

Active Citizenship, Participation & Belonging

YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MIGRANT AND
REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS IN VICTORIA



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Suggested Citation: Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging. CMY: Melbourne.

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Acknowledgements

CMY acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government



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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1. Executive Summary

All young people in Victoria have the right to participate as active citizens in shaping the community they live in, both locally and in society as a whole. However young people are frequently viewed as either 'citizens in the making', as disengaged or disinterested. Additionally, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds often face further barriers that can result in them missing out on opportunities to participate, preventing them from being able to make positive contributions as valued citizens in society.

Supporting and creating opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to meaningfully participate can build a strong sense of agency and belonging. Not only this, but the broader community benefits from the rich diversity of experience and skills such young people can offer. On a broader level, the involvement of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is not only beneficial for the individuals concerned - it is also a crucial measurement of the depth and vigor of multiculturalism within Victoria.

This paper explores the ways in which young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds choose to participate both formally and informally in the Victorian context, including the barriers they may face in this process, the impact of participation on their lives, and their attitudes and motivations for getting involved. This provides tangible insights as to how policies and programs can be best designed to meet the needs of this group of young people, including the roles that gender and the length of time lived in Australia can play in affecting the way in which young people participate.

CMY developed a survey on the topic of active citizenship and participation, which was completed by 88 young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria between January and February 2013. CMY also held three focus groups with a total of 20 young people to gain further insights into how they view issues of active citizenship and participation.

Key findings reveal that with regard to voting, young respondents:

- » Are likely to be enrolled to vote, if eligible (91%);
- » Have overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards voting, although only 52% of those under 18 years plan to enrol to vote upon turning 18;
- » Mostly understand how voting works in Australia (over two thirds or 72%);
- » Generally understand that enrolling to vote is compulsory (76%) and that voting itself is compulsory (79%);
- » Are affected in terms of their knowledge of voting by how long they have lived in Australia; those more newly arrived were less likely to have knowledge around voting system; and
- » Think that voting is an important opportunity to make a change and to have a say; and believe that voting is a right that they have in a democratic society.

Key findings reveal that with regard to community participation, young respondents:

- » Are highly active in the community; over one fourth (28%) were involved in seven

or more identified activities in the last 12 months, and over half (53%) were involved in four or more activities;

- » Participate mostly in social and recreational activities (65%); youth leadership initiatives (59%); and volunteering (53%);
- » Are affected in their participation types by the length of time lived in Australia - young people born in Australia were more likely to engage in volunteering and social media; those living in Australia for six or more years were more likely to be involved in leadership initiatives and cultural community activities; those more newly arrived were most likely to participate in sport and recreation or school based groups;
- » Are affected in their participation types by gender; young men were more likely to engage in recreational/social activities, whereas young women were more likely to volunteer or participate in their own cultural community activities;
- » Experience key barriers to participation including not knowing what opportunities exist (25%), not having enough time (23%), and not knowing what is involved (19%);
- » Experience further barriers if they are very newly arrived; those in Australia for two years or less years faced additional obstacles of limited English language skills, lack of finances and transport difficulties;
- » View the impact of participating as overwhelmingly positive; they have made new friends (80%) and learnt new skills (77%) as a result;
- » Believe that getting involved in the community will lead to new skills that will help them in the future (74%) and will allow them to be heard and involved in decision making (73%);
- » Are motivated to participate in order to gain new skills and experiences (72%) and to interact with other young people who share the same ideas (68%).

Creating and supporting meaningful opportunities for youth participation contributes towards creating a stronger, more socially cohesive society – one that is built upon inclusion, equity and a robust, dynamic multicultural society where young people from refugee and migrant background play an integral role in shaping and benefitting from Australia as a whole.

The survey and youth focus groups highlight key principles that should underpin youth participation programs and activities. Youth participation activities should:

- » Take into account the different needs of young people, according to their stage of settlement;
- » Be inclusive of gender;
- » Aim to build confidence and self-esteem
- » Strengthen social cohesion, through bringing diverse groups of young people together.
- » Additionally, programs should aim to contain the following elements:
 - » Skill building and exposure to new experiences;
 - » Opportunities to develop new friendships and work with others;
 - » Adequate resourcing to allow young people to put their positive ideas into action;
 - » Adequate follow through and feedback when young people are consulted for decision making purposes.
- » *'Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging'* makes a series of recommendations in order to ensure that this group of young people have every opportunity to get involved, and that their contribution to Australian society is both valued and celebrated.

Recommendations:

1. The Victorian Electoral Commission to investigate, in consultation with young people, develop online voting methods and social media platforms to capture the youth audience and to increase the likelihood of young people choosing to vote.
2. The Victorian Electoral Commission to work in collaboration with education providers to develop and deliver applied learning educational programs around understanding voting and democracy in Australia.
3. Create inclusive and relevant opportunities at the local level for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to interact with and gain a deeper understanding of formal politics in Australia.
4. Promote the achievements of young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are actively contributing to the community around them.
5. Invest in leadership programs that focus specifically on multicultural young people, in order to build their confidence, strengthen social networks, and provide a stepping stone to engage in further opportunities.
6. Build the capacity of ethnic community organisations to more effectively work with young people, and support these organisations to be a bridge for young people to access mainstream participation opportunities.
7. Undertake further research into:
 - » Increasing understanding as to the role of mentors and peers in supporting active citizenship amongst migrant and refugee young people;
 - » The role that settlement, gender and social networks play in impacting on the rates and types of participation; and
 - » Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds' experiences of volunteering, including barriers, facilitating factors and its overall impact on their lives.

2. Glossary of Terms

Young person:

According to the UN, 'youth' is defined as being between the ages of 15 and 24 years. In Australia, government and non-government organisations frequently broaden this definition to include 12 – 25 year olds, which is the definition used in this paper. It is important to recognise, however, that youth is not a universal concept and differs across cultures according to life stages, roles within the family and other social expectations.

Newly arrived young person:

A newly arrived young person is someone who was born overseas and has lived in Australia a relatively short amount of time. According to the Federal Government, someone who is newly arrived has lived in Australia for five years or less. Other definitions vary according to the length of time it is considered to take to settle in Australia (up to 10 years). This paper refers to newly arrived young people using the Federal Government's definition.

Refugee:

According to the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, of which Australia is a signatory, refugees are people who:

- » are outside their country of nationality of their usual country of residence; and
- » are unable or unwilling to return or to seek the protection of that country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

The UN's definition provides a restrictive definition based on proving a well-founded fear of persecution. The definition does not include people fleeing natural disasters or economic deprivation.

Refugees have fled circumstances that have put their lives at risk and have affected their psychological health and well being. They seek new lives in Australia, not out of a free choice, but in order to be protected. They have often experienced torture and trauma, lost family members, and spent years in transit countries or in refugee camps, where access to services such as education and health care may be limited. They have often had minimal information about the country in which they are resettling and the customs of that particular society.¹

Migrant

A migrant is someone who has moved to another country out of free-will, whether this is for educational, employment or other opportunities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a migrant as someone who has migrated freely, not due to any external compelling factor.

¹ Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2005, Refugee and CLD Young People: Definitions - Info Sheet No. 11, Carlton, CMY.

3. Methodology

Literature review

A review of Australian and international research was conducted to explore current understandings of how young people, migrants and refugees relate to notions of active citizenship and participation. A full list of references is available at the conclusion of this paper.

Survey

A survey was undertaken with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds aged between 12–25 years, who currently reside in Victoria. The survey aimed to increase understanding around how young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds participate both formally and informally in the community, including their attitudes and motivation.

Out of 109 initial respondents, 88 were eligible to participate in the survey. Not all respondents answered all questions. All tables in appendices indicate the total number of respondents, as well as how many opted out of answering the question. Responses by percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

The survey was available both in hard copy and online, and promoted to youth services and youth networks, and via social media. Several surveys were administered verbally with young people who had low English literacy levels. Respondents could elect to go into the draw to win a \$100 gift voucher as an incentive to participate.

Survey limitations included the fact that:

- » the survey was distributed in English, requiring a reasonable level of English literacy or else assistance in completing it;
- » the topic of ‘active citizenship’ or ‘participation’ can be unfamiliar to some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, particularly those who are more newly arrived, and may have resulted in underreporting;
- » the voluntary nature of survey could have resulted in those more interested in the topic or engaged in the community being more likely to respond, resulting in a skewed sample group; and
- » the demographic variables of gender and length of time in Australia are at times difficult to distinguish from one another, given many more young male respondents were newly arrived compared with young female respondents.

The demographics of respondents are discussed in more detail in section two.

Focus groups

Three focus groups were held in different regions in Melbourne, with a total of 20 young people (aged between 16 – 25 years) from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. These included Afghan, South Sudanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Malaysian, Iraqi, Assyrian, Eritrean and Djiboutian. These young people were sourced through CMY’s programs and local networks, and were provided with a \$20 gift voucher each in recognition of their time and expertise.

4. Background

4.1 About CMY

CMY is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. CMY believes that diversity is a cornerstone of Australia's success; respect for everyone's human rights is essential for a fair and equal society; and that everyone should be able to feel like they belong and can participate fully. This is reflected in CMY's 25 years of working with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, to ensure they become connected, empowered and influential Australians.

4.2 Policy context

CMY welcomes the Victorian Government's Youth Statement, 'Engage, Involve, Create', which affirms a commitment to ensuring young people have opportunities to participate in their community and in decision making processes. Australia's Multicultural Policy – The People of Australia – also demonstrates a commitment to "a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds."²

Similarly, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) provides a sound international framework for youth participation of which Australia is party to. Key principles include the right of children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account (Article 12); to participate freely in the community with by joining groups or organisations (Article 15); and have access to a wide range of recreational and leisure opportunities (Article 31).³

4.3 Active Citizenship and Participation – what do we know?

4.3.1 Defining active citizenship

There is no one shared definition of citizenship. Formal or minimal ideas of citizenship are often restricted to legal definitions of the rights and responsibilities associated with belonging to a nation-state, such as voting or holding a passport.⁴ A broader understanding of citizenship (sometimes referred to as substantive, maximal or 'thick' citizenship) encompasses concepts such as power, agency, identity and belonging, and is not necessarily restricted to those who hold formal citizenship in a legal sense.⁵ These interpretations emphasise the awareness of self as a part of a shared democratic society, and the importance of participatory processes to political involvement. This includes the

² Australian Government, 2011, The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf Accessed 9.5.13.

³ UNICEF, Convention on the Rights of the Child, www.unicef.org/crc Accessed 13.3.13.

⁴ Janoski, T. 1998, *Citizenship and Civil Society: A framework of rights and obligations in liberal, traditional and social democratic regimes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Oliff, L. & O'Sullivan, K. 2006, *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*, Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth, p. 13; Holdsworth, R. Stokes, H. Blanchard, M. & Mohamed, M. 2006, *Civic Engagement and Young people in the city of Melbourne*, Australian Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, p. 23.

ways in which social disadvantage can weaken citizenship by denying people full and meaningful participation in society around issues of concern.⁶

The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme's (NYARS) 2004 report on youth citizenship in Australia identified citizenship to include:

- » • rights and responsibilities;
- » • membership of clubs or social activities;
- » • voting;
- » • engaging in political or policy debates and ideas;
- » • community service and volunteering;
- » • and involvement in political activism.⁷

This description is closely affiliated with the term 'active citizenship', which is commonly understood to include both structured forms of engagement with political processes, and more every day forms of participation in society.⁸ For the purposes of this paper, CMY has adopted this broad view of active citizenship – to encompass both the formal and informal ways that young people engage and contribute to the community.

4.3.2 Active citizenship, Participation & Belonging

“If I can identify myself as an Australian then I can fully contribute, but if I have to fight for my identity ... why should I contribute if I don't belong?”

– participant from FECCA Youth Forum⁹

Young people engaged in research conducted by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme's (NYARS) in 2004 stressed the importance of participation when discussing what citizenship involved. Active citizenship was viewed as “a set of rights and duties concerned with participating in society.... About membership of a community, and participating in decisions which affect you.”¹⁰

Similarly, Hart identifies that at the core of citizenship is the right to participate. Participation is

“[the] process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of a community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is the standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.”¹¹

⁶ Evans cited in Holdsworth op. cit., p. 23-24.

⁷ Manning, B. & Ryan, R. 2004, Youth and Citizenship, Canberra: The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) p. 87.

⁸ Collin, P. 2008 (a), Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Literature Review, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, p. 7.

⁹ Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council Australia (FECCA), 2011, A Message from the FECCA Chair, Australian Mosaic, Issue 28, June 2011, p. 2.

¹⁰ Manning, op. cit., p. 5.

¹¹ Hart, R. 1992, Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, no. 4. Florence: UNICEF, p. 5.

Active citizenship is therefore essentially about participation and belonging.¹² The concept of citizenship itself has long been related to ideas of inclusion and exclusion;¹³ it includes the “experiential and subjective dimensions that enable a person to feel they belong and have a stake in society.”¹⁴ Participation has similarly been described as the opposite process of social exclusion, highlighting that notions of citizenship, participation, inclusion and belonging are inextricably linked.¹⁵

4.3.3 Young people as active citizens

“It is no longer feasible or wise to look at young people as citizens sometime in the future. Citizenship cannot be seen as something one acquires once one has ‘grown up.’ The challenge is to create the capacity of young people to participate today.”¹⁶

Many of the elements that formal citizenship emphasises, such as voting, are acquired in adulthood. This view of citizenship sidelines young people, particularly if they are under 18 years of age, suggesting that citizenship is something that occurs in the future; young people are “citizens in training.”¹⁷ Their active participation in society is therefore often in question.¹⁸ Such a view is detrimental as it reinforces the idea that politics is something “distant, that they will be invited to join when they are judged to be ‘full’ citizens.”¹⁹ It also positions young people as having a less significant role in society than adults – they are a group seen to be in deficit, waiting to become adults and therefore citizens in the future.²⁰

Alternately, if citizenship

*“goes beyond the legal status and focuses on the array of roles that individuals can play in forming, maintaining and changing their communities, then young people are already valuable, and valued, citizens to the extent that they participate in those roles.”*²¹

Therefore Holdsworth et al. outline ‘full’ or ‘deep’ participation as the ideal in terms of youth participation – where young people are recognised as equal and full citizens, with valued skills, ideas and contributions to make to the community around them.²²

12 Collin, P. 2008 (b), ‘The internet, youth participation policies and the development of young people’s political identities’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11(5), October 2008, 527- 542.

http://uws.academia.edu/PhilippaCollin/Papers/1665964/The_internet_youth_participation_policies_and_the_development_of_young_peoples_political_identities_in_Australia Accessed 1.11.12.

13 Moosa-Mitha, M. 2005, A Difference-Centred Alternative to Theorisation of Children’s Citizenship Rights, *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 369 – 388, p. 370.

14 Gow, G. 2006, Zebra crossings to ‘thick’ citizenship, *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 12 (4), August 2006, p. 55

15 Edwards, K. 2008, Youth Participation and Social Inclusion: A New Policy Agenda? *Social Policy Issues Briefs*, no. 1, Social Policy Research Network, University of Sydney.

16 Mokwena cited in Holdsworth, op. cit. p. 25.

17 Holdsworth, op. cit., p. 24.

18 Couch, J. & Francis, S. 2006, Participation for All? Searching for marginalized voices: The case for including refugee young people, *Children Youth and Environments*, 16 (2): 280.

19 Arvanitakis, J. & Marren, S. 2009, Putting the politics back into Politics: Young people and democracy in Australia, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, p. 11.

20 Wyn, 1995, cited in Holdsworth, op. cit. p. 25.

21 Owen, 1996, cited in Holdsworth, op. cit. p. 24.

22 Holdsworth, op. cit., p. 26.

4.3.4 Young people and participation

As of 2007, it was estimated that only 80% of eligible young Australians between ages 18 and 25 are enrolled to vote, compared with a rate of 95% for the eligible voting age of the population as a whole.²³ As a result, young people are often framed as ‘ignorant’ or ‘apathetic’ when it comes to political engagement in Australia.²⁴ Such concerns feed into a deficit model of young people, “emphasizing their lack of knowledge, skills, commitment and finally engagement.”²⁵

There is a growing awareness amongst researchers that young people are not in fact apathetic or disinterested in political issues, but instead engage and participate in non-traditional ways.²⁶ Participation is increasing around international ‘issues or causes’, such as boycotting and blogging. The internet and new media is transforming forms of participation, no longer restricting young people to geographical boundaries.²⁷

Young people in Australia are active and interested in social and political issues, but they are often alienated by formal politics, and are more inclined to engage with more informal forms of participation.²⁸ Edwards’ research with young people in Australia claims several reasons for this, including the fact that young voters are not ‘listened to’; and that politics is dominated by Anglo-Australian men, tending to be about representing issues of working people like taxes and interest rates.²⁹ For many young people, formal politics lacks the cultural specificity and fails to take into account for the diverse and complex nature of contemporary Australia.³⁰ Similarly, young people, particularly those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, do not often see themselves or their interests reflected in parliament.

Additionally, there can be challenges associated with engaging in formal politics. Young people can perceive that there are few opportunities to engage in more formal processes.³¹ Even if opportunities present themselves, it can be difficult to see the impact of participation in more formal political structures, in contrast to localised or community based responses where results are more immediate and their work is encouraged.³² There is also often a distinction between the types of participation available in both local and government settings. Local settings may focus on encouraging and building participation amongst young people, whereas government settings may use participation to formalise decision making. Overall, it appears that there are few opportunities for young people to participate in more formal, meaningful ways: “While many settings provide children and youth with opportunities for participation, opportunities that develop political competence, power and self-determination are often limited.”³³

Arvanitakis and Marren’s research reveals that young people tend to “demonstrate positive

²³ Edwards, K. 2007, ‘Introducing YES: Young People’s democratic participation – Towards developing a youth democratic voice’ in Wierenga, A. (ed.), Are we there yet? National Youth Affairs Conference Proceedings: Peer reviewed papers, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, p. 38.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Holdsworth, op. cit, p. 26.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Collin, P. 2008 (a), op. cit., p. 6.

²⁸ Arvanitakis, op. cit., p. 8.

²⁹ Edwards, op. cit., p. 40.

³⁰ Arvanitakis, op. cit., p. 14.

³¹ Ibid, p. 10.

³² Ibid, p. 14.

³³ Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005 cited in Holdsworth, op. cit.

attitudes towards 'community' and 'getting involved' which can be contrasted with distrust of broader formalised political structures.³⁴ Research suggests that young people are generally 'joiners'; "involved in community-based activities for the common good or that are based around shared interests, and usually less interested in participating in formal political organisations."³⁵

Similarly, many young people do not necessarily perceive their contributions to the community as 'volunteering', but speak of 'helping' or 'giving back' and participating in activities where they can see the practical results of their efforts.³⁶ Young people's motivation to participate seems to be guided by feeling part of a community; feeling part of something bigger than themselves.³⁷

Youth participation has been shown to have positive effects upon young people's health and wellbeing, social connectedness and identity.³⁸ Evidence suggests that young people who participate in groups and organisations have improved skills and a strengthened sense of citizenship.³⁹ Not only this, but opportunities for participation can also build social cohesion and strengthen social networks, resulting in more robust multiculturalism in practice.

“When we started the youth group at [the community centre] we had Afghan kids, Asians, Africans who came along – but they didn’t know each other even though they were all living next to each other. The youth group and activities now bring them together and they are friends now.”

– Youth group organiser (young woman, East African Background)

4.3.5 Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Although young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds may share common experiences as a result of the migration process – such as leaving behind friends and family, and having to adapt to a new culture and systems - important differences exist between the two groups. Migrants have generally made the decision to move to Australia, often for employment or educational opportunities, although it is important to consider that a young person migrating as part of a family unit may not necessarily have had a say in the matter.

In contrast, refugees have been forced to flee their countries of origin due to fear of persecution. They have often spent years in transit countries or refugee camps, may have experienced disrupted education, torture and/or trauma, lost family members, and may know little about Australia prior to arrival. They also often lack financial resources due to the refugee experience, and/or having to provide remittances to family members overseas. This can also be the case for some migrants who support family members outside of Australia,

34 Arvanitakis, op. cit., p. 10.

35 Vromen, A. 2008, Inclusion through voice: Youth participation in government and community decision-making, Social Inclusion and Youth Workshop Proceedings, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 29 October 2008, p. 3. Accessed online 6.12.12. http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Vromen_paper_29Oct08.pdf

36 Collin, P. 2008 (a), p. 6.

37 Evans and Prilleltensky 2005, cited in Holdsworth, op. cit.

38 Francis, S. & Cornfoot, S. 2007, Multicultural Youth in Australia: Settlement and transition, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, October 2007.

39 Collin, P. 2008 (a), op. cit., p. 15.

which can cause financial strain.

There are also important differences in experience according to how long a young person has lived in Australia. Newly arrived young people (defined by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as five years or less in Australia) face very different issues to those who have lived in Australia for more substantial periods of time, or those whose parents may have migrated to Australia (referred to as 'second generation' migrants). These unique stages of settlement and length of time living in Australia impact on how young people experience and interact with ideas of citizenship and participation.

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds not only face the same challenges as other young people in the areas of active citizenship, they may also experience additional barriers. For refugee young people, these challenges may include:

- » English language acquisition;
- » disrupted education;
- » competing settlement priorities such as housing, education or employment;
- » limited financial resources to take up opportunities; and
- » the ongoing effects of torture and trauma.

Both migrant and refugee young people may experience:

- » unfamiliarity with Australian democratic systems;
- » negative experiences of politics prior to arriving in Australia;
- » unfamiliarity with the opportunities that exist;
- » limited social networks; and
- » limited support and understanding amongst family and/or community as to the value of participating in various activities.

Young people's civic and social identity is influenced by age, gender, cultural background and personal experiences (including sexism and racism).⁴⁰ Research indicates that there are substantial barriers to participation and civic engagement for certain groups of young people, particularly those who are marginalized.⁴¹ Despite this, little research exists around the attitudes and levels of participation amongst young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria.

4.3.6 Engagement with formal participation

There is minimal research around the attitudes and behaviour of young migrant and refugee attitudes towards electoral enrolment and voting in Victoria. However there has been a small amount of research undertaken with Arabic and Turkish speaking communities (aged 18 years and above) in Victoria, revealing that one third of participants were unsure as to whether enrolment was compulsory, although understood that once enrolled, it is compulsory to vote.⁴² Barriers to voting that were identified by participants included not knowing how to enroll; not understanding the electoral system; limited English language skills; political disillusionment and concerns over being fined.⁴³

⁴⁰ Holdsworth, op. cit, p. 26.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 20.

⁴² Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), 2012, Barriers to enrolment and voting, and electronic voting, among Arabic-speaking and Turkish communities, Sydney: CIRCA, p. 3.

⁴³ VEC, op. cit., p. 3.

It has been suggested that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds may have even lower enrolment rates than the general youth population in Victoria, which is already thought to be below general adult enrolment rates.⁴⁴ Although there is little data available to establish whether or not this is true, broader research suggests that informal voting is noticeably higher in electoral districts with large numbers of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.⁴⁵ These figures could potentially include young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, although data according to age is not currently available.

It is important to consider the experiences of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds prior to arriving in Australia, in order to contextualise their participation in formal processes. Many have fled political dictatorships or corruption, where they may have witnessed or experienced persecution for political involvement.⁴⁶ For this reason, young people from refugee like backgrounds may require adequate time, resources and support in order to feel comfortable in participating in more formal decision making processes.⁴⁷

4.3.7 Engagement with community forms of participation

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can often feel excluded from not only from mainstream political processes, but also from day to day levels of participation. The complex range of barriers young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds often encounter can result in them being unable to shape their own lives as they had hoped, resulting in feelings of disempowerment and marginalization.⁴⁸

Vic Health's research also outlines that migrant and refugee community members (aged 18 years plus) frequently self-exclude themselves from participating in certain activities due to feeling unsafe or fear of discrimination.⁴⁹ CMY's experience is that this is also true for young people, who may judge certain environments as potentially unwelcoming, and avoid these contexts as a result.

There is also a strong connection between low levels of participation and a lack of access to economic resources, something which many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience. Additionally, these young people may have limited social networks as a result of the migration experience, which can make it challenging to access information and opportunities.

Yet opportunities for participation can be an integral piece of the puzzle in helping such young people to gain the skills and social networks to transition successfully to adulthood; to become both connected and empowered individuals.

...those individuals who are disadvantaged economically – including disadvantaged youth – are the very people who are likely to have few resources for civic participation and little access to broad, useful social networks ... helping disadvantaged youth develop the

44 Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Amendment (Electoral Participation) Bill 2010, Parliament Library Research Service, Number 11, 21 July 2010.

45 Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2006 Victoria State election and matters related thereto, Melbourne, 29 August 2007. Accessed 3.1.13. <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/archive/emc/2006%20State%20Election/By%20witness%20PDF/29w7.pdf>

46 Couch, J. & Francis, St. Participation for All? Searching for marginalized voices: The case for including refugee young people, Children Youth and Environments, 16 (2), p. 281.

47 Ibid.

48 Couch, op. cit., p. 280.

49 Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (Vic Health), 2012, Mental health impacts of racial discrimination in Victorian culturally and linguistically diverse communities: Experiences of racism survey – a summary, Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD), Carlton: Vic Health.

skills, networks, and interest in becoming more civically engaged can help them to break out of the cycle of cumulative disadvantage.”⁵⁰

In spite of the numerous settlement challenges they can face, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds tend to be particularly independent, resilient, opinionated and more than capable of making their own decisions.⁵¹ This is hardly surprising given the strong determination and survival skills young people have had to draw upon throughout the refugee or migration experience.

“Refugee young people are rarely constructed as actors in the public sphere. Instead, the public discourse about all young people reflects an image of a generation that is materialistic, self-absorbed, disenfranchised, disengaged or ‘at risk’ of ‘becoming’ problems. For young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their minority status can leave them being referred to as ‘victims’ at best, or criminals without ambitions or academic ability at worst.”⁵²

The resilience and rich life experiences migrant and refugee young people bring with them means they have a significant contribution to make, both to others around them and to the broader community as a whole. If migrant and refugee young people are supported, informed, feel safe and understand the outcomes and context of their participation, they are often eager to take up such opportunities.⁵³

50 Winter, N. 2003, Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Positive Youth Development Outcomes, Washington DC: Policy Studies Associates, 2003, p. 12.

51 Couch, op. cit., p. 279.

52 Couch, op. cit., p. 280.

53 Oliff, L. 2007 (b), Young people and multiculturalism in Australia: participation and representation, Australian Mosaic, Issue 15, pp.33-36.

5. Survey and focus group findings

5.1 Demographics of respondents

Age

Survey respondents were aged between 12 – 25 years of age. The largest age demographic of survey respondents were 18-year-olds (10%), followed by 21 year olds and 24-year-olds (both 8%). The average age of respondents was 19 years.

Gender

Interestingly, equal numbers of young men and women (both 43; 49%) responded to the survey. Two people did not indicate their gender. Young female respondents tended to be aged between 19 – 25 years whereas young male respondents were highly represented in the 16 – 18 age group, demonstrated in the graph below.

Age by gender of survey respondents

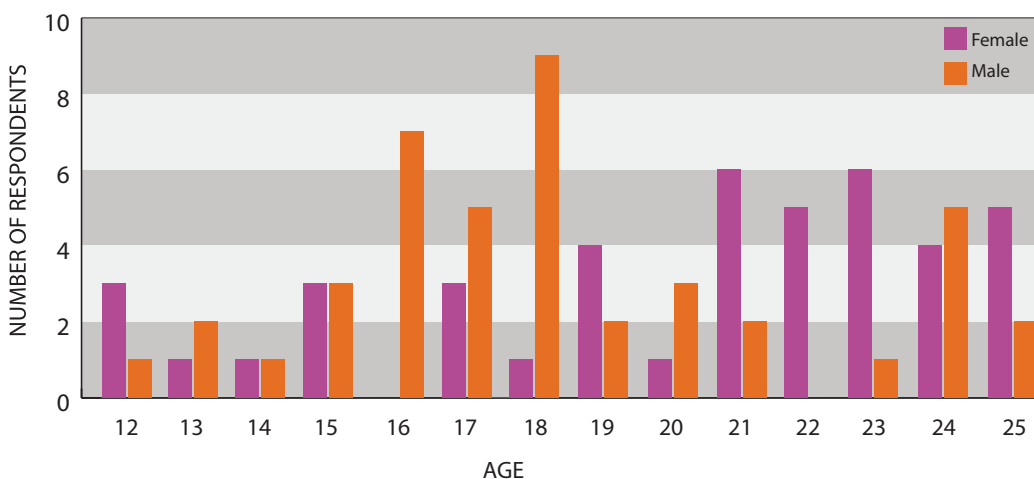


Chart 1: Age according to gender of survey respondents

Although there were an equal amount of young male and female participants, the average female respondent had lived in Australia nine years compared with the average of four years for male respondents. Similarly, 40% of female respondents were born in Australia, compared with only 21% of male respondents. There were also far more newly arrived young male respondents compared with females; 77% of newly arrived respondents were young men. This reflects more recent humanitarian settlement patterns, with higher numbers of young men arriving in comparison to young women, particularly through Australia's onshore humanitarian program. This should be taken into account when looking at gender as a variable, as at times the difference in responses may also be influenced by the length of time they have lived in Australia.

Country of birth

Just over two thirds of the respondents were born overseas (61; 70%), while 26 people (30%) were born in Australia; one person opted out of replying.

Number of respondents born overseas versus born in Australia

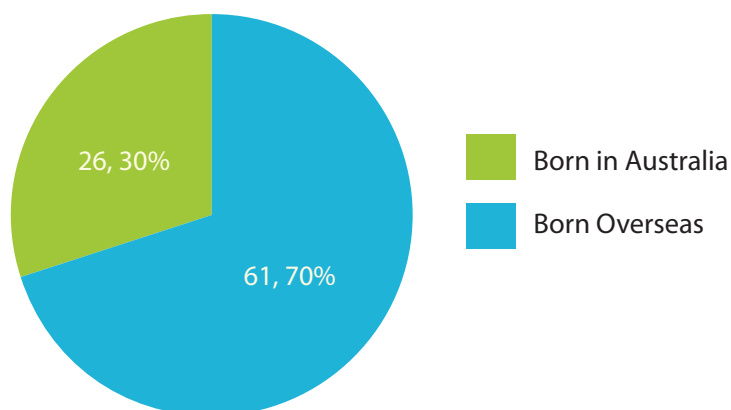


Chart 2: Number of respondents born overseas versus born in Australia

Table 1 shows the countries in which respondents were born; five people born overseas did not indicate where they were born, in addition to the one person who did not report whether they were born in Australia or overseas.

Australia	26
Afghanistan	16
Sudan	10
Egypt	4
Ethiopia	3
Iraq	3
Oman	3
Iran/Persia	2
Kenya	2
South Sudan	2
Uganda	2
Africa	1
China	1
England	1
India	1
New Zealand	1
Nigeria	1
Philippines	1
Somalia	1
Sri Lanka	1
No response	6
Total number:	88

Table 1: Country of birth

Table 2 shows the self-identified cultural backgrounds of respondents. Two young people did not report their cultural identity.

Afghan	13	Cambodian/Indian/ New Zealand/Australian	1	Middle Eastern	1
Sudanese	13	Dinka Bor	1	N/A	1
Australian	5	Eritrean-Egyptian	1	Nigerian-African	1
Chinese	3	Greek	1	Nuba Mountain/ Sudanese	1
Eritrean	3	Indian	1	Nuer	1
Chinese Australian	2	Indigenous Australian/ Ukrainian	1	Persian	1
Hazara/Afghanistan	2	Iraqi	1	Filipino/Spanish- Chinese	1
Italian	2	Italian Filipino	1	Scottish-American	1
Oromo	2	Jewish	1	Sinhalese	1
Somali	2	Karen	1	Sri Lankan-Sinhalese	1
South Sudanese	2	Kurdish Iranian	1	Swiss Australian	1
Sri Lankan	2	Malaysian	1	Syrian-Armenian	1
Sudanese-Ugandan	2	Malaysian Chinese	1	Uganda/South Sudan	1
Vietnamese	2	Maltese	1	Vietnamese Australian	1
Afghan Islam	1	Maori	1	No response	1
Anglo-Saxon	1			Total	88
Arabic/Muslim	1				

Table 2: Self-identified cultural backgrounds of respondents

Languages spoken

A total of 37 different languages were spoken by the 78 young people who responded to this question (Table 3).

English	65	Mandarin	2	Malayalam	1
Arabic	19	Murle	2	Nuer	1
Dari	13	Oromo	2	Shilluk	1
Persian	8	Swahili/Kiswahili	2	Somali	1
Cantonese	7	Acholi	1	Syriac	1
Hazaragi	6	Bari	1	Tamil	1
Dinka	4	Chinese	1	Tigre	1
Sinhalese/Sinhala	4	Chollo	1	Tigrinya	1
Urdu	4	Greek	1	Yoruba	1
Vietnamese	4	Indonesian	1		
Hindi	3	Juba	1		
Italian	3	Kurdish	1		
Filipino	2	Luganda	1		
French	2	Madi	1		

Table 3: Languages spoken

Many survey respondents were multilingual. Out of a total of 77 young people who responded to the question as to how many languages they spoke, 38% young people spoke two languages and 25% spoke three. Chart 3 gives a visual overview of the number of languages respondents spoke who participated in the survey.

Number of languages survey respondents speak

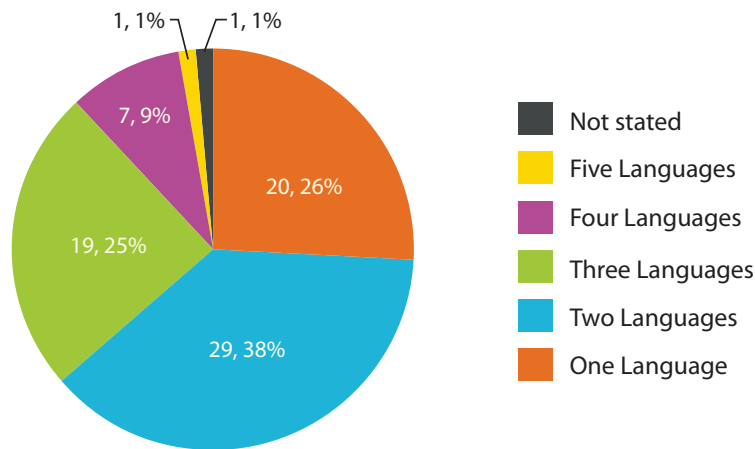


Chart 3: Number of languages survey respondents speak

Length of time in Australia

Out of the 61 respondents born overseas, five people did not specify how many years they have lived in Australia. As mentioned, one person also did not identify whether they were born in Australia or overseas, resulting in a total of 7% of respondents unaccounted for in terms of length of time spent in Australia.

Of the 56 people who did respond, 26 have lived in Australia for six or more years (30% of the total 88 respondents) and 30 (34%) have lived in Australia for five years or less. Included in this latter group are 16 young people who have lived in Australia two years or less (18%).

Education

An overwhelming number of respondents (69; 89%) were currently undertaking some sort of study. Equal numbers of participants were studying at high school and University (both 27; 39%). 15% (10) were attending TAFE, whilst 6% (4) were at an English Language Centre. One respondent was studying through another institution. Those more newly arrived were far more likely to be studying at high school or TAFE, whereas those born in Australia or living here for more than five years were more likely to be studying at University, followed by high school.

Australian citizenship

53 respondents (68%) had taken up formal Australian citizenship, while 24 participants (31%), indicated that they were not yet citizens. One person responded that he or she did not know whether he or she was a citizen. Ten people did not respond to this question.

5.2 Formal Participation and voting

Key findings:

- » A large majority of respondents who were eligible voters had enrolled to vote (91%);
- » Just over half of those under 18 years planned to enrol to vote upon turning 18 (52%);

- » Over two thirds of respondents reported they understand how voting works in Australia (72%);
- » More than three quarters understood enrolling to vote is compulsory (76%); whilst 79% understood that voting itself is compulsory;
- » There is a correlation between greater lengths of time lived in Australia and an increased understanding of voting;
- » Respondents had overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards exercising their right and responsibility to vote – viewing it as an opportunity to make change; a chance to have a say; and a democratic right.

Eligibility to vote is affected by two variables:

- » Age – you must be 18 years of age or over; and
- » Citizenship status – you must be an Australian citizen.

In order for young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds to apply for Australian citizenship, they must be permanent residents and have lived in Australia for four or more years.⁵⁴ A number of respondents and focus group members had not lived in Australia long enough to qualify for citizenship, and thus were ineligible to vote. Despite this, CMY still enquired as to their knowledge and attitudes towards voting, given many will be eligible to vote in the near future.

Intentions to vote

Just over 60% (32) of the respondents who were Australian citizens and thus eligible to vote, were over the age of 18; 40% (21) were under the age of 18. Out of the eligible voters, a large majority said that they had enrolled to vote (29; 91%). For those who were under 18, just over half said they planned to enrol to vote (11; 52%). Six (29%) said that they did not plan to enrol, whereas four (19%) said that they did not know whether they planned to enrol or not.

Knowledge of voting

There were 13 respondents (15%) who skipped the three questions related to voting knowledge. Out of the 75 young people who answered these questions, the majority (72%) responded positively to the question 'Do you understand how voting works in Australia?' However 9% ticked 'no' and 15% stated 'don't know', resulting in a total of 22% who were unclear. 76% correctly answered that enrolling to vote is compulsory, and a slightly higher percentage (79%) understood that voting is compulsory. This means that almost one quarter of young people (24%) were unclear if enrolling was compulsory, whilst roughly one fifth (21%) were unsure of whether voting itself was compulsory. It is also worth considering that 15% of respondents chose to skip these questions.

***“I haven’t done it before, so I don’t know how it works yet.
I know I have to vote, but I don’t know the process.”***

– Young woman, Chinese background

***“The first time [voting] I just sort of chose the names
I liked more.”***

– Young woman, Iraqi background

⁵⁴ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), Application process for Australian citizenship, http://www.citizenship.gov.au/applying/how_to_apply/conferral_app_process/ Accessed 7.3.13.

Understanding of voting according to length of time in Australia

Significant differences begin to emerge when comparing participants’ responses according to their length of time lived in Australia. The majority of respondents born in Australia (83%) understood how the voting system works, compared with slightly fewer of those living in Australia for six years or more (79%). This figure drops for respondents who had lived in Australia five years or less (57%). Despite knowledge increasing with length of time in Australia, 21% of respondents who have lived here for six or more years were still unsure of how voting works, as were 17% of those born in Australia.

Born in Australia - Do you understand how voting works in Australia?

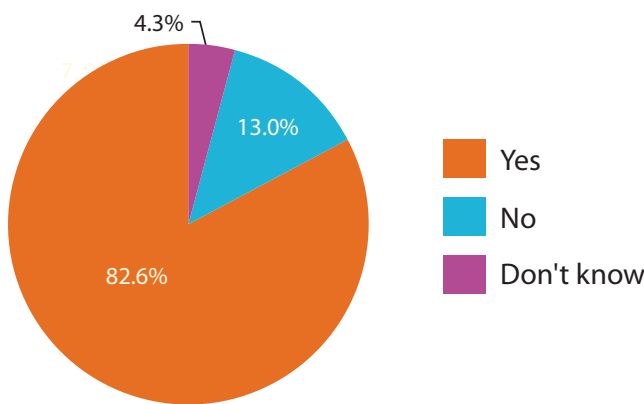


Chart 4: Understanding of how voting works in Australia - respondents born in Australia

Five years or less in Australia - Do you understand how voting works in Australia?

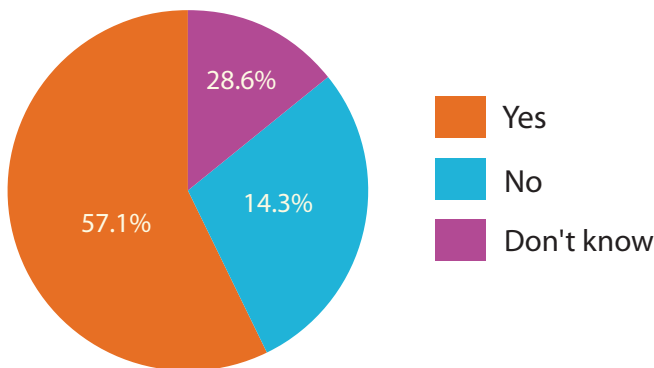


Chart 5: Understanding of how voting works in Australia – respondents living five years or less in Australia

The vast majority of respondents born in Australia (91%) understood that voting was compulsory, compared to two thirds (75%) of those living in Australia for six or more years, and 71% of those in Australia five years or less. Similarly, 83% of respondents born in Australia understood correctly that enrolling to vote is compulsory, compared with 75% of

respondents here for six or more years, and only 68% of those living in Australia five years or less.

Understanding of voting according to gender:

Young women had a greater understanding of how voting works (81%) compared with only 63% of young men. Similarly, young women were more likely to correctly identify that enrolling to vote was compulsory (81% young women compared with 71% of young men), and that voting is also compulsory (86% of young women compared to 71% of young men). However this difference according to gender may be due in part to the fact that the young female respondents tended to be slightly older and to have lived in Australia for longer periods of time compared with young male respondents.

Attitudes towards voting

Responses to attitudinal questions towards voting were overwhelmingly positive. The most common attitudes participants expressed including that voting was:

- » the opportunity to make a change (72%);
- » the opportunity to have a say (71%); and
- » one's right as a citizen in a democratic society (71%).

I think voting is:

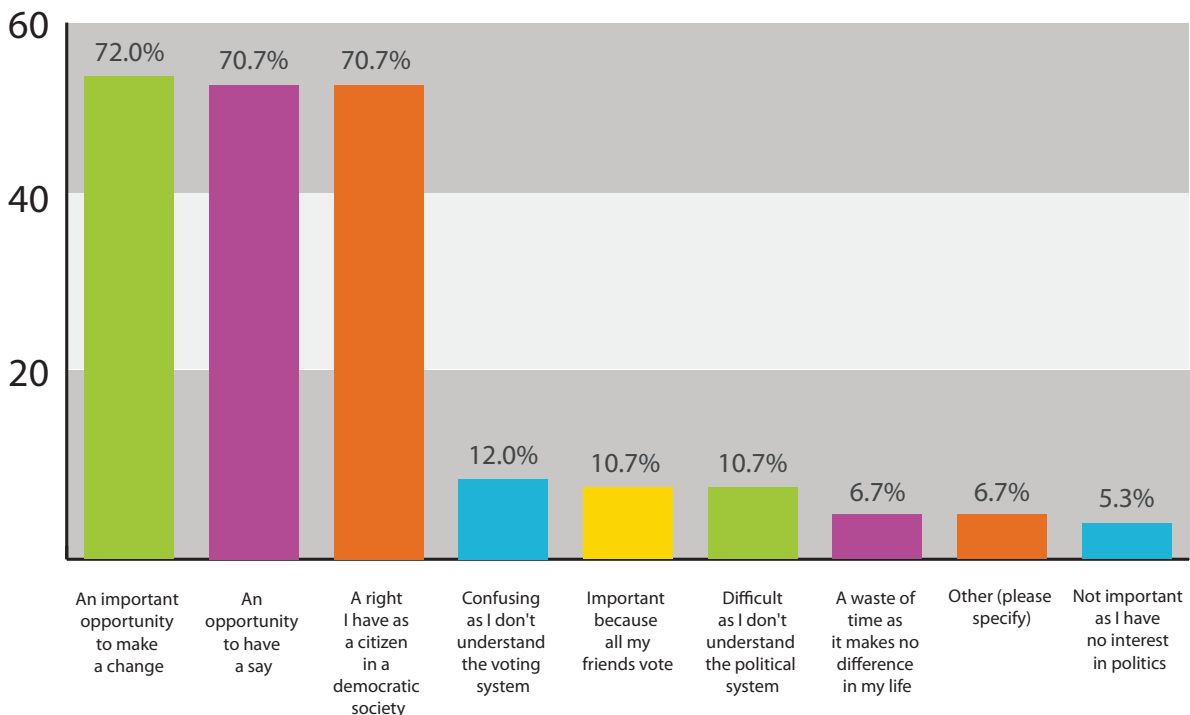


Chart 6: Attitudes towards voting

“I believe that we need to go and vote, because we are responsible for the country we live in, and to say who is able to be as the representative of the people. I would go and vote.”

– Young woman, Sudanese background

Although the figures were small by contrast, it is worth noting that 12% of participants reported that voting was confusing as they didn't understand the voting system, and 11% reported it was difficult as they didn't understand the political system.

“I think it is confusing [the Australian voting system], but I understand politics. For anyone who didn't go that extra step to understand it, I still think it is very confusing. The different tiers of government are confusing, who is responsible for what, who are you voting for, and what are they responsible for.”

- Young male, Vietnamese/Australian background

“Sometimes it is difficult to understand the political system”

- Young person living in Australia for 3 years

A very small number stated that voting is a waste of time as it makes no difference in their life (7%) or that it wasn't important as they had no interest in politics (5%). Issues around compulsory voting were raised several times both throughout the focus groups as well as via the survey. One young person commented on their survey that voting “should be up to you and not made compulsory.” Several others raised the issue of not being informed enough to know who to vote for, as well as not being interested. Others spoke about issues in their community, where people vote informally, motivated predominately by avoiding a fine.

“Often amongst the African community, people don't understand or they think it doesn't matter, so they just put numbers wherever so they don't get a fine. The main thing is that people don't want a fine.”

- Young female, Horn of African background

Broader attitudes towards formal politics

The focus group discussions raised broader issues around general attitudes and experiences of formal politics that may influence future interactions and decision making around political engagement. These included the fact that:

- » Negative experiences of authorities in countries of origin or transit can impact on how young people and families interact with politics in Australia;
- » Young people may learn about rights within democratic political system, but do not necessarily know how to exercise them (for example, knowing that a Member of Parliament can assist you, but not knowing what steps are involved);
- » Negative experiences of political tokenism or being consulted in order to legitimise decision making can result in cynicism and disengagement;
- » The culture and combative nature of politics deters some young people from becoming more involved, particularly those from cultures who may have very different cultural norms around leadership or debate.

5.3 Participation in the community

Key findings:

- » Respondents were highly active in the community; over one fourth (28%) were

- involved in seven or more activities in the last year, and over half (53%) were involved in four or more activities;
- » The most common forms of participation included social and recreational activities (65%); youth leadership initiatives (59%); and volunteering (53%);
 - » Participation is affected by length of time in Australia - young people born in Australia were more likely to engage in volunteering and social media; those living in Australia for six or more years were more likely to be involved in leadership initiatives and cultural community activities; those more newly arrived were most likely to participate in social/recreational activities or school based groups;
 - » Participation is affected by gender; young men were more likely to engage in social and recreational activities, whereas young women were more likely to volunteer or participate in their own cultural community activities;
 - » The major barrier to young people getting involved was due to not knowing what opportunities exist (25%), followed by not having enough time (23%); and not knowing what is involved (19%);
 - » For very newly arrived young people (two years or less in Australia), limited English language skills, lack of finances and transport difficulties are additional factors that inhibited their participation;
 - » The most common reported impacts of participation were making new friends (80%) and learning new skills (77%);
 - » Participants believed that getting involved will lead to new skills that will help them in the future (74%) and will allow them to be heard and involved in decision making (73%);
 - » Respondents were motivated to participate in order to gain new skills and experiences (72%) and to interact with other young people who share the same ideas (68%).

Forms and rates of participation

Survey participants were asked to identify the types of activities and events they have been involved in during the last 12 months. 13 young people (15%) did not answer this question.

The most popular form of participation was in social and recreational activities, for example playing sport, music or getting involved in other social activities and clubs (65%). This was closely followed by being involved in youth leadership initiatives (59%) and volunteering (57%). The least common activity was to interact with a Member of Parliament (MP) or politician, whether by visiting in person or via written correspondence. However these figures are not low by any means, with 20% of respondents having sent an email or letter to a politician regarding an issue they care about, and 16% having met with a Member of Parliament or other politician.

Furthermore, answers indicate broad and high participation rates over a wide range of activities, with over one fourth of participants or 28% indicating that they have been involved in seven or more activities out of the 12 examples given. More than half (53%) of the respondents indicated that they have been involved in four or more of the activities suggested. Only two young people (3%) indicated that they had not participated in any of the suggested activities.

Participation types - all respondents

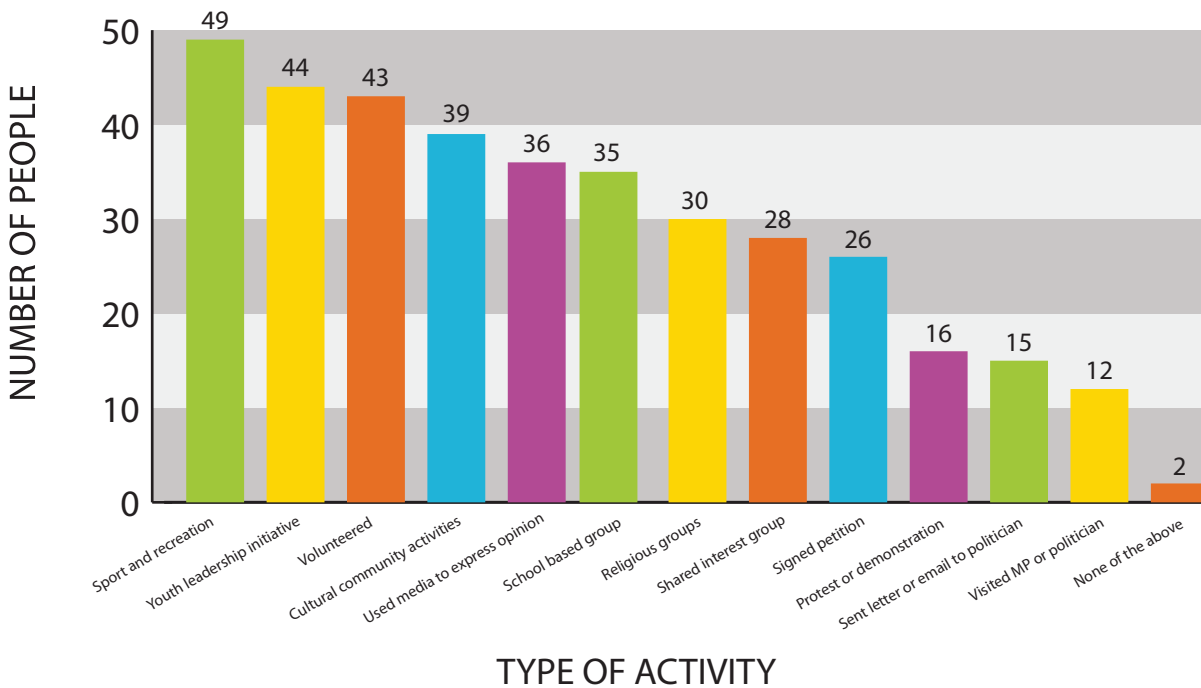


Chart 7: Types of participation

“When it comes to our cultural community... I’m doing sport activities with my friends and we are from the same background. And also we have parties, cultural ceremonies so we see each other regularly. I do voluntary activities, supporting homework clubs for young people.”

– Young male, Afghan background

Differences in participation according to time spent in Australia

The length of time a young person has spent in Australia appears to influence their type of involvement in community activities. Young people who were born in Australia cited volunteering (74%) as their most common activity, followed by engaging in discussion through media (including social media) (70%). For those born overseas but living in Australia for six or more years, involvement in leadership initiatives (75%) followed by involvement in their own cultural community activities (71%) rated most common.

In contrast, 71% of respondents who have lived in Australia for five years or less said that they have been involved in some sort of group recreation or social activity, followed by involvement in school based groups (50%). However, only 36% had volunteered; 39% were involved in youth leadership initiatives; and only 29% engaged with social media to express opinions about social issues.

Participation rates also appear to be affected by the length of time spent in Australia. Interestingly, those born outside Australia but living here for six or more years were the most likely to be involved in a number of activities; 60% of this demographic reported they were involved in more than three activities in the past year. In comparison, only 44% of those born in Australia ticked more than three activities; whilst only 29% of young people living in Australia for five years or less ticked three or more activities.

Differences in participation according to gender

Significant gender differences emerge when looking at both the types and rate of participation. Over the past 12 months, 50% of young women reported participating in three or more activities, compared with only 36% of young men. Young men were most likely to be involved in recreation or social groups (68%), followed by school based groups (50%). In contrast, young women were most likely to have volunteered (75%) and to be involved in their own cultural community activities and events (69%). Both groups reported relatively high involvement in youth leadership activities (67% of young women and 50% of young men).

Participation types by gender

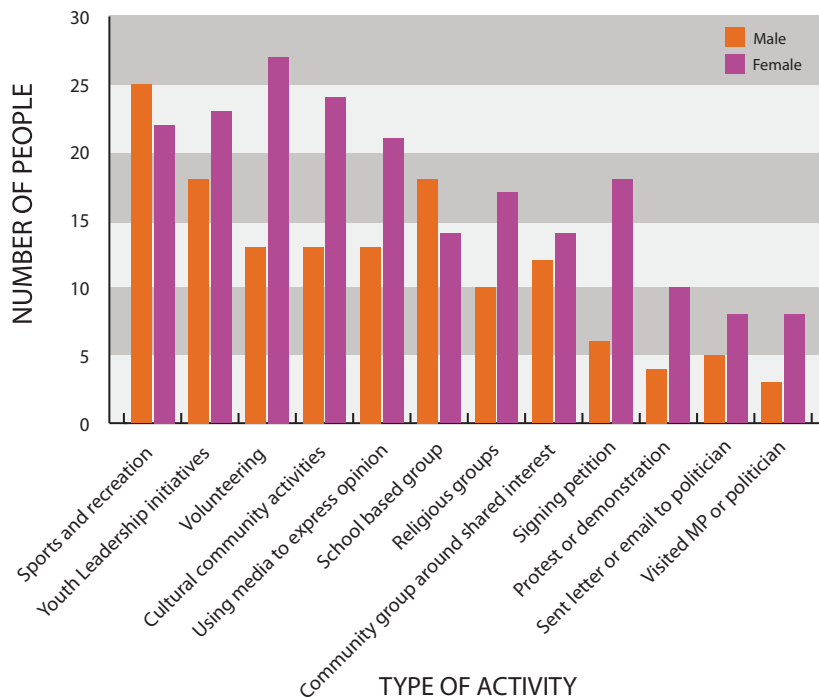


Chart 8: Participation types according to gender

Interestingly, young women were more likely (61%) to use media (such as face book, twitter, radio etc.) to express an opinion about an issue they cared about compared with only 37% of young men. Similarly, young women were far more likely (53%) to sign an online petition or campaign compared with only 18% of young men.

Issues of concern to young people

In the focus groups, young people spoke about issues they cared about or were working to address in some way. These included:

- » Domestic violence
- » Community safety
- » Education
- » Crime
- » Immigration policy and asylum seeker/refugee issues

- » Health
- » Sport and recreation
- » Racism and the portrayal of young people in media
- » International politics

5.3.1 Barriers to youth participation

Young people who were involved in less than three activities over the last twelve months were asked to identify the key barriers to their participation. The survey and focus group discussions revealed that the main reason young people do not participate is that they do not know what opportunities are available. 16 young people out of a total 64 respondents who answered this question (25%) listed not knowing about opportunities as a key barrier to getting involved.

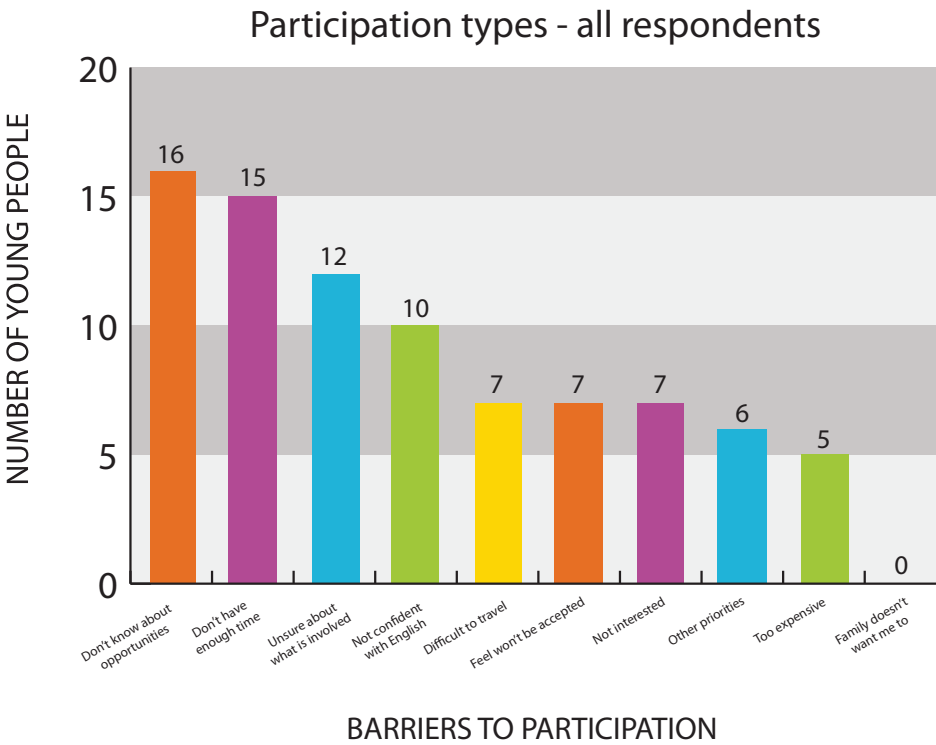


Chart 9: Barriers to participation

“We don’t have any idea about that (what is available). If anything comes in front of us... I will take it. I was the leader of the students at my English Language School and high school. The teacher selected me... If there is any opportunity, so we can do it. How I should know if there is any opportunity for leadership? Maybe if there is a social network they have to let us know if there is something going on.”

– Young man, Afghan background

“I think there are opportunities, but they’re not promoted well enough.”

– Young woman, Iraqi background

Not having enough time to spare (23%) was also a major barrier to participation that respondents reported.

“I work full-time, around 8 hours a day and unfortunately do not have sufficient time to commit.”

– Young woman, Chinese background, 25 years

11% of respondents reported that they were prevented from participating due to feeling they would not be welcome or as a result of transport issues. The same percentage of participants stated they were not interested in the activities listed.

Barriers according to length of time in Australia

There are significant differences in the various barriers that young people encounter when wanting to participate in community activities. For those born in Australia, 38% reported the biggest barrier to participation to be not having enough time, followed by being unsure as to what participating involves (25%).

This data differs for young people who were born overseas. For those living in Australia for six or more years, not knowing what opportunities exist (20%) followed by being unsure as to what is involved (15%) were the two reasons most commonly reported. For those living in Australia five years or less, the main barriers identified were due to lacking confidence with English, and not knowing what opportunities exist (both 32%).

For those who had been in Australia for two years or less, lacking confidence with English was rated as an even greater barrier (58%), followed by several factors all rated equally: not knowing what opportunities exist, it being too difficult to travel, the financial cost of participation and having too many other things that are more important in my life all rated at 25%. This finding was reinforced in a focus group with newly-arrived young men from Afghan backgrounds,⁵⁵ who stressed the issues of limited finances, a lack of confidence in speaking English and limited transport options as the main reasons for not participating.

“We do not have that much confidence to talk. So that’s why we have a little bit of a problem, until we have more confidence.”

– Young man, Afghan background

“Gym membership is expensive. Public transport can be expensive.”

– Young man, Afghan background

5.3.2 Impact of participation upon young people

The most significant impacts of getting involved in the community that participants identified were making new friends (80%), followed closely by learning new skills (77%).

Increased confidence and being a part of positive change (both 63%) also rated highly as outcomes of participation. Overall, the majority of the respondents claimed that community involvement had brought real benefits to their lives.

⁵⁵ These young men had been in Australia between seven months and two years.

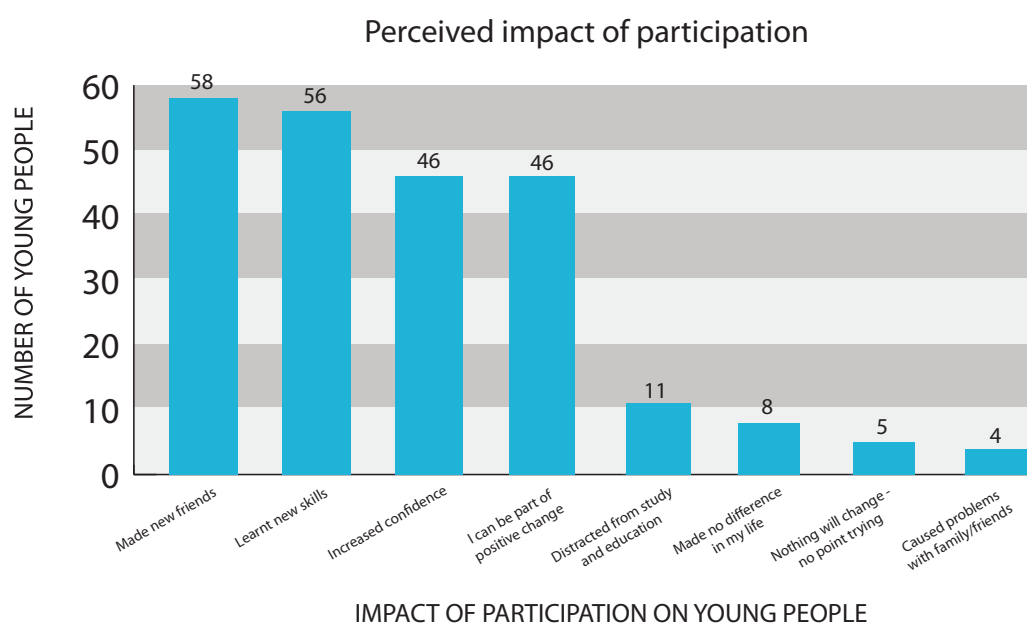


Chart 10: Perceived impact of participation

“I got more of an idea of how people see refugees, how you can make a law with the UN, how it is working... I got a lot of ideas, different ideas. I said that ‘I can do it’...”

– Young male, Afghan background who participated in a UN youth leadership day

One young man of Afghan background (14 years of age) responded to the survey saying that participating has made him feel healthy. Others spoke about feeling ‘happy’ when they engage in activities.

“It makes us happy. We believe we will grow up if we participate and join in (in sporting activities) – that’s why we feel happy”

– Young male, Afghan background

Only a low number of respondents indicated that participating in such activities has had a negative impact on their lives. Key areas identified were:

- » Distraction from study or education (15%)
- » It has made no difference in my life (11%)
- » It made me think that nothing will change – there is no point trying (7%); and
- » It has caused problems for me with my family and/or friends (6%).

One respondent (young woman of South Sudanese background, 19 years old) said that her experiences have led her to think that her community involvement was ineffective: “[N]o results has come through, usually just paper work, that makes no difference.”

Impact of participation according to time spent in Australia and gender

There were no significant differences in participants’ responses regarding the impact participation has had upon their lives according to length of time in Australia or gender. The most common responses include having made new friends and learnt new skills across all three groups.

5.3.3 Attitudes and motivational factors for participation

Attitudes towards participation

The majority of young people surveyed believed that active participation within the community will lead to new skills (74%), which in turn will help them in the future. This was closely followed by the desire to be heard and involved in different kinds of decision making (73%). Overall, the respondents overall held very positive attitudes towards being involved in community matters, with more than 60% agreeing that doing so will be for the general good of society.

Relatively few participants viewed participation in a negative light, or were indifferent. However almost 20% of young people stated that they believed getting involved in the community is mostly for well-educated, confident youth.

Attitudes according to length of time in Australia and gender

Attitudes towards participation did not appear to vary according to length of time spent in Australia. All three groups believed that participation would help them learn new skills for the future; that it is important so that young people are heard in decision making processes; and that participation is a way of making a difference and giving back. Similarly, gender did not feature as a noticeable variable with regards to this question.

Motivational factors for participation

Most young survey respondents reported being motivated to get involved in community activities in order to gain new skills and experiences (72%). They also reported wanting to work together with other young people who share the same ideas as they do (68%). Making new friends was listed as another high priority, equally along with putting ideas into action and changing things for the better (both 65%).

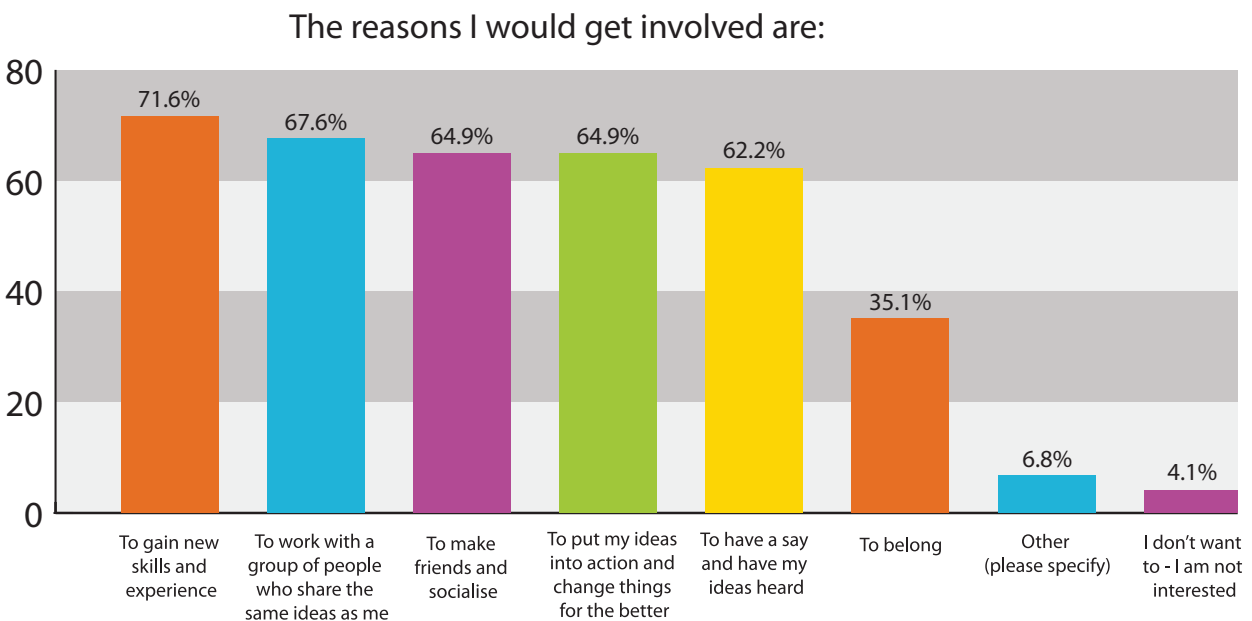


Chart 11: Motivational factors for participation

Motivational factors depending on time spent in Australia

Young people who were born in Australia stated that gaining new skills and experiences was the strongest motivating factor (91%), as was it for those living here for six year or more (79%). In contrast, those living in Australia five years or less prioritised making new friends and putting their ideas into action (both 63%).

Motivational factors according to gender

There was not a significant variation in responses according to gender, although young men prioritised making friends and socialising (73%), whereas young women prioritised gaining new skills and experiences (81%). Both groups prioritised putting their ideas into action in order to change things for the better (70% of young men and 61% of young women).

6. Discussion and ways forward

The results of the survey and focus group discussions provide a small snapshot, suggesting that many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in Victoria are highly active and engaged in the community. The young respondents demonstrated overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards both voting and participating more broadly. They believed that opportunities to get involved in the community will not only allow them to make a positive contribution to society, but also will build their skills for the future.

6.1 Formal participation

6.1.1 Voting

The young people consulted and surveyed expressed positive attitudes towards voting, challenging existing stereotypes that suggest young people are apathetic or are disengaged from formal politics.⁵⁶ In fact, the survey and focus groups highlighted the very opposite – young migrant and refugee respondents felt strongly about their basic right and responsibility to participate in democratic processes. Interestingly, the experience or knowledge that they may not have been able to vote in their countries of origin was a motivating factor for some young people to take voting in Australia seriously.

“We do have a responsibility to vote – there was no democracy back home so we should appreciate it here.”

– Young woman, Eritrean background

The enrolment figures of those eligible to vote (91%) amongst survey respondents was higher than the estimated 85% of the general Australian youth population, although this figure is still below the average Australian 95% enrolment rate.⁵⁷ There appeared to be a lack of clarity amongst this group of respondents about voting requirements, given that just over half of those under 18 years of age said they planned to enrol once they turned 18. There was also noticeable confusion amongst participants as to whether enrolling to vote or voting itself is compulsory. The fact that over one fourth (28%) were unsure of how voting works in Australia also suggests that a substantial amount of young people do not understand this basic democratic process.

56

57 Ibid.

An interesting theme that emerged through the focus groups surrounded the important educative role young people can potentially play with regards to reducing informal voting within their families. Several young people reported that parents or relatives look to them to assist with voting due to limited English language and literacy skills. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that informal voting is noticeably higher in electoral districts with large numbers of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.⁵⁸

“I’m not enrolled, but I help my mum vote, because she doesn’t understand what to do...”

– Young man over 18 years old, Horn of African background

A very small number of participants had negative views regarding voting, stating that it is a waste of time or that they had no interest in politics. It is unclear whether this is due to a lack of understanding as to how politics affects their everyday lives, or as a result of feeling disempowered or cynical towards the political process itself. One participant in a focus group reported that there was no real difference between the major parties, so no point in voting.

“The political parties don’t seem any different, so I don’t bother [voting]”

– Young man, Horn of African background

Feedback from some young people suggests that a lack of follow through can result in disillusionment with government or authority figures, leading to a broader distrust in political systems. This is particularly the case where young people have been involved in consultations or planning processes, where there has been inadequate follow up, action taken or communication. This highlights the importance of being clear about what young people can expect from their involvement, including what will happen to their suggestions, and being honest about the limitations that may exist around implementing their ideas.

Voting according to time spent in Australia

There is a clear correlation between understanding how voting works and how long a young person has been in Australia. This may partly be due to the fact that young people with permanent residency from migrant or refugee backgrounds are unable to enrol to vote for at least four years upon arrival in Australia, and so have limited exposure to the process. This suggests that more newly arrived young people would benefit from education and information around voting and political processes, particularly if they are close to turning 18 or are already 18 years or over.

It is also important to consider the educational sites newly arrived young people access, in order to target civic education initiatives effectively. Many young people go directly from English Language Centre’s on to TAFE or bridging courses if they’re unable to attend secondary school, due to age or English language restrictions. Therefore targeting these alternative places of education may be integral to ensure that these young people are not overlooked.

6.1.2 Broader attitudes towards formal politics

Young people in the focus groups discussed broader attitudes towards formal politics in

58 Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2006 Victoria State election and matters related thereto, Melbourne, 29 August 2007. <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/archive/emc/2006%20State%20Election/By%20witness%20PDF/29w7.pdf> Accessed 3.1.13.

Australia that impact upon on their participation. The following themes emerged through the focus group and survey with regards to formal political engagement:

- ***Gaps in applied knowledge of democratic processes***

For some, a gap can exist between their theoretical knowledge of what it means to be an active citizen, and how this works in practice. Young people can know that it is compulsory to vote, but not actually understand the voting processes or how to go about this. One young woman spoke about learning about her rights, but not knowing what practical steps to take should she want to exercise this right.

“In the citizenship test I studied that we can ask our local representatives of government and council for help and to speak for us, but I don’t know how to approach them.”

– Young woman, Chinese background

- ***Prior experiences of authority figures and politics***

At other times, young people and their families’ experiences of governments in countries of origin or transit negatively impacts on their attitudes towards engaging with political processes in Australia.⁵⁹ Several young people spoke about the mistrust their families felt towards authorities, including a reluctance to be associated with anything that appeared ‘political’.

“People still fear the government here. They don’t realise they can say things. They think they’ll get in trouble. Back at home you don’t talk about the government.”

– Young woman, Eritrean background

Despite this, some of the same young people were highly active in youth groups and as volunteers in their local community. This reflects Arvanitakis and Marren’s assertion that young people may be reluctant to engage with formal politics, despite holding positive attitudes towards ‘getting involved in the community’.⁶⁰

- ***Youth participation in government processes***

Focus group participants believed that more young people would be inspired to vote if they felt recognised by politicians and their needs were represented. This supports Edwards’ research with young people in Australia, which claims young voters are not targeted or ‘seen’ by political parties or politicians.⁶¹ Similarly, focus group discussions supported the idea that on the whole, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds do not see themselves or their interests generally reflected in parliament.⁶²

“I think campaigning should be made more appealing to young people. They should talk the young people’s language rather than big words. Also meeting the promise of what they say they are going to do for young people, because people learn throughout the year... Meeting the needs of young people

⁵⁹ Couch, op. cit., p. 281.

⁶⁰ Arvanitakis, op. cit., p. 10.

⁶¹ Edwards, 2007, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶² Busch, 2002 in Holdsworth, op. cit.

- it would encourage young people to vote.”

- Young woman, Vietnamese/Chinese background

Participants also identified that there is a strong distinction between real opportunities to make change, and settings that may use participation to formalise decision making, supporting Evans and Prilleltensky’s claims that opportunities for young people to have real influence can be minimal.⁶³ Focus group participants reported that experiences of political tokenism or being consulted in order to legitimise decision making can result in not wanting to engage in the future. This supports the argument of Holdsworth et al., that the degree to which young people choose to participate is directly affected by whether they believe their input will be valued, listened and acted upon.⁶⁴

“Many times politicians use youth as their symbol, saying that we have great policies and practices, when they really don’t listen to young people and don’t address exactly their issues. They [want to] show the public ‘We represent the people because we have a youth forum or we are listening to young people.’ But they are not listening to young people.”

- Young man, Vietnamese/Australian background

• Culture of Australian politics

The culture of Australian politics, including its adversarial, confrontational nature was also raised as a deterrent to engaging in more formal processes. This supports Arvanitakis and Marren’s research suggesting that young people are often alienated by formal politics, despite being interested in political and social issues.⁶⁵ One young woman in a focus group chose to disengage from a youth organisation due to the ‘culture’ it had adopted, based on that of formal Australian politics:

“I used to be involved in an organisation called United National Youth Association, where young people can debate and like they learn to be the future politicians. I find it hard to speak for myself, because I feel like I’m from a different cultural background and I don’t know how to speak up for myself because they’re talking...in a debating way that I don’t really like. I feel like this is the image of Australian politics – and like I’m never going to join this, it’s too hard for me.”

- Young woman, Chinese background

6.2 Participation in the community

The survey findings and focus group discussions suggest that migrant and refugee young people are both actively engaged in the community and are developing new skills as a result. However, participation types and rates are significantly affected by factors such as gender and length of time spent in Australia, which must be taken into account when developing programs.

Recreation and social groups, youth leadership initiatives and volunteering were the

⁶³ Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005 cited in Holdsworth, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Holdsworth, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Arvanitakis, op. cit., p. 8.

primary ways that survey respondents engage in their community. Interestingly however, survey participants were slightly less likely to have volunteered (53%) compared with a 2012 national survey of young Australians (60.5%); and less likely to have participated in sport (65%) compared 78.4% of youth in Australia.⁶⁶ Although the CMY survey sample was small in comparison, it may suggest that young people from migrant backgrounds are participating at slightly lower rates in comparison to the general Australian youth population, perhaps due to encountering some of the specific barriers as identified in this paper.

Focus group discussions revealed that peers, community members, teachers and parents can all play an important role in inspiring and supporting young people to get involved in their local community. Mentors within young people's cultural community can provide a tangible example of what is possible for others, given they've already paved the way.

“I remember arriving in Australia it was good just seeing girls who had been here longer than me – being able to look up to them and thinking ‘Well it’s possible, some other girls have done it’. That was really important actually, really important.”

– Young woman, Iraqi background

Peers can play an important role in sharing information about opportunities, and encourage one another to take the first step to get involved.

“I think it’s important for active people like us to spread the word, to them there are a lot of things happening around us and we can really have a say – to show them you can do it in the same way.”

– Young woman, Iraqi background

Teachers can also be a vital channel for assisting newly-arrived young people to be involved in the community, given they are often the first adult they often develop a trusting relationship with beyond their own family or cultural community in Australia.

“The teacher told me ‘Do you have an interest to go to the UN conference?’ I said ‘What is it? Do you want help me?’ She said yes I can help. If the people can help us, then we can do it.”

– Young male, Afghan background

Finally, parents can provide a strong, positive role model in supporting their children to participate actively in the community. Several participants identified that their parents provided them with a resilience and determination to get involved and give back, even if this at times meant going against the flow.

“If people put you down you have to challenge. I was raised by a single mother, she worked very hard for me in Sudan so I could go to school, and sometimes she was put down by other people around us.”

– Young woman, South Sudanese background

6.2.1 Barriers to participation

⁶⁶ Mission Australia, Youth Survey 2012, <http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/research-social-policy/115-research/research-social-policy/658-youth-survey> Accessed 13.3.2013.

Although participation rates were high amongst the sample group, many young people reported not knowing what opportunities were available. For those that did learn about and gain access to opportunities, strong social networks appeared to be the key. Social networks are often fragmented for young people through the migration and refugee experience, and thus developing friendships and social connections can be even more critical for this particular group.

Being unaware of opportunities not only means that young people may miss out on valuable experiences, it may also restrict them from the future benefits and life skills associated with participation. For example, the social networks and skills developed through volunteering can be important in gaining future employment.

Other commonly reported barriers to participation were not having enough time and being unsure about what is involved. As a result, some young people require encouragement and support to seize opportunities around them; activities need to be actively promoted through a variety of channels.

“My participation ebbs and flows, depending on the opportunities that come up...I see that in a lot of other people too, unless the carrot is kind of dangled in front of you, you just kind of blend into your world.”

– Young man, Vietnamese/Australian background

Several young people raised the issues of a lack of confidence, self-esteem and sense of belonging as key barriers to getting involved. This supports Vic Health’s research that people from migrant and refugee barriers frequently self-exclude themselves from participating in certain activities due to feeling unwelcome, unsafe or due to fear of discrimination.⁶⁷

“Sometimes you feel shy. You feel like your English is not good. If you speak and feel like people are watching you or laughing, then you feel scared to talk again or ask questions.”

– Young man, Afghan background

Related to this is the fact that just under one fifth of respondents held the concerning view that that ‘getting involved’ is mostly for well educated, confident young people, perhaps due in part to the type of opportunities they see around them. This perception could prevent some young people from participating in opportunities due to self-exclusion, particularly for young people who have experienced interrupted education or are struggling to learn English.

Confidence and self-esteem are critical to young people taking up future opportunities that present themselves. This is particularly the case for more newly arrived young people, who may lack English language skills or an understanding of Australian systems. Programs and initiatives that provide easy entry points, through social and recreational activities such as sport and the arts, can have an explicit focus on building up young people’s self-esteem and overall sense of self. This has beneficial flow on effects, impacting on other areas of life such as overall wellbeing, education and employment.

“I think it’s confidence... that’s what stops a lot of young people from stepping up.”

⁶⁷ Vic Health, op. cit.

– Young man, Vietnamese/Australian background

A further challenge can be that families and parents do not always understand the value of volunteering, given that the concept may not have existed in their home country as it does in Australia.

“My family is saying ‘people are exploiting you, they are misusing you’ – if you do volunteering and work without payment. But I continue volunteering, because I get something out of it – so that is a kind of payment. Not monetary based, but it is about learning, networks, having the feeling that I’m contributing and boosting my confidence.”

– Young man, Afghan background

Although volunteering can be highly valuable, it can also be considered somewhat of a luxury for those who may be struggling to catch up on years of disrupted education or who have the pressure of having to find paid employment to pay off debts or support family members overseas. It’s also worth noting that many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are highly involved in their local communities or religious groups, but do not necessarily perceive or identify this activity as ‘volunteering’. Young people in focus groups advocated for educating both parents and young people about what they can gain from the volunteer experience, including how to translate the skills learnt onto a resume.

“[We need to] educate young people on the importance of volunteering... values and future outcomes. When my family asks me about what I am going to get from volunteering, [I can then explain] these are the things I will gain from volunteering. I won’t get money, but I will gain these things.”

– Young woman, Sudanese background

6.2.2 Impact of participation

Participation can have an overwhelmingly positive impact upon young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly in terms of increasing their social networks and developing new skills. Young people also reported feeling more confident and being a part of positive change as important outcomes of their involvement. This supports previous research that suggests participation has positive effects upon young people’s health and wellbeing, social connectedness and identity;⁶⁸ including improved skills and a strengthened sense of citizenship.⁶⁹

Getting involved in community activities and taking on leadership roles can also help young people gain a more complex understanding of social change, and how this takes place. This applied knowledge assists them to try out new approaches, and continue to work on issues they care about within the community.

“Participating has given me confidence; it keeps you grounded, [gives you] new perceptions and interpretation of things – you see the bigger picture ... Through participation and active involvement, we get a realistic idea, an experience

⁶⁸ Francis, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Collin, P. 2008, Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Literature Review, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, p. 15.

of what works and how hard it can be to bring change.”

- Young man, Afghan background

Although a relatively small number of respondents reported that participation had had a neutral or negative effect on their lives, it should be noted as a concerning impact, and a clear reminder that young people value follow through and being able to see the outcomes of their involvement.⁷⁰

Overall, the survey and focus group responses suggest that participation has extremely strong benefits for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds that impact positively on their future and transition to adulthood. Increased skills, strong social networks, confidence and the belief that you can help create positive change in the community are all essential life skills that should be nurtured through participation programs and opportunities.

6.2.3 Attitudes and motivation to participate

Young people involved in the survey and focus groups generally believed they had something valuable to offer to the community and that their contributions would benefit others, demonstrating a healthy view of their own roles as active citizens in Victoria. Overall, participants expressed extremely positive attitudes towards getting involved, believing this will help them develop new skills for the future, and will allow them to be heard and involved in decision making. This resonates strongly with the commitment of the Victorian Government’s Youth Statement to ensuring young people can participate in decision making processes.

Survey and focus group findings suggest young people are motivated to participate in the community in order to:

- » gain new skills and experiences;
- » interact with other young people who share the same ideas;
- » make new friends; and
- » put ideas into action to change things for the better.

Participation strategies that wish to engage young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds should provide both exposure to new experiences and skill building elements, whilst creating space for developing new friendship and networks. These elements are critical in helping prepare young people for the future, such as increasing employability. They should also provide real opportunities for young people to be able to implement and try out new ideas, through adequate resourcing and support. This facilitates learning in action, and supports young people to take the practical next steps that can be often missing from youth participation initiatives if not adequately resourced or thought through.

6.2.4 Participation according to length of time in Australia

Young people’s participation appears to be impacted greatly by the length of time they have lived in Australia, which is also supported by the research of Holdsworth et al.⁷¹ For those more newly arrived, recreation and social activities (such as sport) were by far the most common activity young people had participated in, followed by involvement in

⁷⁰ Arvanitakis, op. cit., p. 14.

⁷¹ Holdsworth, op. cit., p. 102.

school based groups. These activities often an accessible entry point for young people, and don't necessarily require advanced English skills or complex understanding of Australian systems. Additionally, targeted sport and recreation programs can promote trust, facilitate settlement and transitional support, build social networks, serve as a diversion approach, be a pathway to other forms of participation, and provide young people with the chance to develop skills that can assist them in other parts of their lives.⁷²

In comparison, young people who were born in Australia were more likely to have volunteered, whereas those living in Australia for six or more years were most likely to engage in leadership initiatives or activities associated with their own cultural community. This suggests that the longer young people have lived in Australia, the more likely they are to begin exploring and find entry points into more structured forms of participation.

Barriers to participation also vary according the length of time young people have spent in Australia. Time constraints featured as a strong barrier for young people born in Australia, compared to a lack of confidence for those living in Australia five or less years. For those very recently arrived – in Australia for two years or less – the practicalities of not feeling confident with English rated even more highly, along with everyday challenges such as the financial costs of participation and lack of transport. This suggests that programs aiming to be inclusive of newly arrived young people must take these factors into account.

“It’s expensive and we have a problem with English. It’s very difficult for us to join a club. Even if it is not expensive, it is difficult for me to talk with them.”

– Young man, Afghan background

Motivation for getting involved in community activities also appears to be affected according to length of time in Australia. For more newly arrived young people, forming friendships and putting their ideas into action were key priorities, whereas those born in Australia or those living here for longer periods of time prioritised gaining new skills and experiences. This suggests that newly arrived young people may place a strong emphasis on building social networks, which is understandable due to the fact that existing networks may have been fractured due to the migration process. It also proposes that newly arrived young people are strongly motivated to play an active role in improving the community around them, a fact that may be considered surprising given the settlement challenges and many face in their early years living in Australia, not to mention the negative perceptions of migrant and refugee youth that can exist in the community.

Consequently, is important to have programs and opportunities that fall along a continuum of participation – to ensure that there are a variety of ways for young people to get involved, particularly for those who may lack confidence, social networks or fluency in English. Given the benefits young people have identified they have obtained through participating, it is critical to ensure that all young people have access to these opportunities.

This includes creating programs and easy access points for more newly arrived youth to engage through sport, recreation, the arts, school based opportunities and culturally specific activities. In the early years of young people's settlement, much care and attention should be given to their unique and practical needs with regards to their ability participate.

⁷² Oliff, L. 2007 (a), *Playing for the Future: The role of sport and recreation in supporting refugee young people to 'settle well'* in Australia, Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), p. 2.

This could include using interpreters or cultural support workers, ensuring activities are free or affordable, and by providing transport or ensuring that venues are easily accessible by public transport.

On the other hand, opportunities to be involved in volunteering and leadership initiatives are important in developing young people's skills, particularly for those who have lived in Australia for longer periods of time. For this group of young people, creating opportunities that take into account the competing demands on their time – such as juggling study and work commitments - are essential.

6.2.5 Participation and gender

Gender also plays a role in determining the types of activities migrant and refugee young people are likely to engage with. Young men reported being more likely to engage in social and recreational activities, whereas young women were more likely to volunteer or engage in cultural community activities. This division of participation along gender lines also resonates with the findings of Holdsworth et al, who found that young men from migrant and refugee backgrounds were far more likely to be involved in sport, whereas young women were more likely to be involved in youth groups or organisations.⁷³ Interestingly, this finding is also consistent with the findings of Mission Australia's national survey of young people across Australia.⁷⁴

Despite the fact that this trend may exist across the broader youth population, it is important to consider if there are unique aspects relevant for young people from migrant or refugee backgrounds. Young women's participation preferences may be due in part to the fact that in some instances it can be more culturally acceptable for them to participate within their own communities where there are women's only activities. Families may also be more comfortable with allowing their young women to participate in 'known' events where trusted community members are involved.

As a result, mixed gender activities run by generalist youth organisations can be inaccessible for some young women. However, there can be a lack of female only activities available in the broader community, and mainstream services are not always responsive to gender issues in their programming.

“When we suggested girls-only activities to council (such as an adventure camp), we were told businesses and services wouldn't sponsor it because it was only for girls. They said “What's the point? We can't just support girls only.”

- Young woman, Eritrean background

Both young women and young men's needs must be taken into account when looking at accessible opportunities for participation. For example, supporting and resourcing community-led initiatives or youth groups may be an important way of providing avenues for young women to engage in activities and develop leadership skills, who may otherwise be unable to do so. Similarly, developing 'young women only' programs will enable greater numbers of young women to be able to take up opportunities around them. Alternately, sport and recreation may provide a valuable tool to engage with young men who may be disinterested in other types of opportunities.

⁷³ Holdsworth, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷⁴ Mission Australia, op. cit.

7. Recommendations

1. The Victorian Electoral Commission investigate, in consultation with young people, develop online voting methods and social media platforms to capture the youth audience and to increase the likelihood of young people choosing to vote.

Online methods could encourage more young people to vote, given that it is a familiar medium for interacting for many young people. The time requirements involved in having to physically attend a polling booth was identified as a deterrent, with the suggestion that voting online would be preferable and would increase the chances of young people's participation. Similarly, developing social media platforms to engage with young people around voting and upcoming elections could be another way to engage them in these issues.

“I think it if voting was online it would be much easier than going and waiting.”

- Young woman, Iraqi background

2. The Victorian Electoral Commission to work in collaboration with education providers to develop and deliver applied learning educational programs around understanding voting and democracy in Australia.

This should include targeting both secondary schools and non-traditional educational sites such as English Language Centres and TAFE youth English language classes, to ensure more newly arrived young people also gain access to this information. Embedding applied learning around this topic in the curriculum, such as visiting Parliament house, meeting a Member of Parliament or simulating voting exercises are potentially effective ways to engage students with limited English ability and to increase accessibility. This education could have a flow on effect in assisting young people to help family members who may lack English language skills or may be unfamiliar with voting in Australia.

“A voting training in year 12 would be really good. Teaching young people who are about to leave school how to look at the system and not just donkey vote, or just go in there and vote for the person who they might have heard the name of the most on the news or TV. Add something to inform them... how to vote according to their beliefs and their value systems.”

- Young man, Vietnamese/Australian background

3. Create inclusive and relevant opportunities at the local level for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to interact with and gain a deeper understanding of formal politics in Australia.

It is critical to ensure that young people have supported opportunities to engage and interact with formal politics. This is particularly the case for young people and their families who may be unfamiliar with Australian political processes, who may have come to Australia as a result of political persecution, or who may have experienced authorities as being dangerous or corrupt.

This could include creating programs in local areas that familiarise young people with decision making processes, build their leadership skills, facilitate meetings with local councillors or Members of Parliament, and support visits to Parliament house and so on. This will support greater engagement from young people who may lack confidence and

familiarity with political processes. It will also assist in raising the profile of this group of young people as an often overlooked group of constituents with unique needs and perspectives.

4. Promote the achievements of young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are actively contributing to the community around them.

Promoting the achievements of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds has the multiple benefits of publicly recognising and acknowledging the contributions of young people, providing positive role models, inspiring others to get involved, whilst combating negative stereotypes about migrant and refugee youth that can exist in the community.

“Sometimes I feel that my community is misrepresented, because when I was [volunteering] there was a whole bunch of people asking me where am I from, and when I say I’m from Sudan they’re like ‘What are you doing here?’ because I was the only Sudanese person up there [volunteering]. They were all Australian, so to me it’s like I’m giving them a message saying that not all young Sudanese people are crazy. Not as in crazy, but troublemakers. Because that’s how they think when you say I’m from Sudan. It was worthwhile doing it.”

- Young woman, Sudanese background

5. Invest in leadership programs that focus specifically on multicultural young people, in order to build their confidence, strengthen social networks, and provide a stepping stone to engage in further opportunities.

It is critical to create accessible and supported entry points for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to engage, given they may lack familiarity with opportunities and what participating involves. Targeted programs that actively engage migrant and refugee young people are crucial in providing a space where young people can build their confidence, expand social networks, and be exposed to new opportunities. Such programs can act as a stepping stone to further activities or ways to get involved.

There are also rich opportunities in bringing together culturally diverse young people with the aim of developing their leadership skills. It can facilitate intercultural learning and understanding, where different modes of leadership, debate and conflict resolution can be explored and discussed. Multicultural programs can also strengthen social cohesion and inclusion, and work to prevent young people from self-excluding due to feeling different or like they don’t belong. It also increases young people’s ability to create diverse social networks, which can expand their opportunities in the future, and strengthen multiculturalism in Victoria.

6. Build the capacity of ethnic community organisations to more effectively work with young people, and support these organisations to be a bridge to mainstream participation opportunities.

Ethnic or cultural organisations can be the first point of contact for many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in terms of community involvement. They can provide an important space for young people to build social networks, and to engage with sport, recreation, cultural and religious activities. Building the capacity of these

community-based groups to better meet the needs of their young people can open up greater opportunities for migrant and refugee youth. They can also provide an important bridge between ethnic communities and mainstream organisations or programs, acting as a stepping stone for young people to get involved with opportunities beyond their own cultural community.

7. Undertake further research into:

- » Increasing understanding as to the role of mentors and peers in supporting active citizenship amongst migrant and refugee young people;
- » The role that settlement, gender and social networks play in impacting on the rates and types of participation; and
- » Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds' experiences of volunteering, including barriers, facilitating factors and its overall impact on their lives.

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9. Appendix – Survey data

Please tick the statements you agree with. I think voting is:	Response Percent	Response Count
An opportunity to have a say	70.7%	53
Important because all my friends vote	10.7%	8
A right I have as a citizen in a democratic society	70.7%	53
An important opportunity to make a change	72.0%	54
A waste of time as it makes no difference in my life	6.7%	5
Not important as I have no interest in politics	5.3%	4
Difficult as I don't understand the political system	10.7%	8
Confusing as I don't understand the voting system	12.0%	9
Other (please specify)	6.7%	5
	answered question	75
	skipped question	13

Table 1: Attitudes towards voting

Have you been involved in any of the following activities in the past year?	Response Percent	Response Count
Sent a letter or email to a politician about an issue you care about	20.0%	15
Visited your Member of Parliament or a politician about an issue you care about	16.0%	12
Signed a petition or online campaign	34.7%	26
Used media to express an opinion about an issue that you care about (through radio, newspaper, online, Facebook, Twitter, blog etc.)	48.0%	36
Attended a protest or demonstration	21.3%	16
Attended a social action or community group around a particular interest	37.3%	28
Volunteered (with an organisation or in the community - e.g. unpaid community work)	57.3%	43
Been involved in youth leadership initiatives (e.g. youth councils, youth reference groups, youth-led groups or organisations etc.)	58.7%	44
Been involved in my own cultural community-based activities (e.g. community celebrations, events, groups etc.)	52.0%	39
Been involved in religious groups or organisations	40.0%	30
Participated in group recreation (e.g. sport, dance, music etc.) or social activities or clubs	65.3%	49
Participated in school based groups (e.g. student council, issue based groups etc.)	46.7%	35
None of the above	2.7%	2
	answered question	75
	skipped question	13

Table 2: Participation in activities

If you ticked LESS THAN THREE of the above activities, what are the main things that stop you from getting involved? Tick as many as you agree with.	Response Percent	Response Count
It is too expensive	7.8%	5
It is too difficult to travel	10.9%	7
I don't know what opportunities are available	25.0%	16
I feel unsure about what is involved	18.8%	12
I feel like I won't be accepted or welcome	10.9%	7
I don't have enough time	23.4%	15
My family doesn't want me to	0.0%	0
I am not interested	10.9%	7
I have too many other things that are more important in my life	9.4%	6
I am not confident with my English	15.6%	10
None of the above/ticked more than three	42.2%	27
Other (please specify)	7.8%	5
	answered question	64
	skipped question	24

Table 3: Barriers to participation

Tick as many as you agree with. If you ticked any of the activities in the question before last, how do you think being involved in these activities have impacted on you?	Response Percent	Response Count
It has made me more confident	63.0%	46
I have learned new skills	76.7%	56
I have made new friends	79.5%	58
It has helped me see that I can be part of positive change	63.0%	46
It made me think that nothing will change - there is no point trying	6.8%	5
It has caused problems for me with my family and/or friends	5.5%	4
It distracted me from important things like study and education	15.1%	11
It has made no difference in my life	11.0%	8
Other (please specify)	9.6%	7
	answered question	73
	skipped question	15

Table 4: Impact of participation

Tick as many as you agree with. The reasons I would be getting involved in community activities are:	Response Percent	Response Count
To make friends and socialise	64.9%	48
To work with a group of young people who share the same ideas as me	67.6%	50
To have a say and have my ideas heard	62.2%	46
To put my ideas into action and change things for the better	64.9%	48
To belong	35.1%	26
To gain new skills and experience	71.6%	53
I don't want to - I am not interested	4.1%	3
Other (please specify)	6.8%	5
	answered question	74
	skipped question	14

Table 5: Motivation for participating

Tick as many as you agree with. I think getting involved and participating in the community:	Response Percent	Response Count
Is mostly for very well-educated, confident young people	19.2%	14
Is important so young people are heard and involved in decision making	72.6%	53
Is a waste of time - nothing will change	1.4%	1
Is a way of learning new skills that will help me in the future	74.0%	54
Is a way of meeting friends and meeting people	61.6%	45
Is a way of making a difference and giving back	63.0%	46
Might cause problems for me with my family or community	2.7%	2
Is a distraction from important things like education and study	8.2%	6
Other (please specify)	9.6%	7
	answered question	73
	skipped question	15

Table 6: Attitudes towards participation

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