



# Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN Australia)

## Submission to the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism

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May 2017

## MYAN Australia

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) is Australia's national peak body representing multicultural youth issues. MYAN works in partnership with young people, government and non-government agencies to support a nationally consistent approach to addressing the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in policy and service delivery.

MYAN has partners in each of Australia's states and territories through which it facilitates a national approach to youth settlement and a multicultural youth specialist approach across Australia. MYAN also works directly with young people to build their leadership and advocacy skills and supports a national Youth Ambassador's Network, with representatives from each of Australia's states and territories.

## About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee's Inquiry into ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion. A strong multicultural and socially cohesive Australia is particularly significant for young people, especially those who arrive in Australia as refugees and migrants and those born in Australia to refugee or migrant parents. Multiculturalism is also supported by the majority of Australians, with the Scanlon Foundation reporting that 83% of respondents supported multiculturalism<sup>1</sup>.

This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on MYAN's broad networks with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities, and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia.

## Introduction

Since 1945, more than seven million people have migrated to Australia, contributing to one of the most diverse nations in the world. Multiculturalism is a central tenet of Australian national identity and is a valuable asset to the country in an era of globalisation. 25% of Australia's youth population are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background<sup>2</sup>.

Australia has a strong history of promoting and celebrating cultural diversity, with well-established policy and legislative frameworks to support social cohesion and a successful culturally diverse, multicultural community. For ethnic communities, cultural expression and intra-ethnic bonds are important for creating strong, supportive networks, positive identity formation and wellbeing, which all support new arrivals to settle well.

MYAN has welcomed the Government's recently released Multicultural Statement, *United, Strong and Successful*, through which the Government reinforces the success of Australia as a multicultural nation, promotes the principle of mutual respect and denounces racial hatred and discrimination as incompatible with Australian society. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull states that: 'Australia is one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world'<sup>3</sup>. The Statement reinforces multiculturalism as a central tenet of Australian national

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<sup>1</sup> Markus A (2016), Mapping Social Cohesion 2016: National Report, The Scanlon Foundation Surveys

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011), CALD Youth Census Report

<sup>3</sup> 'Multicultural Australia: United; Strong Successful', Australia's Multicultural Statement, Department of Social Services, March 2017

identity and a valuable asset to the country in an era of globalisation. The fundamental principal articulated through the Statement is the recognition of cultural diversity as one of the great strengths of Australia. MYAN has also welcomed the Statement as complementing other Government policies and programs that, together with numerous community and volunteer activities, inspire, support and sustain social cohesion and multiculturalism.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness with the potential to be active participants in and contributors to Australian society. However, they commonly face a range of barriers to achieving this potential. These include negotiating the developmental tasks of adolescence within a context of cultural dislocation and sometimes complex peer and family relationships, racism and discrimination and, for those more newly arrived, limited social capital and unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including education, health, income support). These factors can place them at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which can mean they are at higher risk of social and economic isolation.

## Response to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

### **a. The views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities**

MYAN regularly consults with CALD young people on their experience of settling in Australia and inclusion in the community. Through international and domestic programs and forums such as the Australian component of the Global Refugee Youth Consultations and MYAN's National Multicultural Youth Summit (FUSE), we know that for young people, dealing with issues of racism and discrimination is an issue that they experience regularly. Racism and discrimination and its impact is commonly identified as the key priority issue.

For young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, identity formation is influenced by a sense of belonging in terms of nationality (and significantly, government policy agendas around Multiculturalism), cultural identity and family, and by the response from the broader society to themselves and to their community. Positive settlement in Australia for young people is inextricably connected to a sense of belonging amongst family members, peers, their own cultural community and the broader community – where cultural and religious diversity is valued and welcomed.<sup>4</sup> Positive settlement can be profoundly impacted by experiences of exclusion, racism, discrimination, racial and cultural stereotyping and vilification.

### **b. The adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities**

Australia is considered a world leader in the provision of settlement services to recently arrived migrants and refugees. Recent reviews have indicated that they are generally working well and are achieving their objectives; are broadly meeting client needs; and, are having a clear and lasting impact on client outcomes and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hunter, F. Amato, D. & Kellock, W. (2015). *The people they make us welcome: A sense of belonging for newly arrived young people*, Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth

<sup>5</sup> Ernst & Young (2015). *Evaluation of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support programmes*. Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Social Services.

The provision of settlement support services underpins Australia's commitment to providing a path and a means for eligible migrants and new arrivals to achieve full participation and adjust to their new society. These principles have played a key role in the success of our multicultural society, supporting the economic benefits of diversity and maintaining high levels of social cohesion.

No other comparative country has the scope and focus of Australia's settlement services, including a comparable investment in youth settlement support. This includes the government's investment in the work of the MYAN, which has recently developed the National Youth Settlement Framework. This Framework is the first of its kind in Australia and internationally, designed to support an evidence-based approach and measure good practice in youth settlement.

Australia has distinguished itself as a world leader in settlement through the investment in youth approaches in settlement services, and structures that support this. While these are important developments, improvements could strengthen and better coordinate this investment.

MYAN has written at length about the adequacy and accessibility of settlement services in meeting the needs of young people in settlement. We refer the Committee to our recent submission to the Joint Standing Committee Inquiry in Migrant Settlement Outcomes - found [here](#).

Key recommendations in relation to settlement and social inclusion services for young people are:

- Develop a national youth settlement strategy to support a more targeted, consistent and coordinated approach to meeting the settlement needs of young people.
- Improve consistency in youth settlement services through benchmarking that is embedded in national guidelines, based on the National Youth Settlement Framework.
- Improve nationally consistent data collection to monitor and measure settlement outcomes for young people – to allow comparative analysis across sites and over time and build a robust evidence-base.
- Invest in research that examines the factors that contribute to and support successful settlement outcomes for young people.
- Invest in multicultural youth specialist services in each state and territory to facilitate a nationally consistent and coordinated approach to youth settlement.
- Expand the eligibility criteria for the Settlement Services Program, so that support can be based on need rather than a defined time period or visa sub class.
- Expand the definition of youth in settlement services to include young people between the ages of 12 and 15 years.
- Invest in support to assist families and communities to help young people in their settlement journey.
- Ensure the mainstream sector is well-equipped to support young people to settle well through investing in initiatives that:
  - Facilitate collaboration between the settlement and mainstream sectors and
  - Build the capacity of mainstream services to ensure they are effectively responding to the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

- Increase investment in youth-centered support in health, education, employment and sport and recreation
- Invest in initiatives that foster social cohesion and community harmony, including activities and programs that bring together diverse groups of young people to build their social connections, build social capital and strengthen a sense of belonging in Australian society.

### **Duration of access to settlement services**

Supporting young people to settle well in Australia requires services and systems to remain flexible and responsive to the changing needs and challenges facing newly arrived young people over time. Increasing the period of time and the flexibility of when settlement support and social inclusion services can be accessed would improve the adequacy and effectiveness of the support system.

It is important to recognise that the needs of refugee and migrant young people continue beyond the first five years of settlement. This requires an investment in structures, policy and programs that ensure all young people, regardless of cultural background or migration history, can access the support and opportunities they need to feel they belong, and be active participants in and contributors to all aspects of Australian society.

### **c. The adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes**

Adequate data collection and research on racially motivated crimes is critical to building a robust evidence-base for evaluation, policy and programming. There is some valuable data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes, including the annual Mission Australia *Youth Survey*<sup>6</sup> and the Scanlon Foundation's annual Mapping Social Cohesion survey and report<sup>7</sup>. The research of the Scanlon Foundation is particularly important in building an evidence-base in relation to the strength of multiculturalism and social cohesion (including the prevalence of racism and discrimination in Australian society).

MYAN notes a number of papers that highlight the importance of (and deficiencies in) adequate data collection on racially motivated crimes. This includes the Australian Human Rights Commission *Agenda for Racial Equality 2012-2016*. This report notes that, "There is currently no comprehensive process in Australia for collecting data on crimes motivated by racial hatred or prejudice. Building our knowledge and understanding of the nature and incidence of racially motivated violence can:

- Inform policy responses by different levels of government to ensure the safety of vulnerable groups;
- Better equip law enforcement agencies to deal with these issues; and
- Contribute to the development of law reform initiatives at state and federal level."<sup>8</sup>

The 2011 Australian Institute for Criminology report, *Crimes against International Students in Australia; 2005-2009*, notes that "Determining the motivation for offending would best be achieved by the development and implementation of a large-scale crime victimisation survey of international students, but also Australian migrant populations as a whole. This

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<sup>6</sup> Bailey, V., Baker, A-M., Cave, L., Fildes, J., Perrens, B., Plummer, J. and Wearing, A. 2016, Mission Australia's 2016 Youth Survey Report, Mission Australia

<sup>7</sup> Markus A (2016), Mapping Social Cohesion (2016): National Report, The Scanlon Foundation Surveys

<sup>8</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) *Agenda for Racial Equality 2012-2016*, Sydney

would enable an assessment of the nature and extent of victimisation, the extent of under-reporting and other reporting issues, and identify more of the risk or causative factors for reduced or increased likelihood of victimisation.”<sup>9</sup>

MYAN is concerned that there may have been no or limited progress over the five years since these reports and defers to other submissions to this Inquiry with particular expertise in this area.

We also recommend that this Committee investigate the capacity of the ABS to collect data in relation to racially motivated crimes in its national crime victimisation survey, and engage translation and interpreting services to undertake this work. The ABS produce reports on victims of crime for a range of offences recorded by police over a 12 month period. The data is provided by state and territory police agencies and provides some breakdown of victims by category (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; Family and Domestic Violence). However, it does not indicate whether victims are from CALD backgrounds.

#### **d. The impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief**

The 2013 Report *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia* by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration provided strong evidence ‘that the impact of race discrimination and prejudice is real, is becoming more pervasive, and can be deeply traumatic for the individuals who experience it’.<sup>10</sup>

For young people, racism and discrimination is an ever-present reality and commonly identified by young people in MYAN’s networks as the most significant issue they face. A national study conducted by Mission Australia in 2016 found a third of all young Australians surveyed experienced unfair treatment or discrimination based on their race in the last year, with rates of racial discrimination reaching up to 90% among respondents from some non-English speaking backgrounds<sup>11</sup>.

More broadly, evidence of the prevalence and impact of discrimination and exclusion is available through the annual national Scanlon studies on social cohesion in Australia, *Mapping Social Cohesion*. The 2016 survey documented an increase in the reported experience of discrimination, which rose from 15% in 2015 to 20% in 2016 – the highest proportion recorded over the nine annual Scanlon Foundation surveys.<sup>12</sup>

The 2016 survey reported that the most common experience of discrimination made recipients feel that they did not belong (56% of those who experienced discrimination); 55% indicated verbal abuse; 17% were not offered work or were not treated fairly at work; 10% had their property damaged; and 8% were physically attacked.<sup>13</sup>

For young people, the experience of racism and discrimination can have a particularly significant impact on participation and their sense of belonging in Australia. We know through our work directly with young people that the experience of racism, of verbal and physical abuse, commonly has a highly detrimental impact on young people’s sense of identity and their mental health. Young people are experiencing a particularly significant

<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute for Criminology (2011) *Crimes against International Students in Australia; 2005-2009*, Canberra

<sup>10</sup> *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Canberra March 2013*, 3.62

<sup>11</sup> *op.cit*

<sup>12</sup> Markus A (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion 2016: National Report*, The Scanlon Foundation Surveys

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

developmental stage where they are negotiating identity and their place in the world – their place (and interdependence) within their family, community and the broader Australian society. Experiences of racism and discrimination, implicit or explicit, send clear messages of exclusion and can lead to isolation - diminishing a young person’s sense of connection and belonging to their community and broader society, creating a sense of marginalisation and diminishing participation in education, employment or recreational activities.<sup>14</sup> This can have a detrimental impact on mental health, psychological development and capacity to negotiate the transition to adulthood. In so doing, young people’s experience of racism and discrimination, causes harm not only to individuals, but to the wider community, and undermines social cohesion.

The MYAN has recently developed the National Youth Settlement Framework to support a targeted and consistent approach to addressing the needs of newly arrived young people settling in Australia. The Framework focuses on supporting young people to become active and engaged members of Australian society and provides a set of indicators for benchmarking and measuring settlement outcomes for young people. Freedom from racism and discrimination, community engagement and social networks, an understanding and enjoyment of civil and political rights are all key indicators that facilitate the active participation (and contributions) of young people in all aspects of Australian society. If young people are able to actively participate in economic, social, and civic life, they build the relationships, skills and networks, i.e. the social capital, that enables them to develop a sense of belonging in and connection to Australian society.

**e. The impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief**

Young people identify sections of the media as specifically negative towards CALD young people and refugees and also note the significant impact that the media and political leadership can have – both to strengthen and undermine social cohesion.

A recent example has been the very prominent (negative) media attention on criminal activity of a small number of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Victoria. This reporting has contributed to a rise in concerns for community safety in Victoria and, while there has been an increase in the violent nature and frequency of certain offences, this has been among a small group of young repeat offenders.<sup>15</sup>

A review of available evidence suggests that despite continuous reference to ‘migrant youth gangs’ and the ethnicity of young offenders, the level of overseas born young people participating in criminal activity in Victoria is not indicative of a large scale migrant youth problem or endemic issues within Australia’s migration programme. In fact, overseas born young people are actually underrepresented in Victorian crime statistics, with just 12% of young offenders born overseas in 2015/16 while overseas born young people make up 17% of Victoria’s youth population.<sup>16</sup> See MYAN’s submission to *The Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes* for more information.

Young people in MYAN’s networks have also noted that negative media and political

<sup>14</sup> Mansouri, F, Jenkins, L & Leach, M (2009) Cultural diversity and migrant youth in secondary schools, Youth Identity and Migration

<sup>15</sup> MYAN (2017) submission to The Joint Standing Committee on Migration Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

<sup>16</sup> MYAN (2014). *The CALD Youth Census Report*. Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)

leadership can have a detrimental impact on their sense of safety and security – particularly for those young people from refugee backgrounds, who have come to Australia seeking protection from persecution and human rights abuses. This group of young people particularly value the legislative and policy frameworks that protect human rights in Australia, including protection under law from racial vilification. They feel these are undermined through misconceptions and stereotypes in the media and divisive political leadership. This can have a profound impact on a young person’s sense of belonging, undermining faith in democratic frameworks that uphold human rights.

All levels of government need to avoid misrepresentations and stereotyping of refugee and migrant young people in public narratives and ensure strong leadership to support rather than undermine social cohesion. This requires conscientious leadership, from government, from the media, from the community and civil society. This leadership must be reflective of the power of words – for promoting community harmony and social cohesion, and undermining it.

**f. How to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief**

Promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion and multiculturalism depends on leadership at the political, business and community levels. Improving expected standards of public discussion on these issues must begin with strong political leadership. MYAN commends the Government’s recently released statement on multiculturalism partly for this reason, noting that this provides the foundation, along with a policy and legislative environment (at the state and commonwealth levels), to foster a culturally diverse, successful multicultural society. The Racial Discrimination Act, and upholding Section 18C in its current form, is also important in this regard.

**g. How to better recognize and value the contributions that diverse communities bring to Australian society and community life**

Recognising and valuing the contributions of diverse communities to Australia society and community life can be better achieved through positive images and stories in the mainstream media, school curriculum, (local) community education, and utilising social media. There are a range of existing initiatives in that can be built on, including within the AFL and other sporting codes, and within the business community.

MYAN promotes positive stories and contributions of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at every opportunity, conscious also of tackling racial and cultural stereotyping and misconceptions, as well as highlighting commonalities between young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and the Australian-born population. We consider this an important part of our work in strengthening multiculturalism and social cohesion. Our partners at the state and territory level also support programs that build the public speaking skills of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to engage with diverse community groups, government and the business sector - opportunities for young people to share their stories within the broader community, and with those who may have more limited exposure to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

In addition, building cross-cultural awareness through school and community programs and networks offers important opportunities to increase community understanding and awareness of the benefits of diversity, multiculturalism and social inclusion.



#### **h. The potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation**

The MYAN notes the importance of policy and legislative frameworks across jurisdictions, in addition to the federal government's multicultural policy framework (e.g. Racial Discrimination Act, state/territory Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Acts), in supporting a socially inclusive, multicultural Australia.

The 2013 Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia*, discussed these potential benefits and disadvantages<sup>17</sup>. Canada (since 1988) as well as Victoria and New South Wales have enshrined multiculturalism in legislation.

Legislation which incorporated the principles of multiculturalism would reflect the Commonwealth's commitment to Australia's cultural diversity and principles/policy of multiculturalism as fundamental to social inclusion and cohesion.

However, as the Australian Human Rights Commission noted in 2012, to have impact, such legislation would also need appropriate machinery of government to ensure that multiculturalism is supported by a whole-of government response.<sup>18</sup>

#### **i. The potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission**

MYAN considers that establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council would strengthen the foundation on which it operates and we would welcome this if it also strengthened measures to build a robust evidence-base (including accountability in relation to policy) on the benefits of multiculturalism.

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<sup>17</sup> *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia*, Joint Standing Committee on Migration Canberra March 2013 6.54 – 6.61, pp 118-120.

<sup>18</sup> Dr Helen Szoke in Committee, Hansard 23 Feb 2012 p.4. (*Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Canberra March 2013*)