

# Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People and Digital Citizenship:

## A Pilot Study



## Executive Summary

Online technologies have fundamentally reshaped the meaning and function of citizenship in the internet age because they have reshaped public space. As digital environments become more important in contemporary society, the extent to which individuals can participate in digital life will shape access to opportunities and benefits, including full participation in civic life.

Active citizenship, or full and equal participation in civic life, is necessary for integration in society. Jakubowich et al. (2014: 11) argue that a central aspect of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people's integration is the extent to which they are socially included in their neighbourhood, yet much of this integration can happen online. Similarly, other forms of civic engagement and activities, including economic, cultural and political participation, are increasingly taking place, at least partially, online. As our online and offline lives become increasingly enmeshed, what it means to be an active citizen comes to depend evermore on digital inclusivity and digital citizenship.

Rather than treat 'digital citizenship' as a separate realm of citizenship, this project conceives of the digital as a new medium for pre-existing civic practices. The task is to rethink citizenship through the digital. In other words, rather than treating digital citizenship as a domain of civic practices separate from social citizenship, economic citizenship, political citizenship or cultural citizenship, this project attempts to understand how CALD young people participate in social, economic, political, and cultural civic practices using digital technologies and environments.

This project does this by exploring how CALD young people (16 to 25-years-old) in Victoria, Australia use digital and mobile technologies to participate in key domains of citizenship: that is, social, economic, political, and cultural domains. The project also explores the relationship between CALD parents' and their children's use of digital and mobile technologies.

The project used an online survey and focus groups with a total of 203 CALD people. 175 young people participated in the online survey and 20 young people and 8 parents in the focus groups.

Most of the survey participants were born outside of Australia (69%) and have come to Australia to study (55%). CALD young people from refugee backgrounds, young people who are working full-time, as well as young people who are in neither education nor employment were under-represented in this survey sample. Focus group participants were predominantly newly arrived to Australia.

## Findings

This project suggests that, overall, CALD young people are highly engaged in civic practices through digital technologies, participating across all key domains of citizenship: social, political, cultural, and economic life. The project also shows that they are aware of online security risks and safety issues and have developed various ways of negotiating these issues. However, the focus groups suggest that digital access is uneven along class and generational lines rather than ethnic lines. This recognises that socio-economic status is interlinked with mode of arrival and length of time in Australia, and some ethnic groups may be over-represented in these.

## Digital Access

Digital access includes physical access, as well as, the skills, literacy, and knowledge to use digital technologies. Except for one individual, all CALD young people that participated in the survey or focus groups had access to a mobile phone and at least one computer at home or school. Newly arrived CALD parents had uneven digital access, owing to differences in digital skills and digital literacy.

CALD young people tended to use their mobile phones for socialising and networking and their computers for studying and entertainment.

- 68% of survey respondents had more than one computer in their home, however, only three newly arrived focus group participants had their own laptops.

CALD young people tended to be self-sufficient in terms of learning about the internet.

- Almost three-quarters (74%) are self-taught with only one-tenth (10%) having learnt about the internet or digital devices at school.
- If they encounter a problem online, most young people do their own research or ask a friend. Only 15% would ask a family member for help while none said they would go to a teacher or an IT professional for help.

When asked why they go online, survey respondents reported:

- to make friends and socialise (75%)
- to gain new skills and experience (70%)
- to work with a group of like-minded young people (57%)

- to belong (39%)
- to have a say and to be heard (35%).

While making friends/socialising and gaining new skills were the overriding motivations for all CALD young people in the survey, some differences emerged in how different sub-groups responded to this question.

- Young Australian citizens and permanent residents had as their third motivating factor to work with a group of people who share similar ideas (64%) and to belong (41%).
- For young temporary residents belonging was less relevant, these young people rather choose to go online to gain new skills and experiences (78%) and to have a say and their voice heard (48%).
- Belonging (60%), having a voice and being heard (60%) and putting their ideas into action (60%) is more important to those who are not studying than to those who are still in education.
- Contributing to something positive was particularly important to young people who were not born in Australia, but have permanent resident status (21%) and to those participants who were not in education anymore (30%).
- For those who were not studying, digital activity was significant because it contributed to making new friends (30%), while those young people who were studying did not report this.
- Focus group participants from newly arrived backgrounds also highlighted the advantage of the mobile phone in terms of its GPS features. Access to GPS allowed them to navigate public space more confidently, which also allowed them to learn about their new neighbourhoods or city faster.

Certain groups also reported experiencing particular barriers to participating online:

- Feeling unwelcome or unaccepted was more prevalent among those with permanent or temporary residence.
- Not knowing what is involved and what opportunities are available is a bigger block for young people not in education, than for those who are studying.
- Findings suggest that economic, more so than racial/ethnic, differences impact upon digital access for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in Victoria. This recognises socio-economic status is

interlinked with mode of arrival and length of time in Australia, and some ethnic groups may be over-represented in these.

- Participants in the CALD parents focus group, newly arrived parents from Thailand and Burma, reported limited digital access in terms of skills and knowledge.

## Social Engagement Online

Social participation, such as connecting with friends, family and work colleagues, are important aspects of social citizenship. They provide important ways for people to feel that they belong in local communities and wider society.

The survey shows that CALD young people regularly use digital technologies to participate in social activities.

- More than 80% of CALD young people surveyed use social media and messaging services for daily contact with friends and family in Australia.
- Around half are in daily contact with family and friends overseas, highlighting how digital technology is facilitating transnational friendships and contact with their homeland.

The major motivations for going online were:

- to make friends and socialise (75%).
- to belong (39%).

While social media is a robust space for CALD young people to socialise with existing friends and family, contact outside these circles (i.e. bridging networks) is relatively limited for most CALD young people.

- only 32% use social media to make new friends.
- 1 in 5 CALD young people surveyed have directly experienced harassment, discrimination or bullying online.
- 1 in 4 have a friend who has experienced harassment or discrimination online.

## Cultural Engagement Online

Cultural engagement includes producing and consuming cultural products and participating in cultural events. Cultural engagement is important for young people's intellectual development and allows young people to shape the community's shared meanings and values.

The data underscores the centrality of the internet for the cultural engagement of CALD youth.

- Almost all CALD young people in our survey (97%) use the internet to listen to music daily or occasionally.
- 91% watch movies or TV online daily or occasionally.

The internet also facilitated online multilingual engagement.

- 65% of CALD young people surveyed occasionally or daily watch/listen/read things online in languages other than English.
- 60% occasionally watch/listen/read things online in languages they cannot speak.

The internet facilitates participation in both online and offline social and cultural activities, but not to the same degree for newly arrived young people.

- 90% of survey participants used the internet to find information about social activities and social clubs occasionally or daily.
- 80% use the internet to participate in social activities or social clubs online.
- newly arrived young people in the focus groups said that they did not share news of volunteering or local social events online because they did not receive this news or have access to it.

## Political Engagement Online

Being able to participate in political processes allows young people to have a say in who runs the country or the local council and to shape the wider environment. Political engagement was measured in terms of online interactions with traditional political institutions and leaders (such as political parties and community leaders), and involvement in online political activities (such as signing online petitions, being active in online political groups, reading political news, and engaging in online political discussion).

The data suggests that CALD young people are very politically active online but not through traditional political channels.

- 79% of CALD young people surveyed avoided participating in online political groups or forums.
- almost 90% never or rarely ever contact politicians or other leaders online.

In contrast:

- CALD young people in the survey (66%) read news about politics online often or every day.
- For more than half of the participants (57%) social media is a way to get information about social and political issues.

- 22% use social media to inform others about social and political issues.
- 16% post their thoughts about politics on any social media platform regularly while a further 21% do it occasionally.
- 70% used the internet to find information about their rights.
- At least half of the survey's respondents use the internet to sometimes sign online petitions, find knowledge about electoral politics and politicians, and search volunteering opportunities online.

Focus groups showed that CALD young people are quite sophisticated in navigating perceived political bias in online news reporting, as well as, in choosing when and how to engage politically online.

There is also some evidence from the focus groups that CALD young people who are politically active are more likely to encounter harassment and bullying, which suggests that digital safety should be understood in relation to specific activities.

## Economic Engagement Online

Economic participation is important for being able to conduct daily activities (for example, banking), and for achieving important life goals, such as studying for a degree. Being able to participate economically in society does not just provide necessary income, but also creates confidence, builds important networks, develops skills, and adds to feelings of belonging.

The survey shows that CALD young people use the internet for education, business and other economic activity.

- 88% of survey participants use online banking, which is comparable with the general population.
- more CALD young people use the internet for shopping (80%) than the general youth population.
- CALD young people navigate online shopping using different strategies to protect their financial safety.
- almost two-thirds of participants (67%) never or rarely ever use the internet for economic gain.
- a small but significant minority (14%) use the internet daily or often to earn money. How this income is generated was not captured and is an issue that

requires further research.

- All but one survey participant use the internet for studying and researching assignments.
- Most survey participants use the internet to plan their future education (93%) or to search for work (84%).
- The internet was also important for newly arrived migrants who use it in class to assist with learning, including searching for translations.

## Newly Arrived CALD Migrant Parent-Child Digital Divide

The most significant finding of the project was evidence of a digital divide between newly arrived migrant parents and their children.

In the focus groups, the newly arrived CALD parents had not used the internet until they came to Australia, although they use it regularly now. In these cases, CALD migrant parents had to learn new technologies upon arrival in Australia. This meant their digital skills and knowledge was quite uneven and sometimes lacking.

Consequently, many newly arrived CALD parents in the focus group relied on their children for help to use the internet. According to newly arrived CALD young people in the focus groups, this responsibility sometimes tended to fall on the young men in the family.

Newly arrived CALD parents were aware that they lacked knowledge of what their children were doing online. Some did not have enough digital knowledge to be able to effectively monitor their children's use of the internet. Even if they did attempt to limit their child's use of the internet, they sometimes lacked the technical skills needed to enforce their rules.

## Recommendations

### 1. Address barriers to digital access among newly arrived migrants, both young people and parents:

- A. Federal and State government support for services to provide training to newly arrived migrants on digital access, literacy, and skills. There should be a focus on newly arrived CALD parents to help them support their children's online participation, as well as, various digital practices they may need to perform as parents.
- B. Federal and State government to fund technological support among services working with CALD young people to support the services' engagement in digital environments.
- C. Local councils to fund the development and implementation of digital strategies for engaging local CALD young people in social and cultural events, particularly newly arrived migrants.

### 2. Government and non-government agencies that work with CALD young people develop effective digital communication strategies in a multicultural online context:

- A. Non-government and community organisations review the accessibility of their digital communication strategies for CALD young people. Digital communication strategies for CALD young people should emphasise interactive, dynamic content for self-directed learning across multiple platforms. (For example, campaigns aimed at CALD young people could consider transmedia storytelling to engage young people across multiple platforms.)
- B. Government communication strategies for CALD communities need to consider that CALD young people may be translating material for their parents. Consideration should be given to why this is happening and how digital materials and information can be made more accessible for older migrants.
- C. The Victorian Department of Education and Training should work with schools that are servicing newly arrived migrants to review online communication strategies and engagement with CALD parents regarding the fact that CALD students are often translating school communication (such as letters or forms) for their parents.

### 3. Universities, government, and services to conduct further research

- A. An in-depth national study of Australian newly arrived migrants' digital technologies is needed to provide more nuance to these findings. Specifically, the study should highlight the family dynamics surrounding the use of digital technologies rather than focusing on individual use of digital technologies.
- B. Increased understanding of CALD young people's online political participation in the context of their empowerment is needed to address community fears of 'online radicalisation'.
- C. More focused studies on specific domains of citizenship online to assess not just the activities but the contributions of CALD young people to the economy, society, politics and culture. In particular, research on newly arrived young people's use of the internet for income is needed.
- D. Universities should provide training for teachers and educators to take account of the fact that CALD migrant students may be using digital technologies for translation in the classroom.