Liddy & H deAnstiss, 2016, 'National youth settlement framework', *Proceedings of the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> S Hephill & R Smith, 2010, 'Preventing youth violence: What does and doesn't work and why? An overview of the evidence on approaches and programs', prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Melbourne: Centre for Adolescent Health, Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> World Health Organisation, 2015, 'Preventing youth violence: An overview of the evidence', p. 13, accessed via [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/181008/1/9789241509251\\_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1&ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/181008/1/9789241509251_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1&ua=1)

<sup>16</sup> J Burns, P Collins, M Blanchard, N De-Freitas & S Lloyd, 2008, 'Preventing Youth Disengagement and Promoting Engagement' prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth by the Inspire Foundation and ORYGEN Youth Health Research Centre, accessed via [https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download\\_file/id/120/filename/Preventing\\_Youth\\_Disengagement\\_and\\_Promoting\\_Engagement.pdf](https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/120/filename/Preventing_Youth_Disengagement_and_Promoting_Engagement.pdf)



happen within and around them.’<sup>17</sup> Research also concludes that ‘the behaviours of family, friends, neighbours and teachers all influence a young person’s view of the world and where they fit into it.’<sup>18</sup> This further highlights how attitudes, exclusion and marginalisation can be contributing factors in a young person’s disengagement.

Social cohesion is important to consider, as a lack of social cohesion, or social exclusion, is known to increase the risk of an individual’s involvement in crime.<sup>19</sup> The Australian Human Rights Commission defines social cohesion as ‘positive social relationships – it is the bond or “glue” that binds people.’<sup>20</sup> A socially cohesive Australia would promote the welfare, trust, belonging, mobility and sense of community of all Australians and work towards ensuring that no one is marginalised.<sup>21</sup> However, the 2016 ‘Mapping Social Cohesion’ report found an increase in discrimination, with 20% of respondents reporting discrimination – the highest level yet recorded in nine years.<sup>22</sup> Rates of reported discrimination were higher for young people, with 32.1% of people aged 18-24 years reporting discrimination on a racial or religious basis within the last year.<sup>23</sup> This is true of the experience of young people in NSW, who tell us that racial discrimination and the negative portrayal of refugee and migrants in the media is a key contributor to feeling like they ‘do not belong’ or ‘feel welcome’ in Australia.

Aforementioned research found the importance of engaging in social networks to a young migrant’s sense of belonging, but it also uncovered racism as one of the largest barriers to social network engagement for young migrants. The research stated that ‘for African and Arabic-speaking young people, direct experience of overt racism was the greatest single factor for social withdrawal. For Pacific Islanders, most experiences leading to self-exclusion were related to collective stereotyping and more implicit forms of discrimination.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2009, ‘Violent and antisocial behaviours among young adolescents in Australian communities’, ARACY, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, 2015, ‘Crime Prevention Approaches, Theory and Mechanisms’, Australian Government, Canberra, [http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rpp/100-120/rpp120/07\\_approaches.html](http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rpp/100-120/rpp120/07_approaches.html)

<sup>20</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015, ‘Building social cohesion in our communities: A summary of the online resource for local government’, developed by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government for the Australian Human Rights Commission under the National Anti-Racism Strategy, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*; A Markus, 2016, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, Scanlon Foundation, p. 4, accessed via <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-Mapping-Social-Cohesion-Report-FINAL-with-covers.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> A Markus, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> F Mansouri & Z Skrbis, 2013, *op.sit.* p. 14.



Discrimination and social cohesion are also linked to other outcomes for young people. In 2016 there was a study into the predictors of school completion eight to nine years after resettlement in Australia. It found that perceived discrimination was one of the most significant predictors for not completing school.<sup>25</sup> This reflects the importance of social inclusion for young people settling in Australia to find education and subsequent employment. Another study about social inclusion demonstrated that 'over their first three years of settlement, the significant predictors of subjective health and wellbeing were: region of birth, age, time in Australia, sense of control, family and peer support, perceived performance at school, subjective social status of their families in the broader Australian community, and experiences of discrimination and bullying.'<sup>26</sup>

The year 2016 also saw a decrease in Australians' sense of belonging according to the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion. In this period, 91% of people felt a sense of belonging, a significant decrease from 94-96% in the 2007-2012 period.<sup>27</sup> Such marginalisation is exacerbated by negative rhetoric used by politicians and decision makers in the media. It is crucial that a national conversation around the involvement of young people from migrant backgrounds in criminal activity is framed in a way that does not further marginalise and alienate young people or undermine social cohesion.

Furthermore, if a 'gang' becomes associated with a particular ethnicity there is a risk of racial profiling from police and the community. It is important to consider that all sorts of people participate in gang activity, including Anglo-Australians, and not to conflate violent behaviour with cultural identity. For example, the Apex gang is predominantly made up of people from Sudanese or Somali backgrounds and this is often the focus of media reports. Young people have reported feeling targeted by police just because they are in a group and look Sudanese or Somali.<sup>28</sup> When discussing young migrants and refugees in the media it is important not to make young people feel as though they must identify with gang activity in order to connect with their own culture.

**Recommendation 9:** Young people must be part of defining their own narrative, that is true to their culture and place in Australia. The Inquiry should challenge stereotypes and

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<sup>25</sup> I Correa-Velez, S M Gifford, C McMichael, R Sampson, 2016, 'Predictors of Secondary School Completion Among Refugee Youth 8 to 9 Years After Resettlement in Melbourne, Australia', *Journal of International Migration and Integration* pp.1-15.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> S Farnsworth, 2016, 'Young South Sudanese 'constantly stopped' by police, as community grapples with Apex Stigma' accessed 13 February 2017 via <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-04/young-south-sudanese-constantly-stopped-by-police/8078642>



assumptions regarding young people in its report, as well as ensure there is ample opportunity for young people to participate in policy decisions that impact their life, including in the inquiry process itself.

There have been a number of evidence reviews nationally and internationally that demonstrate that there is the knowledge and programs necessary to support young people, and create positive changes for individuals and communities that is specific to violence and antisocial behaviour.<sup>29</sup>

To combat marginalisation and youth disengagement, it is essential that mainstream services working in employment, health, mental health, education, domestic violence and disability contexts are skilled in working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The best protection against youth disengagement is ensuring young people have access to early intervention programs, which mitigate against risk factors, supporting young people to be engaged in their community, and helping them feel valued and develop a sense of belonging.

**Recommendation 9:** Improve access to youth specific and culturally intelligent early intervention programs that utilise the skilled youth workforce to counter anti-social behaviour.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2009, 'Violent and antisocial behaviours among young adolescents in Australian communities'; S Hephill & R Smith, 2010, 'Preventing youth violence: What does and doesn't work and why? An overview of the evidence on approaches and programs', prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Melbourne: Centre for Adolescent Health, Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne; World Health Organisation, 2015, 'Preventing youth violence: An overview of the evidence', accessed via [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/181008/1/9789241509251\\_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1&ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/181008/1/9789241509251_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1&ua=1)