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Labor's Multicultural Engagement Taskforce: The role of the Commonwealth government in securing a more inclusive society and economy

Submission by Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW

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About Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW

MYAN NSW is the first state-wide multicultural youth specialist organisation. We engage, connect and build the capacity of the youth, settlement and multicultural sectors to meet the needs of young people from refugee, migrant and asylum seeking backgrounds. We support the development of young people's skills, knowledge and confidence to access the support and opportunities they need to be active citizens in Australian society, as well as supporting young people to engage in advocacy and influence the local, state and national agenda.

MYAN NSW is a hub of networking, information and capacity building. We support and strengthen the work of our large and diverse network. Our networks, partners and young people benefit from a range of initiatives and services, including:

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

About this submission

MYAN NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Labor's Multicultural Engagement Taskforce (LMET) in order to inform federal Labor's policies and provide a youth perspective on the role of multiculturalism in social cohesion and Australian identity. This submission makes general recommendations for consideration on the broader role of the Commonwealth government in securing a more inclusive society and economy, particularly in relation to young people aged 12-25 from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and multicultural sectors across NSW.

This submission draws on our wide-ranging experience working in partnership with multicultural young people, government and non-government agencies to ensure that the needs and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised in policy and practice. This submission is also informed by MYAN NSW's recent Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy consultation (September 2019) where input was collected from 26 young people from diverse cultural backgrounds including Kurdish, Anglo-Indian, Filipino, Hazara, Afghan, Iranian-Afghan, Turkish-Cypriot, Nigerian-Australian, Sudanese, South Sudanese-Ugandan, West African-Ghanaian, Ghanaian-Australian, Iraqi-Syrian, Vietnamese-Australian, Mexican and Canadian-Filipino-Australian.

Key messages

Multiculturalism is the cornerstone of a meaningful social inclusion agenda

MYAN NSW looks forward to engaging with LMET in relation to the issues presented in this submission. We also encourage LMET to hear directly from young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and we are happy to coordinate participation of young people at consultations in NSW.

Social cohesion is vital to creating the conditions for a productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia. A safe and welcoming community is crucial for positive

settlement outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. However, public perception of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers can influence the settlement experience of young people and can have implications on the level of cohesion among the Australian community.

There is a need for government initiatives that actively promote the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism to all of Australia and reiterate that successful settlement is a two-way process — equally dependent on the host community's 'reception' or welcome, as it is on new arrivals' skills attributes. Many federal politicians continue to use inflammatory and politicised language, including problematising certain cultural or religious groups and using negative and inaccurate stereotypes. This language harms young people, their families and communities, and undermines Australia's efforts in securing a more inclusive society and economy.

MYAN NSW remains committed to protecting and strengthening multiculturalism in Australia. A strong multicultural and socially cohesive society significantly benefits young people, particularly those who arrive in Australia as refugees and migrants and those born in Australia to refugee or migrant parents. MYAN NSW considers multiculturalism (as a public policy framework) is the cornerstone of a meaningful social inclusion agenda. In order to continue to maximise Australia's social and economic prosperity, multiculturalism must continue to be promoted.

MYAN NSW encourages the Australian Labor Party to create inclusive opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to interact with and gain a deeper understanding of formal politics and the civic process in Australia. This includes committing to invest in civic education support in schools to ensure all young people are supported to develop their knowledge of Australian society and culture, laws, regulations, policies and political landscapes, the service system and the voting process.

A targeted approach focused on strengths and assets benefits young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have the potential to be active participants in and significant contributors to Australian society. However, young people often face particular challenges in accessing the support and opportunities they need to navigate the demands of settling in a new country. Barriers may relate to characteristics and experiences, such as:

- age
- language
- level of education
- culture and religion
- gender
- history of trauma
- mode of arrival
- knowledge of service system
- racism and discrimination

One in four young people in Australia is from a refugee and migrant background. In the 2020 Snapshot of the NSW Youth Sector³, 84% of youth services reported working with CALD young people compared with 68% in 2011. These statistics highlight the importance of a targeted and specialist approach to designing and delivering Commonwealth government services. This approach should be based on young people's strengths and assets, rather than seeing them through a deficit lens where only needs are considered.

MYAN NSW would like LMET to acknowledge the distinct ways in which young people experience and access government services which differ from adults, families and children. In programs designed for newly arrived communities, it is often assumed that adult-focused programs can be readily applied to young people. Equally, youth programs are often designed around the needs of Australian born youth and neglect the cultural and migration/settlement experiences of young people. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds would benefit from programs and services that are age-appropriate, culturally sensitive and relevant to their migration and settlement experience.

In response to these unique experiences, MYAN Australia developed the [National Youth Settlement Framework](#) (NYSF) to support a targeted and consistent approach to addressing the needs of refugee and migrant background young people in the settlement context. MYAN NSW encourages LMET to examine the framework, in particular the good practice capabilities. The capabilities reflect best practice in responding to the particular circumstances of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. When applied, the capabilities address the range of barriers young people face in accessing the support and opportunities they need to sustain participation in multicultural Australia.

1. Cultural competence
2. Youth-centred
3. Strengths-based
4. Youth development
5. Youth participation
6. Trauma-informed
7. Family-aware
8. Flexible and responsive
9. Collaboration
10. Advocacy
11. Reflective practice
12. Outcomes focused
13. Rights-based

A strengths-based approach recognises that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have enormous strengths, resources and capabilities, a strong sense of family and community, and a desire to enjoy and uphold the rights and responsibilities of Australia's democratic processes. Multicultural young people are eager to embrace opportunities to actively participate in and contribute towards a cohesive and inclusive multicultural Australian society. A strengths-based approach in service delivery involves supporting young people to identify and utilise these strengths, resources and capabilities in navigating and accessing the service system. It also involves all levels of government understanding what contributes to these strengths and use this knowledge to inform, explore and integrate the strengths of various multicultural communities in the development of responsive and targeted services.

Opportunities for collaboration

MYAN NSW works in partnership with young people and government and non-government agencies to ensure that the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised in policy and service delivery at the local, state and national levels. We are part of a wide network of organisations that have a specific focus in ensuring that governments recognise the challenges that multicultural young people face in navigating a complex, unfamiliar and often disjointed service systems. Our collaborative approach means we are actively involved with networks such as MYAN Australia, the Joint Partnership Working Group on Refugee Resettlement (JPWG), the Humanitarian

Services Program Network (HSPN), the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Community of Practice, as well as local and regional youth and multicultural interagencies. Our involvement in these networks ensures MYAN NSW is in a strong position to provide networking and partnership opportunities that help link community groups to Commonwealth government services. MYAN NSW encourages Labor’s Multicultural Engagement Taskforce to invest in growing these relationships to ensure that multicultural young people, their families and communities are continually engaged in and directly informed about future development of Commonwealth government services.

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^a Collin, P. Giordano, M. Matthews, I. Conomos, F. Acheson, K. (2020) Snapshot of the NSW Youth Sector 2020. Youth Action, Sydney.