Bright Futures Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

In a rapidly changing world characterised by increasing competition for tertiary education, decreasing job security, globalisation, technology, cultural diversity and over-exposure to the internet, young people are increasingly required to be skilled, digitally connected, resilient and adaptable.

These challenges were identified in 2015 by the report Bright Futures: Megatrends impacting the mental wellbeing of young people in Victoria over the coming 20 years. VicHealth has partnered with Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) and CSIRO's Data61 to explore what this work means for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The rising bar: Rising education and skill levels are creating a more competitive job market.

- Young people in Australia are more highly qualified but less likely to find a job than previous generations. Refugee and migrant young people face additional challenges, even though they may come from families who strongly value and promote educational success.
- 38% of young people whose parents were born overseas were in some form of tertiary education in 2016. This compares with 25% of young people whose parents were born in Australia.
- Only 45% of university students born outside Australia find full-time employment after graduation, compared with 69% of Australian-born university students.

Global reach: Digital technology and globalisation are changing all facets of society.

- Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds might be more globally networked than their Australian-born peers but they lack the local networks that lead to employment opportunities.
- First-generation migrants aged 15–24 are much more likely to be employed in part-time than full-time work, compared with Australian-born young people. The 'gig economy' can expose refugee and migrant young people to precarious work conditions and other risks.

Life's richer tapestry: Culture and society are increasingly diverse.

- In 2016, one in five Australians aged 12–24 was born overseas. A further 25% of young people had at least one parent born overseas.
- Young people in Australia are significantly more accepting of multiculturalism than older age groups.
- The incidence of racial discrimination has been rising steadily over the past 10 years. Young people aged 18-24 years are most likely to be impacted.

Overexposure online: The virtual world has changed relationships and ideas about privacy.

- More than half of all young people aged 15-17 years, and around 45% of 18–24 year olds, spent 15 or more hours online per week in 2014–15.
- Some refugee and migrant young people may have poor digital literacy skills or limited access to the internet, which can impact their connectedness and participation in Australian society.
- Refugee and migrant young people may be more digitally literate than their parents.
- Cyber-racism is a key threat for refugee and migrant young people in Australia. One study found that Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees are the most frequent targets of harmful race-based online content.

Out of the shadows: Scientific research will improve understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and service delivery models will change.

- Growing awareness about mental illness has reduced stigma.
- Mental health resources designed for refugee and migrant young people must be co-designed with young people in order to adequately reflect their diverse needs.
- Migrants to a developed economy are known to have better health on arrival than native-born populations, so further research into this resilience could have society-wide benefits.