

Everyone should be
heard, no matter your
race, culture, religion...
no matter what.



The experiences of
young people from
refugee and migrant
backgrounds in NSW



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and cultures. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We would also like to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture within the NSW community.

We also acknowledge the young people who participated in the development of this report for sharing their experiences. ACYP extends its gratitude and thanks to those young people.

If you or someone you know requires support, there is always hope and there is always help available. For support, contact Lifeline on **13 11 14** (at any time, 24/7) or visit [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au) and Kids Helpline on **1800 55 1800** (at any time, 24/7).

Advocate's Foreword

Since starting this piece of work, as so often happens with our work, the world has changed and we find ourselves facing new issues and challenges. This piece of work gives us an opportunity to reflect on the wonderful, diverse community that we have here in New South Wales and the young refugees and migrants that help make up that community.

NSW has over 307 different ancestries, 215 languages spoken and 146 religions practised. We are a beautifully diverse state. This report was an opportunity for us to lift up the voices of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in NSW. The team did an incredible job in ensuring that all young people who wanted to participate could, including engaging translators and support agencies to ensure that the young people could share in the language they were most comfortable to speak in and that they had support should they need it.

The schools that participated in this work showed a keen interest in ensuring their students could share their experiences and were incredibly supportive. What was clear is that education plays an important role in the lives of these young people. That they value and cherish that opportunity. We need to continue to ensure the education settings are inclusive and ensure access to resources and supports that enable all young people to thrive, including those from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

I had the opportunity to sit with a number of groups and one moment stands out for me with one young woman. I asked what word in English that they have learnt that is significant for them. This one young woman said "respect". Something we are all entitled to from our fellow humans. I am glad this young woman felt respected in their community and I hope that we continue to strive to ensure respect for all children and young people.

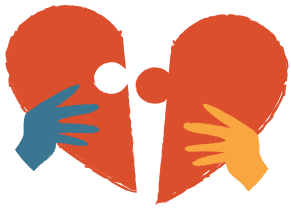
The young people who participated in this work shared with us their culture and their stories bravely. They wanted to ensure that by doing so there is opportunity for us to grow as a community in welcoming refugee and migrant young people, but also that we can understand and appreciate their cultures. We know the power of lifting up the voices of children and young people, and the team and these young people have demonstrated how powerful it is when we ensure those that are often not heard have an opportunity to be heard.

Thank you to all the young people who participated in this work. It has been a special piece of work for this office, and you have taught us all so much. Thank you to the schools and services that supported the work and ensure that young people were heard and could participate. We have an opportunity now to hear these young people, ensure they are respected and included but importantly to ensure that the experience of children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is highlighted and seen for the unique experience that it is.

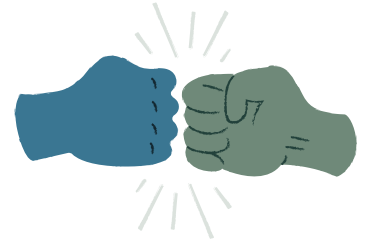


Zoë Robinson

The NSW Advocate for Children
and Young People



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Introduction

The *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024 (Strategic Plan)* identifies six commitments to children and young people. These were developed in response to what children and young people told ACYP was important to them over a number of consultations, over a number of years. ACYP has focused on two commitments each year of the three year plan. In 2024, the two focus commitments were:



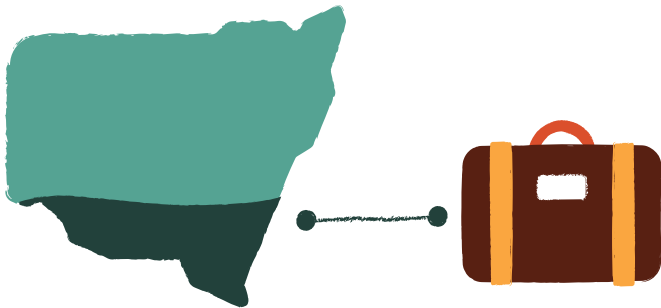
Love, connection and safety includes ensuring all children and young people:

- feel safe, loved and nurtured;
- can connect and build friendships with others;
- feel that they belong to a wider community, social or cultural group; and
- are free from neglect, abuse and violence.



Hope for the future includes ensuring all children and young people:

- develop their learnings and interests through education, training and skills development which supports them to grow and prepares them for their future; and
- to be independent, engage in society and to join the workforce.



According to the 2021 Census, **29.3%** of the overall population of NSW was born overseas.¹

People arrive and settle in NSW for a variety of reasons and Australia's migration policy organises its visas into three main categories, the 'Skilled' stream, the 'Family and Child' stream, and the 'Humanitarian' stream.



1. The 'Skilled' Stream

For workers with specific skills, qualifications and entrepreneurship most needed in the Australian economy.



2. The 'Family and Child' Stream

To enable the permanent migration of close family members, of Australian citizens, permanent residents, and eligible New Zealand citizens.



3. The 'Humanitarian' Stream

For those seeking asylum or protection under international obligations.

¹ The Population Experts. (2024). *New South Wales: Birthplace*.

Settlement by migration stream, by state

For the last 10 financial years

● Humanitarian ● Family ● Skilled

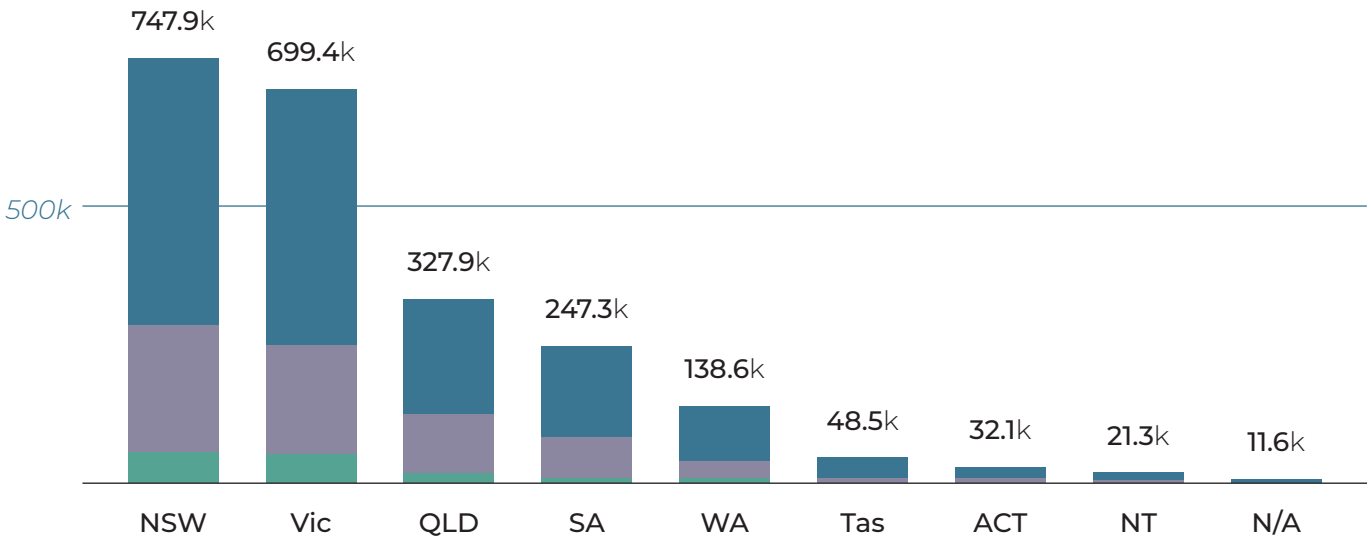


Figure 1: Settlement in Australian states and territories by migration stream, 2013–2023.

As seen in Figure 1, NSW is the largest settlement area in Australia and a significant portion of this demographic include children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. As seen in Figure 2, in 2023 alone, over 50,000 children and young people aged 0 – 24 years settled in NSW.² Children and young people accounted for almost half of all humanitarian and skilled visas and a third of family visas.³ Over 80% of all new arrivals settle in the Sydney region with the majority of these children and young people live in vibrant Western Sydney.⁴ Outside of Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Armidale, Wagga Wagga, Albury and Coffs Harbour have been designated as primary settlement locations for NSW under the Humanitarian Settlement Program.⁵

Children and Young People Settling in NSW

● Humanitarian ● Family ● Skilled

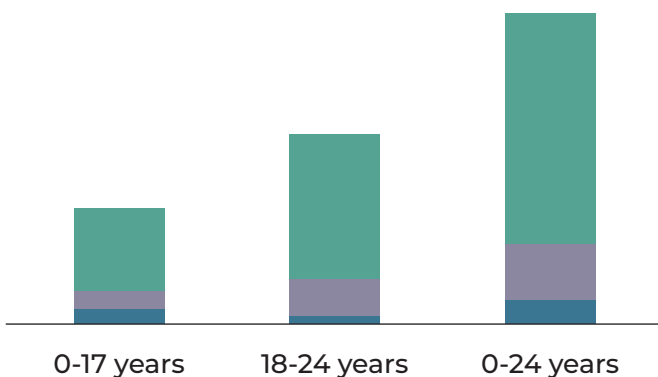


Figure 2: Children and young people aged 0 – 24 years who have settled in NSW by migration stream, 2023.

Throughout ACYP’s broader consultations and polling over the last five years, children and young people from a refugee or migrant background have consistently been identified as a cohort who overcome barriers to thrive in NSW. Throughout consultations, ACYP has heard young refugees and migrants can face barriers while they learn English, gain confidence in their language skills and navigate a new environment. This reality often limits their capacity to access resources and support and can hinder their ability to express their needs and concerns let alone feel heard in their community. It also has significant impacts on their settlement journey and can lead to social isolation and disconnection from community.

² Department of Immigration. (2023). *Settlement Data Reports Calendar Year 2023 by Migration Scheme*.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ ACYP. (2024). *Strategic Plan Research*, in field from 16 – 30 August 2024.

⁵ Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs. (2024). *Humanitarian Settlement in Regional Australia*.

These experiences were highlighted in the consultations with children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds that informed the *Strategic Plan*. ACYP's 2024 Strategic Plan Tracking polling indicates young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are more likely to feel unsafe at work and rate the level of respect they feel at university/ TAFE or college, their ability to eat a balanced and healthy diet and access enough clothing poorly.⁶

More broadly speaking, young people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse in this polling were more likely to feel unhappy at the time of completing the survey.⁷ In 2023, ethnic, cultural background or skin colour were the top four reasons young people who had experienced bullying identified as what they were bullied about.

To better understand their experiences and their insights about what could help during their settlement journey, ACYP committed to undertake targeted consultations with children and young people from a refugee or migrant background in 2024. Aligned with the two core commitment areas of the Strategic Plan, these consultations focused on hearing from children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds about their:



Sense of belonging and community.



Identity and culture.



Hopes for the future in terms of education and employment aspirations.

For the purpose of this work, the ACYP team consulted with three cohorts and have sought to define these:

Refugees

Someone who has been forced to leave their country due to war, violence, conflict or the risk of being treated unfairly or cruelly because of who they are, what they believe or where they are from. Refugees often do not have a choice around leaving and they will often not return to their home country.

Migrants

Someone who moves away from their country of birth to another country. They may choose to do this for work, study or family or because their birth country is not safe.

Second generation migrant

The child or young person of a migrant as defined above.

This report reflects the stories, challenges, highlights and hopes of these young people.

⁶ ACYP. (2024). *Strategic Plan Research*, in field from 16 – 30 August 2024.
⁷ Ibid.

Recommendations

In the planning of these consultations in addition to the drafting of this report, ACYP sought to consult with NSW Government partner agencies, educational institutions and relevant service providers to share the findings and collaborate on the development of recommendations.

It is evident there is a substantial commitment to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds across all sectors of the community. Many policies, programs and services exist to support this cohort however their meaningful participation in the design, development and review of such policies could be strengthened. More could be done to promote this good work and ensure young people and those who support them know about available supports and how to access them.

These recommendations highlight some of the good practice in NSW in the context of what young people asked for and what more could be done to complement and leverage this work.

Recommendation

Responsibility

1. NSW Government and service providers that support children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, develop a simple, accessible communication document and update the **NSW Government website** to reflect current available services and information that supports children and young people. This information should be made available in language and distributed through schools and services. It should include but is not limited to information about:
 - pathways for education available to them depending on their age and visa. This should include flexible options to learn English, complete the HSC, access vocational education, higher education and alternatives; and
 - visa stipulations, including work rights, access to childcare and education, English classes and medical care.

Multicultural NSW (MNSW), the NSW Department of Customer Service (DCS), NSW Department of Education (DoE), The Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW), Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW), multicultural service providers.

Recommendation

Responsibility

<p>2. Grant programs across government and communities should consider the specific needs of the multicultural communities in terms of application forms and requirements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Expanding application criteria so young people who are not connected to a specific service provider, have opportunities to access financial support to participate in:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– further education, training and employment pathways; and– activities (sports, creative arts, camps, tutoring etc).· Resourcing support to guide young people through the application process.	<p>NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), Multicultural NSW (MNSW), the Australian Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and service providers.</p>
<p>3. The NSW Government should prioritise greater investment in NSW Government led programs that aim to assist multicultural communities. As examples, this includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· the NSW Police Multicultural Community Liaison program; and· refugee support programs in primary and secondary schools.	<p>NSW Government including NSW Department of Education (NSW DoE), NSW Police, Multicultural NSW (MNSW) and NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).</p>
<p>4. Embed the voices of children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in decision making processes including by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· actively recruiting representatives from this cohort in Student Representative Councils in educational institutions, local Councils and Government Advisory boards; and· mandating seeking their input, ideas and recommendations in the development of any strategies, policies and plans designed to support or impact them. For example, Anti-Racism or Anti-Discrimination Strategies, Multicultural Plans, Community Cohesions Plans, Youth Strategies.	<p>Premier's Department, Multicultural NSW (MNSW), NSW Department of Education (NSW DoE), The Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW), Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW), Local Councils.</p>

What young people said would be helpful

Across the consultations ACYP identified common experiences shared by young people and the ideas and solutions they provided to support:



Belonging, connection and community cohesion.



Hope for the future.

These are outlined in the table on the following pages, alongside a snapshot of some of the existing resources, programs and policies which align with what children and young people suggested would be helpful to them.

This table demonstrates the substantial commitment to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds across all sectors of the community. However, it was evident through conversations with young people that more could be done to promote this good work, and ensure young people and those who support them know about what is available and how to access supports.

The examples provided have been recommended by young people themselves during consultations, or by NSW Government partner agencies, educational institutions, and service providers ACYP consulted with in the development of the recommendations. This information is current as at December 2024 and is not an exhaustive list. The aim is to promote and share examples of resources, programs and policies that support children and young people from a refugee and migrant background.

ACYP encourages NSW Government partner agencies, local councils, educational institutions, relevant service providers and the broader NSW community to:



Consider these experiences and ideas.



Wherever possible, identify opportunities to take action.



Do so in partnership with children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Belonging, connection and community cohesions

What young people asked for	Existing supports and examples of programs and approaches
<p>Young people suggested inter-cultural education and awareness as a strategy to address racism, discrimination and exclusion in communities, schools and workplaces.</p>	<p>This recommendation aligns with existing MNSW work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• COMPACT Program; and• Remove Hate from the Debate. <p>NSW Settlement Strategy action:</p> <p>4.41 Empower young people and community partners in settlement locations to stand up and stand united against divisive forces as champions for community harmony through the Multicultural NSW COMPACT Program and Remove Hate from the Debate initiative (MNSW).</p> <p>A number of NSW Government departments develop their own multicultural plans and strategies including the NSW Department of Education, TAFE, the NSW Department of Customer Service, Multicultural NSW and local Councils.</p>

Case Study

All One Under the Sun is a remedy to racism campaign developed in the Coffs Harbour area for the whole community. Driven by young people, it uses the arts to promote inclusion, belonging, connection, education and empowerment.

The campaign was led by STARTTS and supported by Blue Sky Community Services, Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Lands Council, headspace Coffs Harbour and Coffs Harbour City Council. Funding has been provided by the NSW Government through Multicultural NSW.

Better police support to address racism and crime, increase police force cultural awareness and strengthen community trust, particularly in high settlement areas.

The Multicultural Community Liaison program, run by NSW Police, employs civilian officers at the local level to work with communities and police to strengthen links and facilitate communication and interaction between police and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Multicultural Community Liaison Officers (MCLOs) are currently located in: Eastern Beaches, St. George, Sydney City, Blacktown, Kuring-Gai, Mt Druitt, Nepean, North Shore, Parramatta, Ryde, Auburn, Bankstown, Burwood, Campbelltown, Campsie, Cumberland, Fairfield, Liverpool, Coffs Harbour, Clarence, Newcastle and Wollongong.

MCLOs are not permanently located in the settlement locations of Armidale, Wagga Wagga and Albury.

Young people spoke about experiencing discrimination themselves or being aware of discrimination towards people from refugees and migrant backgrounds in hiring processes and workplaces.

Anti-Discrimination NSW can run workshops and information sessions for young people/community.

Information in 29 different languages here including videos in Arabic, Chinese simplified, Chinese traditional, Vietnamese, Korean and Karen.

[Fact sheets in English](#)

[Videos in English](#)

[Easy read resources](#)

[Legal Aid NSW's Respect at Work](#) Legal Service:

- They provide holistic and trauma-informed legal services to people who have experienced sexual harassment and/or discrimination in the workplace – including job seekers; and
- Young people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are one of their priority groups that have access to additional/ongoing legal advice.

Grants

What young people asked for	Existing supports and examples of programs and approaches
<p>Young people said they wanted more youth-friendly spaces and activities in all local council areas which are low-cost or free.</p> <p>Young people said they wanted more events to celebrate to different cultures and cultural holidays within local communities.</p>	<p>This list is not exhaustive but provides a snapshot of grant programs available:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Youth Opportunities Program</u> Funding is for new projects that enable marginalised young people, aged 12 to 24, to lead and participate in their communities. Not-for-profit community organisations and local Councils in NSW can apply for a grant between \$10,000 and \$50,000 to deliver a Youth Opportunities project. Youth Opportunities projects may seek to address one or more of these themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community inclusion and participation; • COVID-19 recovery; • cultural identity and connection; • cyber safety and awareness; • domestic and family violence; • healthy relationships; • financial literacy (budgeting, rent, phone, contracts, fines); • health and wellbeing; • homelessness and housing; and • natural disasters (preparedness, resilience and recovery). <u>Multicultural NSW Grants</u> <u>Clubgrants Category 3 Fund</u> <u>Community Building Partnership</u> <u>Service NSW hosts NSW Government grant information</u>, which includes a 'youth' filter <u>Youth Week Grants</u>

Hope for the future

What young people asked for	Existing supports and examples of programs and approaches
<p>Young people felt that schools could do more to increase teacher and students' awareness and understanding of culturally significant norms and expectations that are different to the norms or expectations in Australia so the onus is not on them to always modify their behaviour.</p> <p>Schools should ensure cultural education, awareness and celebration is an ongoing part of the school environment beyond Harmony week celebrations. For example: acknowledging and celebrating different culturally significant days as a normal part of the school calendar, cultural cooking classes, culturally diverse canteen food.</p>	<p>STARTTS</p> <p>STARTTS work in collaboration with schools across NSW to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of students with refugee experience.</p> <p>STARTTS School Liaison Program works with educators across NSW public, private and Catholic systemic schools to enhance schools' capacity in their work with students with refugee experience. The program operates in partnership with the NSW Department of Education, Catholic Education and the Association of Independent Schools NSW. The School Liaison Program also offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• interagency collaboration with school leaders and collegial networks to address refugee students' needs in different geographical locations across NSW; and• a specialist consulting service to schools across NSW. <hr/> <p>DoE Multicultural Education Unit</p> <p>Offers information, resources support and training to schools and teachers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They have an information page which provides information and resources to teachers, parents and young people from a refugee background.• The following professional learning and training modules are available to support teachers:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– culturally inclusive teaching and learning (self-access);– engaging culturally and linguistically diverse communities (delivered face-to-face, twice every term);– teaching students from a refugee background;– S.T.A.R.S. in Schools; and– Classrooms of Possibility: working with students from refugee backgrounds in mainstream classes (self-access) professional learning courses.

DoE Policies and Strategies

- [Anti-Racism Strategy](#).
- Multicultural Plan.
- DoE has [this policy around supporting students to practice their religion in school](#).

In-school support positions

Anti-Racism Conduct Officers (ARCOs) – Every school has at least one staff member trained to collaborate with school executives and inform strategies to mitigate racism. In this role, they maintain a record of any incidents and provide training to teachers and students.

Refugee Education Officers (REOs) are responsible for supporting and training teachers on how to appropriately support students from refugee backgrounds.

Transition and support programs

DoE has a [Welcome Program](#) for newly arrived students.

Intensive English Centre (IEC) schools have a Transitions Officer who is responsible for the IEC student's transition to mainstream school (e.g., IEC Sydney gives their IEC students 1 week to experience mainstream school.)

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW)

AISNSW is currently implementing a Community Cohesion project for leaders, educators, and students in independent schools.

[Community Cohesion: Developing whole-school approaches to belonging, resilience and respect](#) includes a range of resources, tools, professional learning modules and in school support programs to strengthen intercultural understanding, support inclusion and belonging for all students and respond to misinformation, radicalisation, racism and bullying.

Catholic Schools

Catholic schools across NSW offer various localised support programs for students from a refugee background.

For example, Sydney Catholic Schools have a Refugee and Community Liaison Program with a dedicated position to coordinate supports for newly arrived refugee families attending the school. The program includes:

- learning support and creative workshops for refugee students;
- parenting programs; and
- parent training and further education in partnership with TAFENSW.

More flexible options to complete the HSC for young people who arrive in Australia with low English proficiency or have disrupted education.

Young people often felt limited in their career choices based on their own and their parents' knowledge and/or views about respectable, highly valued, well-paid professions. More information for young people and their parents (in-language) to better understand the different career pathways and increase options for young people to consider.

More opportunities to gain work experience and knowledge in different areas to help increase their skills and experience for paid employment and help choose which profession they would like to pursue.

Job readiness, programs, workshops and resources made for the unique needs and experiences of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Case Study

Bankstown Senior College provides secondary education to students of post compulsory age, new arrivals, refugees, re-entry students and those who have found it difficult to engage with education in a traditional setting.

Commonwealth Government-funded programs

- [Settlement Engagement Transition Support \(SETS\) providers.](#)
- [Youth Transition Support Providers.](#)

Current MNSW work/opportunities

MNSW supports Community Hubs Australia to run the Community Hubs program in NSW – a primary schools-based initiative that aims to support individuals and families of diverse backgrounds (including some of refugee and refugee-like background), particularly women with preschool-aged children, to connect with each other and with the broader community. Activities delivered include referral services, English language classes, vocational and 'work readiness' workshops and community engagement events.

Other NSW Government-funded programs

- [TAFE NSW Counselling and Career Development Service.](#)
- [Careers NSW.](#)
- [Regional Industry Education Partnerships \(RIEP\).](#)

Some schools also facilitate careers information nights inviting people from diverse backgrounds and professions to come and share information with students and parents about their journey, education and what the job is like.

DoE Multicultural Education Unit

The DoE Multicultural Education Unit provides information and advice for teachers about tertiary pathways for students from refugee backgrounds.

- [Tertiary pathways.](#)

There are also a number of tertiary scholarships available for students from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds. This information is updated yearly and available on the [tertiary pathways page.](#)

- [Tertiary scholarships 2024-2025.](#)

More support programs and skills workshops for young people when they first arrive to help learn about different government processes, services, rules, using transport, booking medical appointments, library cards etc.

MNSW provides funding for Youth Linker, delivered by Service NSW. ACYP can direct young people to this service for orientation to **government services**.

Provision of orientation services is in the remit of Commonwealth Government-funded **Humanitarian Settlement Program** (HSP) providers.

If eligible for HSP, ACYP can direct young people to either SSI or Australian Red Cross, depending on their location in NSW.

Young people talked about fear, uncertainty and sadness around settlement and visa rights, sponsorship and the impact of visa stipulations on themselves and their family. They reflected information often lacks transparency or is not communicated in youth friendly or plain English language.

Immigration Advice and Rights Centre provides a number of resources with general information about immigration law in Australia. These are not youth specific but do provide more simplified information about different Visa types. It includes a **factsheet on Offshore Refugee and Humanitarian visas**.

The **Refugee Council of Australia** provides **information and factsheets** for refugees about getting to Australia, visa's, and living in Australia. The information is not youth-specific but may be helpful for young people and those who support them:

- ***I am applying to be a refugee in Australia;*** and
- ***I have a bridging visa.***

How do you support children and young people from a refugee and migrant background?

1. Consider what young people said would:
 - help them achieve their goals for the future, and
 - feel a greater sense of belonging and connection in their communities;
2. Identify how you currently support these in the context of your work; and
3. Whether there are opportunities to strengthen the support and services you provide.

ACYP would love to hear about the work you do, how you include children and young people, and the opportunities you identify to strengthen your work in this space. You can share this with ACYP via participation@acyp.nsw.gov.au so we can celebrate your work as well!

How does your organisation, service or team increase and support belonging, connection and community cohesion for children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

How does your organisation, service or team support children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to achieve their hopes for the future?

How could your organisation, service or team strengthen what you do?

How do you / how can you include children and young people in the decision-making process?

How do you / can you communicate and share information, resources and support with children and young people?

Methodology

This report includes findings from:



ACYP's 2024 Strategic Plan Survey and 2024 Youth Week Survey.



Qualitative consultations with 276 young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, through focus groups with between two and twelve participants.

Many refugee and migrant young people may have experienced significant trauma, including loss, violence, displacement, and discrimination.⁸ As with all our work, ACYP employed a trauma-informed approach that was sensitive to this context and the range of lived experiences. The following steps were taken in the design and implementation of the consultations:

- ACYP sought input from partner agencies including Multicultural NSW, the Department of Education and external specialist multicultural services including the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, Queanbeyan Multicultural Centre, Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre, Community Migrant Resource Centre, Cumberland Multicultural Community Services, the Muslim Women's Association and Mosaic Multicultural Connections. Their expertise:
 - Informed the scope, considerations and context of this work;
 - built ACYP's understanding of the young people's backgrounds, traditions and values; and
 - Was used to test ideas and ACYP's approach.
- ACYP translated project information, consent forms, consultation questions and key terms in a range of languages through Multicultural NSW's Multilingual NSW Program.⁹
- ACYP used interpreters and support workers during the consultations, where possible.
- As part of the introduction, ACYP advised young people they were not required or expected to share their lived experiences before coming to Australia. ACYP also clarified they could stop participating at any time and that support resources were available. A flyer listing Transcultural Mental Health Service, NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, EMBRACE and the Kids Helpline including their contact details and a QR code to their website was made available. ACYP also investigated services that could provide visa assistance, if asked.
- ACYP did not ask young people to identify information captured in their demographic form during consultations beyond their age and ethnicity to ensure the privacy of young people participating was maintained.
- One of the project co-leads identified as being from a migrant and second-generation refugee background. Their lived experience was essential to inform the planning and development of this project.

⁸ NSW Services for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS): [Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Trauma](#).

⁹ These languages were included: Arabic, Burmese, Dari, Persian, Korean, Kurdish Kurmanji, Nepali, Pashto, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese. These were selected based on the Census 2021 for Low English proficiency and growing/ emerging languages for younger audiences, Multicultural Audiences Dashboard and consultations with Multicultural NSW.

Reporting on similarities and differences between cohorts

As outlined, ACYP spoke with young people who had their own refugee or migration experience and others who were Australian born, second generation migrants.

There were instances where consultations included all three cohorts, as well young people from different countries and cultures, who had lived in Australia for as little as three weeks to more than 10 years.

To appropriately manage the breadth of experiences, complexities and capacity to participate in this work, analysis and observations made in this report should be considered in the context of these practices:

- ACYP asked each young person at the beginning of the session which country they were born in and how long they had been in Australia.
- ACYP did not ask young people to disclose their immigration status or visa category during group discussions, however some young people shared this independently during the consultation.
- In other instances, young people shared details that indicated they had spent time in a refugee camp, been displaced or experienced war and persecution in their home country, or that their parents had immigrated to Australia on skilled migration or study visas.
- Young people and their parents filled out demographic forms as part of the consent process and support staff provided high level demographic data about the group's migration background prior to consultations. The demographic form asked their age, gender, which country they were born in and the top three issues facing children and young people from a multiple choice list.
- Throughout the conversations, some young people shared information about their life prior to arriving in Australia as a point of comparison.
- ACYP considered the experiences shared in each focus group in relation to how recently they had arrived in NSW, their current location, including regional or metropolitan Sydney, and whether they were living in a high or low humanitarian settlement area or multicultural community – where this information was provided or known.

During consultations, ACYP observed some similarities and differences between cohorts that have been documented in this report.¹⁰ These comparisons were discussed internally and recorded after the consultations and are identified throughout the report to help identify the different experiences and needs of children and young people from different cohorts and at different stages in their settlement journey and lives.

¹⁰ While young people did not always explicitly make this connection, ACYP notes that each culturally and linguistically diverse cohort has different and unique experiences and needs. These are included in the report only where young people themselves made these statements and observations.



With voices from Afghanistan, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, England, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Türkiye, Vietnam.

The young people who participated in this work identified as being from 29 different countries, five young people identified as being from Palestine. Given the breadth of lived experiences and views expressed in consultations, ACYP sought to test recommendations with 297 young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who had registered to stay involved in this work via surveys.¹¹ ACYP acknowledges this survey confirmed the diversity of views of this cohort. ACYP's 2024 polling has included various samples of young people who identify as being either from a refugee or migrant background or speak a language other than English. Where findings are reported in this report, the group this finding relates to is clarified.

Demographics data

ACYP consulted with 276 refugee and migrant young people aged 12-24 years across 21 focus groups. Consultations were held both face-to-face and online across Sydney, regional and rural NSW. For the benefit of this report, and ease, the cohort will be referred to as "young people".



Of the 229 young people who completed the demographic survey,

129 females

99 males

1 transgender, non-binary or other



Face-to-face consultations across:

- **Regional NSW** – Armidale, Wagga Wagga, Albury, Goulburn, Cooma and Wollongong; and
- **Greater Sydney** – Fairfield, Holroyd, Guildford, Lakemba, Blacktown and Beverly Hills








From 29 countries






Many young people spoke multiple languages including, but not limited to: Arabic, Bengali, Burundi, Cantonese, Dari, English, Farsi, Fijian, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Kurdish Kurmanji, Malayalam, Malaysian, Mandarin, Nepali, Punjabi, Rohingya, Sinhala, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Tongan, Vietnamese and Yazidi.

¹¹ ACYP. (2024). *Youth Week Survey*. The survey received 29 responses from a refugee or recently arrived migrant while it was in the field from 14 Aug – 6 Sep 2024. It was promoted to 30 refugee and migrant youth attending ACYP's Youth Showcase event on 14 August and circulated to 267 young people who had identified as CALD or from a refugee or migrant background via the 2025 Youth Advisory Council application process, ACYP's Share your views survey or had nominated to receive more information.

The young people who participated in these consultations ranked these as the top five issues facing young people in NSW:

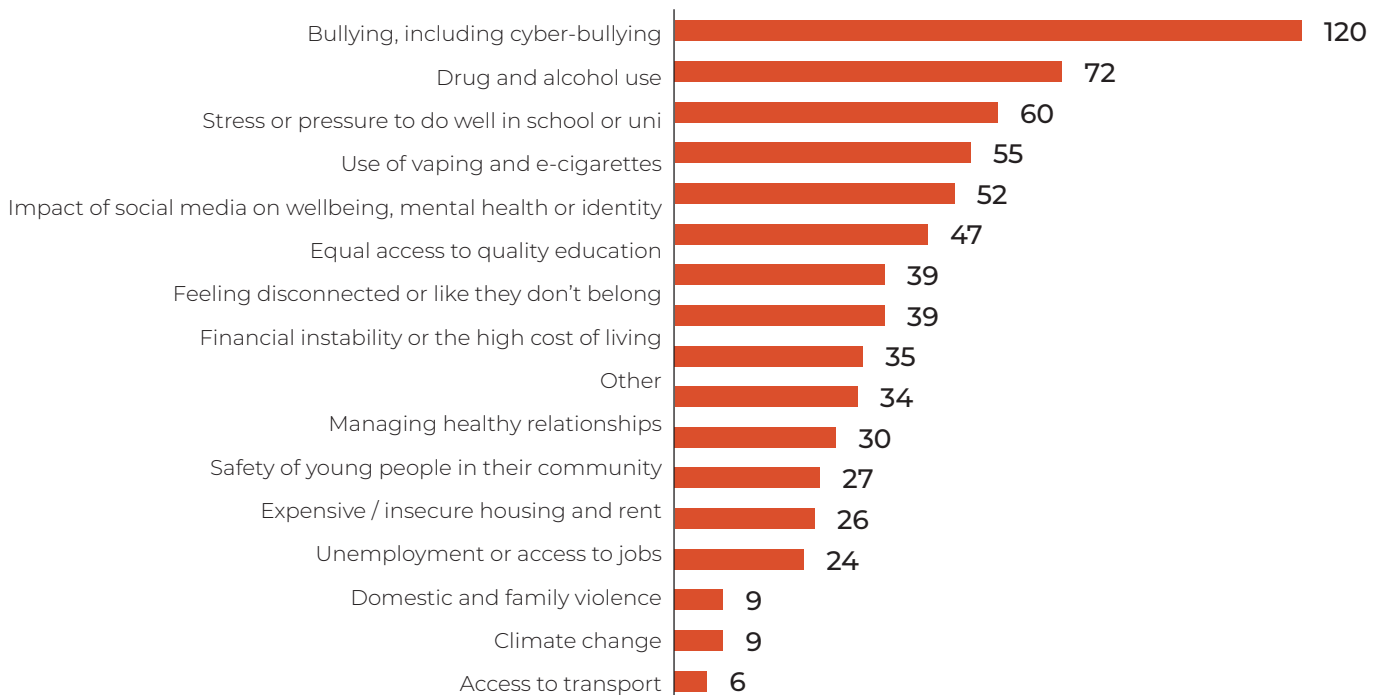
-  #1 Bullying, including cyber-bullying
-  #2 Young people's drug and alcohol use (excluding vaping)
-  #3 Stress or pressure to do well in school or university
-  #4 Young people's use of vaping and e-cigarettes
-  #5 The impact of social media on wellbeing, mental health and identity

By contrast, ACYP's polling found young migrants were more likely to rank these the main issues facing young people:¹²

-  #1 High cost of living / inflation – 56%
-  #2 Unemployment or access to jobs – 34%
-  #3 Affordable housing – 30%
-  #4 Education/school – 29%
(Identified as particularly important for those who had arrived in the last 5 years.)
-  #5 Social wellbeing / wellness / quality of life – 25%

Top issues elected by children and young people from a refugee or migrant background in consultations

● Number of votes



This should be considered in the context that many of the young people participating in the consultations were of school age, while the young people who participated in the polling and identified as migrants (young migrants) were aged 10 – 24 years. At the end of the consultation, ACYP asked young people for feedback on their experiences of the consultation. Young people appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard and importantly have requested more opportunities to speak about issues that matter to them at a local, state and national level.

Collaboration with schools, local organisations and community leaders was essential to reach and engage with the communities effectively. These services and schools included:

- The Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra Ltd (MCCI);
- Armidale Secondary College IEC;
- Mosaic Multicultural Connections;
- Muslim Women's Association;
- Guildford Community Centre CMCS;
- STARTTS - Fairfield Youth Centre;
- Evans High School IEC;
- Holroyd High School IEC;
- Fairfield High School IEC;
- St Patricks Parish School;
- Country University Study Hub (Cooma Campus);
- Goulburn High School;
- Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga;
- James Fallon High School;
- Beverly Hills Girls High School; and
- Translation support, Multilingual NSW Program.

Their feedback, insights and ideas inform recommendations which aim to:



Amplify the experiences and voices of children and young people from a refugee and migrant background to key decision makers in local, state and federal government.



Inform the design and delivery of programs and initiatives to increase belonging, connection and celebrate cultural diversity in NSW.

Identity and Connection to Culture

ACYP recognises the role culture plays in shaping young people's identity and enabling them to express their sense of self. ACYP's 2024 Youth Week Poll found education (52%) and ethnicity or cultural background (51%) are highly influential factors in shaping the identity of young people who have migrated to Australia.¹³ In consultations, young people also reported a shared understanding and experience of culture provides them with opportunities to develop support networks and build their confidence. Across all cohorts, ACYP observed that for many young people their culture and religion underpins their values and beliefs, guides their interactions with others, and gives them a sense of belonging as they navigate their life as a young person from a refugee or migrant background.

For young refugees and migrants, they navigate the many challenges of displacement, migration and resettlement in a new country and culture. For second generation migrants or young people who have lived in Australia for longer than five years, they may navigate multiple identities and expectations.

ACYP identified the positive impacts for many young people's sense of self and wellbeing when they;

**Are strongly connected to their culture
(i.e. cultural and religious communities).**



**Have ongoing opportunities to learn about
and practice their culture.**

**Feel safe to share their culture with others
and celebrate it openly within the
broader Australian community.**

ACYP asked young people what 'culture' means to them.

Across all cohorts, young people described being deeply proud of their culture. Many young people identified culture as a core part of their identity and inseparable from who they are.

“

It defines who I am.

*I'm proud to be part of my culture,
I love it – I express it by being
proud of it.*

*It's very important to me and it
shapes me as a person.*

*I don't feel the need to do or go
anywhere special, it's part of
who I am.*

”

Young people also defined culture as 'being in everything.' From food, dance, music, dress, language, stories, traditions, celebrations, ceremonies, rituals, daily habits, to shared values, beliefs and religions.

“

Culture is everything.

Who and what you believe in.

How people live, what's important to them.

How we talk, how we act, how we live with each other.

Our beliefs – in our culture, our past stories, our ancestors, singing and dancing.

”

Respect and caring for others were core values consistent across all ethnicities and consultations. These words were often articulated by young people as central to their culture. They guided their framework for how they should engage with people, ideas and cultures different from their own and how they hoped to be treated in return.

“

Respect our parents, respect our elders, and help those in need.

”

ACYP asked young people how they stay connected to their culture here in Australia.

“

Having community around you which can be an anchor when you feel lost or like your culture is slipping away.

”

Young people talked about staying connected to their culture through community, family, food, speaking in language, traditional dress, dancing, games, practicing traditions, cultural celebrations and events, places of worship and cultural centres. For many young people, a lot of these things were part of their everyday lives because they are core to their family's way of living.

“

Being together as a family, eating with each other, loving and supporting each other as a family, playing traditional music and dancing out of happiness, speaking your language at home.

Just being with family allows you to express your culture – family events, celebrations and food.

Speaking in my language at home.

Dad will cook fufu and we eat with our hands. Whenever we have, it's a special occasion.

”

Young people also spoke about the joy and connection they experience celebrating specific holidays, festivals or events like Ramadan and Eid, Nowruz, Sinhalese New Year, Diwali, Christmas and Easter with their families and communities. Others talked about going to places, like the mosque, church, cultural centre, Lakemba night markets, or spending time in areas where their culture is visible and vibrant.

“

Our local mosque and Islamic centre. Here is religion and culture, you are in a place where different but similar cultures come together.

Going to Blacktown where there are a lot of Arabs.

”

A group of young Pacific Peoples spoke about a cultural program in their school where older boys play a mentor role for younger boys. They valued this opportunity, and said it helped them stay connected to and celebrate their culture.

ACYP asked young people if they ever feel like they had to change their behaviour or something about themselves to fit in.

Young people spoke about changing the way they dressed, the way they interacted with others, their body language or accent to fit in, prevent social awkwardness or avoid negative perceptions, responses or consequences. For some young people, they shared that it felt like it was part of the process of integrating into a new country and culture. Young people reflected it was needed to create greater opportunities for connection and a sense of belonging.

“ You kind of have to [be a part of the Australian culture].

It's just to socialise with others, you have to have that kind of lifestyle. I think it makes your life easier because you suit yourself with them. I don't mean the way you look and stuff, I think there's other things if you want to make communication with people, want them to be comfortable with you, you have to suit yourself in that society.

My dad does that a lot, over-emphasises his Australian accent, just to fit in. I cringe sometimes, sometimes I force it just for fun. He's lived in Australia longer than he has lived in Ghana, it's an adaptation. It's a natural adaptation. He feels he needs to do that. Without the accent, he's a bit less understandable.”

However, ACYP also heard examples of young people feeling like they had to change things about themselves or hide parts of their culture due to experiences of social exclusion, racism or discrimination. Young people expressed their feelings of shame, guilt and fear to be themselves or show their culture in some public spaces. They explained these as situations where they felt different, misunderstood by others, or like negative assumptions were being made about them or their culture.

“ We don't want other people to know where we come from. ”

Young people also talked about various social and cultural norms, practices and expectations that are different in their culture versus the dominant Australian culture. Some young people talked about changing their behaviour after finding out that something is not 'normal' or 'socially acceptable'.

“ It is customary for us to be affectionate with other children, even if they are not our own. My friend was doing this at a park to say hello to a little girl and that night the mother complained on a community Facebook page and people were saying she should have called the Police. ”

Young people shared a range of experiences that reflected how they were grappling with juggling or switching between multiple cultural identities in their daily lives across different social contexts. This occurred particularly when they are moving between spaces where there are different expectations about how they should behave or present themselves to fit in. A common example given by young people gave was about the different expectations and practices around interacting with and demonstrating respect for elders.

“ [In our culture] Elders are referred to as “uncle” and “aunty”.

When you meet your elders, you must greet them respectfully and put your hands together. I must tell people what it means.

”

One young person explained their strategy for when their two worlds of school friends and family overlap, was to let their friends know why they are acting differently and explain the different ‘social codes’ in their culture.

Many young people described modifying their behaviour between school and home, or when they are interacting with people who are not from their culture. A group of young people talked about eye contact and how in their culture it is respectful to lower your head and avoid eye contact when adults are speaking to you. In the classroom, their teachers have reprimanded this same behaviour as showing disengagement, inattentiveness, and disrespect. At home their parents receive their eye contact as an act of disrespect and defiance. Young people shared their frustration with having to remember to change their behaviour between school and home to avoid negative consequences in each space.

Young people from second generation migrant backgrounds and young people who have been in Australia for longer than five years, discussed how being part of two cultures and communities led to them questioning their identity.

“ So it's like if your background isn't strong in your culture, you start to lose a bit of identity of your culture.

As I grow up, I kinda see a difference between my culture and here, and so sometimes I think there are some things that are backwards in my culture so something shifted in my personality.

”

“ It's like an out-of-body-experience adapting to the culture around you and moving into places where people don't understand such an essential part of who you are.

I feel like your culture and your identity, the one you didn't change to suit others, it becomes like your cosmos; your small world. And then the rest becomes the big picture.

”

While some young people found this challenging to navigate, others found some aspects to be a positive thing for them.

“ I come from a very traditional and a bit conservative background, but coming here, Australia's culture and lifestyle is very laid back, very chill, very mellow. Everyone's living at their own pace. So I think that also has changed my identity a bit. I've become a bit more laidback instead of more traditional conservative.’

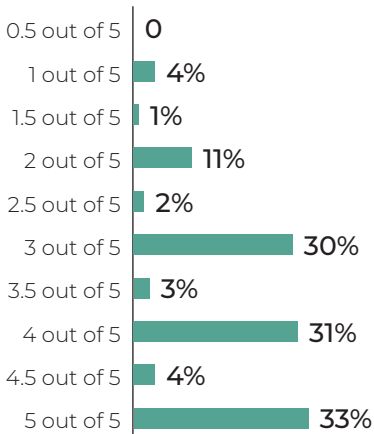
Making plans with people who aren't Muslim, trying to explain practices that restrict how you can make plans, like not being able to go to certain places to eat or at certain times.

”

Community and belonging

ACYP asked young people “from 1 to 5, how much do you feel like you belong in Australia?”

Rating out of 5 for belonging



Young people who had recently arrived, were living in Western Sydney or talking about their immediate community when they reported the highest rates of belonging.

“ There are lot of Afghani people, people who speak the same language.

In school, in the community, everyone accepts each other, even if they are different.

When we arrive in Australia, we have a good place to live, uniform, they take care of us, so makes us feel like we belong.

Young people rated their sense of belonging higher when:

- people in their community are helpful, kind and respectful;
- they feel safe away from war and conflict; and
- they are with and connected to their family
- they live in areas where there are lots of other people from their country or region
- their community is multicultural, or
- they feel accepted and welcomed in the community they live in.

Recently arrived young people from a refugee background and young people who were living in larger metropolitan settlement areas or multicultural communities were;



more likely to feel an increased sense of belonging;



more likely to say that people were helpful, kind and respectful; and



less likely to identify racism and discrimination as things that impacted on their sense of belonging in their community.

This was supported by ACYP’s 2024 Youth Week polling where young people from a migrant background who had migrated to Australia in the last 10 years were more likely to feel positive about their life as a whole (80%) compared to those who had been here for over 10 years (61%).¹⁴

Most young people felt the greatest sense of belonging and acceptance within their own cultural and religious communities, or within areas that had larger multicultural populations. Young people who lived in Greater Sydney generally lived in diverse multicultural communities where they reported higher rates of belonging and acceptance. They most often reported experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion occurred when they left their immediate community.

“ *Some places we don't feel like we are welcome or belong. Like when go out of Sydney, somewhere there are not many Muslims. But in Sydney there is a lot of Muslims.* ”

Young people who lived in regional areas or places where there are not large multicultural communities, or many of people from their own country, often rated their sense of belonging lower. This was generally linked to experiences of racism, discrimination or exclusion or feeling different because of the colour of their skin. While young people from all backgrounds and locations described experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion, young people in regional areas were more likely to say that this impacted on their sense of belonging in Australia.

“ *I've been in situations that make me feel I am not welcomed here.* ”

People feel like I don't belong, sometimes I feel excluded because of how I look but people have warmed up.

It does bring you down. I remember one person was angry with one of my parents and were like, you know, "Go back to where they came from," and that's been said to me as well and I was like, "Well, I was born here." ”

Young people who rated their sense of belonging lower often explained it was because they were still learning English and the language barrier stopped them from participating fully in the community. Others said they were still understanding the Australian culture and way of life. The hardship of other settlement challenges such as access to transport, education, training and employment did not seem to impact a young person's sense of belonging.

“ *I miss my country, I left every thing in my country. I lost every thing.* ”

Your leaving part of yourself behind as your family are still in [your] home country.

In the Philippines, it's really hard, but I don't feel like an Australian. Australia has better education and healthcare, but back home with my family I feel like I belong more, I feel more welcomed and accepted there.

Because I want my Dad. ”

ACYP asked young people what helps them feel accepted and welcomed in the broader community.

“ *Knowing that you can be yourself in a community.* ”

For most young people, feeling accepted includes the ability to express their culture and identity without the fear of judgment, prejudice and discrimination. Young people shared examples of when they feel accepted in the broader community:

- The ability to celebrate their own culture “and other cultures together”;
- Connecting with people from all cultures, learning about other cultures and seeing other people learn about theirs;
- Mutual intercultural understanding and respect for different cultures;
- Wearing cultural clothing and items in public spaces;
- Cultural events, spaces, practices and diverse representation of culture and religion in public spaces and the media; and
- Intercultural and cross-cultural awareness within the community, school and workplace.

“ I like the feeling of dressing up and seeing people in traditional dress. ”

Australia's multiculturalism also made young people feel welcome and accepted with some young people recognising acceptance and respect for different cultures and religions as qualities of Australians. A number of young people also talked about the importance of Harmony Week at school. Young people acknowledged these events and activities often helped increase intercultural awareness, respect and appreciation for other cultures. Young people loved sharing their culture with others and felt a huge sense of acceptance when peers and teachers wanted to learn, participate and celebrate with them.

“ We always invite Australians to our festivals, and they always come. ”

Sharing Vietnamese culture with everyone, people like it when I share my culture. ”

As was highlighted earlier in this report, ACYP heard that living in areas with large multicultural populations had a positive impact on young people's sense of belonging. Some young people said that living amongst so much cultural diversity meant that they did not feel different, and others said that Australia was accepting and respectful of different cultures and religions.

Within regional areas where young people identified cultural communities are smaller, they expressed their appreciation for multicultural community centres and services. They recognised these services provided opportunities to celebrate their culture, meet people from other cultures and learn about them. ACYP heard that this fostered a sense of acceptance and connection for these young people.

“ Celebrat[ing] with other Sri Lankan families at the Multicultural Centre. ”

Going to do traditional dance at the Cooma Multicultural Centre. ”

For recently arrived young people, their sense of belong and acceptance is high during the first year of settlement. During this period, the young people explained they were connected to multicultural services within their communities, attending either an Intensive English Centre (IEC) or Learning Support Classes in NSW Public Schools.¹⁵ In these settings, young people appreciated the connections they made with other students from both similar and different cultural backgrounds. It was clear this sense of shared experience is critical to their sense of belonging.

“ This is a good place to make friends in IEC – because we have our own national traditional people speaking our own language – but also all type of people are here in IEC. ”

I think I personally found it easier to connect with people in IEC because they also have similar backgrounds, so I think it feels that they accept me more.

I noticed transitioning from IEC to normal classes you face... no one talks to you, do you know what I mean? In ELD [English Language Development] classes, it's like a family because you are on the same journey.

Because it's more multicultural. And you hear people talking in their language and it's not a problem and you feel safe and you can talk in your language. ”

¹⁵ While these models are used in the NSW Public School system, the Independent schools, Catholic schools and other faith based schools across NSW use various funding models and in school programs to provide supports to students from a refugee and migrant background. Many of these are at the discretion of schools to adopt and adapt for their specific needs.

ACYP asked young people what the best thing about living in Australia is.

Young people shared the many things they liked about living in Australia. They liked many of its characteristics or features like the weather, beaches, animals, parks, activities, sports and public transport, and more importantly, its values.

What young people said they liked best about Australia was strongly linked to their experiences in their home country or countries they had lived in prior to coming to Australia. Many young people spoke about safety, freedom, rights, respect, education, multiculturalism, access to opportunities and services.

“ *People are nice, they smile at you when you walk past.*

Australia has amazing beaches, forests, and unique animals like kangaroos.

We get to play sports here, we didn't really have that at home. ”

Cultural diversity was something that many young people said they like and appreciate about Australia because it made them feel more welcome and increased their sense of belonging.

“ *The most welcoming thing is meeting new people and new languages – I see more different people in Australia and their cultures, and this makes me feel more welcomed.*

Multiculturalism, each person can have their own culture and the ability to celebrate it. If people have a different culture, everyone can also celebrate it.

Seeing new people and learning about their culture and language. ”

In various consultations, young people referred to ongoing conflicts, political, cultural and religious persecution and discriminatory government policies, and economic instability. Young people who have experienced war, political or religious persecution and/or displacement consistently said the best thing about living in Australia was that they felt safe. Young people shared their sense of safety in Australia included being physically safe, having freedom of cultural, religious or political expression, alongside being safe from violence or persecution. This safety and freedom was experienced at both a political and social level in comparison to their experiences in their home country or other countries they'd lived in prior to settling here.

“ *We are feeling safe. The safety is the most important thing.*

I was not able to go to sleep without being afraid of being bombed.

Freedom, choices and safety. I can go anywhere without fear.

So much freedom here, young people don't have guns, it's safe.

Safety, like freedom. We are free and can express our culture to anyone. Everyone respects us.

It is peaceful here and you can do whatever you want. Some countries in Africa you can't do whatever you want because of violence. ”

For example, on a political level, some young people talked about liking the Australia Government 'because it cares for its people and citizens'. The laws and rules were seen by these young people as fair, given people have the right to practice their culture and religion freely.

This was echoed in ACYP's Youth Week Poll 2024 where young people who migrated to Australia (35%) were more likely than those born in Australia (22%) to feel the NSW Government understands the needs of young people. Those who migrated 10 or more years ago are far less likely to feel this way (15%).¹⁶

*“ Here the laws are more fair.
You have rights to make your own choices. ”*

On a social level, many young people had a general view that Australian people respected and accepted different religions and cultures which contributed to their sense of safety and freedom in Australia. Newly arrived young people from a refugee background had a strong sense that they had options and opportunities in Australia that they did not have in their home countries.

*“ People are respectful here, people in other countries weren't accepting because of our religion.
I think it is better here. When I was in Lebanon, some people don't like me as I'm not Lebanese. It was hard to understand – here everyone loves and respects each other – it is easier to make friends.'
We can express our culture (Hazara) to everyone in Australia, we cannot do this in Afghanistan.
If you learn a bit of English, nothing is impossible.
Education and opportunities, girls in Afghanistan can't go to school.
If you have education, if you study, you're going to find a good job. But in Burundi, but even if have a certificate, you can't find a job. ”*

A number of young women spoke about gender equality, women's rights and freedoms, while young people of different genders spoke of the opportunity to have a good education and get a good job. Many young people felt hopeful about their future here.

ACYP asked young people what they did not like about Australia

ACYP heard that experiences of racism and discrimination are common and impacting young people's sense of belonging and their feelings of acceptance within communities, schools, peer groups and at work.

It also was raised consistently in the context of what they did not like about Australia.

“ Where is the humanity of the world. We have a heart, a brain, why are we different? Is it because I wear a scarf? My voice matters less. ”

Despite young people feeling like Australia respected and accepted different cultures and religions, experiences of racism and discrimination came up in nearly every focus group. It was something many young people said they disliked about Australia.

*“ Even passive racism hurts.
It makes you want to curl up and be at home where it's safe. ”*

During consultations, young people shared their experiences of being treated less favourably or excluded because of their race, religion, ethnicity and skin colour. ACYP heard stories of implicit and explicit forms of racial discrimination in schools from both teachers and students, in sports, workplaces and within the broader community.

These included people:

- intentionally and unintentionally excluding them or others from activities or social groups;
- making inappropriate racial slurs, jokes and taunts;
- perpetuating negative assumptions and stereotypes about people's home country customary practices, traditions and upbringing; and
- not making reasonable adjustments to allow people to practice their culture or religion freely.

A group of migrant young people in a regional area shared a recent experience of a substitute teacher making a derogatory comment to a student in the classroom because of their English proficiency.

“Are you too foreign to say “thank you”?”

Shocked this sentiment would be made by a teacher, the students reported this incident to the principal who took immediate action to remove the teacher from their class. The young people expressed disappointment the teacher was still employed.

Some second-generation migrant young people shared the view that some teachers sometimes adopted stereotypes when interacting with them in class which made them feel uncomfortable and disappointed. An example of this was when a young person shared that their teacher would make remarks such as “all Asians are good at maths”, when they were in class.

“ [They] should respect us more, they know we come from a war-torn country but instead they say, no you're nothing, why are you here.

Everyone keeps saying I am Chinese even though I am Vietnamese which is different from Chinese.

They make fun of my name and fun of me.

When friends are talking to each other more than they talk to you. ”

Young people shared experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion when they were applying for jobs. During consultations in regional NSW, ACYP heard from refugee and migrant young people from African countries that they regularly did not hear back from employers when applying for jobs. When they went into those businesses as customers, they identified the people who worked there were always white. This led them to feel like they did not get jobs because of their appearance. Young Muslim people also perceived hostility towards hiring young Muslim men because of their appearance, for e.g. unshaven beards.

When outside their own community, children and young people raised the challenges they face about navigating social, work and public spaces that may be unfamiliar to them. This was compounded where cultural diversity and inclusion were not predominant features of the environments or communities they were situated in. This led to awkward and alienating experiences in some instances, and more obvious racial, cultural or religious exclusion and discrimination in others.

“ Making plans with people who aren't Muslim, trying to explain practices that restrict how you can make plans, like not being able to go to certain places to eat or at certain times.

*I went to the centre one time,
and an old man was worried
I would have guns.*

*One of the things my coach said
was “Oh, are all the Iraqis carrying
a bomb around?” and I was in front
of the entire team. I smiled and
didn’t know how to act... like first of
all the setting, in front of the team
and then everyone laughed... I was
upset with that. It will bother you later
and it still bothers me today even
though it was last year but what I
learnt is that I am going to speak up
here and there because I can.*

Some young Muslim people told us they were denied time for religious prayer at work, despite observing other colleagues taking smoke breaks throughout their shifts. They also reflected on the lack of prayer rooms in public spaces and identified the inappropriateness of using multicultural and meditation rooms to perform their prayer.

Four groups of young people in Western Sydney explained the apparent socio-economic differences compared with local government areas in Greater Sydney that had less cultural diversity compounded their sense of alienation. While they felt at home in their immediate geographical area, a number of young people also shared experiences where members of the broader community outside of Greater Western Sydney would stare at them when they ventured to other parts of Sydney which made them feel uncomfortable.

*[The worst thing about living
in Australia] is the big difference
in low-socio economic and high
socio-economic areas and suburbs.*

*Being in certain areas where it’s
more obvious that you’re different
can be uncomfortable.*

*People can be unaccepting towards
people who aren’t the same as them.*

“ *Once you branch of of normal
areas where you see community
often, as a visible Muslim woman,
so many perceptions can be
imposed upon you because
of how you look.* ”

Young Muslim women shared stories of people staring and whispering when they wear their hijab in the city, or in public places outside their communities. They acknowledged a lack of public understanding about hijab wearing practices and assumptions connecting the hijab to the oppression of women’s rights. They shared that wearing the hijab was their “own choice” and that they take pride in wearing it to uphold their cultural and religious values.

“ *I think most people think people
who wear the hijab are forced to
wear it, but it is your own choice. Like
for me, my mother, she wears a scarf.
But for me, I don’t wear a scarf and
she doesn’t say “oh you should wear
a scarf”. Like, my mother just says
you know, “when you wear a hijab,
you need to respect it and when
you wear it you shouldn’t
do bad stuff.”* ”

These young women talked about how these assumptions and misinterpretations of cultural practices were reinforced by inappropriate media portrayals of Muslim women.

“ *[In movies] the scarf comes
off and she’s liberated and
a better person.* ”

Many young people spoke about missing their family, or missing the food, culture or traditions of their home country and culture. ACYP heard from some young people, particularly those in regional areas, that they did not have easy and regular access to many physical aspects of their culture like food ingredients (halal meat, spices, specific fruits or vegetables), places of worship (mosques and prayer spaces), ceremonies and cultural or religious festivals.

“ *It's hard to go to my temple. The temple is in Canberra and my parents drive every weekend to go there [from Cooma which is 1.5 hours away].*

We have to drive over an hour to get Halal meat. ”

Other things that young people mention included people's disrespect or lack of consideration for the environment, nature, animals and climate change. A few people said they were/are scared of Kangaroos, spiders, and pet dogs as these were not common in their home countries.

In one school in Western Sydney, young people talked about fighting and violence between students from different schools at the train station. They did not like this, and it made them feel scared. They did not feel like anything was being done to address this. Other young people mentioned 'gang violence' and not feeling safe at night in the community. These experiences were generally localised and not experiences that were common across consultations.

Across metropolitan and regional NSW, young people shared some of the common challenges and barriers they and their communities were experiencing. These included the:

- cost of living;
- availability of affordable housing;
- rising cost of groceries;
- affordability of recreational activities;
- education and access to tertiary education;
- availability and affordability of health services (particularly mental health service);
- lack of employment opportunities;
- language barriers due to English proficiency; and
- lack of interpretation services – for example, for Yazidi, which are not formally recognised in Australia.

“ *I've got a big family living with me, a family of eight, so when we go looking for a house, it is very difficult to look for a house for a bigger family, especially when you come from a war-torn background, and you don't have a very great job. And then you try to find a home or a house, they usually don't give it to you.*

You gotta pay for your mental health here. ”

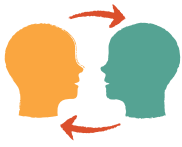
Many of these challenges were compounded for young people living in regional areas where there was less cultural diversity and more reports of:

- racism, discrimination and exclusion;
- higher rates of unemployment or underemployment;
- limited public transport;
- fewer health and social support services;
- fewer community spaces;
- fewer free activities for young people; and
- limited options for tertiary education locally.

ACYP asked young people what would help address racism, discrimination and exclusion and foster belonging and acceptance within the community.

Young people shared that eradicating racial discrimination is a shared responsibility and that all members of the community should play their part in eradicating discrimination. Despite differences in cultural and religious beliefs, young people's shared understanding of the value and meaning of culture often encouraged mutual respect and understanding for other cultures. Although many had encountered negative experiences of racial discrimination or exclusion, young people felt hopeful and empowered to eradicate racial discrimination within their community, school and the workplace.

To generate conversations, awareness, understanding and ultimately normalise cultural differences, young people asked for:



More opportunities to build intercultural and cross-cultural awareness and connections with others who are not of similar cultural or social upbringings.



Workshops that provided education and examples of culture, religion and identities including and different to their own.

They suggested that these workshops could be delivered by different cultural and ethnic groups within the community and schools to help address racism and discrimination



Deliberate efforts to increase greater representation of cultural diversity in media.



More free spaces, places and activities for all young people in the community to build intercultural understanding and respect in a casual way.



Bigger celebrations for significant cultural events.



Racism needs to be called out.

What needs to change is that we need to start building connections.

What needs to change? Learning more about Aboriginal culture and history; a sense of respect towards first nations people.

Sometimes with friends it can feel embarrassing to stop and pray in public, this needs to be normalised and more visual, like Muslims doing Muslim things.

Education about cultural practices and normalising these as much as anyone else has freedom to be who they are.

Early intervention to educate the general population, and allowing conversations about this (early high school), and allowing people to be who they are, as they are.

More education and understanding of people's culture/religion/identity – workshops in schools delivered by different ethnic groups.

More lessons about different religions and cultures.

There's no places for young people to meet up. Young men would want this and want it to be a place they can play sports, meet other young people, eat food – everyone would be invited to attend, and it would be for everyone.

There needs to be more things to do for kids; laser tag, arcades, bowling, cinemas, kids entertainment and more sport programs (not just soccer).

More cultural events, even [at] school, [I] learn about other culture[s]. [It gives] new avenue to meet new people, new opportunity.

Bigger celebrations for Eid and other significant cultural events.



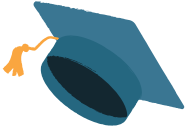
Hopes for the Future

Young people's hopes for the future were influenced by young people's passions and interests, their lived experiences within their home country and their cultural values. This included:

- values around family, gender roles and education;
- lived experiences of war and global conflict;
- lived experience of gender inequity; and
- following family footsteps.

ACYP asked young people about their hopes for the future.

Generally, young people focused their answers on:



Pathways to further education.



Career aspirations.



Motivation to contribute to their family or make an impact on the broader community.



Reunification with family or friends.



Help others in need.

Make my family proud.

Be a good father and treat people well.

Finish my studies, get a job, marriage, children.

Improve my English, finish school, uni, enjoy life.



TAFE or university were seen as the predominant pathways to a career. Most young people either had a specific career in mind or were considering a few different options. Young people under 15 were less likely to have thought about a specific career.



The most mentioned careers were lawyer and doctor, followed by engineer. There was a general perception that these careers were well-respected and highly paid.

A number of young people expressed a desire to go into careers where they could help people, like nursing, disability support, midwifery, medicine, law and policing.

There was a clear trend in recently arrived young people reporting career aspirations that focused on giving back to the community. Interestingly, ACYP's polling found young people who speak a language other than English are significantly more likely to be interested in health care professions, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), cyber security or government jobs.¹⁷

It's a hopeful thing to do, especially coming from a place of war.

Some young people said that helping others was an important part of their culture. Others spoke about wanting to use their experiences or the opportunities they had been given to give back to people and their communities.

ACYP's polling highlighted young migrants as equally as confident as those born in Australia in getting the job that they want. They were more likely to rate their own motivation as a factor that influences their confidence (60% vs. 45%), as well as the support they get from family (33% vs. 21%).¹⁸

Young people identified the importance of diversity and representation in the professions they wanted to work in as it increased their confidence that it was an attainable and safe aspiration. Some young people recognised that their and their parent's aspirations are also driven by their determination to utilise opportunities that are not made available to them back in their home country.

I want to be in a high position in government... when I was a kid watching the news and catching up on politics in South Africa, I didn't see many females in high positions. It was only men in the room and even if you see a female, she's probably a secretary and not really there. I want there to be something for girls like me.

A number of young people had been separated from their immediate family and extended family as a result of war in their home countries, displacement and visa regulations. When asked about their hopes for the future, they prioritised reunification with their parents or siblings who were still back in their home country or had been granted humanitarian visas in other countries. They hoped their families were safe and that they would see them again.

To see my dad again.

To return to my home country.

ACYP asked young people if their parents supported their goals for the future

The vast majority of young people said their parents were supportive of their goals and aspirations.

My parents tell me the most important thing is to like what you do.

My parents would like me to have a career as a doctor, but they are happy as long as I work hard and try my best.

My parents help me to be a professional soccer player by buying me soccer balls so I can play and practice soccer tricks.

¹⁷ ACYP. (2024.) *Youth Week Survey*, in field from 1-14 March 2024.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*

My parents want me to become anything I want to be. However, they did ask if I wanted to study more in the future before I become a professional women's cricketer.

”

Young people shared the perspectives that influenced their career aspirations and provided examples of where their perspectives or aspirations differed from their parents.

“

You have to get a good job, like a lawyer, doctor, engineer. Something that commands respect is important.

They [my parents] tell me I have the skills to be a doctor so if I don't become one, I'd be wasting my skills. They are not pressuring but making it clear what they want.

Being [in the creative arts] doesn't give you respect so I can't talk about this with my parents. They would like me to be an engineer or a doctor.

My parents want me to be [like them], but I'm shy and don't like being in front of people.

”

All three cohorts also spoke about the broader cultural context where there were more expectations from their families and communities to contribute to and support their family units financially. Some young people would explain their aspiration to provide for their parents and family was based on it being a cultural expectation. Others would explain their sense of responsibility or obligation because of what their parents “had given up”. Young people from refugee backgrounds in particular would often raise the hardship and loss their parents had faced to keep them safe.

“

I want to buy my parents a house.

”

There were a small number of young people who were already working to help financially support their families. Others felt pressure from their family to get a job as soon as they turned 18 to help support the family.

ACYP asked young people what the biggest challenges were for them in achieving their goals.

Young people identified a number of different things which impacted on their ability to focus on their studies or achieve specific goals related to their career aspirations or employment including;

Money and financial hardship

Some young people were struggling to pay for TAFE courses and afford the equipment they needed to complete their training or study to their best ability. Others said they struggled to cover the cost of commuting to school, TAFE or university. These challenges were identified by this cohort in ACYP's 2023 Cost of Living consultations. Some young people who were talented and/or interested in pursuing sports did not have the money for club membership, coaching or sporting equipment.

Citizenship or visa type

Which determines access to subsidised primary, secondary and tertiary education, government support and services, or working rights. For example, when one family is sponsoring others, young people on the refugee 100 VISA do not get a lot of support because they were sponsored to come to Australia, versus the refugee 200 VISA where they would get support.

Housing stress, including rental affordability or instability and overcrowded housing

This impacted on young people in different ways. Sometimes they were unable to attend school or work because they were searching for rentals, or they had to move very far away from their school or community and commute. When families are sponsoring another family, they also have to financially support them which leads to crowded houses and financial stress.

“ *There are two families living in one house and my dad is paying for everything. We are seven in our family plus three cousins and their mum. It's 11 people living in one house. There are two rooms, one big living room and one toilet, it's hard to find space or quite to do study.* ”

Uncertainty and worry about their family overseas

Some young people talked about not being able to think about their own future goals because they were:

- in a constant state of worry and fear for loved ones; and/or
- working to save for money for family members in dangerous situations overseas, or to see family who had been settled in other countries.

“ *When someone is [living] in war, you don't know if they are going to live for today or tomorrow, so you overthink stuff. When you don't have someone you love here, it hard to think about the future.* ”

Lack of flexibility in the education system

ACYP heard a few examples of this, particularly around the HSC:

- they could not start in a lower year which reflected their confidence in English and had to start year 11 or 12 because of their age, and complete the HSC despite not feeling ready. This impacted their ability to access pathways to further education; and
- they were still dealing with trauma as a result of war, persecution and displacement and found there was little recognition of the impact of this.

English proficiency, literacy levels and disrupted or lack of formal education

In consultations, there were several young people who had experienced disrupted education as a result of ongoing conflict in their home country and displacement throughout the childhood. Others had never had the opportunity to learn how to read and write in their own language. Very few had experienced opportunities to learn and practice.

For young people aged over 18, this made it very challenging to complete their education in Australia, gain qualifications or find work. These young people needed more intensive and immersive English and learning support which they felt they were not able to get through TAFE.

“ *When I first arrived to Australia, I hoped to go to school but unfortunately I had to go to TAFE because I was 19, not 18. TAFE is only 3 days in a week. It isn't enough for me to learn.* ”

Lack of recognition of formal school and work qualifications from their home country

Consultations also highlighted that it was often challenging for young people and their parents to get recognition of prior learning, despite qualifications and experience. They had to retrain, which is costly and time consuming.

Access to quality or equal education and opportunities in regional areas

In regional areas, young people spoke about not having access to face-to-face learning for all subjects and instability in teaching staff. They felt the inconsistent quality of teaching impacted their learning. Other young people were not able to participate in particular sports they wanted to because they were not available in their communities.

Work experience or opportunities to gain experience

Young people talked about the challenges of 'getting your foot in the door', especially in regional areas where there was more competition for jobs. Similar to sentiment shared across ACYP's broader consultations, they talked about how entry level casual jobs require them to have experience, but they could not get experience until someone gave them an opportunity. For this cohort, many felt their lack of social connections was a barrier to getting their foot in the door.

Racism and discrimination

Young people identified opportunities for a good education and employment as being things they liked about Australia. Newly arrived young people in particular had the perception that if you learnt English and worked hard, anything was possible. However, it is important to highlight that this is not necessarily the experience of people from a refugee or migrant background when seeking employment.

In this part of the conversation, some young people expressed feeling like they did not have the same access to opportunities and resources that people who were born in Australia had.

Australian people can do it, because it's their country.

A number of young people explicitly identified racism and discrimination as a barrier for both young people and adults from a refugee or migrant background in gaining employment. Some young people had experienced this themselves when applying for casual positions or looking for work experience, as identified earlier in the report. Others had developed this view because their friends, family or other adults in their communities had shared their experiences of it.

Young people over the age of 18 years were more likely to comment on it being common for people from a refugee or migrant background to have multiple part time or low paid jobs despite their qualifications, skills and experience.

ACYP asked young people what helped or would help them achieve their goals

In consultations, young people asked for more opportunities to try new things and gain experience. Many talked about the importance of work experience opportunities. Young people acknowledged these opportunities helped them gain skills and experience for future employment, and enabled them to explore different professions before deciding what they would like to gain a qualification in. They suggested that the Year 10 work experience program be extended to support opportunities for young people who wanted them to also do work experience in Year 11 and 12. ACYP recognises the impact this could have during a high stress time of Higher School Certificate preparation and the administrative burden this would place on schools so has not included it as a recommendation.

I did a work placement – did here [at the Muslim Women's Association]. I really liked it. It was a different experience working in an office and working with other people. It made me feel like an adult. In the office I had responsibilities of my own to complete throughout the day and enjoyed.

Family, parents, teachers, careers advisors, job supervisors and case workers had all given young people information, advice or support in relation to their future goals. Young people shared stories of multicultural community services staff and IEC school staff who had helped them get their foot in the door by:

- introducing them to local businesses;
- recommending them for a casual jobs; or
- helping them organise a volunteer position to increase their chances of gaining employment.

Young people shared a number of mechanisms that helped inform their study and career choices ranked from most frequently mentioned to least:

#1

Using the internet to find out information about university and TAFE courses.

#2

The school's careers advisor had provided helpful information and advice about different career options and pathways however this was only mentioned by young people over 16 years.

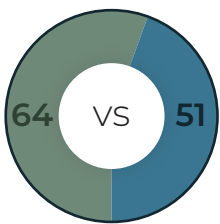
#3

Programs that helped with life skills or work readiness skills had been or would be beneficial for them. Young people explained the need for skills such as learning how to “drive, pay for bills, write a resume, use a computer or change a tyre”. In particular, they asked for more driving supervisors so they could complete their driving learners' course and travel for work and school.

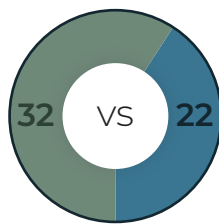
#4

Online platforms or apps had helped them achieve different goals, for example, healthy eating advice, study tips, money and budgeting advice.

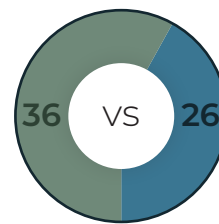
More broadly speaking, ACYP polling found young migrants are significantly more likely to want to build a range of emotional, social and relationship skills compared with those born in Australia.¹⁹



Improving communication skills

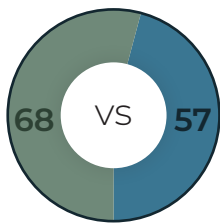


Cultural awareness

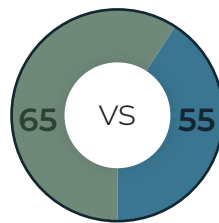


Learning about different cultures

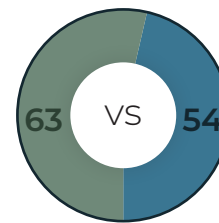
Those who speak a language other than English at home also have greater interest in learning about health and wellbeing skills.



Nutrition and health eating



Looking after your mental health




Looking after your physical health

● Refugee and migrant young people ● Young people born in Australia



ACYP recognises that more can be done by the broader community and by the adults in these young people's lives to ensure young people do not shoulder the burden of expectations alone. They have told us what they need to help them navigate a new way of living and to secure a sense of identity, belonging and connection.

It requires deliberate and ongoing collaboration with the young people and those who impact their lives in policy making, service design and delivery to enable them to thrive.



Office of the Advocate for
Children and Young People

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Office of the Advocate for Children
and Young People

Report:

*The experiences of young people from refugee
and migrant backgrounds*

Date:

December 2025



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