

# Everyday Reality

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RACISM AND YOUNG PEOPLE



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### Everyday Reality: Racism and Young People

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The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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***“There is racism and we are affected by it, in every part of our lives”***

– Young woman at CMY’s youth forum

## Executive Summary

Despite the diversity of the Victorian community, racism is an everyday reality for young people of migrant and refugee background.<sup>1</sup> Against this backdrop, debate about our cultural diversity has in recent years become increasingly politicised and conflicted nationally.<sup>2</sup> While research on racism and youth wellbeing in Australia remains limited,<sup>3</sup> it is clear that young people experience racism as a significant issue in a range of contexts.

Racism manifests itself in variety of ways in the lives of young people. Racism can be intercultural and occur across many different racial groups.<sup>4</sup> For some young people, experiencing racism in Australia is a continuation of the racism they experienced prior to arriving in Australia.<sup>5</sup> For other young people, racism adds a layer of challenge to the already complex transitions that take place during adolescence.<sup>6</sup>

Racism has a negative impact upon the settlement and transition of young migrants and refugees, affecting self-esteem, self-confidence, and belonging to the broader community.<sup>7</sup> Racism threatens personal and cultural identity and is often linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and anger.<sup>8</sup>

Racism also negatively affects young people’s health. Both Indigenous and young people of migrant and refugee background experience the negative effects of racism through inequitable access to resources; higher exposure to risk factors; mental health; and disengagement from healthy activities.<sup>9</sup> VicHealth concludes that as individual coping strategies do not appear to provide sufficient protection, organisational and community interventions are needed to reduce racism.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding these issues, many young people are passionate anti-racism activists both within their own cultural communities and the wider Victorian community. However it is the combined work of the whole Victorian community - including government, business, community members and young people - needed to tackle racism.

1 Francis, S. and Cornfoot, S. 2007, Multicultural Youth in Australia: Settlement and Transition Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

2 The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia Joint Standing Committee on Migration, March 2013.

3 Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 2009, The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians. Accessed 3 May 2013. [http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact\\_of\\_Racism\\_FYA\\_report.pdf](http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact_of_Racism_FYA_report.pdf) page 16.

4 Ibid, page 110.

5 Refugee Health Research Centre, 2007, Good Starts for Refugee Youth, Broadsheet #4.

6 Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2006, Late Arrivals: The needs of refugee young people who resettle in later adolescence.

7 FYA, 2009 page 18.

8 Ibid

9 Paradies, Y. 2013, Definitions, manifestations and impacts of racism for young Australians, CMY Statewide Forum, 4 April 2013.

10 Paradies, Y. Chandrakumar, L. Klocker, N. Frere, M. Webster, K. Burrell, M. & McLean, P. 2009, Building on our strengths: a framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria, Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).

# 1. Setting the scene: diversity in Victoria

## *Multiculturalism is part of the daily experience of Victorians*

- All of Us, Victoria's Multicultural Policy<sup>11</sup>

Victoria is the most culturally diverse state in Australia, with more than one quarter of Victorians born overseas in more than 200 countries.<sup>12</sup> Almost half of Victorians (46.8%) were either born overseas, or have at least one parent born overseas.<sup>13</sup> Data from the 2011 national census shows that 23 per cent of Victorians speak language other than English at home (an increase from 20.4% in 2006).<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Background

In December 2012, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) held a forum with 40 young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds on the topic of racism. Young people from both Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre's Ethnic Youth Council (EYC) and CMY's Youth Advisory Group (YAG) set the topic of the forum based on discussions with peers in their own migrant and refugee communities. Young people made recommendations as to what government, schools and services could do to better support anti-racist practice and improve young people's wellbeing.

In April 2013, CMY hosted a Statewide Forum for 90 participants from government, community, sporting and multicultural agencies. The forum addressed contemporary manifestations of racism; the legal architecture relating to racial discrimination in Victoria; CMY's engagement with racism over the past 25 years; and migrant and refugee young people's experiences of and views on racism. The forum included breakout groups on the key themes of Media, Sport, Education and Employment, to generate discussion and recommendations to tackle racism against young people.

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<sup>11</sup> Victorian Government, 2009, All of Us: Victoria's Multicultural Policy. <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/MulticulturalPolicy09-res.pdf> Accessed 17 May 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC), 2011 Census: a snapshot of our diversity, <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/population-and-migration/victorias-diversity/2011-census-a-snapshot-of-our-diversity>. Accessed on 17 May 2013.

<sup>13</sup> VMC, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Understanding racism

Racism is commonly understood as a combination of both prejudice and power.<sup>15</sup> It is expressed through stereotypes (racist beliefs); prejudice (racist emotions) and discrimination (racist behaviours and practices).<sup>16</sup>

Although racism can also be perpetuated by people from ethnic or racial minority groups who may also be the victims of racism,<sup>17</sup> it is those with greater social power, including organisations and institutions, that have potential for greater impact.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, race-based discrimination occurs when “behaviours and practices result in avoidable and unfair inequalities across groups in society.”<sup>19</sup> Discrimination affects multiple areas of people’s lives, and has a dramatic impact on the distribution of life chances, including education, employment, housing, health and wellbeing.<sup>20</sup>

Racism occurs in multiple forms. Direct racism - unequal treatment that results in unequal opportunity - is often easier to identify than indirect racism. Indirect racism is equal treatment that results in unequal opportunity, such as delivering an essential service in English to participants with limited English language skills, or demanding that all employees have their head uncovered while working.<sup>21</sup> Such examples may not be motivated by prejudice or negative stereotypes, yet the effect is still that of racial discrimination.<sup>22</sup>

Both indirect and direct racism serve to reinforce existing inequalities, in terms of access to power, resources and opportunity.<sup>23</sup> The fact that racism serves to strengthen inequalities on the basis of ethnicity means that it also reinforces existing privilege also based on ethno-racial grounds.<sup>24</sup>

Racism can occur at three conceptual levels which can occur simultaneously:

- **Internalised racism** – when negative beliefs about ethno-racial groups are adopted by people belonging to that particular group, which serves to uphold or intensify inequality of opportunity;
- **Interpersonal racism** – when unequal power distribution across ethno-racial groups is maintained or exacerbated by interactions between individuals;
- **Systemic or institutional racism** – when resources in society (including material, informational and symbolic) serve to maintain or exacerbate the unequal distribution of opportunity across ethno-racial groups.<sup>25</sup>

15 Berman, G. & Paradies, Y. 2008, Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: towards effective anti-racist praxis, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2008, p. 3; Ethnic Youth Council Network (EYIN), 1992, *Breaking Barriers: A resource kit for housing services and workers with NESB young people*, Fitzroy: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, page 25.

16 Berman & Paradies, page 4; EYIN, 1992, page 14.

17 Berman & Paradies, page 3.

18 Paradies, 2009, page 17.

19 Ibid.

20 Link, B. & Phelan, G. 2001, Conceptualising Stigma, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 363-385.

21 Berman & Paradies, page 4.

22 Ibid, page 3.

23 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *National Anti-Racism Strategy*, July 2012, p. 3.

24 Berman & Paradies, page 4.

25 Berman & Paradies, page 4.

## 4. CMY's engagement with racism

CMY is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. Our purpose is to ensure that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have every opportunity to succeed in Australia. We believe diversity is a cornerstone of Australia's success, we believe respect for everyone's human rights is essential for a fair and equal society and we believe everyone should be able to feel like they belong and can participate fully.

CMY has a longstanding commitment to seeking equality for multicultural young people. Given racism may be subtle or deeply entrenched, CMY recognises the need to build partnerships across communities and sectors in anti-racism work. CMY recognises the primacy of systemic racism in the challenges faced by young people. Government and civil society need to engage in challenging racism so the burden is not just on those on the receiving end of discrimination.

CMY remains committed to ensuring young people are connected and contributing to their communities and their sense of wellbeing is enhanced in safe environments free from racism. As well as working directly with young people, CMY works with the youth and settlement sectors to tackle racism in Victoria.

## 5. Legal and policy architecture

In September 1975 Australia ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which sets out our international legal obligations to eliminate racism and guarantee the right to equality.

At the Commonwealth level, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 is the primary mechanism by which Australia meets its obligations under the Convention, providing equality before the law and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin. In 1995 the Act was extended to make 'racial hatred' unlawful.

In 2012, the Australian Human Rights Commission released its first National Anti-Racism Strategy which identified the following priority areas: schools & higher education; media; government service provision; workplaces; online; and sport.<sup>26</sup>

Under the Anti-Racism Strategy, the Government has committed to 'a zero tolerance approach to racism'. The key objectives of the strategy are to create awareness of racism and how it affects individuals and the broader community; identify, promote and build on good practice initiatives to prevent and reduce racism; and empower communities and individuals to take action to prevent and reduce racism and to seek redress when it occurs.<sup>27</sup>

In Victoria there are three pieces of legislation relevant to racism: the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

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<sup>26</sup> AHRC, July 2012.

<sup>27</sup> AHRC, National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy Discussion Paper, March 2012.

## 6. Racism in Australia

### *Ultimately, racism hurts us all*

- Australian Human Rights Commission National Anti-Racism Strategy

Racism is alive and well in Australia today. The history of colonisation and oppression of indigenous Australians coupled with the overt racism of the White Australia Policy forms the backdrop to contemporary race discourse. There remains a broader collective discomfort in acknowledging the presence of racism in Australia. Shifts in government policies and a strong commitment to multiculturalism have reduced the acceptance of racism in contemporary Australia.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, one in seven Australians report experiencing discrimination because of their skin colour or background, a figure that has been steadily increasing.<sup>28</sup> The Challenging Racism Project which surveyed over 12,000 Australians in all States and Territories, revealed that the majority of Australians recognise that racism is a problem in Australia, although just under half deny that people from Anglo-Australian backgrounds experience privilege as a result.<sup>29</sup>

Research shows there is a residual core of 10 per cent of Australians who are intolerant and have very negative views around cultural and linguistic diversity.<sup>30</sup> Intolerance is characterised as unease with minority groups and multiculturalism; demands for assimilation and opposition to cultural diversity.<sup>31</sup>

The Scanlon Foundation's research around social cohesion in 2011 found that the incidence of racism is increasing in the community, with a particular negativity expressed towards asylum seekers and Muslims.<sup>32</sup> The burden of racism is unevenly distributed across cultural groups.<sup>33</sup> Negative attitudes towards immigrants from Lebanon and Iraq are close to 25 per cent, similar to the level of negative views of Muslims, suggesting both suffer from negative racist stereotyping.<sup>34</sup>

The Australian Human Rights Commission reports that racism locks people out of social and economic opportunities, entrenching disadvantage and adding unnecessary costs to workplaces and the economy.<sup>35</sup>

28 AHRC, July 2012.

29 Dunn K, Forrest J, Ip D, Babacan H, Paradies Y, & Pederson A. 2008, Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project, 4 R's Conference, University of Technology Sydney. [http://www.uws.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/42185/State\\_level\\_comparison\\_for\\_4Rs\\_conference.pdf](http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/42185/State_level_comparison_for_4Rs_conference.pdf) Accessed 19.6.13.

30 Ibid; Markus, A. 2011, Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation national surveys national report 2011, Caulfield: Monash University. <http://arts.monash.edu/mapping-population/--documents/mapping-social-cohesion-summary-report-2011.pdf> Accessed 20.6.13.

31 Dunn et al. 2008; Markus, 2011, page 31.

32 Markus, 2011, page 31.

33 Dunn, K & Nelson J, 2011, Challenging the Public Denial of Racism for a Deeper Multiculturalism, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 32 (6), page 588.

34 Scanlon Foundation, Mapping Social Cohesion 2011 Report: Summary of Key Findings. <http://www.scanlonfoundation.org.au/mappingofsocialcohesion2011.html> Accessed 17 May 2013.

35 AHRC, July 2012, page 4.

## 7. The Victorian context

***Racial and religious discrimination or vilification towards people from CALD backgrounds can limit their access to education, employment and housing and affect their health.***

- All of Us, Victoria's Multicultural Policy<sup>36</sup>

Racism is present in the everyday lives of many Victorian young people. In 2010-11, VicHealth undertook a survey of 1,139 people from CALD backgrounds in Victoria, including rural and metropolitan areas. Almost two thirds had experienced racism in the previous 12 months, with 40% experiencing six or more incidents a year.<sup>37</sup>

VicHealth found that many CALD Victorians who did experience racism ignored (45%) or accepted (26%) the occurrence.<sup>38</sup> Sixty-four per cent of respondents avoided situations where they predicted racism may take place, suggesting that some Victorians do not feel safe to participate in activities other people may take for granted.<sup>39</sup>

The Refugee Health Research Centre states that racism can act as a powerful barrier to successful settlement among refugee youth.<sup>40</sup> Young people report negative impacts of racism such as an erosion of trust in others,<sup>41</sup> affected eating,<sup>42</sup> and fear for physical safety.<sup>43</sup>

The health impacts of racism are clear: racism results in psychological distress,<sup>44</sup> specifically anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and anger.<sup>45</sup> Research further suggests that the experience of racism can lead to withdrawal from mainstream society, negative group identification or anti-social behaviour.<sup>46</sup> It can also undermine people's ability to claim equal citizenship and develop a strong sense of belonging; factors that are particularly important for migrant and refugee young people as they develop a sense of identity and transition to adulthood in the Australian context.<sup>47</sup> For instance, "those who complain about racism and privilege can easily be characterised as ungrateful if they are immigrants or religious minorities (especially if they are refugees)."<sup>48</sup>

***"It's subtle and hard to identify. It's a feeling like you can't challenge or advocate for yourself, or it might become even worse."***

- Young woman, Horn of Africa background

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Government, 2009, page 20.

<sup>37</sup> VicHealth, 2012, Mental health impacts of racial discrimination in Victorian culturally and linguistically diverse communities: Experiences of Racism survey – a summary, Carlton South. <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Mental-health-impacts-of-racial-discrimination-in-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-communities.aspx> Accessed 4 February 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, page 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, page 2.

<sup>40</sup> Refugee Health Research Centre, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> FYA, 2009, page 83

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, page 86.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, page 87.

<sup>44</sup> VicHealth, 2012, page 2.

<sup>45</sup> FYA, 2009, page 18.

<sup>46</sup> Francis, & Cornfoot, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Dunn & Nelson, 2011, page 597.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, page 597.



Racism affects beyond the person being directly targeted. VicHealth reports that 40 per cent of respondents worried at least a few times a month that friends and family would be victims of racism.<sup>49</sup> The Foundation for Young Australians noted a statistically significant correlation between negative health and wellbeing and experience of witnessing racism, indicating witnessing racism decreases health and wellbeing.<sup>50</sup>

## 8. Racism and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

VicHealth reports that people mainly experience racism in public settings, employment, shops, public transport, educational, sports and housing settings.<sup>51</sup> In the course of CMY's consultations, young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds reported experiencing racism in a range of settings, with a focus on the following sites:

- public transport
- sporting clubs
- education, including schools, TAFEs and universities
- employment
- media
- police

Despite the focus of this paper on young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, recent research undertaken by VicHealth suggests that in order to address racism, a broader community approach must be adopted. This includes the importance of 'bystander action', which involves individuals responding to specific issues of discrimination or intolerance, such as speaking out or seeking the help of others to address racism when it is observed.<sup>52</sup> Almost one quarter of respondents were uncomfortable when witnessing forms of racism, yet had not taken any action.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that community members are an untapped resource with regards to changing social norms and what is considered acceptable.

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds require the support of the community to identify and address racism in its various forms; there is an onus on all members and institutions of society to support equality and respect cultural diversity. This should be considered when examining the following settings where racism can occur.

### **Public transport**

***"I was waiting at the bus stop and it was at night and the bus driver drove past me and I started running after the bus and he stopped and said, 'Sorry mate, I couldn't see you in the dark, you just blended in'. I was shocked but I didn't know what to do and he just laughed so I laughed too. He thought this was just a joke,***

49 VicHealth, 2012, page 2.

50 FYA, 2009, page 111.

51 VicHealth, 2012, page 2.

52 Russell, Z, Pennay, D, Webster, K & Paradies, Y. 2013, Choosing to act: Bystander action to prevent race-based discrimination and support cultural diversity in Victoria, Melbourne: VicHealth, page 7.

53 Ibid, page 9.

***but it is racist.”***

– Young man, African background

In public spaces, especially on public transport, young people at CMY’s forum reported experiencing racism from the general public, public transport officers, tram and bus drivers. This accords with media reporting of several racist attacks on Melbourne public transport.<sup>54</sup>

Research undertaken by VicHealth also reveals that racist encounters in public settings, such as on public transport, are connected with extremely high levels of psychological distress.<sup>55</sup> This in turn can impact on the ability to acquire everyday goods and services.<sup>56</sup> One Sudanese young man in contact with CMY explained that his friend now refuses to catch the train to the city after having experienced racism on this train line – the fear for his physical safety directly impacts on his freedom of movement.

***“Every day I experience racism...I don’t feel safe to go to the shopping centre alone.”***

– Young women of Sri Lankan background, regional Victoria

**Sport*****“I was playing soccer and I heard referees talking about me and saying things about my country and Afghans and makes it hard to be part of (the) team so I just play soccer with my friends and not the club because it is not fun. Sometimes I think what they know about us, they don’t know our culture. My English is not good, but I know about Australia, they don’t know about Afghanistan.”***

– Young man of Afghan background

Sport is often identified as a site where racism occurs, undermining young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds’ ability to participate. The Foundation for Young Australians highlights that racism at junior levels of sport remains an issue, based on the experiences of young people in school sport and club competition settings.<sup>57</sup> Young people at CMY’s forum reported that the main perpetrators of racism were other parents, coaches, referees and sometimes other players on their team or players on opposite teams. Research conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission with African Australian young people also reveals that experiences of racism and discrimination is a strong deterrent from continuing participation in sport.<sup>58</sup>

In sporting contexts, young people have reported incidents of indirect or direct racism such as verbal and physical abuse, ostracism and exclusion.<sup>59</sup> In some instances this has taken the form of receiving unequal playing time, or parents of migrant and refugee young people encountering ostracism from other parents, resulting in them being unwilling to return to sporting competitions with their child.<sup>60</sup>

54 <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1755708/Passengers-unite-against-racist-train-rant>

55 VicHealth, 2012, page 12.

56 Ibid.

57 FYA, 2009, page 8.

58 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2010, In our own words: African Australians – A review of human rights and social inclusion issues, [www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/review/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/review/) Accessed 25 November 2012.

59 Oliff L. 2007, Playing for the future: The role of sport and recreation in supporting refugee young people to ‘settle well’ in Australia, Carlton: CMY, page 20.

60 Ibid.

The sector reported that many local sporting clubs are not culturally diverse, and remain difficult for young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds to access. While clubs have historically relied on Anglo Australian membership, participation is declining. Clubs need further cultural competency training in order to effectively engage with migrant and refugee young people, and to ensure that their settings are welcoming and embracing of cultural diversity. Additionally, for change to occur at an institutional level, organisational accountability, resource development and provision, role modelling and inter-group conduct must be adopted.<sup>61</sup>

This is highlighted by research undertaken by Taylor (2002), who

*“found a degree of incongruence between rhetoric and practice in sporting organisations. She found that 72 per cent of sport associations saw themselves as open to cultural diversity, yet few of these (12 per cent) could cite specific policies that encouraged diversity in practice... This suggests a tendency for sporting organisations to see themselves as open to diversity but failing to match this by putting structures in place.”*<sup>62</sup>

There is strong support in the Victorian community for sports clubs to take a strong leadership role in terms of promoting tolerance and respect. VicHealth’s research with over 600 community members found that there was a high level of agreement (87%) that community sports clubs should work not only to ensure their own clubs are inclusive, but also have a prominent role to play in the community in terms of upholding acceptance of cultural diversity.<sup>63</sup>

### **Education**

***“I’m African, when I started school the teacher asked me where I was from and I told them and no one in class knows where that is, and the next day they (the other students) put bananas on my locker and I told the teacher but the teacher didn’t do anything”***

– Young woman of African background

VicHealth highlights schools as a key setting for racism for young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds<sup>64</sup> and Foundation for Young Australians’ research suggests that school is the predominant setting for racist experiences, with 67 per cent of incidents reported occurring at school.<sup>65</sup>

Further research with young Victorians of Arab background highlights the social and educational impacts of racism in schools.<sup>66</sup> This cohort of young people reported feeling ambivalent about their sense of belonging to the Australian community due to the pressures of racism and exclusion exacerbated following the events of September 11, 2001.<sup>67</sup>

Young people at the CMY forum in 2013 asserted that the main perpetrators at schools were other students. However teachers can also make racist remarks. Additionally, some teachers do

61 FYA, 2009, page 8.

62 Cortis N, Sawrikar P & Muir K, 2007, Participation in Sport and Recreation by Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

63 Russell et al. 2013.

64 VicHealth, 2010, Review of strategies and resources to address race-based discrimination and support diversity in schools, Carlton South.

65 FYA, 2009, page 63.

66 Mansouri, F & Trembath, A. 2005, Multicultural education and racism: The case of Arab-Australian students in contemporary Australia, International Education Journal, 6 (4).

67 Ibid.

not respond to racism reported to them or observed in the classroom or school grounds. This silence or inaction can be viewed as being complicit.<sup>68</sup> Many young people, especially girls, also report being told that they shouldn't aim too high by teachers; they are actively discouraged from pursuing further education to avoid disappointment.<sup>69</sup>

Research has demonstrated the fundamental and influential role of teachers in addressing racism.<sup>70</sup> When they do intervene and adopt a no tolerance approach to racism in class, they can play a powerful, positive role for establishing a culture of what is acceptable and what is not.<sup>71</sup> Sector professionals highlighted the need for a whole of school approach, and to work with teachers around their pivotal role in developing consistent, anti-racist practices in both the school and classroom.

Additionally, schools can play a critical role in educating young people about other cultures to foster positive experiences with multiculturalism. The Foundation for Young Australians found that schools that adopted compulsory in classroom education around anti-racism, stereotyping and cultural diversity were less likely to have young people who demonstrated ignorance or racist attitudes.<sup>72</sup>

## ***Employment***

### ***Economic self-sufficiency is one of the most important factors in successful integration***

- United Nations international handbook on refugee resettlement<sup>73</sup>

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) outlines the importance of employment as leading to positive self identity, financial independence and aiding the process of establishing a sense of home in a new country.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the Victorian Government's Youth Statement highlights the importance of engaging young people in "employment that meets their needs, their career aspirations and provides them with long-term economic and financial security."<sup>75</sup> Racism in employment settings has been linked to undermining business outcomes, whilst valuing cultural diversity has clear benefits for businesses and the economy.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, institutional and systemic racism can pose a very real barrier to young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds from being able to secure and maintain meaningful work. VicHealth research highlights the impacts of racism on individual productivity, noting that for newly arrived people employed in the first two years after arrival, 47 per cent of all highly qualified migrants to Australia are in low or medium skilled jobs. The rate for Australian born workers is 23 per cent.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, those born overseas have also been found to be twice as likely to encounter racism in the workplace compared to people born in Australia.<sup>78</sup>

68 FYA, 2009, page 65.

69 AHRC, 2010, page 14.

70 FYA, 2009, page 67.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid, page 110.

73 Cited in Real Jobs: Employment for Migrants and Refugees in Australia, ECCV Policy Discussion Paper No 3. 2008.

74 Real Jobs: Employment for Migrants and Refugees in Australia, ECCV Policy Discussion Paper No 3. 2008.

75 Victorian Government, 2012, Engage, Involve, Create: Youth Statement, Melbourne: Victorian Government, page 10.

76 Russell et. al. 2013.

77 Paradies, Y. Chandrakumar, L. Klocker, N. Frere, M. Webster, K. Burrell, M. & McLean, P. 2009, Building on our strengths: a framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria, Melbourne: VicHealth.

78 Dunn K, Forrest J, Ip D, Babacan H, Paradies Y, & Pederson A. Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project, 2008, 4 R's Conference, University of Technology Sydney. [http://www.uws.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/42185/State\\_level\\_comparison\\_for\\_4Rs\\_conference.pdf](http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/42185/State_level_comparison_for_4Rs_conference.pdf) Accessed 19.6.13.

Migrant and refugee community members are also underrepresented in a number of employment industries. For example, in the public service, there is an over-representation of Anglo-Australians and an under-representation of other groups.<sup>79</sup> People born in non-English speaking countries comprise 21% of Australian population, yet they make up only 6% of the Australian Public Service overall.<sup>80</sup>

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds' experiences support this data. They report that gaining meaningful employment can be extremely challenging in Victoria; there is an underrepresentation of people from culturally diverse backgrounds employed across various industries. As a result there is a lack of role models for young people to look up to. Accounts of highly educated parents or community members working in unskilled labour areas, such as taxi driving or factory work, are widespread. As a result, these communities often lack the social capital, knowledge and networks to assist their young people to transition successfully into employment.

Additionally, cross-cultural knowledge is lacking in many employment settings. This makes it difficult for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to experience acceptance and understanding in workplaces that may be relatively culturally homogenous. This is compounded by a tendency for workplaces to recruit workers who are a similar 'cultural fit' to their current employees, leading to the exclusion of certain groups. This form of systemic racism is difficult to identify and subsequently challenge. For example, it is extremely problematic to establish with proof and certainty that a particular encounter, such as not being offered an interview or job, is due to racism – making any possibility of reporting fraught.<sup>81</sup> Employers can use 'merit', 'qualifications', 'experience' or 'the best person for the job' as 'rational' excuses for refusing employment, which are legally difficult to challenge, particularly for a young person.<sup>82</sup>

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds encounter numerous barriers to employment due to underlying racism, regardless of their educational level. For instance, a study conducted by the Australian National University found that the call back rates for job interviews were far fewer for Chinese and Middle Eastern sounding names than resumes submitted with Anglo-Saxon names.<sup>83</sup> Their findings suggest that people from ethnic backgrounds would need to apply for many more jobs in order to obtain an interview, with more newly arrived communities encountering further prejudice than more established migrant communities, such as those from Italian or Greek backgrounds.<sup>84</sup>

***“My second name is Mohammed, and when they [employers] read that, they go, you’re bad.”***

– Young person, Middle Eastern background<sup>85</sup>

Despite this, there is widespread support within the community for the belief that employers have a strong role to play to ensure that their workplaces are free from racial discrimination. According to VicHealth's research with over 600 Victorians, “the overwhelming majority agreed that employers had a responsibility to:

79 Dunn & Nelson, 2011, page 558.

80 Ibid.

81 Dunn and Nelson, 2011, page 591.

82 Thornton, M. & Luker, T. 2010, The New Racism in Employment Discrimination: Tales from the Global Economy, Sydney Law Review, 23 (1), page 3.

83 Booth A, Leigh A & Varganova E. 2009, Does Racial and Ethnic Discrimination Vary Across Minority Groups? Evidence From a Field Experiment, Australian National University. <http://people.anu.edu.au/andrew.leigh/pdf/AuditDiscrimination.pdf> Accessed 18.6.13.

84 Booth et al. 2009

85 Mansouri and Trembath, 2005, page 520.

- make sure people are treated fairly at work regardless of their racial or ethnic background (99%)
- act if one of their employees is subject to racism or discrimination at work (98%)
- educate workers about racial tolerance and respect (92%)
- play a leadership role when it comes to promoting respect and tolerance towards people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (90%).<sup>86</sup>

### **Media**

The media plays a critical role in shaping public debate issues of cultural diversity and racism, which can impact directly on the experiences of young people. Negative media portrayals of migrant and refugee young people can result in adverse stereotyping; high profile news reporting or comments by influential personalities can incite acts of discrimination and racism.<sup>87</sup>

Research conducted by the Foundation for Young Australians reports that 21 per cent of respondents experienced racism in the media,<sup>88</sup> particularly with regard to generating concern over migrants and refugees. This directly influences the way in which young people view their place in the community, and whether or not they have a sense of belonging. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), the negative portrayal of African Australians by mainstream media is perceived as a major obstacle to acceptance and integration within the broader Australian community.<sup>89</sup>

***“The media makes them feel they are not Australian. You know, like it’s not their country”***

- Parent of Arabic speaking young person in Victoria<sup>90</sup>

A lack of culturally diverse representation can also reinforce stereotypes and fails to reflect the reality of the community we live in. In fact, “media analysis have consistently shown that ethnic minorities are routinely misrepresented and under-represented in mainstream media.”<sup>91</sup>

This is something frequently cited by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, highlighted again at the recent CMY forum. Young people report a lack of culturally inclusive television programs and emphasise the need for more programs and stories driven by culturally diverse communities on mainstream television and radio. Research by the Foundation for Young Australians’ supports this, emphasising that the media and popular culture are powerful tools for altering discriminatory attitudes and promoting diversity.<sup>92</sup>

### **Police**

***“Police go out of their way to give you a hard time. But they don’t help you when you need it.”***

- Young man, Horn of Africa background

Victoria Police have demonstrated a strong commitment to community engagement with young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds, and there are numerous examples of

86 Russell et al., 2013, page 9.

87 AHRC, 2010, page 30.

88 FYA, 2009, page 63.

89 AHRC, 2010, page 36.

90 Mansouri & Trembath, page 524.

91 Dunn & Nelson, 2011, page 588.

92 FYA, 2009, page 111.

positive community initiatives. However there is clearly still much to be done in the area of developing anti-racist practices and respectful relationships built on mutual trust between police and migrant and refugee young people.

Throughout CMY's work, young people frequently raise concerns over racist interactions with police. They describe these experiences as highly distressing and alienating, resulting in a sense of injustice, a lack of trust in formal institutions and at times leading to broader disengagement. Research conducted by the Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre revealed that young men of African backgrounds were more likely to experience "difficulty with police than other youth, were less likely to have their rights respected, were more likely than other youth to feel that they experienced some form of inappropriate treatment by police and reported feeling racially targeted by the police."<sup>93</sup>

The issue of racial profiling by police has had recent media attention as a result of the recent historic Haile-Michael & Ors v Konstantinidis & Ors federal race discrimination case, brought by six young African men. As part of this case, renowned statisticians analysed Victoria police Law Enforcement Assistance Program data, concluding that between 2006 -2009, despite committing less crimes than the broader population, Africans in the Flemington and North Melbourne area were 2.5 times more likely to be stopped by police.<sup>94</sup> This clearly constitutes racial profiling, which is defined as any public safety or security action that is taken on the basis of stereotypes such as race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin rather than on reasonable suspicion, such as being targeted for scrutiny or being treated differently.<sup>95</sup>

The recent revelation of Operation Molto, a Victoria Police operation in 2006 which specifically targeted African youth in Flemington, similarly highlighted these issues. According to Jeremy Rapke, QC, who represented the six young men in the Haile-Michael case, Operation Molto is an overt case of racial profiling:

***"It's racism, because what you are doing is you are targeting an individual based on his race rather than based upon any other legitimate policing criteria. What you are doing is you are making assumptions about an individual based on your assumptions about the racial group to which he belongs. Not only is that racism, but it is highly ineffective policing."***<sup>96</sup>

Racial profiling has been shown to have strong negative ramifications, such as negative health and socio-economic impacts, erosion of trust, alienation, unnecessary criminalisation and disengagement.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, it can result in refugee and migrant young people and their families being less likely to seek help from police, and a general erosion of trust. The experiences of individuals also quickly spreads through communities, so that one person's negative interaction with police can be generalised and internalised by the broader community, ultimately leading to wide-spread mistrust.

<sup>93</sup> Flemington Kensington Legal Centre (FKLC), 2011, Race or Reason? Police encounters with Young People in the Flemington Region and Surrounding Areas, Flemington: FKLC.

<sup>94</sup> Daniel Haile-Michael & Ors v Nick Konstantinidis & Ors, VID 969 2010, Summary of Professor Gordon's and Dr Henstridge's first reports, [http://www.communitylaw.org.au/flemingtonkensington/cb\\_pages/files/Summary%20of%20Experts'%20report.pdf](http://www.communitylaw.org.au/flemingtonkensington/cb_pages/files/Summary%20of%20Experts'%20report.pdf) Accessed 20 June 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), Paying the Price: The Human Cost of Racial Profiling, Toronto: OHRC, [http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Paying\\_the\\_price%3A\\_The\\_human\\_cost\\_of\\_racial\\_profiling.pdf](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Paying_the_price%3A_The_human_cost_of_racial_profiling.pdf) Accessed 20 June 2013.

<sup>96</sup> Waters, J. Secret police operation 'targeted' African Australians, ABC News, Friday 8 March 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-08/secret-police-operation-targeted-african-australians/4561566> Accessed 20.6.13.

<sup>97</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC).

*“There is a sense of powerlessness – like nothing is going to happen if you report it to the police – so people won’t make a complaint. It doesn’t feel like the police or legal system is there to help you... It’s because of racism people don’t have the confidence to make complaints or go to the police.”*

– Young woman, Eritrean background

## 9. Recommendations: what the Victorian Government can do

The following actions are recommended to combat racism experienced by migrant and refugee young people in Victoria.

### **1. That racism be addressed in educational settings by:**

- Ensuring that Indigenous history, anti-racism, stereotyping and cultural issues are embedded in the school curriculum, starting with primary aged students
- Encouraging schools to raise awareness of racism as an issue through new and existing initiatives such as Harmony Day
- Implementing cultural competency and anti-racism training for teachers
- Working with schools to develop whole-of-school, anti-racism policies and strategies

### **2. That racism be addressed in the broader community by:**

- Promoting opportunities for interaction between cultures through multicultural festivals and programs
- Identifying inspiring multicultural leaders and role models to promote anti-racism
- Resourcing opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to develop media skills and create their own media
- Resourcing bystander action programs designed to equip and skill community members to challenge racism on a day to day level, including building a climate of visible support for bystander action (as advocated by VicHealth)

### **3. Build the capacity of sporting clubs and referees through:**

- Increased cultural competency training with club administrators, referees and coaches
- Improving responses to reports of racism and discrimination in clubs
- The development of inclusion and diversity policies

### **4. Improve police interactions with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds through:**

- Increasing opportunities for positive interaction between police and migrant and refugee young people
- Implementing comprehensive cultural competency training modules for all recruits, that are youth focussed and underpinned by an anti-racist paradigm



- Embedding a whole of organisational approach to developing anti-racist policies and practices across the Victorian police force, with built in mechanisms for accountability and evaluation
- Demonstrating accountability mechanisms for members of Victoria Police who repeatedly discriminate against young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

**5. That successful models of supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to gain meaningful employment be:**

- Researched
- Evaluated; and
- Further resourced

**6. That the Victorian Government implement comprehensive data collection and research on the experiences of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in:**

- Education; and
- Employment settings

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