

Victorian Multicultural Commission's response to the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) is the primary conduit between Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities and the Victorian Government. The VMC provides independent advice, informed by its regular community consultations, and Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meetings, to the Victorian Government in accordance with its statutory role under the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* (MVA).
- 1.2 The VMC makes this submission to The Joint Standing Committee on Migration in relation to the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes by responding to its Terms of Reference and identifies areas where the Australian Government can assist in improving settlement outcomes based on the VMC's gathered intelligence of Victoria's multicultural communities.
- 1.3 Given the VMC's statutory mandate under the MVA to provide independent evidence-based advice relating to Victoria's multicultural communities in the social, cultural and political life of Victoria, it is well placed to respond to the Terms of Reference, with specific regard to migrant settlement outcomes. The VMC's objectives are underpinned by the lived experiences of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and actively advocate for, and on behalf of, these cohorts across all tiers of government, the sector and the broader community.
- 1.4 The VMC has been actively advocating for positive and sustained settlement outcomes through its engagement with humanitarian arrivals, as well as co-convening formal partnerships with both state and federal government and settlement service providers to develop and implement a holistic model of support. The VMC is of the view that the settlement experience differs from one individual to another and that a long-term and fluid service delivery model is pivotal to achieving settlement outcomes.¹

2. MIGRATION CONTEXT

- 2.1 Australia's history and identity has been shaped by migration and by the unique cultures, skills and experiences of migrant communities. Migration has been integral to the economic, social and cultural development of Australia, making us a richer society and more competitive on a global market. Over the last seven decades migration has counted for seven million people to the Australian population, and may add a further 13 million by 2060.²

¹ VMC Annual Report 2015-16

² CEDA Migration: The Economic Debate, 2016

- 2.2 Victoria is internationally renowned for its multicultural success stories globally and is defined by its ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, with 47 per cent of Victorians either born overseas or having at least one overseas-born parent.³ Victoria's migration intake is predominantly through the skilled migration stream, followed by those settled through family reunion. The state has received 33 per cent of Australia's annual humanitarian intake over the past five years.⁴
- 2.3 As Australia's most diverse state, Victoria is best placed as a settlement location, not only due to its inherent diversity, but also because of its well dispersed settlement locations and strong settlement sector. Victoria is very proud of its diversity and the benefits it has bestowed to its social and economic landscapes.

3 THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

- 3.1 The Victorian Government is committed to facilitating a Whole-of-Victorian-Government approach to multicultural affairs including settlement services. Through its leadership, and history of bi-partisan support, the Victorian Government sponsors an inclusive and positive vision for the community. As such, the VMC strongly endorses the Victorian Government's bi-partisan and sustained commitment to the settlement of migrants from all backgrounds including young people, and its inclusive approach to multiculturalism.
- 3.2 Victoria's commitment to supporting strong and engaged multicultural communities is manifested through its ongoing service delivery, genuine community engagement and multicultural grants program. The government's 2016 State Budget allocated \$38.3 million to supporting migrant communities including refugees and asylum seekers over five years to strengthen outcomes across the multicultural affairs, health, education and employment portfolios.⁵
- 3.3 Through sustained investment in initiatives that foster participation and equality of opportunity, the Victorian Government continues to support migrants to participate in, and contribute to, the state's economic, cultural and social life. For example, independent advice provided to the Victorian Government by the VMC has resulted in initiatives such as the *Recruit Smarter* pilot, which seeks to tackle unconscious bias and increase employment opportunities for all disadvantaged cohorts, including migrants from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. The pilot undertakes a de-identified approach to recruitment to ensure equal opportunity for all by omitting name, gender and age from the recruitment process. The recent initiative was launched in partnership with government agencies and prominent companies in the private sector.

³ Diversity the key to economic growth, VECCI (pg 14)

⁴ VMC Annual Report 2015-16

⁵ Ibid

4 CURRENT RESPONSES TO HUMANITARIAN ARRIVALS

- 4.1 The Syrian and Iraqi displacement crisis requires a shared and coordinated international response to resettle those fleeing persecution and war. In response, the Australian Government has committed to a one-off increase of 12,000 permanent humanitarian places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Australia. The VMC was requested by the Premier of Victoria to lead the settlement coordination of Victoria's humanitarian intake.
- 4.2 To further inform the resettlement process of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Victoria, the Chairperson of the VMC recently travelled to Canada and America to investigate initiatives and approaches on responsive and proactive best-practice settlement programs. The refugee settlement programs and insights gathered from Canadian and American settlement service providers will be used to inform Victoria's wrap-around, holistic, and long-term service delivery framework to support good settlement outcomes.
- 4.3 Discussions took place with a range of stakeholders (government, local agencies, service clubs, volunteer groups and members of the wider community) in Canada and America who have primary responsibility in overseeing and delivering settlement services.
- 4.4 The VMC maintains the view that Australia can look to Canada's approach to settlement as international best-practice for migrant and refugee settlement.

5 RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

- 5.1.1 Migrants positively contribute to the economic growth and wellbeing of our society. Hugo (2011), noted that the success of Australia's Humanitarian Program is not only measured by how many people we resettle, but to what extent refugees are able to rebuild their lives and contribute to the Australian community. Supporting the successful settlement of all migrants is in the best interest of all Australians.
- 5.1.2 Current settlement services provided by the Federal Government are designed to assist humanitarian entrants and eligible migrants in the first five years of arrival and to complement existing services available to all Australians. The VMC supports the Australian Government's efforts identified in *Snapshots from Oz* to refocus the fundamental building blocks of initial and longer-term settlement by ensuring greater focus on English language proficiency, access to education and gaining employment that relates to skills and qualifications.⁶

⁶ Snapshots from Oz, 2016

5.1.3 With regards to policy, the VMC endorses the current National Settlement Framework⁷ and the National Youth Settlement Framework⁸ as high level blueprints for all three tiers of government to work in partnership and appropriately plan for, and deliver services. Evaluation and measuring settlement outcomes is necessary to not only assist future policy development and program delivery, but also to identify any potential gaps or positive factors that help the successful settlement of humanitarian migrants. The VMC recognises the Settlement Council of Australia's National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards as a rigorous evaluative model available to service providers who are responsible for providing settlement support.⁹ Longitudinal studies are also a useful evidence-base to measure settlement outcomes and ensure continuous improvement. For example, *Building a New Life in Australia*¹⁰ study is a long-term research project that measures how humanitarian migrants settle in Australia.

5.1.4 In 2016, the VMC reported on key findings and recommendations from consultations with settlement service providers and peak bodies. The consultations were conducted in a workshop format with an overarching theme *Strengthening Social Cohesion – Meeting Community Needs*. The VMC found that settlement services should be:¹¹

- determined by individual circumstance, rather than predefined timeframes and restrictions, particularly for vulnerable cohorts;
- flexible and holistic supports that cater to the unique needs of migrants;
- resourced adequately for effective service delivery;
- culturally responsive; and
- delivered through collaborative practice and partnership models.

5.1.5 Discussions at the consultations unpacked complexities around the needs of both new arrivals and those of more established communities. For example, settlement support was raised in the context of meeting increased demand to service multicultural communities. Key discussion points around resourcing effective settlement are listed below:¹²

- Help people to understand their entitlements and how they can be accessed.
- Provide assistance that links people effectively into the local community.
- Establish network groups for services and community members.
- Extend the AMES 'community guide' program to provide one-on-one support beyond six months.
- Increase settlement planning funding to five years.
- Recognise that women often have additional caring responsibilities that can delay successful settlement, which may lead to isolation. This can be remedied by assisting women to: (i) access courses at Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN) by supporting caring responsibilities and providing childcare to enable women to attend,

⁷ See National Settlement Framework - www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/national-settlement-framework

⁸ See National Youth Settlement Framework - www.myan.org.au/our-work-with-the-sector/156/

⁹ See SCOA - www.scoa.org.au/announcements/national-settlement-service-standards-project

¹⁰ <http://www3.aifs.gov.au/bnla/>

¹¹ VMC Service Providers Report, 2016

¹² Ibid

and (ii) attend LLEN courses and activities to improve social connectedness, language skills and assist in labour market access.

5.1.6 Appropriate planning and infrastructure support is crucial to the settlement of migrants and the host community. The report¹³ identified that creating appropriate levels of supporting infrastructure requires the following aspects:

- Involving migrants in the planning, management and delivering of appropriate programs.
- Developing tailored responses as required to meet migrant and host community needs.
- Supporting workforce transitions for humanitarian entrants, especially through building English language proficiency and providing adequate supports to pursue further education.

5.1.7 With regards to partnerships and coordination of settlement services, the report noted that 'no one organisation can meet all individual and/or community needs', and that integrated service pathways and joined up collaborative approaches would present better solutions, minimise duplication of effort and alleviate stresses on existing resources. From a client perspective, it also involved making connections and linking people into the services they need, as well as utilising available resources to best advantage. Participant suggestions and comments are summarised below:

- Provide better integrated service pathways, and enable agencies to work together for (optimal) outcomes, such as via improved local service provider networks.
- Share staff resources wherever possible and appropriate (for example, bilingual workers).
- Rural and regional centres to model 'one-stop-shops' to provide effective and accessible services.
- Partner with local media to publicise information and increase awareness of available services.
- Collaboratively advocate to the Federal Government and inform future settlement and multicultural policy needs.

5.1.8 Meeting the needs of humanitarian entrants can be particularly challenging considering the circumstances surrounding their entry pathway to Australia. As such, pre-settlement experiences of detention, displacement, family separation, vulnerability and experiences of torture and trauma, and the range and level of services available impact on settlement outcomes. The VMC's Service Providers report (2016) noted that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach does not respond to the varying needs of Victoria's multicultural communities and suggests that the national frameworks (refer to 5.1.3) be implemented across the settlement sector to be more responsive to the unique needs of migrants and refugees.

5.1.9 Settlement in Australia also relies on the assistance of mainstream services. Multicultural communities have informed the VMC through its RACs, community consultations and

¹³ VMC Service Providers Report, 2016

roundtables, that it is extremely critical that the delivery of mainstream services to migrants and refugees is undertaken by service providers that are culturally competent, locally place-based, client outcome focussed, and that respond in a timely and efficient manner.

The VMC recommends that the Australian Government is able to provide better settlement outcomes by:

- Strengthening cooperative partnerships across federal, state and local governments, recognising each has a crucial role to play to improve settlement service responsiveness through information sharing for better local area coordination, innovative and creative best practice models, sharing of resources and streamlined service-delivery.
- Ensuring sustained investment to build the capacity of both state and local settlement infrastructure to support a needs based and flexible settlement support service to improve settlement outcomes for new arrivals.
- Mandating an evaluation of settlement service delivery against Settlement Council of Australia's *National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards* for continuous service improvement and best-practice modelling.

5.2 National and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects

International best practice

5.2.1 The VMC is of the view that Australia should consider Canada's holistic approach to settlement given the somewhat similar approaches to migration. Canada is considered an exemplar of world's best practice with respect to its settlement programs and support of refugees. Migration continues to play an increasingly critical role in the shaping of both populations, in particular the sustained economic and social cohesive success of the respective nations. Among the benefits of ongoing migration is its ability to counter ageing populations and to amplify social and economic opportunities in an increasingly mobilised society. A variety of factors including policy developments and political leadership have led to important changes in the composition of the migrant populations over time.

5.2.2 Despite the similarities, both nations approach settlement in quite distinct ways, particularly in facing more recent political and social challenges. There is sound evidence that indicates that Australia and Canada rank as the most receptive nations to immigration amongst western nations, compared to European countries where anti-migration sentiment is strongest.¹⁴

¹⁴ Reitz J 2011, *Pro-immigration Canada. Social and economic roots of popular views*. IRPP Study, No 20 October; Markus, A 2012, 'Immigration and public opinion', in Pincus, J and Hugo, E, *A Greater Australia: Population, Policies and Governance*, CEDA, Melbourne, pp. 114-132

- 5.2.3 One of Canada's core immigration priorities focuses on family reunification to better facilitate and improve integration outcomes. This is consistent with feedback received by the VMC at its community consultations with recently arrived Assyrian communities, who were separated from their families when they fled the war in Syria to neighbouring countries. Australia's visa provisions often mean that family reunification is not an option for refugee status claimants in Australia which, in many circumstances, has compounded the suffering and mental issues experienced by many refugee arrivals.
- 5.2.4 Canada's globally recognised Private Sponsorship Program for refugees is a model for other countries to follow. It engages private citizens and organisations to provide financial and settlement support for refugees for up to 12 months of their initial resettlement. Many refugees are privately sponsored by family members who already live in Canada. See the report *Finding Refuge in Canada: A Syrian Resettlement Story*¹⁵ regarding different ways private sponsorship can be undertaken. Similarly, the Australian Government is trialling a Community Proposal Pilot (CPP) programme as a mechanism for communities to privately sponsor humanitarian individuals and offers a flexible pathway to resettlement in Australia. The VMC encourages greater visibility and community outreach of this program, particularly as it provides a pathway to reuniting families. The VMC welcomes the CPP as a private resettlement model and it is encouraging that the Australian Government is lifting its refugee intake with the announcement of an additional 500 places under the Community Support Program.¹⁶

Political leadership

- 5.2.5 The VMC's community consultations and research clearly identify the impact of leadership statements on community harmony, and social cohesion should not be underestimated. As such, it is critical that all Australian leaders focus on the positive contribution that migrants have made and continue to make to the Australian society, and recognise the vital role Australian settlement services play in facilitating this.
- 5.2.6 The VMC firmly believes that Canada has been at the forefront in demonstrating how compassion, positive narratives, and political leadership have galvanized a nation towards immigration and laying the groundwork for good settlement outcomes to be achieved for all migrants. The Trudeau Government has encouraged common good will and has embraced a more humanistic approach to immigration which has generated a supportive environment for all communities, not just humanitarian arrivals.
- 5.2.7 Many of the organisations consulted during the Chairperson's visit to Canada commented on how the change in political narrative at the highest level of government around immigration and multiculturalism has shifted community views and support of refugees. Catherine Dauvergne, Professor of Law at the University of British Columbia summarised this notion well – that overall support for the arrival and settlement of Syrian refugees in Canada was

¹⁵ http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/sen/committee/421/RIDR/Reports/RIDR_RPT_SyrianResettlement_FINAL_E.pdf

¹⁶ http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2016/jb_mr_160921.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D

due in large part to the Canadian Government's proactive, positive narrative and injection of resources into the settlement system.

- 5.2.8 Similar to Australia, negative responses to immigration are still present among communities in Canada. A meeting with the Hon Laura Albanese, Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration provided insight into the political leadership and narratives upheld by her government. The Minister advised that negative messages are never allowed to permeate the positive stories and benefits of migration – they are kept separate. Canada focuses on learning from each other and the differences in cultures, and by ensuring that diversity is represented across members of parliament. She outlined that her Government strongly promotes respect and leadership, by reinforcing the message that Canada's identity is built on immigration through nation building which "makes our province stronger and ensures that multiculturalism is engrained in our values".
- 5.2.9 In Toronto, The Hon Michael Coteau, Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism held a community consultation to inform the establishment of an Anti-Racism Directorate for Ontario. Key discussion focused on systemic racism, particularly Islamophobia which is considered the fastest growing hate in Canada. Feedback put forward was around holding institutions accountable to discrimination practices and the collection of data and evidence to inform government programs, services and policies.

Community and refugee readiness

- 5.2.10 The positive learnings of the Canadian approach to resettlement demonstrates the benefits of first preparing host communities to embrace and welcome new arrivals. It was also acknowledged that similar preparedness is necessary for refugees to ensure the success of their immediate settlement prior to arrival to Canada. Australia can look to Canada's #WelcomeRefugees¹⁷ federal website as a resource centre for both new arrivals and host communities to easily access information (e.g. orientation and settlement services, including housing and jobs information, English language skills, civic engagement, and cultural responsiveness) and to receive emotional and other support.
- 5.2.11 The City of Vancouver has developed the Vancouver Immigration Partnership (VIP) which brings together community groups and organisations to support migrants as they settle in Vancouver. The Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) funded program is designed to assist newcomers through the support of community-based knowledge and local strategic planning, improving accessibility to services, and creating an overall Vancouver Immigrant Settlement and Immigration Strategy – *New Start Strategy*.¹⁸ VIP builds on the success of the Welcoming Communities Initiative (2013-14), a City of Vancouver project that involved 27 of the city's most respected community service agencies and links in with the City's *Healthy City Strategy*. This collaboration saw the creation of innovative and effective strategies designed to increase understanding, awareness and communication in supporting the unique needs and perspectives of Vancouver's newcomers.

¹⁷ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/>

¹⁸ <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancouver-city-local-immigration-partnership.aspx>

Social inclusion

- 5.2.12 A holistic settlement framework that focuses on programs to engage new arrivals and encourages social inclusion will ultimately provide better two-way integration settlement outcomes. The power of sports, arts and cultural programs to provide avenues for new arrivals to participate in the community cannot be underestimated.

Sport

The City in the Community (CITC) was launched in New York City in 2010 in partnership with Manchester City Football Club and the United Arab Emirates Embassy and has provided a safe space for young people to play soccer.¹⁹ Victoria's own City in the Community initiative was launched in 2015 by the Melbourne City Football Club to promote employment, social inclusion and physical activity between the football club and the local Victorian community.²⁰ More recently the Victorian Government, with the support of the VMC, has announced *The Multicultural Sports Funds Grants Program* which will work in partnership with Victorian sporting bodies to help local sporting clubs boost participation among culturally diverse women and multicultural communities.²¹

Art/culture

Art for Refugees in Transition (A.R.T), was established in New York to help rebuild individual and community identity for refugees worldwide with programs that engage children and adults in visual, performing and creative arts drawn from their own indigenous cultures. A.R.T has enabled elders to teach young people cultural traditions, provide materials to facilitate cultural learning and instilled a sense of identity, belonging and personal development amongst young people. This program addresses both the intergenerational disconnect between young people and leaders in their communities, and the ability for young people to express themselves through the arts. It also provides tools to help refugee communities rebuild their communities and cope with the trauma and dislocation of war and natural disaster.

¹⁹ <http://www.nycfc.com/community/new-york>

²⁰ <http://www.melbournecityfc.com.au/community/city-in-the-community/qjnuj9h7aqyr1pznjqkwablkw>

²¹ <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/banding-together-through-sport/>

The VMC recommends that Australian Government look to Canada’s settlement model and approach to the resettlement of humanitarian arrivals as one of political leadership and positive narrative. This could be done by:

- Developing of positive narratives and messaging around migration.
- Encouraging family reunification.
- Fostering the advantage diversity affords Australia both now and in the future.
- Expanding the collective good will of the Australian community by promoting the Community Support Program through community outreach.
- Ensuring an evidence-based approach to government decision making including legislation, policies, programs and services to identify, monitor and prevent systemic racism and discrimination.
- Developing a federal website as a resource centre for both new arrivals and host communities to easily access information regarding orientation and settlement services.
- Developing community-based partnerships to provide avenues for sports, arts and cultural programs for new arrivals.

5.3.1 *The importance of English language ability on a migrant, or prospective migrant’s settlement prospects*

- 5.3.1 The VMC acknowledges that English language proficiency is paramount to successful settlement as it is a precursor to securing sustainable employment, undertaking further education and training, and participating in the broader community. Maintaining government commitment for the delivery of practical everyday English language training for all arrivals will go a long way to ensuring they are empowered and equipped to confidently interact with and contribute to their community and obtain meaningful employment.
- 5.3.2 Current Australian migration policy is primarily concerned with economic imperatives, and for those newly arrived, English language proficiency is key to accessing local labour markets.²² Research supports a correlation between the impact of language proficiency on unemployment rates across all migration streams.²³
- 5.3.3 The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) delivered by the Australian Government’s Department of Education and Training provides English language tuition to eligible permanent and temporary migrants. AMEP delivers foundational outcomes in areas of English language skills, settlement information and cultural orientation, establishment of social connections, and transition to further training and employment.²⁴
- 5.3.4 The VMC welcomes the Federal Government’s reformed AMEP business model, due to be implemented on 1 July 2017. The prospective model will address specific challenges facing multicultural communities. Community feedback during RAC meetings in 2015-16 identified specific challenges, including:

²² VMC Service Providers Report

²³ Snapshots from Oz, 2016

²⁴ AMEP and Settlement outcomes, AMEP Conference, 2013

- The AMEP is not sufficient to provide a pathway to employment, particularly for those needing ongoing tuition and language support.
- The AMEP can be restrictive in terms of eligibility, attendance and assessment.
- Migrant women experiencing difficulties in accessing English language programs, including access to childcare which impact women's employment outcomes.
- Lack of awareness of available language services and transitions to accessing mainstream services.
- 510 hours of English language learning hours is not sufficient and puts a lot of pressure on new arrivals.
- Language is a barrier to social cohesion and inclusion.
- Need for specific language programs to assist new arrivals in navigating systems, for example using public transport and understanding work rights and responsibilities.
- Despite the AMEP, many community members find it difficult to progress English language proficiency.

The reformed model will focus on creating more flexibility in tuition delivery to increase participation and improve learning outcomes. Furthermore, it will provide choice of tuition streams (Social English or Pre-employment English), along with the additional capped sub-program of 490 hours (in addition to the standard 510 hours), which will seek to better support migrants throughout their settlement journey.²⁵

5.3.5 In terms of settlement service delivery, the VMC Service Providers Report (2016) illustrates that communication is a major barrier for service providers in meeting client needs. Low English proficiency impacts upon other aspects to service delivery such as gauging cultural intelligence, which is required in delivering culturally responsive services.²⁶

5.3.6 Through its consultations with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, the VMC has found that poor English language skills are a major barrier to accessing and participating in employment, work experience and having networks and connections to facilitate entry into labour markets. The following comments from young diverse people were captured at the VMC's youth forums conducted in 2015:

- Concerns about accents and perceptions of poor English language skills from potential employers.
- Language barriers, poor reading and writing skills, and lack of proficiency in English can be a barrier at interview.
- Language barriers in writing job applications, grammar for non-English speaking backgrounds is hard.
- More tutoring needed and support for languages.
- Difficulties with English language skills, people don't readily provide assistance.

²⁵ Snapshots from Oz, 2016

²⁶ Cultural intelligence relates to information about ethnicity or ancestry of a client.

The VMC recommends that the Australian Government recognises the importance of English language ability for better settlement prospects by:

- Implementing an appropriate evaluation of the AMEP program at 510 hours of completion and again at 490 hours of completion to measure the impact of AMEP across all settlement outcomes.
- Strengthening access to out-of-school learning for students from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to improve English language skills.
- Encouraging AMEP to assist with transitioning to mainstream services.

5.4 Whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects

- 5.4.1 Existing migration processes include a robust range of checks and balances designed to ensure that newly arrived migrants and refugees meet public interest criteria. It is difficult to determine a person's likelihood of successfully integrating before their arrival, nor to attempt to determine that of future generations of a migrant's or refugee's family. To attempt to do so could be considered racial profiling and is contrary to Australia's non-discriminatory migration policies.
- 5.4.2 With the increasing resettlement of refugees and requests for asylum, the VMC's view is that current migration processes must be accompanied by sufficient support and resources to achieve good and sustainable settlement in a globalised context. Resettlement is a durable solution put forward by the UNHCR which allows individuals to seek asylum and to rebuild their lives with peace and dignity
- 5.4.3 For those seeking asylum, the initial resettlement period may be filled with uncertainty, mixed emotions and concern for any family members left behind as they wait for their protection claims to be assessed and their status to be resolved. The nature of refugee determination creates significant anxiety and additional stress on asylum seekers as they experience delays in visa processing and the diminishing prospect of reuniting with their family. Current Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Special Humanitarian Entrant Visa (SHEV) holders are restricted to accessing settlement services, government welfare supports, limited access to housing and to further education. All of which impede good settlement and places these individuals at greater risk of disengagement.
- 5.4.4 Inadequate levels of support for young people seeking asylum, particularly for those that are unaccompanied, only exacerbates their vulnerability and effects their settlement prospects. For example, limited financial support creates significant difficulties in covering basic costs associated with secondary education. Many of these young people often resort to dropping out of school, leaving them disengaged and living below the poverty line.²⁷
- 5.4.5 Australia's current family reunification provision limits opportunities for families to reunite, compounding the mental trauma experienced by many humanitarian arrivals. The diminished prospect of family reunification for TPV and SHEV holders, and in particular for young people, undermines their ability to recover from trauma, participate and actively contribute to the Australian community.

²⁷ Refugee Council of Australia, *Barriers to education for people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas*, 2015

5.4.6 Through its community consultations and RACs, the VMC has captured evidence about the unique challenges facing TPV and SHEV holders, who are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, poor mental health and wellbeing, discrimination and social isolation and thus, impacting on settlement prospects. Some of the findings included:

Visas

- Visa restrictions impacting the ability to pursue further education and to work even in a volunteer capacity.
- Insecure visa status impacting on mental health and wellbeing.
- Refugees in regional areas are concerned about their citizenship delays – lack of formal communication for over 16 months.

Impact of family separation

- Impact of long term mental health issues is often compounded by delays in reunification with family members, and pre and post arrival experiences.
- Those seeking to reunite with family in Australia and have lodged applications, and have completed medical examinations and interviews have been subject to extensive waiting periods, causing immense financial and psychological stress on their families who often suffer from survivor guilt.
- Financial pressures on recent arrivals who send money back home to support families with basic shelter, clothing and food needs.

Accessing services

- Difficulties in navigating and accessing the limited available support services for asylum seekers.

Mental health and wellbeing/family violence

- Concern for undiagnosed and mistreated mental health issues of asylum seekers who will settle in Australia after prolonged and indefinite periods of detention.

Settlement services

- Local government councils and service providers' ability to effectively plan and coordinate services for asylum seekers is negatively impacted by the lack of available and timely data about the incoming cohorts.

Media narratives

- Negative media portrayal of asylum seekers and refugees impacting on limited opportunities for intercultural interactions in safe environments.²⁸
- Young forum participants described the frequency with which negative views are aired in the national media, and its damaging effects - 'on the news 24/7'. Although they understood that this was the 'policy of Australia' ('turn back the boats') they felt that this continuous stereotyping impacts negatively upon all multicultural communities and subsets in some measure, making them feel they don't belong.²⁹

²⁸ Comments made by a young woman from Dandenong – extracted from VMC Youth Report, 2015

²⁹ extracted from VMC Youth Report, 2015

The VMC recommends that the Australian Government is responsible for improving current migration processes by:

- Revising current migration processes, particularly visa restrictions, to enable asylum seekers the ability to access higher education opportunities and welfare supports.
- Increasing the capacity of service providers to advance long-term positive mental health and wellbeing of humanitarian arrivals, who may have experiences of torture and other related trauma both pre and post settlement.

5.5 The VMC provides comment to other related matters as discussed below:

Involvement of youth migrants in ‘anti-social behaviour’

The VMC is in a unique position to comment on the involvement of young migrants in anti-social behaviour, including ‘gang activity’ given its longstanding engagement with multicultural communities. In response to the recent public events of crime related activity involving particular community groups, the VMC undertook a number of roundtable discussions in 2015/16 to obtain a collective understanding of the broader issues impacting young migrants and refugees.

The VMC notes that young people from migrant or refugee backgrounds represent 25% of Australian young people. Victorian Crime Statistics do not indicate that this group is over-represented in anti-social behaviour but reveal that across all criminal activity, most offences are committed by young people born in Australia.³⁰

While in many respects young people from multicultural backgrounds share similar challenges to mainstream groups, there is also a range of issues more specific to the multicultural cohort that may place some of these young people at increased risk of personal, social and economic disadvantage.

Given available data and research information the VMC believes that the involvement of youth migrants in ‘anti-social behaviour’ is of a similar level to mainstream, and the issues underpinning such behaviour are not based on their ethnicity or migrant status, but are identical in nature to Australian-born young people’s involvement in anti-social behaviour. Such issues may include low socioeconomic areas, exposure to violence and crime, lack of support services, poor social connections, academic failure, lack of parental involvement and high levels of family conflict.³¹

The VMC Youth Report 2015 ‘*Engaging Our Youth: Our Future*’ provides detailed findings of the challenges that face young people from multicultural backgrounds as they navigate transitions to full adulthood in Victoria. Please refer to **Attachment A** for a summary of key findings and recommendations.

³⁰ <http://bsllibrary.org.au/housing/youth-housing-homelessness/never-refugee-young-people-homelessness-australia-children-youth-services-review-79315/>

³¹ http://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/Fair_and_Accurate_1.pdf

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