

The Missing Link?

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, social capital and the transition to employment

The Centre for Multicultural Youth's most recent policy paper, *The Missing Link?*, explores the role of social capital in young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds' transition to skilled employment.

Background

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are often significantly disadvantaged in their pursuit to find skilled work, in that they often lack professional and social networks beyond their immediate community (RCOA, 2012). This unequal access to social capital has the potential to reinforce inequality of life opportunities, creating an 'ethnic penalty', particularly in terms of access to professional careers (Hasmath, 2013).

Research demonstrates access to social capital plays an important role in finding skilled work, particularly for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds (Yan, Lauer & Chan, 2012; Graham, Shier & Eisenstat, 2015; Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2015). Bonding social capital (close connections with those of similar backgrounds) is important in providing support, aspiration and a sense of identity for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, laying important foundations in order to step into work. However, it is access to bridging social capital (relationships with those of dissimilar backgrounds) that is particularly important for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds at this point of transition to employment.

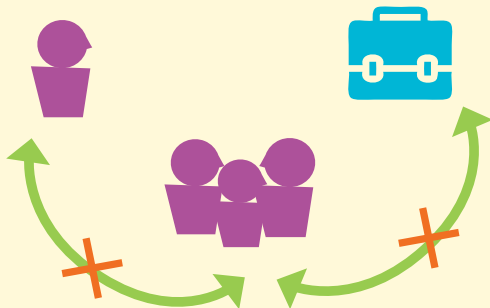
Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds' access to bridging social capital is often a missing link in the step to employment, however in the context of Australia, there is a scarcity of research that focuses on the experiences of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in this area. Understanding this barrier and supporting opportunities for access is critical in ensuring an equitable and just society. Not only is it important for both the young people and families concerned, but it helps ensure that the entire community benefits from their skilled and creative contributions.

Key findings

- Young people's bonding relationships (with those of similar backgrounds to themselves) appear to provide a strong foundation of support and identity, important elements for securing and maintaining work. For the most part, young people describe having close connections to those of similar cultural backgrounds.



- Young people often lack the kind of bridging networks that can assist them in the transition to work, despite overwhelmingly reporting that they have friendships with those of culturally diverse backgrounds and know people from different 'walks of life'.



- Many young people, families and communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds lack (a) information regarding employment pathways (b) professional contacts (c) understanding of the current job market in Australia and (d) knowledge around what kind of skills and experience are required.



- Many young people are turning to peers for help with employment, with friends identified as the most helpful person in their employment search.
- Being actively involved in community activities appears to help young people develop both confidence and diverse bridging networks with people who may be able to support them with employment-related goals.
- A number of young people don't know who can help or where to go to find assistance with employment. Of survey respondents, 15 per cent had not sought help with finding work. This was due to not knowing who to ask, thinking no one would want to help, not knowing anyone with the skills to help, not being confident to ask for help, or feeling they didn't need it.



- Volunteering can help expand young people's social networks and assist with the development of important life skills. However care needs to be taken to ensure it is a meaningful, supported and valuable experience.
- Teachers, community workers and services can be a critical first link in being able to connect young people with opportunities, and to develop connections with members of the broader community.
- Young people are struggling to gain relevant work experience to meet the demands of the current job market (in part due to lacking professional networks), and need greater support to access this.
- Young people's access to bridging social capital can be affected by a number of factors, including confidence, resilience, motivation, racism and discrimination.

Recommendations

Community focused responses:

1. State and local government, services and educational providers explore opportunities to build opportunities for and support development of positive intercultural relationships, based on mutual respect and understanding.
2. Undertake further research around what factors promote the development of social connections across cultural and socio-economic divides.
3. State and local government, services, clubs and associations to promote and ensure access to opportunities for community participation for young people and their families from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
4. Federal, State and Local government to resource youth initiatives that are strengths-based and focused on building the resilience of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Employment focused responses:

5. Education, employment and settlement services work together to inform young people, families and communities from migrant and refugee backgrounds around employment pathways, skills required and the current job market in Australia. This should include creating opportunities to connect with people from the broader community who may be able to assist and to access volunteering, internships or work experience opportunities.
6. Given many young people are unsure of where to turn for employment related help, federal and state government to require all services funded to assist with employment to be accountable in terms of their engagement, accessibility and overall outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
7. In recognition that young people appear to be turning to peers for employment related advice, and often lack professional role models in their own cultural communities:
 - Explore and resource initiatives that use peer-to-peer approaches in order to provide employment related advice and support to young people in educational settings.
 - Explore and resource models that draw on the expertise and experience of professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their knowledge and provide strong role models for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
8. In order to build young people's employment related bridging networks, and develop essential work experience, it is important that:
 - Educational institutions integrate, broker and support meaningful work experience in educational courses, in both secondary and tertiary education.
 - State, local government and employment services work with businesses and organisations to broker work experience and internship opportunities that are well supported, provide mentoring and skill development, and are financially

supported (such as providing a daily rate or at the very least covering travel and food related costs).

- Peak bodies such as Volunteering Victoria work with organisations to ensure their practices are accessible, inclusive and culturally competent for young people and community members from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
9. State and local government, along with employment and youth services, to create more formal ways to bring young people into contact with professional or employment networks that can assist them with either advice or links to particular industries, for example through mentoring or networking events.

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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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