

Blocked: the Social Media Ban, Multicultural Young People and Settlement

Executive Summary



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Contents

Executive Summary	4
Key Findings.....	5
Recommendations	6
Endnotes	1

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Author Positionality Statement

The first author is a first-generation migrant who arrived in Australia as a child, accompanying her family, and is of South-Asian descent. The second author is Australian-born of Anglo-Celtic descent. We acknowledge that our own lived experiences can influence the study design and interpretation of results. We approached the study with sensitivity and a commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices. We consider our diversity, individual experiences, and age (with one researcher being under 30 years old) to be strengths in understanding and communicating the experiences of young people and workers.

Acknowledgement of Country

CMY acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands on which we work across Victoria, paying our respect to elders past and present and recognise the ongoing connection to and care for Country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CMY offices in Carlton, Dandenong, Sunshine, Ballarat, Melton and Gippsland are located on the traditional lands of the Kulin nations.

In recognition of CMY's aspiration that all young people are valued and influential, we acknowledge and thank young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for their leadership, friendship and courage to share their stories and culture. In doing so, we acknowledge our shared history and the importance of working and walking together to build our shared understanding and foster strong Victorian communities.

CMY values respect for diversity, and in keeping with our aspiration that all young people are free and equal, we respect distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural differences, beliefs, values and languages, and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights to self-determination, culture and land.

About CMY

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a non-profit organisation based in Victoria, Australia. We've been shaping culture for more than 35 years. Our purpose is to create a society where multicultural young people live a life where they are connected and can fully reach their potential. At CMY, we find the gaps, partner with experts, model the future, and deliver real outcomes. We are the shaper of systems, attitudes and behaviours that create the society we all deserve.

Contributions

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) would like to thank the young people and CMY staff who gave their time to be interviewed and share their experiences to inform this paper. Special thanks to Alfadzni Haddimah for his research contributions to this paper. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the time and contributions of:

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- Wyndham Community and Education Centre Inc. (WCEC)
- Victorian Multicultural Youth Alliance (VMYA)

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Executive Summary

Late in 2024, Australia became the first country globally to legislate a ban on social media for young people. This landmark legislation, the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) 2024 Act (the Social Media Ban) is due to come into effect in December 2025, with the stated aim of protecting young people under 16 from the potential harms of social media by banning their access to prohibited platforms.

While the ban has been defended largely as a response to parental and community concerns for young peoples' mental health and digital safety, critics argue that a blanket ban alone fails to address these core concerns and that there is insufficient evidence to justify it. Concerns have also been raised that a blanket ban unnecessarily limits the rights of young people and, in so doing, risks harm to some by limiting important access to and participation in digital life. Advocates have suggested additional measures are needed, such as stronger platform regulation and practical support to families and young people to navigate digital platforms safely, arguing such measures would better address risks posed by social media use.

Despite the Social Media Ban's unique and far-reaching consequences, there was very limited opportunity for community consultation during the legislative process, including with the young people it would ultimately impact. Research shows that some marginalised young people, including multicultural and newly arrived young people, derive unique benefits from social media that are not readily available to them elsewhere.¹ Research also shows that digital technology use can facilitate participation and support critical connection for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, especially those who face exclusion from more formal mechanisms for connection and expression.² This includes newly arrived young people who are navigating a period of transition during a critical stage of their development, when access to and participation in civil life is critical.³ This paper explores the Social Media Ban and its potential impacts from the perspective of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families, with a focus on those newly arrived to Australia.

Between October 2024 and May 2025 CMY undertook a series of consultations with multicultural young people, their families, and those who work with them. Consultations explored the unique experiences of newly arrived and multicultural young people using social media, and views on the likely impacts of the proposed Social Media Ban.

Overall, findings suggest that a ban is unlikely to address the underlying digital safety concerns of multicultural young people and their families. Additionally, the ban

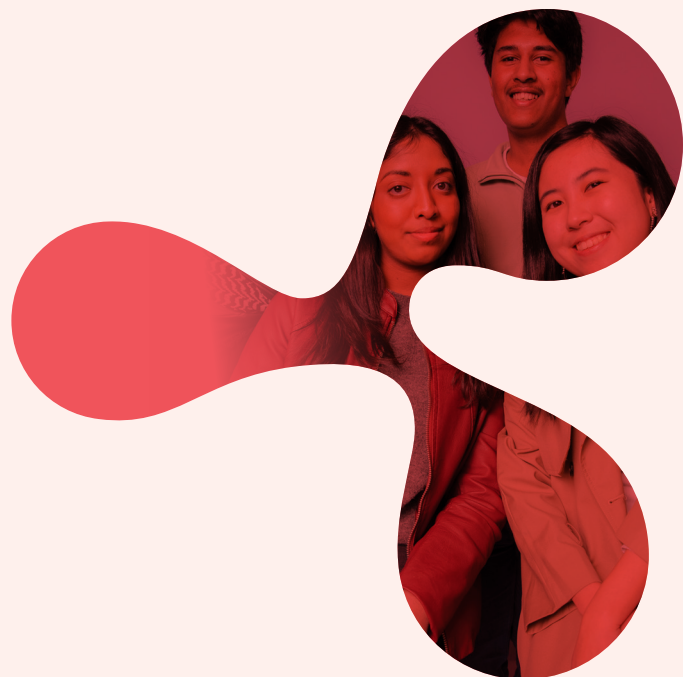
is likely to have broader implications that policy makers and services working with multicultural young people and those who are newly arrived must carefully consider. These include:

- **building the knowledge and skills of young people and families to safely and confidently navigate digital worlds;**
- **addressing systemic risks inherent with digital platforms, including for those aged 16 years and over and for platforms not covered by the ban;**
- **finding alternatives to maintain connections with and effectively serve young people once access to social media is limited under the ban, especially for marginalised and more newly arrived cohorts, and;**
- **how to appropriately resource and guide frontline workers supporting multicultural young people and families to manage impacts once implementation of the ban commences.**

More broadly, the Social Media Ban illustrates the potential in Australian policymaking to risk (or at least be seen to risk) prioritising expediency and socially palatable options over complex, rights-based, evidence-based solutions. This raises fundamental questions about whose interests are valued and prioritised in our policymaking system, whose voices are heard, and what rights we are willing to compromise in the process. These questions are especially important when we are considering policies that impact upon the needs and interest of groups who are regularly marginalised and face persistent barriers to participation and influence in Australian society, such as young people and those from refugee and migrant backgrounds.⁴




Key Findings

- 1** Social media is integral to newly arrived young people's lives. It serves as a primary tool for maintaining connections with family and friends overseas, building new friendships and connections in their new home, and accessing information about local services, events, and opportunities.
- 2** Experiences of racism and cyberbullying on social media are common for newly arrived and multicultural young people. However, social media also provides opportunities for solidarity, support, and collective action.
- 3** For some newly arrived young people, social media is the most accessible way to build positive social networks, stay informed and access relevant support in their new home. A ban risks their digital exclusion, which could harm their mental health, increase social isolation, and disrupt successful settlement.
- 4** Multicultural young people and their supporters are concerned about social media addiction and excessive screen time. While these issues can cause poor mental health, through distraction and increased stress, outright bans are unlikely to change behaviour and additional measures are needed to support healthy digital behaviours.
- 5** Family engagement with young people's online activity and digital literacy varies widely. Many families, especially those who are newly arrived to Australia, face challenges in managing the social media use of their children and young people and keeping them safe online.
- 6** Young people want to be part of the solution. Newly arrived and multicultural young people want more opportunities to participate in policy development and to co-design digital safety and engagement initiatives.






Recommendations




The Australian Government and State/Territory Governments must ensure that young people are given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to legislation and policies that impact them.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>The Department of Families Fairness Housing amend the Victorian youth strategy '<u>Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027</u>' and the Federal youth strategy '<u>Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make.</u>' to include mandatory requirements for consultation and co-design in legislative development that impacts young people, with a focus on strengthening engagement with multicultural young people including those who are newly arrived. This could be done through advisory councils or regular forums for example.</p>	<p>Despite the disproportionate impact of this legislation on young people, their voices have largely been absent due to limited consultation windows, and inaccessible legislative and policy development processes.</p>	<p>Policy decisions are better informed by those most affected, leading to fairer, and more effective legislation. Young people feel empowered, and policies become more representative of community needs.</p>

The Australian Government must engage with existing culturally inclusive online 'third spaces' to uplift these where they exist, and invest in grassroots, community-led digital belonging initiatives.




 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>The Department of Home Affairs must fund partnerships between digital literacy providers and settlement services to meet youth demand for digital and in-person spaces for newly arrived young people to socialise and interact with their local and identified communities.</p> <p>This funding should support community-led moderation and peer-mentors to ensure spaces are safe, for example the <u>South Sudanese Minds</u> initiative, and the <u>Good Things Australia community grants</u>.</p>	<p>Social media is no longer a purely recreational tool, but a vital 'lifeline' for many young people to access information, connection and support. Limited access to physical 'third places' for many young people means that online communities play a critical role in social inclusion. A blanket ban on access to social media risks exacerbating feelings of isolation, particularly for those experiencing barriers to participation.</p> <p>Investment in safe, supported digital spaces co-designed with young people provides an inclusive alternative.</p>	<p>Young people have access to safe, trusted, culturally and identity affirming digital spaces that support connection, self-expression and identity formation.</p> <p>Communities and young people are empowered to lead local, culturally responsive solutions.</p>

The Australian Government must include digital inclusion as a core settlement outcome for young people. This would measure whether those under 16 have accessible, digital and non-digital pathways to build social connections.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>The Department of Home Affairs incorporate belonging and identity indicators into settlement program evaluations by implementing the National Youth Settlement Framework across youth settlement services and beyond the first five years.</p> <p>Include both qualitative and quantitative measures of belonging, identity, and social connectedness—including both online and offline pathways for connection.</p> <p>This could be measured through longitudinal data collection such as part of the Building a New Life in Australia longitudinal study, or through the Australian Digital Inclusion Index being expanded to collect data around migrant and refugee background young people, and newly arrived young people.</p>	<p>Belonging is a significant indicator of social integration, however young Australian’s report lower levels of belonging. Systematically measuring this can allow services and government to better understand the role of the digital in belonging during settlement, and to quickly mitigate any potential negative unintended consequences of the ban for newly arrived young people.</p>	<p>Settlement programs become more responsive to the holistic needs of young people, including digital needs, leading to improved social cohesion and stronger community connections</p>



The Australian Government must strengthen protections against racism and discrimination online by stronger moderation of content and algorithms.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>Strengthen enforceability of Australian regulation and legislation for social media platforms. This could be achieved by adopting in full the final recommendations of the <u>Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society</u>.</p> <p>This should include stronger regulation of the use of algorithms, as proposed under recommendation 4, by requiring social media platforms to: implement content and algorithm filters, enforce content moderation to block racist and hateful material, remove harmful content immediately, and be 'safe by design' regarding algorithms.</p> <p>Additional measures should strengthen the eSafety Commissioner's regulatory enforcement powers, including to set industry standards, and inform Australia's role in global collaboration to develop global regulatory frameworks and mobilise multilateral pressure to hold platforms accountable.</p>	<p>More than one in two young Australians report seeing hateful comments about cultural or religious groups online, with Islamophobic or anti-Muslim and anti-asylum seeker content making up a large proportion.⁵ However few young people feel equipped to challenge or report this.⁶</p> <p>Proactive content moderation, and consistent enforcement of rules online would reduce exposure to hate speech and create safer digital spaces.</p>	<p>Experts recommend strengthening platform regulation as the most effective way to improve online safety for young people.</p> <p>This approach protects young people from online racism, fosters safer and more inclusive communities, and enables authorities to enforce legislation while holding platforms accountable for user safety by design.</p>

The Australian Government and State/Territory Governments must enhance digital literacy support for multicultural and newly arrived communities and young people.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>In line with recommendation 7 of the <u>Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society's</u> interim report, fund tailored digital literacy programs for multicultural young people and their families, co-designed and implemented with communities and young people, to support tailored and place based approaches.</p> <p>This could be achieved by the Australian and State/Territory Governments supporting: expansion of youth-led and school-based digital education programs, like <u>PROJECT ROCKIT 'Digital Futures'</u> to partner with community organisations to reach more multicultural young people, for example in English language schools and community homework clubs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-designing grants programs with young people, such as the <u>Good Things Foundation's Building Digital Skills'</u> and the Department of Home Affairs <u>Modernised Multicultural Grants Program.</u> 	<p>Parents report a significant digital knowledge gap, feeling less informed about the uses and risks of social media. Research suggests many multicultural parents are unaware of government initiatives aimed at protecting their children online.⁷</p> <p>Recently arrived multicultural cohorts score far lower on the digital inclusion index than the broader refugee and migrant background community and general population, highlighting variations within multicultural populations and the need for tailored programs.⁸</p> <p>Research shows that such programs should include in-language support for families to better understand and engage with their young people's social media use; focus on practical, culturally relevant skills beyond basic technical ability; and include guidance on Australian norms and values regarding young people's digital participation, digital wellbeing and safety, as well as relevant laws and supports.⁹</p>	<p>By investing in community informed digital literacy programs and expanding youth-focused digital wellbeing workshops, multicultural communities will be better equipped to engage in their children's online lives.</p> <p>This approach will enhance intergenerational communication around digital safety and empower parents with the tools to actively support their children, fostering safer, more inclusive online environments for multicultural young people.</p>

The Australian Government and State/Territory Governments must proactively mitigate the likely negative impacts of the Social Media Ban for newly arrived and multicultural young people.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>In addition to implementing stronger platform accountability and youth and family digital supports, the Australian and State/Territory Governments must mandate, and support settlement and other services working with newly arrived young people and their families to collect data on the impacts of the ban on their access to information, connections and support.</p> <p>Actively support youth services, including settlement services, to transition to other platforms and modes for connecting and communicating with young people online.</p> <p>Engage such services and supports to work collaboratively with young people and families on understanding the ban and what it means.</p> <p>There should also be mechanisms for feedback from young people and communities during and following implementation of to ensure it is responsive to their needs.</p>	<p>Given the potential for disproportionate impacts of a ban on newly arrived and multicultural young people, it is essential to accurately understand how/if their access to services are impacted once the ban comes into effect, and to take quick action to mitigate this beforehand and once risks are identified.</p>	<p>The impact of a ban on diverse cohorts of young people is clearly understood and can be evaluated meaningfully. This approach allows services to proactively mitigate against any negative impacts and to respond effectively to unexpected consequences once the ban takes effect, to ensure sustained connection and support to newly arrived and multicultural young people.</p>

Endnotes

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"I think that [the ban] will just mean kids will not [learn] social media etiquette and digital literacy. The same problems will occur with just a higher age group now. Research has shown greatly mixed results from around the world as bullying still occurs, mental health problems still occurs."

- multicultural young person, 18 - 24 years old



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