

DIGITAL FOR ALL:

Understanding and Enhancing the Digital Lives of Refugee and Migrant Background Youth

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Access to the Internet is widely recognized as an indispensable enabler of a broad range of human rights. It is not only essential for freedom of expression, but, as digitalization advances, it is also central to the realization of the rights to education, to freedom of association and assembly, to participate in social, cultural and political life, to health, to an adequate standard of living, to work and to social and economic development, to name just a few.”

(United Nations, General Assembly, 2022)

Digital access is fast becoming recognised as an essential human right. Yet, young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds (YPRMBs) often experience inequalities and disadvantage in digital access and inclusion. Many face significant barriers to digital participation, including lack of affordability of digital technology and data, difficulties accessing the Internet and devices, language barriers, and financial barriers (Centre for Multicultural Youth 2020: 5; Caluya et al. 2018; Marler 2018; Rowsell et al. 2017: 159). To prevent these challenges and inequalities from deepening, and to harness the capacities of YPRMBs and their communities to create positive change, we require knowledge and strategies that directly address these young people’s experiences, capabilities and needs in the digital worlds of employment, education, connection and wellbeing.

In 2021 to 2023, this research project investigated what helps and hinders the digital participation of young Victorians aged 15 to 24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In partnership with talented young researchers and change makers from refugee and migrant communities, and through a youth-centred, mixed-methods approach, the project:

- » Explored how YPRMBs experience the use of digital technology in relation to their education, employment, social and civic connection, and wellbeing
- » Identified what communities and youth-serving organisations need to support YPRMBs’ digital participation
- » Supported young people to devise and implement initiatives to improve their digital participation.

In Part 1, this report contains the findings from:



- » A survey with 346 YPRMBs living in Victoria
- » 20 interviews with YPRMBs
- » Focus groups with 47 parents and community leaders
- » 12 interviews with youth-led and youth-serving organisations
- » A mapping exercise to identify youth organisations' capacities.

Taken together, we heard that:

Digital technology plays a crucial enabling role in the lives of YPRMBs, from applying for jobs, enrolling in courses, finding communities, communicating with their social networks, and supporting their education and mental health. Inequalities exist in digital access, inclusion and proficiency, and addressing these challenges and understanding opportunities requires an intersectional, collaborative and strengths-based approach. The most disadvantaged young people are also the most digitally resourceful.

YPRMBs rate their digital skills highly and act as digital brokers for others, despite often being poorly resourced. YPRMBs' digital brokerage skills are recognised and appreciated by parents and older community members, who simultaneously express concerns about their own capacities to understand and adequately support their children's digital participation.

Opportunities can be missed to leverage from YPRMBs' everyday digital cultures and proficiencies because of stereotypes about the digital participation of YPRMBs. YPRMBs are often framed as either suffering from 'digital deficit' due to a lack of access to digital devices and poor English language and digital skills, or being 'digital natives' due to age-based assumptions of them being highly digitally-engaged.

There are insufficient initiatives to promote YPRMBs' digital participation within youth-serving organisations, but some emerging, youth-led initiatives are supporting their digital participation in new ways. Youth-serving organisations need to better understand young people's use of platforms and apps and engagement with online communities for education, employment, connection and wellbeing. They also need mechanisms to better connect with smaller youth-led initiatives.





Part 2 outlines key recommendations to enhance YPRMBs digital participation for policy, practice and research

These include a need for:

- » Greater understanding of what young people's digital participation looks like, especially their everyday practices that support learning, work, connection and wellbeing;
- » Greater coordination between young people, families and schools regarding young people's tech use;
- » Better support for young people's knowledge and advocacy regarding tech companies, rights, data security, and the digital as a safe civic space;
- » Development of culturally-appropriate support services and educational programs for parents, family and older community members on how to use digital devices and programs, including in visual formats and in diverse languages;
- » Mechanisms for joining up and coordinating services and enhancing connections across the youth sector, and taking learnings from the emergence of coordinated, community-led initiatives;
- » Accessible support and funding for existing and emerging initiatives upskilling young people in digital content creation, building capacity for advocacy and adding to skillset for employability. This can lead to opportunities for collaborative content co-creation with the organisation itself.

Part 3 describes how this project actioned research priorities identified by young people, adults and youth organisations by implementing three youth-led projects

These projects, designed and delivered by YPRMBs, included community workshops and a video resource to support YPRMBs' employment seeking in a digital age.

Through this process, we identified recommendations to support young people's meaningful participation in youth-led projects:

- » Provide dedicated support and management assistance from a key point of contact.
- » Provide sufficient resources (time and budget), ideally negotiated with young people.
- » Provide skills-building opportunities, resources and tools.
- » Communicate using clear and accessible language.
- » Be flexible, guided by young people's ideas and account for project changes and obstacles.
- » Consider how youth-led projects can be sustained, rather than one-off engagements.
- » Respect and consider young people's competing responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

It is well established that digital technology has become an indispensable part of all young people's lives.

While young people are not a homogenous group and their digital access and practices are diverse, digital technology increasingly informs and facilitates youth participation in education and employment, their social and civic connections, and their wellbeing. However, opportunities for and barriers to digital participation among YPRMBs are not sufficiently understood, nor accounted for in existing policy and programs, with more research with translational impact required (Kenny 2016; Thomas et al. 2019; VicHealth 2017; OeC 2016, n.d.). Despite policy measures implemented in Australia to increase effective use of ICT in educational settings (Department of Education and Training 2020), there are still gaps in understanding regarding inequalities in access to different types of technologies, as well as in YPRMBs uses of technology, opportunities available to YPRMBs to develop digital skills, and capacities across communities and relevant sectors to support, harness and scale up the existing expertise of young people.

Young Australians need to have strong digital skills and capacities to navigate the future of work, yet differentiated levels of digital participation can severely hinder some young people from developing those skills and capacities and, in turn, create barriers to employment opportunities and outcomes. The Foundation for Young Australians (2017:3) predicts that within ten years, up to 90% of Australian jobs will require digital literacy competencies. Digital technology use can facilitate YPRMBs' economic and educational participation and support critical civic, professional and social networks, especially for those who face exclusion from more formal mechanisms for connection and expression (Caluya et al. 2018; Harris and Johns 2020; Third et al. 2019; Wyn et al. 2018), and many YPRMBs are at the forefront of creative and informal forms of digital participation. The rise of digital technologies has also created important opportunities for youth wellbeing, in terms of enabling remote access to a range of online support services, finding reliable health information, connection to diverse social networks and supports, and navigating identity and belonging.

However, opportunities to access the benefits of digital technology are not equally accessible to all young people, and many YPRMBs are not acquiring sufficient levels of digital proficiency in schools. YPRMBs often experience inequalities and disadvantage in digital access and inclusion. Many face significant barriers to digital participation, including lack of affordability of technology and data in the home, difficulties accessing the Internet, a device or computer, and insufficient devices and data to meet the needs of everyone in the household (CMY 2020:5). Language barriers also limit the capacity of those from non-English speaking backgrounds to utilise ICTs (Bowles 2013), especially recently arrived youth (Caluya et al. 2018: 4). Further, lack of affordability means that YPRMBs are most likely to access the internet via mobile devices (Marler 2018; Rowsell et al. 2017:159), but phone plans tend to have lower download limits which incur additional

costs if exceeded (Thomas et al. 2019). As a result, online education, work, health consultations and meaningful social connections can be difficult to undertake and sustain satisfactorily using mobile phones. As Caluya et al. (2018:4) note, factors such as length of settlement affect digital access and engagement in differentiated ways, with newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers having less access than more established migrant communities. There is significant variation in access and proficiency in relation to digital technology among disadvantaged families (Lamb et al. 2020), with refugee-background students less likely to have access to high quality digital devices in the home (Mupenzi et al. 2020).

While these inequities are longstanding, the pandemic has exposed and heightened their effects. Lockdowns and other measures have compounded pre-existing inequities in opportunities for employment, education, social/civic connection, and wellbeing. Lockdowns in particular foregrounded the limitations of digital engagement for many groups of YPRMBs, with remote learning and working from home posing critical challenges. While many young Australians used technology to stay connected and healthy during the pandemic, YPRMBs experienced comparatively higher rates of digital exclusion, exacerbating their disadvantage (OECD 2020; YACV 2020). Many have experienced intensified racism; mental health issues; uneven digital access, resourcing, and competencies; financial stress; additional responsibilities as digital cultural brokers for families/communities; and compounded challenges transitioning from education to employment (CMY 2020; UNICEF 2020; VicHealth 2020). While digital technologies are vital for sustaining and growing the social and civic networks of YPRMBs, online platforms have also worked against social and civic connection through their capacity to expose young people to harmful, racist, and discriminatory content. To prevent these challenges from deepening, and to harness the capacities of YPRMBs and their communities to create positive change, we require knowledge and strategies that directly address these young people's experiences, capabilities and needs in the digital worlds of employment, education, connection and wellbeing.

PROJECT AIMS

This project investigated what helps and hinders the digital participation of young Victorians aged 15-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds (YPRMBs). In partnership with talented young researchers and change makers from refugee and migrant communities, the project:



Explored how YPRMBs experience the use of digital technology in relation to their education, employment, social and civic connection, and wellbeing.



Identified what communities and youth-serving organisations need to support YPRMBs' digital participation.



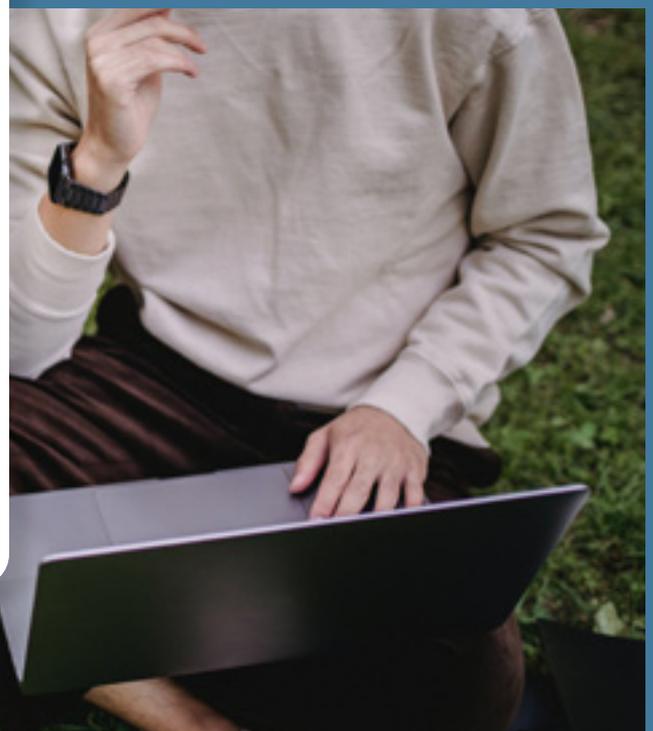
Supported young people to devise and implement initiatives to improve digital participation.

In doing so, the project aimed to facilitate changes in communities and youth-serving organisations that support YPRMBs' digital participation.



The project asked:

1. What is the role of the digital for young Victorians from refugee and migrant backgrounds?
2. What initiatives do YPRMBs want, and what can be learnt from their everyday digital practices?
3. How can organisations, governments, communities and industry better engage with YPRMBs to support their digital participation?





WHAT WE DID

Methods

This study adopted a youth-centred and mixed-methods approach. To inform the development of the data collection methods and identify key issues, challenges, opportunities and gaps in the evidence base, a **literature review** was conducted which summarised recent academic and grey literature on digital participation in education, employment, social and civic life, and wellbeing amongst refugee and migrant background youth in the Australian context.

An **online survey of 346 young Victorians** from refugee and migrant backgrounds (YPRMBs) aimed to provide representative data to explore digital access and skills, device use, digital practices and preferences across education, employment, social connection and wellbeing. Data was analysed to better understand the experiences of young people based on the number of years lived in Australia, level of financial stress, and whether they spoke only English or were multilingual.

To better understand young people's lived experience and their perspectives, **20 interviews with YPRMBs** aged 16 - 24 were conducted. The interviews explored digital technology use and barriers and enablers, benefits and challenges associated with technology in the domains of work, education, social connection and wellbeing, and aspirations for technology use. The interviews provided rich, qualitative data to complement the quantitative survey data, and were triangulated with findings from focus groups with parents and community leaders.

To surface parent and community leader perceptions about existing intergenerational barriers and capacities to YPRMBs digital engagement, as well as resources, learnings and priorities emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, four **focus groups with 47 parents and community leaders** were conducted from four refugee and migrant background communities. The focus groups investigated: use of digital devices within families; views on young people's digital technology use; challenges to using digital technology during the pandemic; experiences of support to access and use digital technology; learnings and capacities, and perspectives on the future of young people and digital technology. Findings from the focus groups were triangulated with survey, interview and other data investigating the perspectives of YPRMBs.

Twelve interviews with representatives from youth-led and youth-serving organisations (see Appendix for organisations represented) explored the strengths and gaps in policies and programs from refugee and migrant background youth, as well as perspectives on barriers and opportunities for young people to leverage technology use. To further investigate **youth organisations'** policies, programming and training capacities for young people aged 14 - 25, a mapping exercise was conducted.

Quantitative methods

Survey

June – August 2022



346

Young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds aged 15-24 living in Victoria

20

Average age



63%
Female

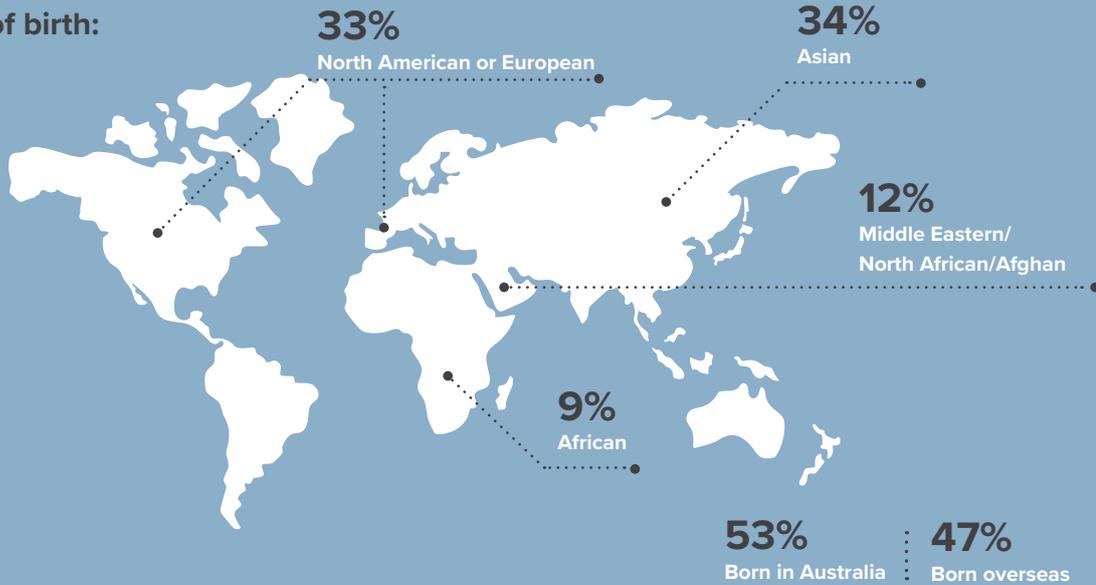


34%
Male



3%
Non-binary

Country of birth:



92%

Living in inner city Melbourne



65%

Spoke one or more languages



37%

Reported they found it easy to cover household expenses

26%

Reported a degree of difficulty

Desk research

Capacity mapping of youth organisations

December 2021 – March 2022

Informed by online desk research of key search terms (see Appendix).

Complemented by informal advice through key informants in refugee and migrant youth advocacy, academia and program delivery.

Focused on organisations that support young people aged 14 - 18 living in Victoria in the areas of: education, employment, civic engagement, social connectedness, mental health and wellbeing, and digital inclusion/participation.

Literature review

September 2021 – March 2022

Sources: Google Scholar, Deakin library database and ProQuest.

Included academic and grey literature (e.g. program evaluations, government and organisation publications).

Focused primarily on articles published in the last 5 years.

Qualitative methods

Interviews with young people

December 2021 – February 2022



20

Young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds aged 16-24 living in Victoria

20.5

Median age



80%

Female



20%

Male

Most participants identified as having mixed cultural heritage



14

Migrant background

6

Refugee background



6

Newly established migrants (lived in Australia for five or less years)



3/4

Spoke English at home in addition to one or more other languages



6

Afghan

3

Indian

2

Australian

Other cultural backgrounds: Burmese, Burundi, Cambodian, Malaysian, Mozambican, Singaporean, South Sudanese and Tamil.

Focus groups with parents and community leaders

May – June 2022



4

Focus groups with 47 parents and Pasifika, Somali, South Sudanese and Afghan community leaders

A majority of children/dependents were between the ages of 5-10 and 10-15

Most families had between 2 and 4 dependents

30-39

Most participants aged between



Languages spoken: Arabic (n=7), Dari (n=23), Dinka (n=1), Nuer (n=4), Samoan (n=7), and Somali (n=4)

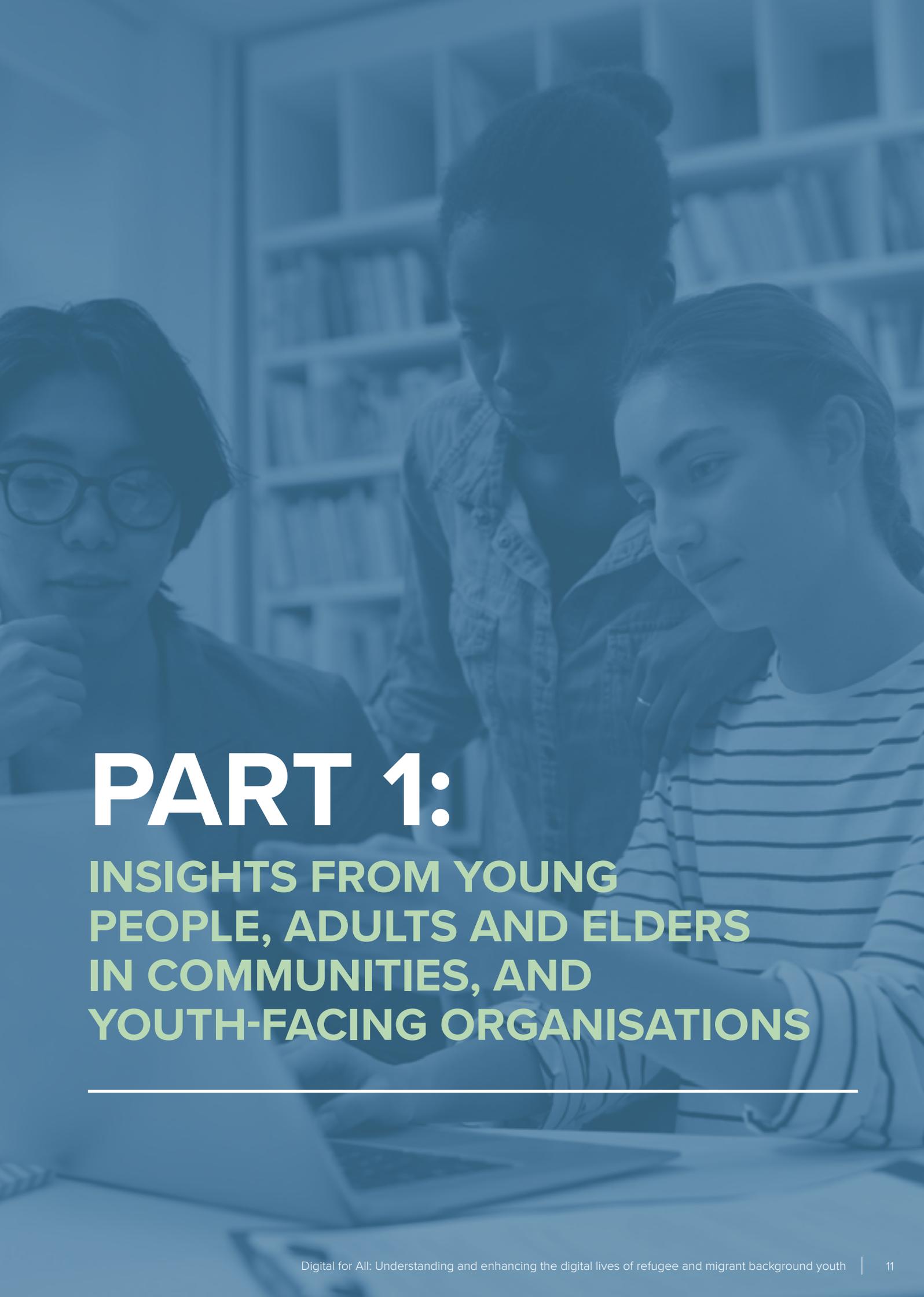
Interviews with youth-led and youth-serving organisations

March – June 2022



12

Online interviews conducted with coordinators, managers or consultants

A blue-tinted photograph of three young people (two women and one man) looking at a laptop screen in a library setting. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

PART 1:

INSIGHTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE, ADULTS AND ELDERS IN COMMUNITIES, AND YOUTH-FACING ORGANISATIONS

PROJECT TIMELINE

JULY 2021 – SEPTEMBER 2021

Clarifying partnership structure; design and commencement of landscape review; mapping of youth-led and youth-serving organisations; ethics application; development of project website.



OCTOBER 2021 – DECEMBER 2021

Data sharing: landscape review, co-design with YPRMBs to refine methodology and research questions.



DECEMBER 2021 – MARCH 2022

Recruitment; YPRMB survey (n = 346); interviews with YPRMBs (n = 20), 4 x focus groups with parents and community leaders from Pasifika, Somali, South Sudanese and Afghan communities (n = 47), interviews with representatives from youth-serving and youth-led organisations (n = 12).



APRIL 2022 – NOVEMBER 2022

Data collation; coding and analysis; co-design of stakeholder workshop to share preliminary findings and seed ideas for youth-led mini-projects.



NOVEMBER 2022

Stakeholder workshop co-facilitated by youth researchers to review findings from the combined data sets. Generate ideas for youth-led mini projects and form teams. Young people mentored by project team, representatives from youth-led and youth-serving organisations.



DECEMBER 2022 – JUNE 2023

Review of youth-led mini project pitches; implementation of 3 youth-designed mini projects; development of publications plan and timeline.



JUNE 2023 – AUGUST 2023

Co-design of youth and stakeholder dissemination finale event; co-authoring initial project report with key findings and recommendations for research, policy and practice.



AUGUST 2023

Launch of initial project report and showcase of youth-led mini projects at youth and stakeholder finale workshop.



WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

We undertook a survey (n = 346) and semi-structured, in-depth interviews (n = 20) to gather quantitative and qualitative data on YPRMBs' digital access & skills, device use, digital practices, experiences and preferences in the domains of education, employment, social connection and wellbeing. Included in the sample were young people from a diversity of migrant and refugee backgrounds, including recently arrived and Australian born, and from a range of financial circumstances. The Appendix includes more information about sampling and methodology.

Digital Skills

1. Almost all (95%) reported that they had the necessary skills to use the internet and/or digital media comfortably.
2. 79% regularly helped others to use the internet and/or digital media. School aged respondents (88%), as well as those speaking multiple languages (91%) were the most likely to do so.
3. Help with tech basics (e.g., setting up and using devices, email, apps, social media, online banking, browsers) was the most common form (80%) of help provided to others.
4. Those who were more recently arrived/less established (in Australia for <10 years) were most likely to help others access content in their own languages.

Digital Access

1. Mobile phones are used by all categories of young people and can be considered the minimum standard of digital tech access.
2. Young people from recently arrived communities, including those who have lived less than 5 years in Australia, consistently indicated relatively lower levels of access in comparison to young people who were Australian born/more established communities.
3. Those from recently arrived communities including those who had lived <5 years in Australia were most likely to be confined to a single device.
4. The higher the level of financial stress, the more likely that devices were shared between others in their household. This was particularly so for newly arrived young people experiencing moderate financial stress and Australian born young people experiencing high financial stress.
5. 91% reported having sufficient data and internet speeds for their digital needs. Note that the sample overwhelmingly represents young people from metro regions.
6. Those who reported higher levels of financial stress were much more likely (60%) to be concerned about affordability of internet/devices. Length of time in Australia had no bearing on this.



Digital Device Use

Mobile



97% use a mobile phone at least once a week. The lowest mobile usage was among newly arrived young people experiencing moderate financial stress.

Laptop



84% use a laptop at least once a week. Usage was highest among tertiary students and those who had been long term settled or were Australian born. Newly arrived young people were the least likely to use laptops.

Desktop



Only 30% use desktops at least once a week. This was more common amongst the older cohort, those in full time work, and those who had been long term settled or were Australian born.

Tablet



The least likely device to be used across our cohort. Only 23% use a tablet at least once a week. Those born in Australia, regardless of their financial situation, were most likely to use tablets.

Digital Participation Barriers and Strategies

Young people experiencing financial stress and newly-arrived, less established young people were more likely to experience digital participation barriers, often sharing devices and lacking suitable spaces to use devices. At the same time, these young people are more likely than the more advantaged young people in our study to use digital technology for more purposes, including activism; volunteering; community building; making money from content creation; online learning; sharing resources with peers; and professional networking.

Whilst most young people interviewed did not report experiencing digital participation barriers*, those who did - refugees and from large families - faced considerable difficulties fully participating in their education and employment. These young people experienced difficulties finding a suitable space and reliable connectivity to study at home, needed to share devices and data between family members, financial struggles accessing laptops, and challenges navigating online enrollment systems without adequate support.

“

“It can be precarious depending on your living situation with a lot of people using the internet at once, because I’m in a big family that can sometimes put a strain on the Wi-Fi.”

(Female, 21, Refugee background)

“It affects me more than everyone. It affects [me] more... because I didn’t know about... the technology. It [made] it really difficult for me to get into any course or study.”

(Female, 20, newly arrived refugee)

”

For these young people, these barriers were difficult to navigate and they did not know who to turn to for help. Few interview participants were aware of resources, organisations or initiatives that support digital participation for people from refugee or migrant backgrounds.

Interviewees thought building digital literacy and online safety skills through visual formats and in diverse languages, and financial supports, would be helpful to enhance digital participation. Both technology companies and community organisations were thought to be responsible for addressing barriers.

“

*“To support people of **all different digital technology literacy levels...** I think we as a community can create more **guides and help classes.**”*

(Female, 21, Migrant background)

”

**It is important to note that all participants spoke English, most to a fluent level, were well educated, and almost half were well-established migrants (five had lived in Australia for over 10 years, and four were born in Australia).*





The Use of Digital Technology in Education and Employment

Digital technology was most commonly used in the context of **education** for attending classes or accessing online learning resources, and using YouTube and similar platforms to learn new skills. Young people reported that they wanted to do more of these kinds of activities for the purposes of education.

Newly arrived migrant and refugee young people experienced significant barriers to harnessing technology for their education, but were more likely to use informal digital mechanisms for education such as online homework groups, video study calls with peers, and learning apps.

“

“[When I first came here] I didn’t know whom should I call and how to use [technology]. So, I missed 3 months class because I didn’t know what to do to enrol in a class.”

(Female, 20, Refugee background)

”

In relation to employment, young people reported that technology was particularly important for facilitating job-seeking. The most common ways participants, and especially young women, used the internet and digital media for employment was for job recruitment and working remotely.

“

“[Employers] refuse to do anything in person. Now, it’s all online.”

(Female, 22, Migrant background)

*“I think definitely... the **best thing** I use **social media** [for is to] get information such as **jobs**.”*

(Female, 20, Migrant background)

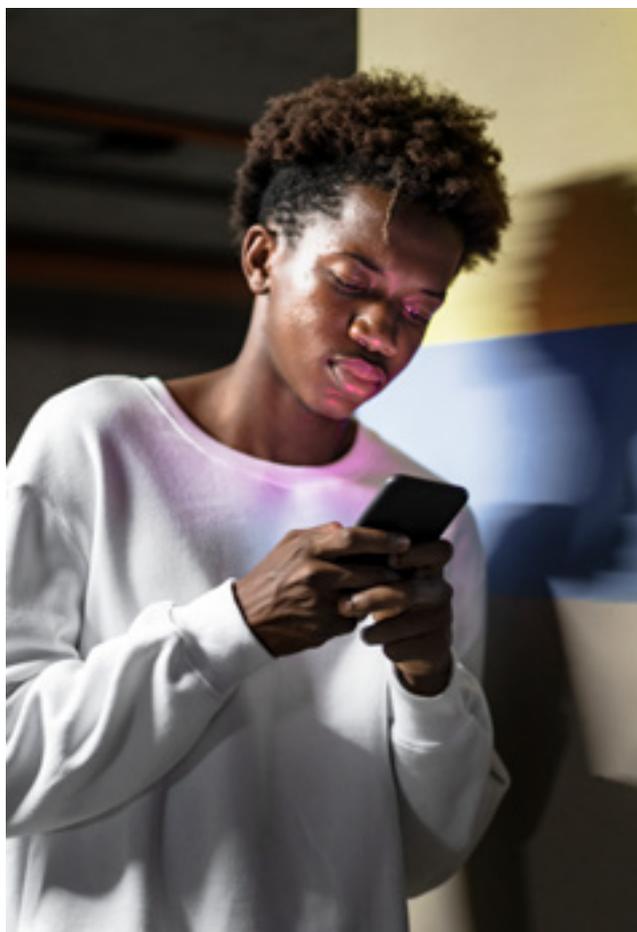
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When asked what they would like to do more of online in relation to employment, most nominated finding work and commercial content creation. Newly arrived young people experiencing financial stress were more likely to be involved in digital entrepreneurship, using digital tech for gig work, and accessing online professional development provided by services.

The Use of Digital Technology in Social Connection and Wellbeing

Digital technology was most commonly used in relation to **social connection** for staying in touch and sharing content with friends and family, as well as engaging in social and political issues. While young people wanted to do more social connecting, they also wished to use digital tech more to find groups and people with shared interests. Interviewees reported that they appreciated that tech use enabled social connections and helped them to connect to communities, in Australia and overseas, alleviating isolation and forming new friendships. Social media also enabled offline social connections, for example, by receiving information about local community events online. Finding and forming online, and offline, refugee and migrant led communities with shared interests, lived experiences, and identifications has helped young people to find a sense of belonging, important for their mental health and wellbeing.

“**[Social media has] been really powerful for me because, being a migrant in Australia, you’re a minority... So we have to seek out those spaces where they are made for us by us. Through Instagram, I’ve been able to find out about so many networks or spaces that are for POCs. And that’s just been really fulfilling for me. Because it’s turned into real life connections... and we know the importance of social connections, cohesion, etc. for our mental health...**”
(Female, 22, Migrant background)



Newly arrived young people experiencing financial stress were more likely to be involved in campaigns, activism, volunteering and using digital media to get involved in the local community. In relation to **wellbeing**, participants most commonly used digital tech to follow positive social media accounts and to search for information about physical health, with newly arrived young people experiencing financial stress much more likely to seek information about mental health. Participants were keen to have more opportunities to follow positive accounts, but also wanted more opportunities to access online forums, game, stream, and create content.

Interviewees expressed their appreciation for online resources for mental health support during the pandemic. Some were able to access telehealth mental health services during the pandemic, whilst for others, accessing supportive, positive digital content on social media and listening to podcasts and music were important for their self-care during lockdowns.

“**[Telehealth] was really helpful in just having that professional support... It was definitely a tough time, being locked up in the house.**”
(Female, 22, Migrant background)

“**In my [social media] algorithm, I sometimes see some motivational things, or sometimes I’d see videos [that] just make me feel better or make me think more optimistically... Being positively influenced in that way was good.**”
(Female, 20, Migrant background)

However, interviewees also expressed concern about their self-regulation of tech consumption, particularly social media, and worried about their reliance on and overuse of tech. Some were concerned about the implications of this for their wellbeing, particularly lowering their self-esteem due to comparisons to others on social media. Others felt like constant online communication can have negative implications on real life connections.

“**[I am] always looking at other people’s lives [online]. I feel like it can sometimes be discouraging, or can sometimes put you in a mentality where you want to compare yourself. And you do it without thinking... it’s an unconscious comparison.**”
(Female, 21, Refugee background)

“**I feel like if we know that everyone’s online and everyone’s active, you just assume that they’re alright... people have the excuse to be lazy communicators.**”
(Female, 21, Refugee background)

A young woman with curly hair and glasses is shown from the side, looking down at her smartphone. She is wearing a light green top and dark pants. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Racism, Discrimination and Social Media Use

1. 49% of participants reported that they were often conscious of racism on the internet/social media. Those who identified as female were significantly more likely to select often (55%) compared to those who identified as male (36%).
2. The most common place that participants reported seeing racism on the internet/social media was in 'Racist posts/content/comments' (71%), followed by 'Racist news media content' (56%) and 'Media reports about racism or racist attacks' (54%).
3. Over half (61%) of participants reported that they had thought about how social media affected their mental health in the previous week.
4. 70% of participants reported that connection to a reliable community and 67% reported reliable and trustworthy information as the primary factors which influenced their engagement with social media content.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM PARENTS AND ELDERS IN COMMUNITIES

Four focus groups were conducted with parents and community leaders from Afghan, Pasifika, Samoan and South-Sudanese communities. The focus groups investigated: use of digital devices within families; views on young people's digital technology use; challenges to using digital technology during the pandemic; experiences of support to access and use digital technology; learnings and capacities, and perspectives on the future of young people and digital technology.

While a key aim of the project is to enhance digital participation amongst refugee and migrant background youth, we avoid framing parental concerns and restrictions on their children's digital media use in terms of 'barriers' or 'enablers' to young people's digital participation. This is because the adult participants we spoke to often had negative or conflicting views about whether, or to what extent, their children's digital participation should be encouraged or enabled. This highlighted both the subjective nature of terms such as 'barriers', 'enablers' and 'needs', and the values implicit in the framing of the research questions. Instead, we report on parents' views about young people's use of digital media, including concerns about their children's online safety, physical and mental health, screen time, tech-related behavioural problems, and their subsequent efforts to monitor, control and limit children's tech use. We also report on what parents perceived to be the benefits and opportunities of digital technology, and how they could be better supported to enhance their children's digital media use.



Parental Concerns

Over-use of digital technology and loss of connection to cultural and religious upbringing

There was widespread concern among parents about their children's use of the internet and digital technology, particularly with regard to screen time, and reportedly being unable to 'switch off' and 'self-regulate'. Parents felt that such behaviours worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that children were becoming 'addicted' to their devices.

“

*“Nowadays I feel like it's **addiction. They cry or get emotional** because they can't live without it or you tell them to come off and they'll be shocked. Now if you say it's too much, the kids will say it's not enough.”*

(Somali Focus Group)

”

For some parents concerned about the overuse or misuse of digital technology, excessive use of digital technology was regarded as a means through which children were exposed to alternative viewpoints that conflicted with parents' cultural and religious beliefs.

“

“Kids nowadays go on YouTube, they have a guided text and they speak in to their phone and ask if this is true what my mum said about this is how the rainbow's made. They are questioning our belief system. As a church member, and most of us here today are church members, it's harder for us to keep teaching our beliefs. The challenge is for us to keep teaching our beliefs and our values to our children not that they will be so much tainted but influenced in a wider community.”

(Pasifika Focus Group)

”



Online safety and developmental issues

Many parents expressed concerns about their children's online safety and their development, which stemmed from normative expectations about age-appropriate technology use. Concerns about online safety centered around exposure to inappropriate content, being contacted by strangers, and mis-use of technology for nefarious purposes. These concerns were heightened for older parents, who felt they were less digitally-proficient than younger parents who had grown up with digital media.

“

“You know, some of the older generation parents, so they don't know, if their children are watching age-appropriate channels, are they doing whatever activity they're doing.”

(South Sudanese Focus Group)

”

Many parents also expressed the view that using technology could lead to developmental issues in children, such as poor handwriting, poor eyesight, and loss of motor control skills. These concerns were couched with reference to expectations about their children's education and physical development.

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“The kids are losing their skills of using fingers. By touching stuff with your finger (pencil) it helps with the child's brain and skills. So I'm against that.”

(Somali Focus Group)

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Feeling 'left behind'

Significant diversity in English language and digital literacy and proficiency was observed in focus groups involving parents from refugee and migrant background communities. Consistent with previous research, those with higher levels of need for digital assistance included newly-arrived refugee and migrant background parents, who had lower levels of English language and digital literacy. There was a broad consensus among parents that children were far more 'advanced' in technology use compared to their parents, with concerns expressed by parents about being 'left behind' compared to young people, and unable to identify and prevent their children's exposure to inappropriate content online. Many agreed that these challenges could be addressed by increasing their own digital literacy.

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“It's mind boggling, yes tech is very fast and because we are always trying to catch up. The oldies need to catch up and they need to learn how to do it. If we don't learn we tend to miss out. If there's anything that we are not sure or know about what our young people are going to do in the future it's because we need us to catch up with where they are.”

(Pasifika Focus Group)

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Education and Employment

Despite expressing concerns about young people's digital technology use, parents identified significant benefits of using digital technology for educational purposes. They observed that children were able to access a vast amount of information, and even challenge what was taught in schools. Online tools, such as apps allowing children to communicate with and send homework to their teachers, facilitated learning during lockdowns.

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*“This is very interesting, because it's not only about making money and having a business online, nowadays with technology **everything is in their fingertips, for the younger ones now, they can get whatever they want.**”*

(Pasifika Focus Group)

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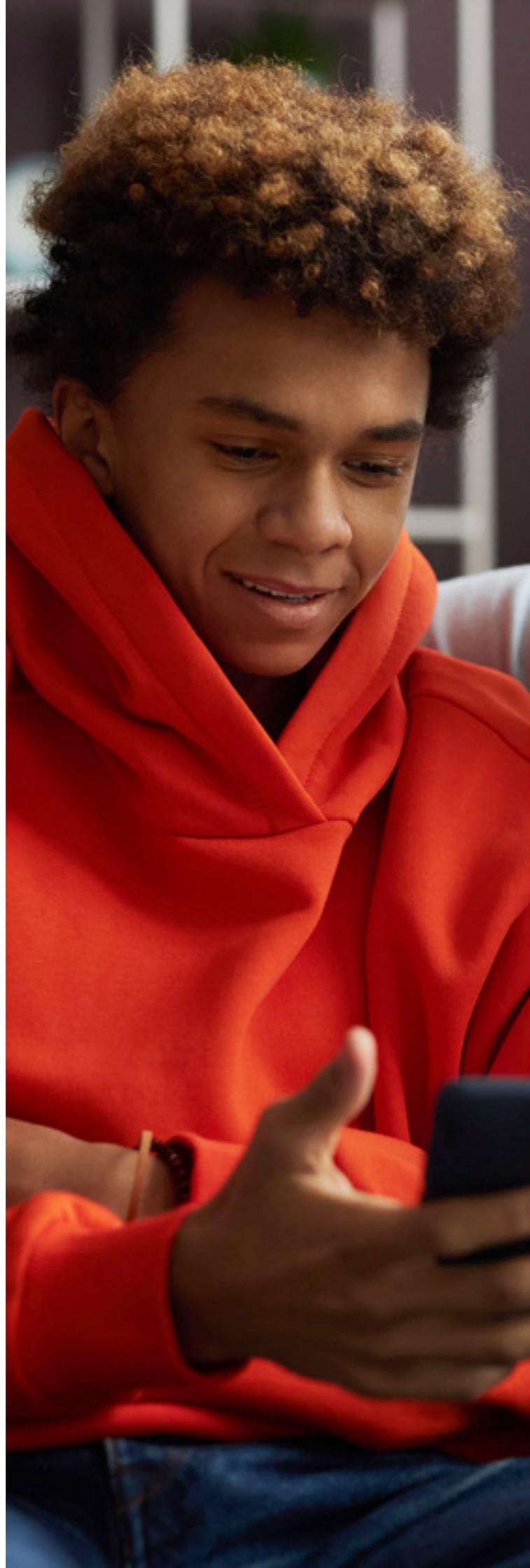
Digital technology was also described as an invaluable tool for providing greater employment opportunities. Parents commented on the ways digital media had opened up new opportunities for young people to start and promote businesses, and to earn more money than their generation.

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*“It opens up a lot of opportunities, kids get discovered now, they make more money than us that went to school and had to graduate. There are kids, 20 something year olds, who earn so much more that they can retire their parents and their families. It's reaching into communities where we wouldn't have known, **tech has opened up so much more than what we see now.**”*

(Pasifika Focus Group)

”





Social Connection and Wellbeing

Many parents felt that digital technology helped build positive social connections during the pandemic, as people were able to stay in touch with their loved ones despite being socially distant. Digitally-enabled communication was experienced as invaluable for facilitating better wellbeing, particularly with regard to mental health, as people were able to stay connected and support each other during the challenging period of the pandemic.

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“With the technology now, we can speak to people like us, we have a lot of family members. If there was no technology or there will be no way of communication, you will not know their wellbeing, you will not know what it is that they may need. But now because of technology, can you easily reach them, you can talk to them, you can send them some money when they need, they need that. So if there's no technology, I think it would have been a different case because we wouldn't be able to communicate and to know people's wellbeing.”

(South Sudanese Focus Group)

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At the same time, many parents felt that digital technology could be detrimental to social connection and wellbeing. This was because they saw their children becoming upset and emotional (for example, by crying or losing their temper) when they could not access digital devices, and preferring to use devices in each others' company rather than having face-to-face conversations.

While many parents expressed concerns about an over-reliance on technology, online safety, the development of health issues, the loss of cultural and religious values and being left behind, they expressed optimism and confidence about communities coming together to support families. It was evident parents understood that in order to understand and establish appropriate guidelines for their children's use of digital technology, they needed to firstly develop higher levels of digital literacy and English language proficiency themselves. Parents also expressed a wish for schools and community partners to share authority and decision-making, by listening to the concerns of parents and supporting existing parenting practices and cultural values.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM ORGANISATIONS

To gauge how Victorian youth-facing organisations are working to support the digital participation of young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds (YPMRBs) through policy, programs, resources and other activities including events and campaigns we undertook an online scan and in-depth interviews with key informants (n=12) working with organisations and initiatives. An online search for key documents, reports, programs and initiatives was conducted using Google, government and organisation pages, social media and service directories. To validate the search and identify additional initiatives and practices, informal advice was sought from key informants in advocacy, academia and program delivery.

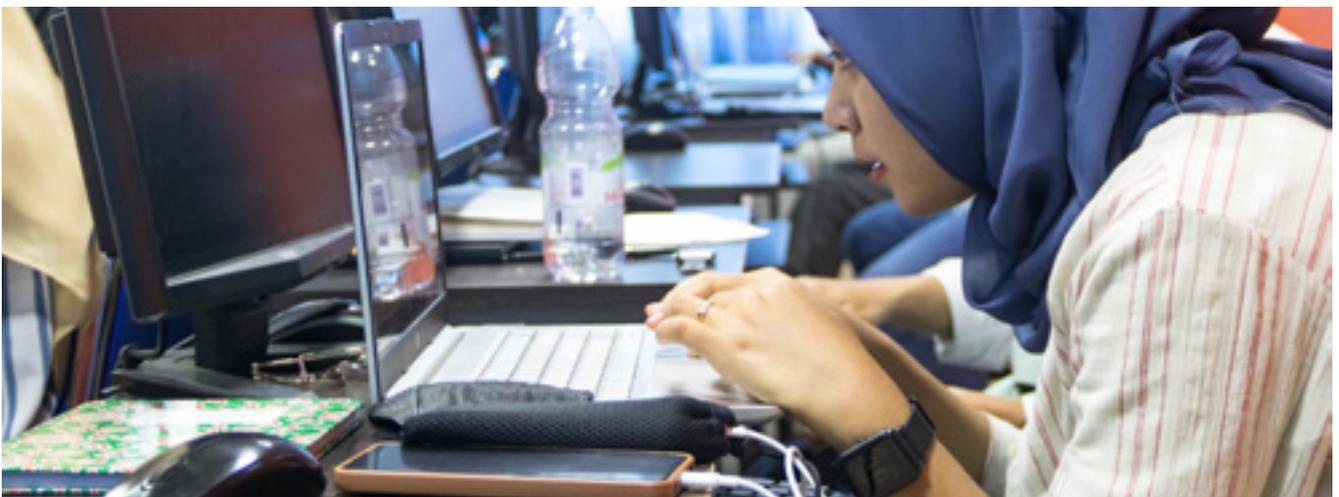
Additional in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from 12 different organisations to explore the strengths and gaps in policies and programs as well as perspectives on barriers and opportunities for young people to leverage tech in migrant and refugee communities.

The current capacity of the sector broadly reflects a digital inclusion agenda geared to support pre-existing policy and services, rather than delivering the digital capabilities these young people require to participate in society according to their own needs, interests and aspirations. For most organisations and programs, digital technology was seen as a tool for delivering policies or programs to young people, rather than working with YPMRBs based on their self-identified strengths and needs. On the other hand, for the small but growing organisations made for and by self-identified communities of YPMRBs— who can be referred to as youth-led and lived-experience-led organisations— funding was frequently cited as the most significant barrier:

“I feel like funding is a huge problem, like in terms of younger organisation or newer organisation like we don't have the funding or the resources there so I feel like [we can't provide the] opportunities like that would benefit them and then also maybe like giving them resources and understanding.”

(Interviewee 10, youth worker)

Many workers advocated for greater coordination of funding, co-design and support for youth-led initiatives; which were generally smaller, newer, and less formally institutionalised than traditional youth services. This was viewed as part of an overarching need for structural and cultural change to shift away from the historical dominance of large, government-funded, institutionalised, and notably not lived- experience-led organisations. Below we highlight specific insights in relation to digital participation, learning, work, social connectedness and wellbeing.





Key Challenges and Opportunities for Organisations

- » There are few initiatives and organisations specifically working to promote the digital participation of YPRMBs. This is despite policy and advocacy identifying the need to support digital inclusion among migrant and refugee populations.
- » Initiatives tend to reflect a deficit approach to YPRMBs and technology, using technology to improve youth engagement through target areas of settlement, education, training, work/enterprise, mental health/wellbeing, civic engagement, and the arts; or alternatively, targeting online safety. Few initiatives consider the identified strengths, needs and aspirations of YPRMBs. However, a small number of lived-experience-led initiatives have started to do so.
- » Many organisations provide online content for general audiences and are increasing translation of materials into languages other than English and providing dedicated spaces or online supports for young people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse.
- » Programs, networks and initiatives did pivot to online to maintain connectedness during the pandemic, but most saw this as a short term response and cited funding and internal skills and capacity as the main barriers to sustaining digital strategies.
- » There is evidence of local level capacities such as public infrastructure eg. libraries and other hubs, community/youth driven initiatives and partnerships with adult-led programs and organisations.
- » Co-research and co-design capabilities (with YPRMBs, young people, and those with lived experience) for programs and strategies were identified, but were generally in one-off projects that lacked sustained funding or mandate to scale.
- » Key informants identified that young people's everyday and informal digital practices are strong in many communities, but are under-utilised in service-delivery.
- » Among non-government and lived-experience-led organisations there was a greater recognition and interest in the way digital participation enables YPRMB to express themselves, share their stories and counter misrepresentation of their experiences by mainstream media.
- » Traditional services still tend to treat technology instrumentally as a mode of program delivery, as opposed to focusing on technology use itself as an aim or outcome of the program.

Digital Participation

Many organisation representatives noted that digital participation is more than ‘access’ and can mean very different things to different young people. Even still, no ongoing initiatives that specifically serve the digital inclusion of YPMRBs were identified, though many services and programs moved online in response to the pandemic and consequently provided devices and data packs to support digital inclusion. In general, these initiatives were one-off responses to the pandemic and are not continuing programs to support access to and use of digital technologies. While general public and youth services in areas with significant migrant and refugee populations support young people’s access to technology and the internet through access to hardware and programs (eg. digital creative content or music production), key informants highlighted the challenges of affordability, quality and young people being able to use technology in ways they themselves value:

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“... [challenges are YP] not having the the equipment, the computers, the laptops, the iPads that others have, and therefore, feeling that well, they sometimes they actually can't participate in everything that others are participating in, because they don't have, you know, the updated equipment to do that.”

(Interviewee 7, service provider)

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Employment and Work

Established and large settlement, English and training providers have resources and courses specifically for YPMRBs that include digital literacy modules, job-related knowledge and skills and to support use of digital technologies for job seeking. This includes services focusing on ‘disadvantaged’ young people including those who are ‘culturally diverse and recently arrived’. While these programs are largely delivered face to face, social media, mobile phones, SMS and online video calling were some of the digital strategies used to maintain contact with and deliver programs, especially during the pandemic. While helping to maintain connectedness, some sector workers noted that the increased use of online communication and the inability to bring people together physically created new challenges, such as making good decisions regarding their communication with workers as well as peers.

Some innovative programs focus on educating employers about the capabilities and needs of YPMRBs through co-created web-based content and resources including video. Others are promoting co-design in partnerships with local councils, state and federal governments and corporate sponsors to develop prototypes for initiatives that leverage digital participation to support learning and work outcomes (eg. YLab with Brimbank Council). Youth-led initiatives have also leveraged digital technologies for campaigns calling for fairer work and conditions, particularly for those from migrant and refugee backgrounds such as the campaign Migrant Justice. These grassroots campaigns require more investigation.



Education and Learning

Formal (eg. settlement and training services) and informal access and resources (eg. public libraries, migrant information services) provide general support and some have youth-specific programs. These are mainly run in person in classrooms/community settings and include computer and internet skills as an area of learning. Some are specific to particular community groups and also assist with attaining certificates and licences that can assist with attaining work. Digital technologies are largely used to convey information (via websites), as an alternative to face-to-face training (for example, online English programs) or to promote activities, events and services via social media. There is little evidence that education and learning opportunities are co-designed with young people. Many interviewees highlighted the diversity of lived experience of YPMRBs that should be worked with in co-design to ensure training meets their needs and interests:

“*I think targeting and tailoring our digital training is very important. And it is important to tailor to young people and their needs and making their access easier...I believe that in every program design co- design with the people who are participating is really, really important... their opinion and their participation in co-design, it is really, really important.*”

(Interviewee 4, service provider)

Civic Engagement

YPMRBs have access to state government and NGO supported programs and initiatives including online leadership programs, consultations and funding for youth-led initiatives and which proactively promote inclusion and diversity. Some specifically work to elevate the views and voices of YPMRBs (eg. CMY, MYAN) and some (eg. FYA) focus on training young people to utilise digital tactics to maximise campaigns for social change. These organisations tend to be well networked with one another, but collaborate mainly on a project basis. Many of these organisations have a very strong digital presence (comprehensive websites, active social media, etc), and are either youth-led or have a strong commitment to youth participation. There are also community-specific organisations working to nurture the agency and leadership skills of YPMRBs and leverage digital participation to support young people to change community perceptions of YPMRBs. For example, AMSSA Youth Connect runs programs and activities to facilitate positive growth, empowerment, and understanding of identities of young Muslim Australians. AMSSA Youth Connect aims to provide safe spaces and platforms for young people to explore ideas, concepts and creative endeavours to help navigate the sometimes-complex issues they face in the ever-changing environment that we live in today. More broadly, a plethora of youth leadership initiatives operate at the local, school and state level, however there was evidence that the extent to which these initiatives are taken up by YPMRBs is contingent on their access to information and opportunities to participate, and prior access to specific digital platforms and resources and social networks.

Social Connectedness and Wellbeing

Initiatives that promote digital participation for social connectedness of YPMRBs are diverse. Some aim to make online information to support safe digital participation more accessible using a range of strategies including translation of content to other languages, care for cultural differences, gender and sexuality diversity, schools programs and Youth Advisory Councils to improve the accessibility and relevance of online safety resources and advice. Face-to-face Youth Services also provide soft entry points to such resources as well as programs that support young people to connect with others through practices such as creative content generation. Arts-focused organisations that foster digital participation are particularly notable, fostering youth engagement in digital art forms, story-telling and exhibitions, promoting artistic capabilities and expression, community connection and pathways into the creative industries. There are also some programs targeted at ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘at-risk’ youth, including YPMRBs to support connection to services and supportive communities. However, interviews indicated that greater online delivery for these groups is neither desirable or achievable given the broader structural challenges they face to accessing the resources for good or routine digital connectivity (for example, if they are experiencing insecure housing, for instance).

There are, nonetheless, a broad range of digital initiatives, websites, programs and content aimed at promoting the wellbeing of YPMRBs. These include podcasts and videos created by young people themselves or guests (celebrities, volunteers, professionals, community leaders) and supported by organisations. For example, Kids Helpline H R U? Podcast (with episodes on multicultural identity and racism during COVID-19 presented by CALD youth) and the Australian Red Cross’ Life in Australia Podcast (a podcast by and for asylum seeker and refugee background youth in Australia that is available in English, Farsi, Tamil and Arabic). In the area of mental health, established providers are increasingly addressing YPMRBs through targeted online forums and discussions on their web-based services. Interviewees emphasised the need for more funding to enable community and experienced-led strategies, particularly given the potential for online spaces to connect people with shared experiences and who might otherwise feel alone or be vulnerable (eg. in relation to family violence).

PART 2:

KEY INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Taken together, insights from young people, adults and elders in communities and youth-facing organisations, revealed key insights and recommendations to enhance young people's digital participation.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: KEY INSIGHTS

Young people say that the role of digital technology in their lives is crucial to enable study and employment, to provide access to online support services and resources, and to foster positive mental health and civic and social connection and wellbeing. Digital technology facilitates connections to friends, family and community, both in Australia and overseas.

Inequalities exist in digital access, inclusion and proficiency for YPRMBs, and addressing these challenges and understanding opportunities requires an intersectional, collaborative and strengths-based approach. Disadvantage is especially evident for those experiencing financial stress, and newly-arrived/less established communities. YPRMBs in these groups are more likely to experience financial and other barriers to their routine access to reliable and robust internet services and devices. They often share devices with family members and also often lack suitable spaces in which to use those devices. At the same time, they are very likely to use digital media for a broader set of purposes, including activism; volunteering; community building; making money from content creation; online learning; sharing resources with peers; and professional networking. **In short, the most disadvantaged young people are also the most digitally resourceful.**

YPRMBs rate their digital skills highly, and often act as digital brokers for older family members and others despite being underresourced. They already use digital media extensively for education, training, job seeking and employment, accessing health and wellbeing resources, job seeking, staying in touch with people, gaming and streaming, creating and connecting with communities, and following positive social media accounts. However, there are also gaps in their digital skills and knowledge and they have a desire to learn more, especially about digital entrepreneurship; finding groups with shared interests; using platforms to learn new skills; and navigating online systems. **Policy makers and educators are sometimes missing opportunities to leverage young people's everyday digital cultures and nuanced proficiencies because of common either/or approaches that stereotype YPRMBs as either suffering 'digital deficit' or being 'digital natives'.**

Young people and adults share many views on digital technology, challenging simplistic assumptions about intergenerational differences. Both groups identify similar **benefits** of digital technology: facilitating work and schooling; and enabling strong local and transnational social connections. They also **share similar concerns, but they define these differently.** Both are concerned about **overconsumption**, especially of social media, and technology's potentially negative effects on mental health and relationships; but adults worry about the loss of family time, while young people worry about low self-esteem and superficial relationships. Both are concerned about **online safety**, but while adults are concerned about exposure to inappropriate material or that which conflicts with cultural and religious values, young people raise the risks of untrustworthy information, data security, and racism online. Strikingly, awareness of these issues is particularly evident amongst the youngest people in our research – those aged 15-18, who are often imagined to be the least digitally literate and most at risk.

Despite these continuities, **there is a genuine knowledge- and confidence- gap between the generations** when it comes to digital technology. Parents from newly-arrived communities with lower levels of English language and digital literacy skills are often reliant on their children's support to use digital technology, and many are unaware of other sources of support. They would like more guidance from schools, settlement services and other institutions and providers to better understand and support the digital needs of young people for the future world of education, employment, civic engagement and wellbeing. While many young people in refugee and migrant communities possess significant digital, language and cultural capacities, and a willingness to serve as digital brokers, there is significant variation in skills, experience, resources and needs across families and communities.

There is a need for more strengths- based initiatives that promote the digital participation of YPRMBs, and are closely aligned with their needs, interests and entitlements. Formal and established services tend to reflect a deficit approach to youth; treat technology instrumentally, as a tool; and focus on top-down delivery to improve individual digital access and literacy. While some programs and initiatives effectively address digital access, online safety and technical skills, **young people themselves say they would like support to use digital media more for content creation; for work and wellbeing purposes; for learning new skills; and for connecting with supportive online forums and groups with shared interests.** Aligned with these needs and interests, some emerging, youth- and lived-experience-led centred initiatives are supporting young people's digital participation in new ways and are often more responsive to and build on young people's existing capacities and practices. Young people say these initiatives are more likely to centre digital participation and citizenship, civic practice, social responsibilities and collective rights, as well as peer-to-peer learning and support.

There is a digital knowledge- and skills- gap in many youth-serving organisations regarding young people's use of platforms and apps and how they engage with their own online communities for education, employment, connection and wellbeing. Formal online programs, digital content and resource provision are not effectively bridging to these other, informal, everyday digital practices. Nor are larger and more resourced organisations effectively connecting with smaller, youth-led groups to share knowledge and resources and address the digital needs and interests of YPRMBs at the grassroots level. **Youth-serving organisations require greater awareness of young people's digital cultures and need dedicated resourcing and mechanisms for connection with smaller youth-led initiatives.**

Resources to support the efforts of grassroots, youth-led and small to medium sized organisations and enterprises to provide initiatives and services that boost the connectivity and digital practices of YPRMBs require strengthening, in order to maximise the opportunities and benefits that digital technologies can bring to educational, work, community and wellbeing outcomes.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research identified the following key recommendations for research, policy and practice.

Research

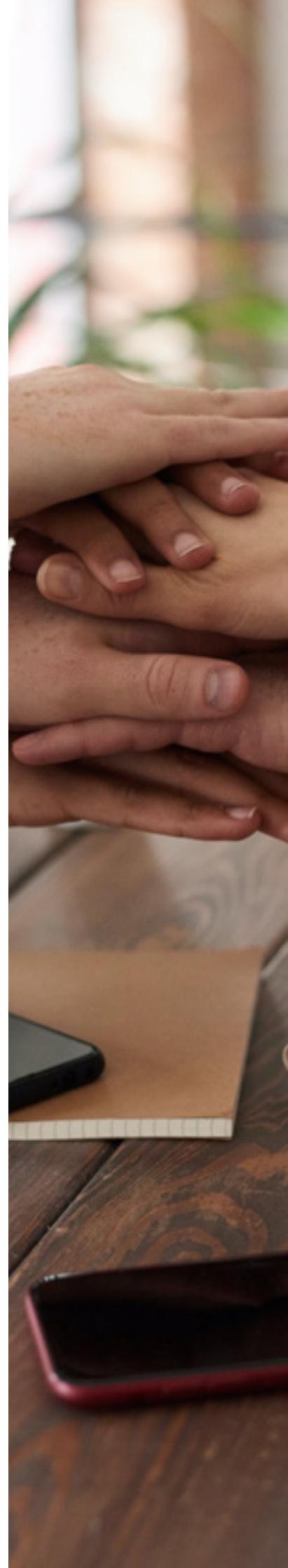
The project findings indicate that governments, NGOs and technology providers should invest in generating research about:

- » Young people's motivations and practices in relation to digital participation, especially their everyday and informal practices that support learning, work, connection and wellbeing;
- » The diverse, intersectional challenges faced by different groups of YPRMBs as well as their digital proficiencies and knowledge;
- » The strengths and limitations of organisations' digital strategies for engaging YPRMBs in relation to mental health and civic connection;
- » Which platforms and apps are used extensively by YPRMBs, and whether/how they support education, employment, social connection and wellbeing. This information can support the development of evidence-based policies to better support the digital participation of YPRMBs and their families in these domains.

Policy

Governments should consider the following options regarding policy development:

- » Provide dedicated resources to boost the capacity of relevant sectors (e.g. youth, health, settlement, social services, education, employment and training) to support YPRMBs digital inclusion in a sustainable way. This should include professional development and support for organisations to develop policies and strategies for embedding digital technologies into their initiatives in ways that the young people they serve value. Organisations can also build the capacity of YPRMBs by supporting them with staff mentorship and adequate resourcing to run youth-led initiatives;
- » Look at ways to connect up relevant sectors and provide cross-sector learning and knowledge exchange on what works;
- » Expand existing offerings beyond settlement (first five years), engaging young people to develop and deliver digital skills workshops to older members of their communities in ways that address cross-generational needs;
- » Expand access to financial support to low-income families to access devices and data, offer grants for young people from low-income families, particularly for young people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage who require access to digital devices and connectivity for their education, and engage community organisations to identify young people and families in need and connect them to this support and allied services;
- » Expand policies on 'Digital Learning in Schools' beyond existing focus on cyberbullying, image sharing and mobile phone use, to better encompass issues young people are interested in: content creation, employment assistance, digital entrepreneurship, mental health and wellbeing, learning new skills, and connecting with supportive online forums and groups;
- » Centre the needs and rights of young people in the regulation of tech companies.





Practice

Future practice and service delivery should:

- » Enhance collaboration between young people, families, educational institutions and settlement support services regarding young people's technology use. e.g. schools could enhance the accessibility of information to parents about the use of social media and other unfamiliar technologies in learning, and there could be a more explicit focus on digital parenting in settlement services;
- » Develop culturally-appropriate support services and educational programs for parents, family and older community members on how to use digital devices, programs and apps, and online safety skills, in visual formats and in diverse languages;
- » Acknowledge that the digital is not always the preferred mode of engaging with diverse communities, and that digital exclusion may occur particularly for those experiencing issues of digital access and proficiency. Consider multiple modes for communicating, and delivering information, services and resources for those experiencing barriers to digital engagement;
- » Bolster mechanisms for joining up and coordinating services and enhancing and sustaining connections across the youth sector, and adopt learnings from coordinated, community-led initiatives;
- » Provide accessible support and funding for existing and emerging initiatives that upskill young people in digital content creation, building capacity for advocacy and adding to skill sets for employability;
- » Build on local level capacities that are strong in specific areas, but are often only resourced for one-off projects – e.g. programs offered by libraries and other municipal hubs, and community/youth driven initiatives;
- » Provide accessible support and funding for smaller and newer lived-experience–led organisations that support young people and their digital technology use, especially in relation to young people's intersectional experiences of mental health, and their advocacy for safe, inclusive, and 'connected' digital spaces. This could include supporting smaller and newer organisations to collaborate and partner with more established organisations for capacity building, accessing funding and building connections;
- » Raise awareness about available support options to enhance digital participation and increase help-seeking knowledge. Support young people to know where they can go for help and what they can do to support digital participation for themselves and their families. Communicate about available programs, initiatives and resources through diverse channels, including schools, universities, social media and local councils;
- » Work with young people and their communities to co-design digital participation initiatives. One-size-fits-all approaches cannot address the different needs of YPRMBs, nor build on their diverse strengths.

WHO NEEDS TO TAKE ACTION?



Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their **communities** demonstrate significant aptitude, adaptability, entrepreneurship, and a desire to learn how to better harness digital technology for education, employment, social and civic connection, and wellbeing. They have a deep, lived understanding of the challenges and opportunities digital technology offers in the present and future, and want to be engaged in designing solutions to better meet their everyday needs.



Governments (including local amenity providers and spaces such as libraries and neighbourhood centres), **education providers**, youth-serving and youth-led **organisations**, settlement **support services** and **tech companies** can play a vital role in working with YPRMBs and their communities to support their digital participation. Moving forward, it is important to engage YPRMBs and their communities beyond one-off or gap-filler initiatives responding to crises and, instead, to develop long-term, sustainable and collaborative uplifting of capacity across sectors and in communities.

ACTION INSIGHTS: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS KEY DOMAINS

The research identified the following actions that would support young people's digital participation in key domains: employment, social connection, education and wellbeing.



Employment

- » 'All recruitment happens online' - employment assistance for young people should focus on the skills required to navigate online job seeking more effectively;
- » YPRMBs have significant interest and capacity in digital entrepreneurship skills, which can be supported through small grants and sustaining programs that deliver skills training workshops.



Education

- » Education providers can consider targeted support to enhance the digital proficiencies of young people at greatest risk of exclusion, including those experiencing financial stress and from newly arrived communities;
- » Schools and settlement support services can partner with parents to negotiate the use of digital tech in families in ways that meet educational and cross-generational needs.



Connection

- » YPRMBs are less concerned about reputational risks arising from their practices of online connection, and are instead calling for tech companies to be held accountable for the responsible management of their data. They also want more ownership and control of their digital labour, data and output. The needs and aspirations of YPRMBs to access safe and inclusive digital spaces should be centered in the design and ongoing refinement of policies, products and platforms;
- » Better intergenerational connections and understanding can be facilitated across generations by building collaborations between trusted sources such as schools and community leaders and organisations.



Wellbeing

- » Accessing appropriate telehealth is critical for young people, but the role of digital self-care needs to be better understood and integrated into digital health care delivery (e.g. young people are using apps, participating in youth-led online communities and curating their social media feeds to manage mental health);
- » Harness the potential of digital technology to support wellbeing by facilitating connection and belonging through social media communities, and through online mental health support services, resources and information that are relevant, representative and appropriate for diverse YPRMBs. Support young people to balance their use of social media in ways that feel right for them.

PART 3:

FROM RESEARCH FINDINGS TO YOUTH-LED PROJECTS

To respond to the key findings and priorities from young people, adults and organisations involved in this research, this project implemented a process to design and implement three youth-led projects to boost the digital participation of YPMRBs.

The process of engaging young people to implement these projects was co-designed with the Centre for Multicultural Youth and youth researchers. It involved:

1. Stakeholder workshop

YPRMBs and youth-facing organisations were invited to attend a workshop to learn about the project’s key research findings, collectively identify key priorities, ideate strategies for addressing these priorities and form teams to collaborate.

YPRMBs were encouraged to think about the most pressing issues or barriers for their digital participation, as well as their own passions and interests. Groups agreed on the problem they wanted to solve and desired end goal, and brainstormed potential solutions.

2. Capacity building

Young people were employed on contracts and worked in teams to design and implement their projects. Teams were provided with mentoring, guidance and skills training from the project team. Regular communication check-ins were established.

3. Project pitch development and grant

With the support of stakeholders from youth-facing organisations, teams developed a project pitch. Teams received feedback on their project pitch and were awarded a small grant (\$3,300).



Timeline



YOUTH-LED PROJECT #1

Youth Employment for a Digital Future Workshop

Led by: Sobur Dhieu, Navjot Kaur and Peter Savat

This project designed and conducted a workshop to bring together YPRMBs, small to medium sized youth-led organisations and larger organisations, to discuss barriers young people face in obtaining employment and accessing employment information; explore how technology can assist young people to develop employability skills; and, ultimately, how organisations can strengthen their engagement with young people and leverage their connections, knowledge and resources to collaboratively develop and implement a project.

This project responded to the research, which highlighted that large youth organisations tend to attract funding more easily than small or medium sized youth-led organisations. The project team identified a lack of visibility of these organisations and opportunities to network and engage in conversations about YPRMBs' digital participation for their employment.

At the workshop, nine participants representing Girl Chat, the African Youth Initiative, Next Gen Unite and headspace, were provided the opportunity to share their experiences, learn from like-minded organisations, build networks and to develop a pitch for funding to support an initiative to help YPRMBs use digital technologies for their employment. A cross-organisational team consisting of representatives from the African Youth Initiative, Girl Chat and Next Gen Unite proceeded to create a formal pitch after the project ideation exercise and were awarded a small grant to implement a series of digital skills building workshops for YPRMBs (see Project 2).



Image 2: The project team and workshop participants.



Image 1: Participants at the workshop.

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“[I enjoyed the] networking / making new connections with other organisations.”

Workshop participant

“As a result of participating in the workshop I will] be more vocal about the lack of opportunities some may face.”

Workshop participant

”

YOUTH-LED PROJECT #2

Digital Skills for Employment Workshops

Led by: Robiel Abraham, Mamuch Chol, Sarah Manyok, Abak Dhieu, Daniel Geberemedhen and Abiei Lazarus

Upon receiving a small grant from Project 1, project leads and facilitators at youth-led organisations NextGen Unite, Girl Chat and the African Youth Initiative designed and implemented four employment skills workshops for YPRMBs aged 14 to 25, particularly of a South Sudanese or African background living in Melton, Victoria. The project team identified this cohort as they had experienced many young people in their locality facing barriers to and lack of skills to facilitate effective job-seeking. Hence, the workshops aimed to foster and develop increased learning and developmental opportunities about digital skills required for employment, build young people's competence, confidence and connections to enhance their job-seeking outcomes, and bring together like-minded young people to connect and meet useful contacts from their community. This project responded to the research, which highlighted the need for young people to be proficient in the use of technology when looking for work.

Twenty-three young people attended the workshops, which covered topics including CV and cover letter writing, interview preparation, worker's rights, workplace etiquette, alternative career pathways and entrepreneurial advice. Young people also learned how to navigate digital platforms for employment, such as LinkedIn and the importance of privatising their online presence. Attendees also were able to network with other young people, local MPs and job advocates.

Through evaluating the workshop, the project team found that young males of African background preferred engaging in employability skills workshops over sports engagement, and reflected that it is often assumed that young men want to be engaged through sports. The team concluded that programs should be co-designed by young people and preferably delivered by young people, with assistance from experienced professionals.

“

“Others should look at the needs of young people. Young people tend to respond well to programs that do not just address the needs of their present self, but also their future self. Young people like upskilling. Providing young people with an opportunity to develop themselves and give them confidence in their abilities is necessary. ... Young people however are not always willing to sacrifice their evenings to attend sessions and programs – you have to meet them where they are at (universities, high schools and community hubs).”

Project team reflection

“The workshop was very informative and I learnt a lot.”

Workshop participant

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Image 3: Workshop participants.

YOUTH-LED PROJECT #3

Video resource

Led by: Aliet Agany and Ayesha Ali, supported by Kelly West (YouthWorx)

Building upon the digital skills for employment workshops implemented in Project 2, and to address the research finding that employment assistance for YPRMBs should focus on the skills required to navigate online job seeking more effectively, this project produced a [video resource](#). The video, targeted primarily at newly arrived young people, aimed to enhance young people's online employment seeking skills, providing personal stories, advice and tips from other YPRMBs. To ensure accessibility, the video is made freely available to youth-facing organisations, public libraries, language schools, settlement services, etc. The project team, supported by YouthWorx, engaged youth volunteers to share their personal stories and advice on camera and developed practical film-making and editing skills.



Image 4: The project team during filming.



Recommendations for young people's meaningful participation youth-led projects

Feedback from young people involved and reflections from researchers identified a number of learnings in regards to achieving young people's meaningful participation in youth-led projects.

- » Ensure that young people are well supported from a key point of contact who can oversee project management and provide assistance to administrative tasks.
- » Ensure that there is sufficient budget to provide young people with appropriate remuneration for the hours that they work on the project. The hours required for a project will vary significantly depending on the aims and activities involved. Hence, hours offered should be negotiated with young people once the activities are confirmed, rather than assumed prior.
- » During induction, provide young people with opportunities to build their capacities in areas where they feel less confident, such as through training sessions, alongside provision of project management resources (e.g. Gantt chart and budget templates).
- » Throughout the process, offer consistent support to young people via regular check-in meetings and emails to support progression and planning.
- » When communicating about the research context, use language that is familiar to young people. If technical or potentially unfamiliar terms are used, make sure they are explained and that young people have an opportunity to offer their own understandings, as well as to respond or challenge definitions.
- » Build in flexibility to the process to be guided by young people's ideas and, if working with multiple groups, for projects to build upon each other's outcomes.
- » Consider how youth-led projects can be sustained, rather than one-off engagements. Support collaborating grassroots youth-led organisations to harness their strong connections with young people and knowledge of their needs, effective co-design and project delivery methods.
- » Respect and factor in young people's competing responsibilities.



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APPENDIX

About the Survey

Methodology

1. Between June and August 2022 our survey was designed by the team, set up in Qualtrics, and distributed to a targeted panel via Cornerstone Research and circulated amongst professional and other networks of CMY, Explorer Youth Researchers and the research team.
2. Survey participants were young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds aged 15-24 living in Victoria. The survey was closed at the end of August and data was cleaned and coded in Oct-Nov.
3. A total of 1734 raw responses were received. After cleaning and removing invalid or ineligible responses the final data set was 346 respondents.

Sample

- » Age: The average age of participants was 20 with a median of 21.
- » Gender: The large majority (97%) of participants reported a binary gender identity, with those who identified as female/woman (63%) significantly outnumbering those identifying as male/man (34%).
- » Geographic distribution: The majority of the participants, 92%, were located in Metro Melbourne, with 6% living in inner regional areas and just 2% living in more remote parts of Victoria. They predominantly lived in postcodes which reflected average Victorian household income levels.
- » Study/Work: 22% were school students; 32% tertiary students; 29% working only (full or part time).
- » Financial Stress: We asked In a typical month, how difficult is it for your household/s to cover expenses and pay the bills? 37% of the sample reported it was somewhat to extremely easy; 37% neither easy nor difficult; 26% somewhat to extremely difficult.
- » Country of Origin: 53% were born in Australia. Of the overseas born, 54% identified an Asian country as their country of origin and 13% an African country.
- » Cultural Background: 34% identified as Asian; 33% North American or European; 12% MENA/Afghan; 9% African.
- » Languages spoken: 65% spoke one or more languages in addition to English.
- » ABS data suggests that the population of interest is approximately 375,000 individuals who meet the criteria of 15-24 year-olds living in Victoria who were either born overseas or who had at least one parent born overseas. The survey's sample size of 346 is a reasonable representation of this population in terms of alignment with the ABS data. The sample is representative of the place of birth of the population and is largely from postcodes which are among those with the highest proportion of people who have one or more parents born overseas.

Participant clusters

In addition to individual dimensions such as age, gender, cultural background and financial stress, the analysis also examined the extent to which these characteristics combined into distinct groups of refugee and migrant youth based on sharing a set of similar circumstances. Unsupervised clustering was implemented to identify cohesive groupings based on the following variables:

- » years lived in Australia;
- » level of financial stress; and
- » whether they spoke only English or were multilingual.

This enabled better understandings of the ways the above factors informed the ways young people used digital tech for education, employment, social connectedness and wellbeing. More importantly this was a means to move away from simplistic interpretations based on singular/siloed elements (i.e., cultural background, gender etc.) and adopt a more intersectional approach to understanding the confluence of factors which influence the young people's digital behaviour. Cluster analysis is available in the survey report on request.

Team

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About the Interviews

The project received ethics approval from Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project number 2021-306) and reciprocal approval from Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference RH14781).

Methodology:

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted online by four trained youth researchers from refugee and migrant backgrounds, with guidance from senior researchers.

The interviews explored how young people use digital technology in their everyday lives; any impacts they had experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic on their technology use and access; how technology is used, and their experiences of benefits and challenges across their work, education, social and wellbeing worlds; barriers to digital access; their role assisting others to access digital technology; any strategies that helped to navigate barriers and challenges; what they believe the future challenges of technology are; and how they want to be able to use digital technology in the future. Participants were recruited through the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) by circulating an email invitation to refugee and migrant young people through their networks. Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and were recorded using the Zoom function and transcribed using Otter.ai¹. The transcripts were subsequently validated by a youth researcher and a deductive coding framework was applied to thematically analyse the data. Participants were provided with a \$50 gift voucher as a thank you for their time.



Sample:

Participants were all: currently living in Victoria (Melbourne and surrounding metropolitan suburbs, particularly southeast and inner-city suburbs); aged between 15 and 24 years old; self-identified as from a refugee and/or migrant background; and used one or more digital device.

Sixteen females and four males aged between 16 and 24 participated. Fourteen participants self-identified as migrant background and were born in Australia (n=4), India (n=3), Afghanistan (n=2), Malaysia (n=1), Myanmar (n=1), Qatar (n=1), South Africa (n=1) and unspecified overseas (n=1). Those born in Australia had parents who were born overseas in Somalia, China and Cambodia. Six participants self-identified as refugee background and were born in Afghanistan (n=4), Kenya (n=1) and Tanzania (n=1).

For those born overseas, six participants were established migrants, with most having lived in Australia for over 10 years. Six participants were newly established migrants, having lived in Australia for five or less years. Data was unavailable for the remaining four participants born overseas.

Most participants identified as having mixed cultural heritage. Six participants identified as Afghan, three Indian and two Australian. Other cultural backgrounds of participants were: Burmese, Burundi, Cambodian, Malaysian, Mozambican, Singaporean, South Sudanese and Tamil. Most participants were bilingual or multilingual. Three quarters of participants spoke English at home in addition to one or more other languages, which included: Chinese (dialect), Dari, Hindi, Mandarin, Burmese, Cantonese, Farsi, Kannada, Pashto, Persian, Portuguese, Somali, Tamil, and Urdu.

Most participants lived at home with their parent(s) and more than 65% lived with siblings. 15 participants were from a two-parent household and 4 participants were from a single parent household. Participants were either studying in high school (n = 5), university (n = 6) or were working in an internship, traineeship or placement program (n = 9). Some students had part-time or casual jobs alongside their study.

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1. After a comprehensive scan of transcription services, Otter.ai was found to be the most robust AI powered software on the market, suitable for the project needs and in line with human research ethical standards.

About the Adult Focus Groups

Methodology

Four focus groups were conducted with parents and community leaders from the Pasifika, Somali, South Sudanese, and Afghan communities. 47 participants in total contributed to focus group discussions. Participants were recruited via dissemination of a flyer about the study to community groups identified by the Centre for Multicultural Youth. Relevant groups were identified and approached on the basis of their need for, and prior engagement in digital resourcing initiatives led by CMY during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community leaders introduced by CMY facilitated participant recruitment, including translations of project information to participants in languages other than English. Focus groups were organised with parents and community leaders from Afghan, Samoan, Somali and South Sudanese communities. The Samoan and South Sudanese focus groups were conducted online over Zoom in May 2022, and the Somali and Afghan focus groups were conducted in person in June 2022. There was one facilitator and one note taker from the research team for each focus group. All participants completed a survey capturing key demographic details. The Samoan, Somali and South Sudanese focus groups and demographic survey were conducted entirely in English. The Afghan focus group was conducted in English, with translation to and from Dari with the assistance of the community group facilitator. A Dari translation of the demographic survey was organised for and completed by the Afghan focus group participants. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes, and all participants were reimbursed with a \$50 gift voucher. Transcripts were generated using Otter.ai, and checked for accuracy by team members. Data was coded inductively and deductively by different team members, who met regularly to discuss and refine the coding scheme in accordance with the research aims. The coding scheme was used as the basis for further analysis and identification of preliminary themes.

Sample

Languages spoken at home: For languages other than English spoken at home, participants identified Arabic (n=7), Dari (n=23), Dinka (n=1), Nuer (n=4), Samoan (n=7), and Somali (n=4).

Age: Most participants were aged between 30 and 39 (n=19), while many participants were between the ages of 40-49 (n=11). In addition, some participants were aged between 60 and 69 (n=6), between 50-59 (n=4), and between 20-29 (n=3).

Number of dependants: A number of families had 2 dependents (n=12), 4 dependents (n=9), 1 dependent (n=9), 3 dependents (n=6), 5 dependents (n=3), and no dependents (n=2).

Age of children/dependants: A majority of children/dependents were between the ages of 5-10 (n=26) and 10-15 (n=26), some dependents/children were between the ages of 0 –5 (n=23), 15-18 (n=16), 18-25 (n=13), and 25 or more (n=7).

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About Capacity Mapping and Interviews with Organisations

Methodology (Interviews with youth-led and youth-serving organisations)

January 2022 – April 2022 (revised May 2022)

- » Explorers: Co-design questions; co-conduct interviews face-to-face or online; analyse and write up data.
- » 20 x 30-minute interviews with representatives from 12 organisations to explore strengths and gaps in policies and programs as well as perspectives on barriers and opportunities for young people to leverage tech in migrant and refugee communities.

Methodology (capacity mapping)

December 2021 – March 2022

- » a desk-based mapping of Victorian youth-facing organizations' policies, programming and training

Procedure – mapping

- » Between 12/21 and 03/22 desk search using Google was conducted combining search terms.
- » Desk search by organisation and new search terms.
- » Informal advice was sought from key informants in advocacy, academia and program delivery (n = 8).

Group

- » Young people aged 14 – 25

Focus area

- » Education and learning
- » Work
- » Civic engagement
- » Social connectedness
- » Mental Health
- » Wellbeing
- » Digital inclusion
- » Digital participation

YPRMB identifiers

- » Migrant
- » Refugee
- » Multicultural
- » Culturally and linguistically diverse
- » Recently arrived
- » People of Colour

Procedure – interviews

1. Identify and invite March - June 2023
2. Co-create interview schedule and conduct mock interviews
3. Twelve interviews conducted via zoom
4. Analyse interviews against questions
5. Create case studies
6. Thematic analysis still to be conducted

NOTE: A further 6 people were invited and agreed to interview. However, there were some difficulties scheduling times due to people's workload.

Additionally, informal phone calls were made to learn more about some organizations in the capacity mapping stage. Some of these conversations briefly touched on interview topics.

Interviewee sample

- » 12 interviews conducted
- » Coordinators, managers or consultants to organisation or initiatives

Organisations represented

- » Multicultural Arts Victoria (ex-employee)
- » Just Shapes and Sounds
- » Shakti Melbourne
- » South Sudanese Minds
- » Ubuntu Project
- » CMY Ballarat
- » Kensington Neighbourhood House
- » TACSI
- » Good Things Foundation

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For further information and to stay connected to the project, please visit our website: <https://www.crisconsortium.org/refugee-migrant-digital-participation>

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