

*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

## Executive Summary



**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.**

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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://lifeline.org.au) and Kids Helpline on **1800 55 1800** (at any time, 24/7).

# Introduction

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The *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People NSW 2022-2024 (Strategic Plan)* identifies six commitments to children and young people that were developed in response to what children and young people had told ACYP over a number of consultations over a number of years. The Strategic Plan has six core commitment areas, ACYP has focused on two of these 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.<sup>1</sup> 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. In 2023 alone, over 50,000 children and young people aged 0 – 24 years settled in NSW.<sup>2</sup> Children and young people accounted for almost half of all humanitarian and skilled visas and a third of family visas.<sup>3</sup>

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 significant impacts on their settlement journey and can lead to social isolation and disconnection from community. 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 Survey 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Population Experts. (2024). *New South Wales: Birthplace*.

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

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*.

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

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.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, ethnic, cultural background or skin colour was the top four reason 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:

<b>Refugees</b>	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.
<b>Migrants</b>	A migrant is 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.
<b>Second generation migrant</b>	The child or young person of a migrant as defined above.

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

<sup>5</sup> 34% of young people who completed the demographic survey were from Iraq.

# Who ACYP Spoke to

ACYP consulted with 276 refugee and migrant young people aged 12-24 years across 21 focus group in eight schools and six services.

Of the 229 young people who completed the demographic survey, 129 identified as female, 99 identified as male and 1 identified as transgender, non-binary or other.



**129** females

**99** males

**1** transgender,  
non-binary  
or other



**Face-to-face consultations occurred across the following locations:**

## **Regional NSW**

Armidale, Wagga Wagga, Albury, Goulburn, Cooma and Wollongong

## **Greater Sydney**

Fairfield, Holroyd, Guildford, Lakemba, Blacktown and Beverly Hills



## **From 29 countries...**

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.<sup>6</sup>



Speaking

**27**

languages

<sup>6</sup> Five young people identified as being from Palestine.

# Recommendations

In the planning and execution 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 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 and 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
<div><div>1.</div><div>NSW Government and service providers tha support children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, develop a simple, accessible communication document and update the <u>NSW Government website</u> to reflect current available services and information that supports this 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:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>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</li><li>visa stipulations, including work rights, access to childcare and education, English classes and medical care.</li></ul></div></div>	<div>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.</div>

## 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"> <li>• Opportunities to financially support individuals, who are not connected to a specific service provider, to access and participate in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Further education, training and employment pathways; and</li> <li>– Activities (sports, creative arts, camps, tutoring etc).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resourcing support to guide young people through the application process.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• the NSW Police Multicultural Community Liaison program; and</li> <li>• refugee support programs in primary and secondary schools.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• Actively recruiting representatives from this cohort in Student Representative Councils in educational institutions, local Councils and Government Advisory boards</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<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 noted 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 there 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 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.

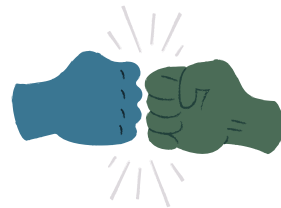
ACYP encourages NSW Government partner agencies, local councils, educational institutions, relevant service providers and the broader NSW community to:



**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
Young people suggested inter-cultural education and awareness as a strategy to address racism, discrimination and exclusion in communities, schools and workplaces.	<p>This recommendation aligns with existing MNSW work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• COMPACT Program; and</li><li>• Remove Hate from the Debate.</li></ul> <p><b>NSW Settlement Strategy action:</b></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 & 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.	<p>The Multicultural Community Liaison program 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.</p> <p>Multicultural Community Liaison Officer (MCLO) 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.</p> <p>MCLOs are not permanently located in the settlement locations of Armidale, Wagga Wagga and Albury.</p>
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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"> <li>1. <a href="#"><u>Youth Opportunities Program</u></a> 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 to 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"> <li>• community inclusion and participation;</li> <li>• COVID-19 recovery;</li> <li>• cultural identity and connection;</li> <li>• cyber safety and awareness;</li> <li>• domestic and family violence;</li> <li>• healthy relationships;</li> <li>• healthy relationships;</li> <li>• financial literacy (budgeting, rent, phone, contracts, fines);</li> <li>• health and wellbeing;</li> <li>• homelessness and housing; and</li> <li>• natural disasters (preparedness, resilience and recovery).</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. <a href="#"><u>Multicultural NSW Grants</u></a></li> <li>3. <a href="#"><u>Clubgrants Category 3 Fund</u></a></li> <li>4. <a href="#"><u>Community Building Partnership</u></a></li> <li>5. <a href="#"><u>Service NSW hosts NSW Government grant information</u></a>, which includes a 'youth' filter</li> <li>6. <a href="#"><u>Youth Week Grants</u></a></li> </ol>

# 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 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><b>STARTTS</b></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 <b>School Liaison Program</b> 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"> <li>• Interagency collaboration with school leaders and collegial networks to address refugee students' needs in different geographical locations across NSW; and</li> <li>• A specialist consulting service to schools across NSW.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>DoE Multicultural Education Unit</b></p> <p>Offers information, resources support and training to schools and teachers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have an <b>information page</b> which provides information and resources to teachers, parents and young people from a refugee background.</li> <li>• The following <b>professional learning and training modules</b> are available to support teachers:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Culturally inclusive teaching and learning (self-access);</li> <li>– Engaging culturally and linguistically diverse communities (delivered face-to-face, twice every term);</li> <li>– Teaching students from a refugee background;</li> <li>– S.T.A.R.S. in Schools; and</li> <li>– Classrooms of Possibility: working with students from refugee backgrounds in mainstream classes (self-access) professional learning courses.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 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 (ARCO) – 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 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.

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.)

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## 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.

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## Catholic Schools

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

For example, Sydney Catholic Schools has a Refugee and Community Liaison Program with a dedicated position to coordinate supports for the newly arrived refugee families attending the Sydney Catholic Schools. 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, resources made for to 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 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 refugee students.

- [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](#)

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More support programs and skills workshops for young people when they first arrive to help learn about different government process, services, rules, rules, using transport, booking doctor's 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.

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Young people talked about fear, uncertainty and sadness around settlement and visa rights, sponsorship and the impact of 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**.



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 - Executive Summary*

**Date:**

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