

# Settlement in the digital age:

## Digital inclusion and newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

The Centre for Multicultural Youth's most recent policy paper, *Settlement in the digital age*, looks at newly arrived young people's engagement with digital technology and the internet and how this impacts their successful settlement in Australia.

### **Background**

In 2016 the first Australian Digital Inclusion Index was released, recognising the enormous role access to and engagement with digital technology and the internet plays in facilitating the economic and social inclusion of Australians in economic, social, cultural and civic life. The index reveals that while digital inclusion is improving, it is uneven and many Australians are missing out on the benefits digital participation derives for our public and private lives (ADII, 2016).

Young people are recognised as some of the most prolific users of technology and the internet and are often described as having 'grown up digital'. However, while many young people may be confident with technology, and disposed to use it, the benefits of this new digital age are not spreading equally to everyone. This is a concern, as we are moving closer to a future where digital participation is less of a choice and more of a necessity, where economic and social participation are increasingly linked to digital skills and technical competencies. (VicHealth and CSIRO, 2015; Foundation for Young Australians, 2016a)

This paper looks at the digital inclusion of newly arrived young people, those in their first five years of settlement in Victoria. The process of settlement involves a complicated series of negotiations and adjustments, as refugees and migrants seek to establish themselves in their new country and become "part of the social, institutional and cultural fabric of a society" (Valtonen 2004, in MYAN, 2016, p. 12). Upon arrival to Australia, newly arrived young people are being thrust in to an intensely digital environment where their digital inclusion offers an abundance of potential advantages for navigating settlement.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds arrive in Australia with an incredibly diverse range of skills and experiences that determine how well prepared they are to

navigate settlement in this intensely digital environment. But during their first five years of settlement, many face barriers to achieving digital inclusion. There is currently little exploration into the factors that impact the ability of newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to successfully balance these challenges in the digital age or of how newly arrived young people are being prepared for this digital transition in the first few years of settlement in Australia.

In this paper, CMY explores digital inclusion among newly arrived young people during this important stage of their settlement. The paper also examines how digital inclusion may impact upon the economic, social, and civic participation and wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, facilitating or hindering their achievement of important settlement outcomes.

The findings reveal high levels of digital technology use and online engagement among newly arrived young people, demonstrating the skills and resources these young people bring with them as they settle in to life in Victoria. However, the levels of skill and technical competency young people have on-arrival are highly varied. The findings also provide an insight into how some of the known barriers to successful settlement experienced by newly arrived young people in Victoria also impact upon their digital inclusion. The inter-connectedness of offline and online participation during the settlement journey is presented, highlighting how digital inclusion has become an increasingly important factor in successful settlement. These findings, coupled with findings from the literature, suggest that newly arrived young people who are left behind in terms of their digital inclusion during settlement may face greater disadvantage and disengagement in terms of their economic, social and civic participation overtime.

The paper provides recommendations for government, generalist and settlement-specific services, and community organisations working with newly arrived young people in Victoria. These recommendations focus on addressing barriers to digital inclusion, including access to technology and the skills to use it. Recommendations also suggest measures for investing in the knowledge and capacity of newly arrived young people, and those supporting them, to assist these young people to successfully translate their digital participation into tangible offline benefits that could improve their long term settlement outcomes.

## Key findings

Digital inclusion refers to the capacity to participate fully and equally in the digital world and is increasingly recognised as a critical factor in social and economic inclusion. Despite this, the pivotal role of digital inclusion in successful settlement for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds remains underexplored.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds arrive in Australia with an incredibly diverse range of skills and experiences that determine how well prepared they are to navigate settlement in an intensely digital environment. However, during their first five years of settlement, the refugee and migration experience appears to present additional challenges to their digital inclusion.

Factors known to impact upon digital inclusion include: ACCESS to digital technology and the internet; level of SKILLS and digital literacy; ATTITUDES towards digital technology; activities and USE of digital technology and the internet; and SUPPORT networks.

### **ACCESS to technology and the internet**

- Internet access in the home among newly arrived young people in their first five years in Victoria mirrors rates for Australia's poorer households.
- One in three newly arrived young people do not have broadband access in the home in their first year in Victoria. This is compared to less than one in five among young people in Australia.
- Less than 20 per cent of newly arrived young people go online regularly at school. This is compared to 96 per cent of young people in Australia.
- 28 per cent of newly arrived young people never use a laptop or desktop computer to access the internet. This is in contrast to 47 per cent of Australian teenagers who go online three or more times a day using a laptop or desktop computer.
- The quality of internet and digital technology access for many newly arrived young people is below average levels for young people in Australia. This is especially the case for newly arrived young women, who are more likely to have no internet access in the home and less likely to use public access points such as libraries. When young women do have internet access in the home this is more likely to be mobile data not broadband.
- Reported poor quality and limited public access to digital technology and the internet among newly arrived young people suggests current efforts to bridge gaps in digital access for this group may not be sufficient to ensure they are not disadvantaged.

### **SKILLS and digital literacy**

- Newly arrived young people's digital skills and competencies (digital literacy) are incredibly varied on arrival, although self-reported confidence in skills is generally high and most newly arrived young people are regular users of digital technology and the internet.
- Many newly arrived young people have had limited formal and informal digital learning experiences, with some demonstrating poor knowledge and familiarity in basic digital skills and online safety.
- Newly arrived young people are receiving limited targeted supports to assess and build their digital literacy in the early years of their settlement to prepare them to enter Australia's intensely digital education system and workforce.

### **ATTITUDES towards digital technology and the internet**

- Attitudes and motivations towards technology are influenced by family, peers and culture, and impact on newly arrived young people's digital participation. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are newer to Australia, are female, and have limited previous experience of digital participation are more likely to have lower confidence, engage in fewer activities online, and place less value in the benefits of technology on their lives.

### **Activities and USE of digital technology and the internet**

Young people's online activities provide insight into how they may be using digital technology to support achievement of offline outcomes in the settlement context. Understanding how newly arrived young people are using digital technology and the internet can help us develop targeted programs and interventions to better support their

settlement journey.

- 77 per cent of newly arrived young people report having been online in the previous four weeks. This compares to 82 per cent of young people in Australia.
- 68 per cent of newly arrived young people go online three or more times per day. This is compared to 87 per cent of young people in Australia.
- Three quarters (76 per cent) of newly arrived young people had participated in online entertainment-related activities, such as downloading music or video clips, during the last three months. Sixty one per cent had engaged in communication-related activities, such as email or social media, while only half (52 per cent) had engaged in commerce online, including online banking and shopping.
- Most newly arrived young people are regularly looking for information about recreation (81 per cent) activities when they are online, closely followed by information about education or study (70 per cent) and general interest, such as news or current affairs (70 per cent).
- While almost 70 per cent of newly arrived young people use email and social networking services (SNS) like Facebook regularly, almost one in five 'never' use these key communication technologies.
- Young men are more likely to be using SNS than young women and use increases with length of time in Australia.
- Generally, newly arrived young people report using digital technology and the internet to access information and services online. However, the types of information and services vary, with newly arrived young people more likely to use digital technology and the internet when looking for information or services related to recreation activities and less likely for core services such as Centrelink or Medicare.

### **SUPPORT networks**

Key digital support networks for young people include parents, teachers and peers. Research shows that these supports provide young people with technical advice and guidance; influence their attitudes and behaviour towards digital technology; impact upon their capacity to derive benefits from their digital participation and manage risks online.

- Many newly arrived young people are predominantly reliant on peers in the first few years of settlement for help and support using digital technology and the internet.
- Newly arrived young people believe they have superior digital literacy, awareness and competency to their parents and older family members, limiting the value of these key supports for facilitating digital participation.
- Newly arrived young people in English Language Schools (ELS) are considerably less likely than young people in mainstream school or education to be accessing digital support from teachers or other formal guides.

### **What does this tell us?**

When they are digitally engaged, newly arrived young people appear to be using digital technology and the internet to support various aspects of their settlement. This includes maintaining important connections to family and friends overseas, connecting in to local opportunities and resources, developing broader social networks and skills, and accessing information and tools to support their language acquisition and general knowledge about Australian culture and society. However, broad assumptions made about young people's

general digital access, skills and expertise, as well as gaps in their digital support networks, may be resulting in newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds not receiving the assistance they need upon arrival to facilitate their digital inclusion. This has the potential to not only leave young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds behind, but to further entrench their disadvantage.

## Recommendations

### 1. Address barriers to digital inclusion by improving access to digital technology and the internet for newly arrived young people.

- a) Federal Government supports English language providers and other on-arrival service providers to assess the digital needs of newly arrived young people in order to inform the provision of consistent and high quality access to technology that bridges gaps to digital access, especially for those in the first few years of settlement.
- b) All levels of government and community services currently providing digital access points to newly arrived young people review the benefits and risks to young people of placing restrictions on online access. (This requires giving special consideration to the potential for these to be the only sites for online access and digital learning for some young people. Risks should be balanced with the need for newly arrived young people to have broad access in order to be able to participate.)

### 2. Recognise digital literacy as a key to unlocking opportunities and promoting participation.

Improving digital inclusion requires addressing prevailing assumptions about the digital literacy of young people to be addressed. Just because young people are online doesn't mean they automatically have all the skills they need to successfully engage and derive benefits from their digital participation.

- a) Generalist and settlement-specific services and organisations review how digital skills assessment and training in formal digital skills and competencies (beyond online safety) can be integrated into current settlement or other on-arrival programs and supports to facilitate the successful transition of newly arrived young people into the highly digitised worlds of education and work in Australia.
- b) State and Federal Government invest in supporting ongoing development of the digital literacy of the workforce engaged to support newly arrived young people settle well. This would recognise that the digital space is ever-changing, and that the skills required to keep pace demand continuous learning and development.

### 3. Strengthen offline supports for newly arrived young people to successfully navigate and draw benefit from digital participation.

- a) Enhance young people's informal learning and digital support networks through Federal, State and local government investment in youth-led, peer-to-peer digital literacy and online safety programs, including the tailoring of existing modules, for newly arrived young people.
- b) All levels of government and community services (particularly youth and family services) resource intergenerational programs for newly arrived community members that

promote online engagement and build familiarity with technology. Such programs would aim to bring parents and children together to develop technical skills and online safety awareness.

#### 4. Support technological innovation in the settlement sector.

- a) Government, as well as generalist and settlement-specific services and organisations working with newly arrived young people to review online information and service accessibility, ensuring that the needs of young people who are newly arrived are being met by this shift in the delivery of information and services. Innovative examples of tailoring digital information and services to this particular cohort include the recent podcast series 'Life in Australia' by Australian Red Cross.
- b) Federal Government resource English language providers to investigate and employ digital technologies in the classroom to complement English language acquisition and build digital literacy in the early stages of settlement. Approaches could build on the existing digital tools and resources young people are already using to supplement their formal learning.

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

- a) Include indicators that measure factors unique to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds (such as migration status, parental migration status, length of time in Australia) to ensure newly arrived young people's level of digital inclusion is captured and change is measured over time.
- b) Increase understanding of the influence of the unique challenges of migration and settlement upon young people's digital inclusion in Australia, specifically the role access, skills and attitudes play in early digital engagement.
- c) Research factors that support newly arrived young people's translation of digital engagement into tangible offline outcomes in the settlement context.
- d) Research role of digital participation in mediating (or intensifying) particular experiences of exclusion, such as discrimination and racism among newly arrived 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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