

# Blocked:

the Social Media Ban,  
Multicultural Young People  
and Settlement



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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

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

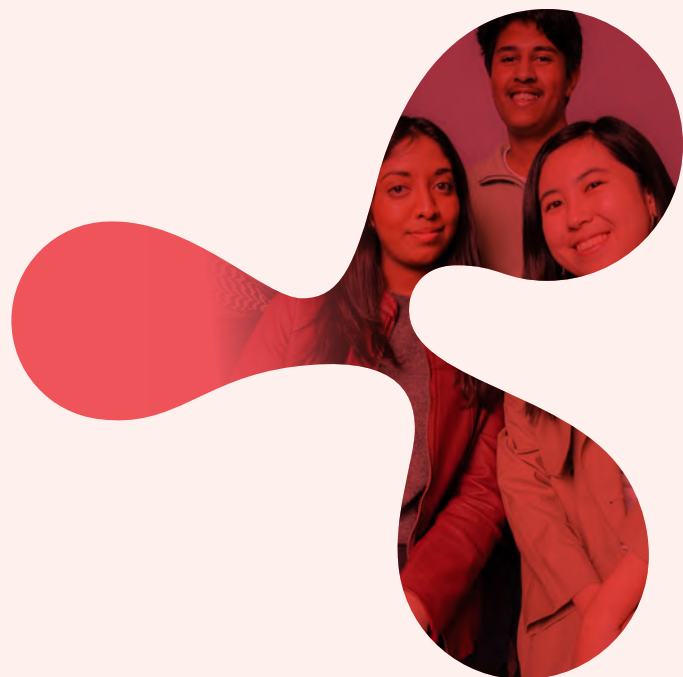
is likely to have broader implications that policy makers and services working with multicultural young people and those who are newly arrived must carefully consider. These include:

- **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.<sup>4</sup>




# 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 <b><u>'Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027'</u></b> and the Federal youth strategy <b><u>'Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make.'</u></b> 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 <b><u>South Sudanese Minds</u></b> initiative, and the <b><u>Good Things Australia community grants</u></b>.</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 <b>National Youth Settlement Framework</b> 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 <b>Building a New Life in Australia</b> longitudinal study, or through the <b>Australian Digital Inclusion Index</b> 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.**

|  <b>Policy solution</b>  |  <b>Evidence and rationale</b>   |  <b>Outcome</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| <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 <b><u>Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society</u></b>.</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.<sup>5</sup> However few young people feel equipped to challenge or report this.<sup>6</sup></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.

|  <b>Policy solution</b>  |  <b>Evidence and rationale</b>   |  <b>Outcome</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| <p>In line with recommendation 7 of the <b><u>Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society's</u></b> 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 <b><u>PROJECT ROCKIT 'Digital Futures'</u></b> 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"> <li>co-designing grants programs with young people, such as the <b><u>Good Things Foundation's Building Digital Skills'</u></b> and the Department of Home Affairs <b><u>Modernised Multicultural Grants Program.</u></b></li> </ul> | <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.<sup>7</sup></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.<sup>8</sup></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.<sup>9</sup></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.**

|  <b>Policy solution</b>   |  <b>Evidence and rationale</b>   |  <b>Outcome</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| <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> |



**"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

# Background



Social media is a central part of young people's lives, –with around 95% of young Australians (aged 15 to 19 years) reporting they use social media daily.<sup>10</sup> Social media serves as a primary means of information and communication, self-expression and community building for young people. For many, especially those from newly arrived backgrounds, social media platforms are essential for maintaining relationships across borders, accessing information and finding identity-affirming 'third spaces' in a new country.<sup>11</sup> Social media is equally an important tool for governments, businesses, and not-for-profit services and organisations, enabling connection and communication with the community.

While the benefits of social media are considerable, the rapid evolution of social media has also brought new risks. Most of this concern has focused on links between the steady decline in youth mental health and an unregulated and unsafe social media environment - although this relationship is complex and dynamic, and research remains mixed on the nature and extent of social media in this decline.<sup>12</sup> Other concerns including exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, breaches of privacy and harmful content have grown sharply, alongside high-profile incidents of platforms being used to cause deliberate harm.<sup>13</sup> Momentum for regulation has intensified as governments currently lack the tools or authority to intervene effectively, and acknowledge that platforms are unwilling to self-regulate.<sup>14</sup> This climate has fuelled political and public support for stronger interventions, including direct calls for a social media ban.<sup>15</sup>

However, the ban has attracted significant criticism from youth and digital rights advocates<sup>16</sup> who argue it is rushed, disproportionate and was developed with limited consultation of young people.<sup>17</sup> Related concerns have emphasised that it also risks overlooking the particular needs of some youth cohorts, including newly arrived and multicultural young people, with unintended consequences (such as reduced access to critical information during settlement) the likely result.<sup>18</sup> Instead, a range of alternatives have been promoted, many reflecting proposals from the Australian Parliament's own inquiry into social media. These include greater regulation of platforms and safety by design principles while also proposing alternatives, including a public health response to the youth mental health 'crisis', stronger regulation of platform design with a focus on user safety, and investment in digital and media literacy for young people and their supporters.<sup>19</sup>

Despite offering proportionate, evidence-based solutions and raising valid concerns about unintended harms, these proposals have gained less traction with legislators than the ban itself, raising important questions about evidence-based policymaking and democratic accountability in our system. In particular, the Social Media Ban shines light on systemic issues with how policy decisions can be made about children and young people, those directly affected by this policy but largely excluded from meaningful participation in its development, given they have notably less power to influence decision-making in our systems.



**Third Space:** Refers to environments where people navigate and negotiate different parts of their identity in a space beyond their home and formal institutions (e.g. school/work) and serve as a critical site for connection, expression and community building. For young people with intersectional identities, social media can provide a vital sense of community and support.

**Multicultural:** Includes people who are of first- or second-generation migrant or refugee background, as well as those who have grandparents who were of migrant or refugee background, or who identify as 'multicultural'.

**Newly arrived:** Someone who was born overseas and has lived in Australia for a relatively short amount of time, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. According to the Federal Government, someone newly-arrived, has lived in Australia for five years or less. Other definitions vary according to the length of time it is considered to take to settle in Australia. This paper refers to newly-arrived young people using the Federal Government's definition.

**Young person:** A reference to young person or young people in this paper relates to those who are aged 12 – 24 years.

# Policy context

## Australia

In the decade leading up to 2024, Australia and many other countries developed a range of local and global frameworks and laws aimed to improve digital safety, especially for children and young people.<sup>20</sup> In 2024 alone, the Australian Government implemented or progressed multiple reforms relating to online safety. These included:

**The Basic Online Safety Expectations (BOSE) (in force as of May 2024)**

**Development of industry codes and standards to address illegal and restricted online content (in progress)**

**Age Assurance Trial (\$6.5 million committed May 2024) to determine how to regulate access to online pornography and social media (in progress)**

**Changes to the Privacy Act 1988, and the development of a Children's Online Privacy Code (legislation passed in November 2024, development of the Code is in progress)**

**Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act 2021 (February 2025)**

**Australia joins UN Global Digital Compact recognises digital access and participation as essential to achieving human rights<sup>21</sup> (October 2024)**

**Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society (final report tabled in November 2024)**

Despite these measures, the existing online safety regime continued to be deemed inadequate for protecting young people and calls for more robust regulation and greater accountability of technology companies continued.<sup>22</sup>

The Social Media Minimum Age Act was legislated on 29 November 2024 and is due to come into effect in December 2025, and will be reviewed two years later. However, this timeline is not guaranteed, as age verification and other enforcement capabilities are not yet usable.

# Legislating a global first 'Social Media Ban'

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced an inquiry into a social media age ban. South Australia proposed under-14 ban (14–16 with parental consent), while Victoria signalled support but commenced consulted.<sup>23</sup>



**10 September 2024**



**7 November 2024**

Before states (like Victoria) made their consultation findings public, the Australian Government announced it would legislate a minimum age of 16 for social media use.<sup>24</sup> The Prime Minister stated the decision followed consultation with young people, parents, academics, child development experts, First Nations youth, and governments.<sup>25</sup>



The Joint Select Committee's final report was released: 'Social media: the good, the bad and the ugly'. It did not recommend an age ban and urged tailored regulations to improve platform safety and enforce company duty of care.<sup>26</sup>



**18 November 2024**



**21 November 2024**

Despite inquiry findings, the Government introduced the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024 following public consultation that was open for only 24-hours.



The Senate Committee recommended the Bill proceed, acknowledging opposition but supporting harm mitigation.<sup>27</sup>



**Late November 2024**



**29 November 2024**

Despite continued opposition from across the political spectrum, Australia passed the world's first Social Media Ban.



It is expected the ban will commence in December, following the completion of age verification trials.



**10 December 2025**

## Global Trends

Australia's approach to regulating young people's social media use is unprecedented globally, with most other countries focusing instead on addressing young people's online safety through measures such as data privacy, parental consent and platform accountability instead of blanket bans. In the United States, the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)* restricts data collection from children under 14, while proposed legislation such as the *Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)* seeks to impose a duty of care on platforms to prevent and mitigate harm to young people, and to prohibit targeted advertising to young people under 17 years old. In Europe, the *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* limits data collection from children under 13 years old and sets 16 years as the minimum age of consent for data processing. In the United Kingdom (UK), the *Online Safety Act 2023* imposes a duty of care on platforms to protect users from harmful content; including preventing illegal content, preventing young people from accessing content that is inappropriate for their age, and providing parents and young people with clear ways to report issues. By contrast, and in the absence of evidence of its likely effectiveness, Australia has positioned itself as a global test case, with countries the UK and New Zealand watching closely as they debate similar bans.<sup>28</sup>



# Discussion

The Social Media Ban represents a significant shift in how online safety for young people in Australia is approached, and the role of platforms and families in this. While the legislation is intended to be in the best interests of young people, and to protect them from the harms associated with social media use, the blanket ban is a blunt social policy instrument that is likely to have significant negative and unintended consequences, particularly for minority youth. Understanding the needs and interests of the young people who will be impacted is critical to ensuring

implementation is informed and that the most negative impacts are prevented. This discussion, drawing on the reviewed literature, survey responses and consultations (detailed in **Annexure 1** and **Annexure 2**) explores the perspectives of multicultural and newly arrived young people and families, and those working with them, on the ban and its likely impacts. It is structured around key themes arising from the survey and consultations, which were:

1. The use of social media to cultivate **a sense of belonging**.
2. The potential harms of social media in relation to **racism and cyberbullying**.
3. The dual effects of social media in relation to **mental health and addiction**.
4. **Challenges and opportunities for families** in managing children's and young people's use of social media.
5. Considering **newly arrived young people in implementation**: What is necessary to ensure these reforms do not inadvertently undermine social inclusion or settlement outcomes?



# 1. Connection and identity – cultivating a sense of belonging

## Belonging and the Settlement Experience

Belonging is a key indicator of successful settlement for young people. It means feeling part of something greater than oneself, having the capacity to participate in cultural life, and experiencing a sense of self and social connectedness.<sup>29</sup> The migrant and refugee journey can disrupt young people’s established social networks and connection to place, threatening their existing sense of belonging.<sup>30</sup>

Traditionally, sites of belonging can be understood as family, schools or education providers and the local neighbourhood. However, over the past decade, where and how young people establish a sense of belonging has shifted. Digital spaces, especially social media platforms, have become key sites where young people forge their identities and develop community connections. Far from being a trivial or purely recreational tool, social media platforms now operate as critical ‘third spaces’ and help build bridging and bonding social capital in the settlement context.<sup>31</sup>

## Young People’s Perspectives on Connection, Identity and Support

Multicultural and newly arrived young people repeatedly emphasised that social media was essential to maintaining ties with family overseas, accessing shared cultural content and forming identity affirming connections. They also reported using social media for practical reasons such as finding events and opportunities, practising English, and connecting with groups and networks.

Newly arrived and multicultural young people averaged 4 hours daily on social media. This is significantly higher than the average young Victorian, who is reported to spend 2.5 hours daily on social media.<sup>32</sup> This higher usage may indicate that multicultural and newly arrived young people rely on online spaces to build belonging and identity, especially when they have limited opportunities for offline connections. However, multicultural and newly arrived young people are not a homogenous group, and many newly arrived young people and those experiencing higher levels of financial stress face barriers to digital access that impact their usage.<sup>33</sup> As such, needs are shaped by each young person’s unique perspective

and identity, and it is important to consider the role of intersectionality in shaping experiences.

## Social Media as a Critical ‘Third Space’

Social media platforms function as critical ‘third spaces’ for young people – informal spaces, away from home and school, where they can explore their identity, share culture and connect with friends.<sup>34</sup> For young people with intersectional identities, social media can provide a vital sense of community and support.<sup>35</sup> It helps them navigate life in a new culture and forge their identity. These platforms can build both bonding capital (connection with existing friends/family) and bridging capital (engagement with new culture), supporting their integration, and can act as a buffer against migration stress.<sup>36</sup>

## Newly arrived young people’s reported uses of social media

71%

use social media to connect with friend

57%

connect with their community

50%

for learning and development

35%

for self-expression

“Children in outer-suburbia like me will be disproportionately affected by the loss of social platforms because we do not have any third places or pedestrian accessible hang out spots where young people can meet.”

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old



**Bridging social capital:** amongst people of dissimilar backgrounds, and is useful for connecting with external information, and resources, and creating broader social identities as we get to know those different to us.

**Bonding social capital:** amongst social relationships of similar people, promoting reciprocity, support and solidarity.

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a framework that recognises how identities shaped by overlapping and interconnected experiences of race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status combine to create unique forms of discrimination and privilege within systems of power.

**"I use it for like, Islamic pages – there are people who learn things all together and who understand you. I don't get that in day-to-day life, school is limited, just classes. Social media is different – you can be more yourself than when you're at school or social settings."**

**– multicultural young person, 16 years old**

Online platforms allow multicultural and newly arrived young people to explore their identity as separate but related to their 'offline' selves. For example, young people shared that growing up in regional and rural areas as a diverse young person can present many challenges. They explained that they can feel isolated from their communities as there are not many people who share their cultural background. Research shows that social media is an important tool for connecting rural and with similar identities, or heritage and background.<sup>37</sup>

However, there is significant evidence that social media can also present risks where young people can be exposed to harmful actors, such as influencers within

the 'manosphere' who propagate misogyny online. The eSafety Commissioner's 2021 report, 'The digital lives of Aussie teens', reports around one third (30%) of young people have been contacted by a stranger or someone they didn't know online, with one in five (20%) receiving inappropriate or unwanted content.<sup>38</sup>

Social media is also a key medium through which newly arrived young people access information relating to settlement and life in Australia. Settlement organisations, like most services and groups in Australia, rely on social media platforms to disseminate information and connect with young people. The ban raises significant concerns about how services will reach young people once they lose access to social media.

Social media is often used by services to translate information that is less accessible such as on government websites, into more accessible or engaging formats for youth audiences. This sometimes gives better exposure to intended audiences than traditional sources, with young people reporting they do not regularly use traditional news sites or government websites for information.

## Social media, belonging, identity and youth settlement

A social media ban without sufficient complementary measures to fill the gaps creates risks of further isolating already marginalised young people. It has the potential to undermine the ability of those more newly arrived to forge identity, access cultural content, and develop language and literacy skills essential for effective settlement. Barriers to accessing mainstream platforms, where civic information, rights, norms, and services are widely shared mean newly arrived young people may miss out on critical support significant to their settlement.

### What is needed?

Any blanket ban must be accompanied by opportunities for young people to build and sustain alternative spaces for social connection, as well as to access and share key information. Culturally responsive, and safe 'third spaces', such as youth-led digital hubs, should be resourced and developed. These should extend beyond basic chat-based platforms, and provide essential information for newly arrived and multicultural young people. These safe spaces must address privacy concerns, as young people may not feel safe sharing personal information and experiences in spaces regulated or auspiced by government, other formal institutions, or their own community.

Young people use online spaces in ways that are distinct to traditional institutions. Youth-led and community-based organisations play a critical role in supporting newly arrived and multicultural young people by fostering a genuine sense of trust and safety, as their lived experiences are shared and understood by facilitators of these digital spaces.<sup>xxxix</sup> Policy and program responses must invest in sustainable, youth-led initiatives, not just co-design, to ensure that the needs of this cohort are adequately met.

Further, the Government must support settlement and multicultural youth services to transition to alternative platforms to support a digital presence that can connect and communicate with young people online but outside of prohibited social media platforms. Service providers advised that they would continue to connect and support with young people on the platforms young people moved to and used. As such, resourcing services to transition to and work collaboratively to support young people in these spaces, will be essential to mitigate negative impacts for newly arrived young people.



**"You all think your restrictions work - adults, parents, schools, even the government - but people still find ways around it no matter how hard you try."**

- multicultural young person, 18 - 24 years old

## 2. Racism and cyber bullying

### Racism in the digital age

Online racism and cyber bullying are an extension of the everyday discrimination that young people face in schools, workplaces and public spaces. This is amplified in digital spaces that lack adequate regulation and adult oversight. A major concern newly arrived and multicultural young people reported was regularly seeing racist content online. This is consistent with findings from Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024 - 2029, which reported that more than half of young people and migrants had seen hate speech online (53%), which negatively impacted their mental health and caused emotional stress (58%).<sup>39</sup>

Young people reported racism and bullying occurred in a variety of ways – 'explicitly', from overt hate speech and discriminatory comments or disparaging memes/emojis that perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and 'subtly', taking the form of exclusion or microaggressions.<sup>40</sup>

**"I received really racist comments on TikTok video my friend and I posted ... about me wearing a headscarf, things like that."**

- multicultural young person, 16 years old

Experiencing racism online has been linked to serious mental health impacts, including isolation, lower self-esteem and a diminished sense of belonging.<sup>41</sup> This is exacerbated for those navigating settlement and cultural adjustment within the first few years of arrival in a new country. Research has found that racism can act as a powerful barrier to successful settlement, with young people reporting negative impacts such as erosion of trust in others, affected eating and fear for their physical safety.<sup>42</sup>

### Lack of support and platform moderation

Many young people reported feeling unsupported by platforms as content moderation was inconsistent and reporting to platforms rarely led to meaningful outcomes. This has been reported as a widespread problem.<sup>43</sup> Self-regulation by platforms has been criticised by experts, largely because of the active use of algorithms, which by their nature promote harmful content to young people, as this material is more likely to generate higher interactions, even if they are negative.<sup>44</sup> As a result of platforms failure to intervene, young people reported often feeling they were left to manage racism and other unsafe content on their own.

The anonymity of social media platforms can also embolden perpetrators and leave people feeling powerless to respond or seek recourse. The eSafety Commissioner supports those who have reported abuse from anonymous accounts by alerting social media services and assisting with removal of content.<sup>45</sup> However multicultural and newly arrived young people are known to be less likely to report abuse, often because of language barriers or lack of knowledge or access to support networks to be able to report or challenge racism online.<sup>46</sup>

Young people talked about trusted adults, including teachers and family members being dismissive of their experiences online and not understanding the impact of online racism. Research shows that young people in English Language Schools receive less digital support from teachers than those in mainstream education programs.<sup>47</sup> Most young people said they do not speak to parents/carers about these experiences at all, due to fear they would not understand, or would further chastise them for using social media. This could stem from a majority of parents reportedly perceiving social media as 'bad' or 'unhealthy' for young people, and a 'distraction from the real world'.<sup>48</sup>

Most young people and families reported that conversations about social media focused exclusively on screen time, rather than meaningful engagement or safety. This often leaves young people feeling misunderstood and reluctant to share their concerns or experiences with adults.



#### Case Study: SOUTH SUDANESE MINDS

The 'South Sudanese Minds' initiative, co-designed by young South Sudanese Australians used social media to promote mental health awareness through culturally relevant programs like Instagram Live talent showcases, and intergenerational Facebook conversations. Supported by TACSI, coHealth and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, this project showed how youth-led and community driven programs can use social media in powerful, tailored ways to foster connection and wellbeing.

## Patterns of usage and exposure

According to research, a high rate of exposure to racism online, both direct and vicarious, may be linked to time spent on social media.<sup>49</sup> Both newly arrived and multicultural young people reported spending on average 4+ hours daily on social media, compared to the average of 2.5 hours daily for Australian teens.<sup>50</sup> As such, it is possible that the newly arrived and multicultural young people consulted were more likely to interact with racist content given their increased usage.

**“If I told my dad, he would just say ‘we had it [racism] so much worse in my day’, he doesn’t understand what it’s like on social media.”**

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

Young people told us they believe that algorithms were to blame for the spread of racist content. Research also supports this, suggesting algorithms reinforce existing biases and normalise racism by creating echo chambers.<sup>51</sup> While some young people reported actively curating their feeds to encourage more inclusive content, others reported feeling powerless to respond.

### Concerned about racism on social media

62%

multicultural young people

31%

newly arrived young people

### Concerned about cyberbullying social media

40%

multicultural young people

30%

newly arrived young people

Notably, more multicultural young people surveyed were concerned about racism and cyberbullying on social media (62% and 31%), than newly arrived young people (40% and 30%). However, these issues were still the second most common concern for newly arrived young people. This difference may be because multicultural young people were more likely to use social media for activism (31%), keeping up with the news (70%), and politics (31%), while newly arrived young people reported using social media for politics and news less often (10% and 40%). This is consistent with research findings that show multicultural young people participate in ‘active citizenship’ in more informal ways, such as through political activism, compared to their newly arrived counterparts, and how digital participation often mirrors trends offline.<sup>52</sup>

Newly arrived young people may be less likely to engage with political and civic activities online as they often face substantial barriers to participation, including limited social networks, unfamiliarity with opportunities, and language and literacy challenges. The early settlement period is also crowded with critical priorities, like learning new systems and adjusting to their new environment.<sup>53</sup> These factors may contribute to their lower reporting of political engagement online, and fewer concerns about racism than young people who are more settled in Australia.<sup>54</sup>

### Newly arrived young people’s reported uses of social media

70%

social media for keeping up with the news

31%

social media for activism

31%

social media for politics

Caveat: total adds up to more than 100 as respondents could select more than one option



**Echo chamber:** An echo chamber, also known as a filter bubble, is an environment where a person mostly encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own.

From the eSafetyCommissioner’s glossary of terms ([see here](#))



**“[My parents] don’t understand, they think real racism is getting thrown off a bus ... they don’t think my cyberbullying racism is important.”**

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

### **Social media, racism, cyberbullying and youth settlement**

A social media ban may inadvertently hinder the settlement process for newly arrived young people because:

- it limits access to news and information, especially for those who rely on social media to remain updated about their home country and engage with content from their cultural communities,
- it reduces opportunities for informal learning and digital participation which are already limited for this cohort due to barriers like language, literacy and unfamiliarity with systems,
- it does not address core harms such as racism and cyberbullying, nor provide support to seek help about forms of harassment experienced online (which will continue via chat applications which are not banned), and
- it may delay digital literacy development, making it harder for young people to safely navigate online spaces and challenge racism online once they regain access.

### **What is needed?**

While young people are deeply concerned about racism on social media, the majority do not think a blanket ban is the solution. Instead, they call for:

- stronger moderation and filtering of content, with government and platforms to enforce content and algorithm ‘blocks’ to reduce exposure to harmful content,
- stricter rules for prohibiting hateful and discriminatory content, and enforcement of these rules by platforms and governments, which should focus on mandating platforms to be safe by design and imposing safety standards rather than enforcing a ban on young people,
- culturally sensitive digital literacy education programs to teach cross-cultural awareness, including anti-racism, and how to report online racism and strategies to protect mental health online, and
- youth-led solutions - young people are the most active on social media and bear the largest burden of racism so are best placed to create solutions.<sup>55</sup>
- As a result, harmful content is not only amplified but also entrenched through echo chambers, which limits exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforce users’ existing views.<sup>56</sup>



### **Case Study: YOUNG INITIATORS INSTAGRAM**

The **Young Initiators** is a leadership program coordinated by CMY. The program aims to empower multicultural young people as active citizens, and leaders of positive change in their local community. Their Instagram account, @the\_young\_initiators serves as a public platform to showcase youth-led projects and to share stories of social change and anti-racist content. By using Instagram as a tool to amplify young people’s work, celebrate their achievements and raise awareness about anti racism, the account moves from activism to creating a community that young people can engage in.



### 3. Mental health & addiction

#### The dual effects of social media on mental health

While social media is often attributed as the cause of Australia’s deepening youth mental health crisis, the impact of social media is more complex, particularly for newly arrived and multicultural young people.<sup>57</sup> For these cohorts it offers many benefits including connection, information and support.<sup>58</sup> While the ban intends to mitigate mental health risks, young people and workers are concerned a ban may unintentionally exacerbate existing mental health concerns by removing a critical lifeline.

Around one third (35%) of multicultural young people and one fifth (21%) of newly arrived young people surveyed reported that the impacts of social media use on mental health and wellbeing were a concern for them. However, most newly arrived young people (70%) and nearly half of multicultural young people (46%) reported that social media has both positive and negative impacts on their lives. Many also reported that they did not believe a ban was going to address the specific concerns they held.

On the positive and negative impacts of social media, multicultural young people shared the following:

|  Benefits  |  Harms  |
|---|--|
| Allows me to stay in contact with friends and organise things. I can also [send] memes/ videos to friends for a laugh. I can see when events are on and share them to attend. | Sometimes it [exposure to negative content] affect (sic) my self-esteem though but try not to compare as I become more educated. |
| Often it is calming and a way to relax and reconnect with friends I haven’t seen in a long time   | Sometimes looking at what everyone has accomplished makes me feel stuck in my life   |
| I can learn about real world news and politics that are going on in the world   | It can be upsetting to see some of the disgusting stuff people post (eg. literal gore)   |
| I really like seeing what opportunities and classes are around, what’s on, and what businesses are doing.   | Seeing what my friends are doing can also make me really sad because I know that life is not all great and sparkling.            |
| I like to have a way to keep up with friends and family.  | Don’t like that I am very reliant on it for entertainment  |

#### Mental health risks of the ban – losing a vital lifeline

Beyond risks, social media can also be a protective factor by connecting multicultural and newly arrived young people, acting as a vital bridge for accessing both community support and mental health services and informal ‘third places’. Losing these supports may exacerbate existing service inequities, particularly for multicultural and regional young people.<sup>59</sup> This can be further exacerbated for some by a distrust of services and cultural stigma associated with help seeking within some multicultural and newly arrived communities.<sup>60</sup>

Young people with intersectional identities reported that they felt more confident to seek help online for concerns and questions, and to use forums and networks on social media instead of seeking advice in person. Additionally, some young people reported that they turn to generative

AI for mental health advice, underscoring a critical shift in how young people access support and raising concerns about the reliability and oversight of digital tools more broadly.

**“Reddit and Tumblr got me through my transition - without the support I received there it would have made my life much harder. Without the YouTubers I watched, I would not have even figured out I was trans, and I would still be dealing with internalised homophobia”**

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old



**“Restrictions aren’t always the answer, supervision is. Keep an eye on the youth, teach us how to be safe. Don’t let them have the lack of awareness that I did when I was younger, but also don’t give them restrictions that destroy their social lives. Find a better solution.”**

**- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old**

Research shows that after family and friends, the internet is the preferred medium for seeking support for mental health, and advice for young people,<sup>61</sup> and that digital participation is an important tool for young people to support their mental health and wellbeing during settlement.<sup>62</sup> Losing access to this support is likely to have unintended consequences for young people. According to the Australian eSafety Commissioner:

**“An abstinence-based approach of cutting young people off the internet is likely to have adverse consequences for the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people not from supportive homes and engaged parents.”<sup>63</sup>**

Supporters of the ban argue that it will curb mental health risks, such as cyber bullying, body image issues and addictive behaviours.<sup>64</sup> While excessive use of social media correlates with heightened anxiety and depression,<sup>65</sup> broader societal factors also shape youth mental health, and a blanket ban is a blunt policy solution that inadequately addresses the interrelated factors contributing to poor mental health.<sup>66</sup>

## **Social media, mental health and youth settlement**

While settlement workers anticipate many needs of new arrivals, young people report drawing on social media to find information and additional support for issues and challenges they may feel embarrassed about sharing or have been unable to find elsewhere, including mental health and wellbeing support.

By banning young people from mainstream social media platforms—widely used by services and communities to share information and connect—a ban could lead to engagement in less moderated spaces. These spaces are likely to remain unrestricted, as users can access them without an account, increasing exposure to extremist content and misinformation not overseen by adults.<sup>67</sup> This is an especially pronounced risk for newly arrived young people who may have limited digital literacy skills to distinguish reliable information from misinformation, which can be heightened in an unfamiliar political context.

### **What is needed?**

If young people are banned from mainstream social media platforms, approaches that support them to seek mental health and wellbeing support offline, or alternative safe online spaces must be established and adopted. These should include tailored approaches for multicultural and newly arrived young people that are focused on:

- **intercultural capability, youth participation, trauma informed care, family-centred practice and youth and community engagement, and**
- **the unique challenges faced by this cohort, including racism, and an emphasis of the importance of self-identity and cultural identity in promoting resilience and wellbeing during settlement.<sup>68</sup>**

## Addiction and patterns of usage

Multicultural young people were more likely to worry about addiction (46%) and excessive screentime (61%) than their newly arrived peers (10%) and (20%). For newly arrived young people, the main concern was distraction from daily responsibilities (30%). This difference might reflect how newly arrived young people are using social media more purposefully, with 70% reporting using it for learning and development (vs 23% of multicultural young people), and fewer using it for entertainment (50% vs 76% of multicultural young people) or to pass time (20% vs 69% of multicultural young people).

Differences in usage between these cohorts may also suggest that newly arrived young people might not view their social media use as inherently problematic, as it may align with their goals of learning and adapting, or could relate to their exposure to Australian norms and expectations around digital use.<sup>69</sup> However more research is needed to understand this further.

## Addiction and algorithms – exacerbating harms

The rise of algorithm driven social media has transformed the way users engage with online content, even in the last decade.<sup>70</sup> Algorithms use automated software designed to optimise engagement and have been found to promote extreme, polarising and sensationalist material to generate higher interactions with platforms.<sup>71</sup>

At the heart of these harms lies a business model driven by data collection and advertising revenue. Platforms are designed to maximise user engagement by exploiting emotional triggers such as outrage, fear and insecurity, rather than to ensure the enjoyment and wellbeing of young people.<sup>72</sup> This has resulted in social media users often being fed increasingly one-sided, biased content that has been shown to encourage limited thinking and at its worst, to proliferate hate speech, misinformation, dangerous stereotypes and racism.<sup>73</sup> As a result, harmful content is not only amplified but also entrenched through echo chambers, which limits exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforce users' existing views.<sup>74</sup>

## On their experiences with algorithms on social media, young people shared:



**“Scrolling on social media is already very time consuming and energy draining for my friends but as neurodivergent person, I find myself particularly susceptible to feeling locked into scrolling, which not only makes me feel bad but also takes a lot of time away from things I want to enjoy.”**

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

**“I think there should be limitations to what can appear on people’s social media not that they should have no access or permission from parents. It is the internet that should be limited and impacted not the young people who use it.”**

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old



**Algorithm:** machine learning-driven recommender systems that personalise and prioritise content based on user data—such as demographics, search history, and behaviour—to maximise engagement and reach.

*From the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society, Social Media: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – Final Report.*



**“Most [parents] probably wouldn’t have a clue as to how to monitor social media. [Put it into the] too hard basket for all of it. But once you given them a phone you open the flood gates and don’t know how to stop it.”**

**- parent of multicultural person/people**

## Social media ‘addiction’ and youth settlement

The engagement driven design of social media platforms can expose young people to harmful content, which can undermine belonging and isolate them. This isolation can heighten vulnerability to misinformation and even contribute to online radicalisation by driving young people to less regulated and potentially more harmful spaces.<sup>75</sup> This can be more pronounced for newly arrived young people who have less social capital and fewer support networks.

Rather than imposing blanket restrictions, strategies that foster media literacy and promote safe, meaningful engagement with parents and young people would better support positive digital participation. Ensuring strategies are culturally responsive and tailored to the needs of different cohorts of young people will make them accessible.

### What is needed?

To address negative impact of technocentric factors, like algorithms and addictive technologies, platforms must be regulated to make them ‘safe by design’. Platforms must be ordered to restrict features like infinite scrolling, and have mandatory safety features, such as algorithm transparency, giving users more oversight of the role of algorithms and control over the content they see.<sup>76</sup>

The Australian Privacy Commissioner has argued that platforms can effectively regulate for greater user safety. This was evident in the reported dramatic shifts in user experience on X (formerly Twitter) following Elon Musk’s 2022 acquisition of the platform. After cutting 80% of the platform’s safety engineering staff, X reportedly became a less safe space for users with response times to hateful messages slowing by 20%.<sup>77</sup> However, there were also market repercussions to such decisions, with X’s advertising revenue decreasing by more than 45% following Musk’s acquisition. This suggests that greater regulation of platform actions related to online safety may also benefit platforms and is something the government should consider when weighing the costs and benefits of increased regulation of social media platforms.<sup>78</sup>

As part of the online safety regulatory framework, the Australian Government must ensure that social media platforms introduce measures that allow users control over what content they see by having the ability to alter, reset or turn off their personal algorithms. This was proposed in the Digital Duty of Care Bill 2024 that failed to pass parliament in 2024; however a digital duty of care has been flagged as a possible future measure by the current government.<sup>79</sup>

Given the ongoing lack of enforceability for ‘global tech giants’, many who operate beyond Australia’s jurisdiction, there is a critical need for international collaboration. Without coordinated global standards and enforcement mechanisms, platforms can bypass their obligations.<sup>80</sup> Australia’s commitment to international regulatory frameworks and multilateral pressure, through support for the UN Global Digital Compact, are critical to holding big companies accountable and ensuring that safety standards are upheld.<sup>81</sup>



## Case Study: RESTRICTING ALGORITHMS IN AMERICA<sup>82</sup>

In America, various states (e.g. Connecticut) have adopted regulations that are focused on making the products safer through design of the platform itself rather than limiting individual user behaviour. These include restrictions on algorithms for users under 18 (without parental consent) which requires platforms to display content chronologically for minors, rather than promoting content based on what the algorithm determines is likely to keep the user on the platform. Regulations provide enforcement powers to the State Attorney General, including the ability to issue fines to platforms for non-compliance.

These laws are among the strongest in the world for regulating addictive platform design and protecting young users while still supporting young people's access to online communities and freedom of expression.

However, critics have raised concerns about the enforceability of the legislation and how platforms will verify ages and apply parental controls effectively, similar to what has been raised in Australia. However, this emerging legislation illustrates alternatives to a blanket ban by addressing addictive algorithms through regulation and system design interventions to enhance online safety for children and young people.

## Challenges and opportunities for family engagement

**“Both parents might be working multiple jobs ... or they might not use social media themselves ... It's the blind leading the blind.”**

– parent of multicultural young person/people

### Barriers to family engagement

Multicultural and newly arrived families face multiple, intersecting barriers to engaging with and supervising young people's social media use. The challenges posed by platforms not prioritising safety are often compounded for families with lower levels of English proficiency and/or digital literacy who can face barriers to access the necessary resources and supports to understand and successfully navigate children's and young people's digital participation. Financial stress and poor digital access can also exacerbate barriers for multicultural and newly arrived families. Additionally, due to juggling the requirements and stresses of settlement, many newly arrived parents lack the time and resources to provide necessary oversight and support for their children and young people online. This extends to their capacity to enforce a social media ban once enacted.

These findings are supported by a 2023 study into parental perception of young peoples' online behaviour in multicultural communities in Australia, which found that “parents from multicultural societies are less equipped to deal with cyber threats that their children face and are ill-equipped to monitor and mitigate the risks posed.”<sup>84</sup>

This difficulty is compounded by the 'digital divide' between generations—a distinct gap in access, skills, and confidence in using digital technologies—that is more pronounced for multicultural and newly arrived young people and their parents or carers compared to the broader population.<sup>85</sup> This was demonstrated in the survey, with many young people reporting limited parental engagement in their social media use. Fifty percent of newly arrived young people and 61% of multicultural young people reported never or rarely discussing concerns about social media with their families. Similarly, 69% of newly arrived young people and 54% of multicultural young people reported having no restrictions on their use.

### Protective but limited strategies

Some multicultural families reportedly take protective actions to increase their children's and young people's safety online, such as increased monitoring when aware of issues or advising children to block users. Where adult supervision of social media existed, it was minimal, such as 'friending' children on platforms or setting basic screen time limits. These strategies were often simple and reactive, rarely supported by open conversations or efforts to build long-term digital literacy skills to help children and young people navigate the online world safely.

**“One time a guy was harassing me online, so I went to my parents to tell them my concerns ... and they helped me out by comforting me and telling me to block them.”**

– multicultural young person, 17 years old.

Some multicultural families reported having more active involvement and greater oversight over their children's and young people's social media use. However, all parents reported feeling ill-equipped to navigate the digital worlds their children inhabit. Research suggests that parents and carers from collectivist cultures are more likely to use restrictions rather than mediation to manage their children's online safety and internet use.<sup>86</sup> However, restrictive approaches alone are unlikely to equip young people with the skills needed to navigate online challenges independently and may prove unhelpful at preventing harms in the longer term. Once young people are old enough to access social media, they may lack the skills and experience to do so safely.

**"The content is out of my control, and I am worried about it, but this is manageable [screen time limits]... I'm worried about the content, not the screen time. I manage that."**

– parent of multicultural young person/people

While some parents expressed confidence about their ability to support their children online, this was often contingent on access to practical and culturally tailored support, including in-language training and workshops.

**"If you were to ask me what I thought would be sufficient, I would probably say some sort of module for parents in schools, or a one pager with tips of healthy social media use, and examples of this and unhealthy use."**

– parent of multicultural young person/people

**"Parents hand over their device because they don't have literacy about the digital world... they might buy [their kids] a digital device because their kids are demanding it, but they have no idea what it means to hand a child a device. They need digital literacy [programs] to give them some skills on how to monitor, and what it means to give a child an iPhone/iPad. Parents need more understanding, and digital literacy skills on that."**

– parent of multicultural young person/people

Parents are wanting to engage in their children's digital worlds, and they play a more active role in their children's lives online but they must be given support and resources

to manage the dangers and risks associated with social media and tools to get involved in the management of this.

**"Yes, parents can support their kids. They are having to navigate all social relationships, and social media is just another one that you have to navigate and adjust to."**

– parent of multicultural young person/people

## Knowledge gaps and consequences

While families reported being aware of common risks, such as exposure to harmful content and cyberbullying, other risks like image-based abuse, radicalisation, gambling or AI-related threats were rarely discussed, reflecting a potential knowledge gap requiring further research.

Gaps in families' knowledge and understanding of young people's online experiences meant that young people reported turning to peers, siblings, or school for guidance regarding their social media use and any concerns they had. While this was reported as helpful, it may not provide the comprehensive support young people need to address serious online risks and could increase vulnerability, especially for those who are newly arrived. This highlights the need to strengthen intergenerational dialogue and to equip families with digital literacy and the tools needed to support their young peoples' safe digital participation.<sup>87</sup>

**"Schools obviously have a role to play in this education; they need to be hiring younger people and teachers who are not anti-internet and actually will educate kids instead of fear monger."**

– young person, 18 – 24 years old.

Families were largely supportive of external interventions for managing social media use, including the social media ban. For families, this stemmed from feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of online risks and the lack of tools to respond effectively.

Research suggests many first-generation and newly arrived parents and carers are less likely to know where to seek digital support beyond schools, and are less equipped to handle the risks their children encounter online due to a lack of culturally appropriate resources and unfamiliarity with Australian systems.<sup>88</sup> Research with multicultural parents in 2023 found that 80% of respondents were not aware of any government policies or initiatives regarding online protection of young people, highlighting a real disconnect between the resources

and tools available and what is used by multicultural families.<sup>89</sup> In contrast, research by the eSafety Commissioner found that about half of parents they surveyed felt confident to deal with cyberbullying

and knew where to get help in relation to their child's online safety.<sup>90</sup> This suggests there is a gap between knowledge of multicultural parents and the general population.

## Social media, parenting and youth settlement

While digital and social media can act as an important tool for newly arrived and multicultural young people to bridge barriers and connect with services, education, and community networks during settlement and beyond, it can also create intergenerational tensions. This occurs when barriers to digital participation for multicultural and newly arrived families compound with barriers to accessing resources and supports impacting their capacity to support their children and young people to manage online risks. This can lead to overcompensation through either permissive or restrictive parenting approaches to managing online activity and/or avoidance or secretive behaviour among young people. This can drive online activity underground, exacerbate feelings of misunderstanding about use, and potentially increase young people's exposure to harm.<sup>91</sup> A ban alone will not equip families with the knowledge they need to support their children and young people to safely navigate online spaces, particularly those that are not subject to the ban or once they turn 16 years old.

### What is needed?

To address these challenges, a social media ban must be complemented with other interventions, such as comprehensive and culturally tailored digital literacy programs for multicultural and newly arrived parents. These could stand alone or be embedded within existing parenting courses for newly arrived and multicultural communities. These programs should focus on technical skills, as well as tools to foster open dialogue between parents and children about online participation, addressing issues that have been identified as key concerns for young people and adults alike. Community informed and community led organisations and movements should be involved in the design and delivery of these programs, to ensure skills and knowledge gaps are targeted effectively, and to leverage existing networks and trusted relationships for fostering engagement.



## 4. Implementation: Key considerations for Newly Arrived Young People

While the intention behind the social media ban is to respond to parent concerns and protect young people, there are likely to be broader implications for young people's digital inclusion, mental health, and access to information – all factors critical to successful settlement for newly arrived young people. Findings suggest a ban could have disproportionately negative impacts for newly arrived young people, and implementation must be preceded by further consultation and research into strategies and tools to mitigate likely risks for this cohort, including:

### Impact on Digital Inclusion and Digital Literacy

Digital participation is recognised as critical to full and equal participation in society and social media is a vital tool in the digital integration of newly arrived young people settling in Australia, facilitating access to information, services, and networks. The daily use of social media by young people also develops their digital literacy as they navigate online worlds, evaluate information and manage their privacy. It also encourages critical thinking through creation and interaction with diverse content. Having a digitally literate generation of young Australians who can tell fact from fiction, navigate digital spaces safely, and build meaningful connections, protects and safeguards democracy while a blanket ban on access is likely to result in less opportunities for young people, especially those who are more newly arrived, to build these essential skills.<sup>92</sup>

**“There are some resources online to support parents to manage screen time and device use and parental controls. It is not enough. Real training, real sessions have to happen on a digital understanding to improve their [multicultural parents’] skills. More is needed than just handing out resources. Parents need to be empowered.”**

– parent of multicultural young person/people

### Access to Information

Social media platforms are key methods through which young people access information relating to settlement and life in Australia. Settlement organisations, like most services and groups in Australia, rely on social media platforms to disseminate information and connect with young people. The ban raises significant concerns about how services will reach young people once they lose access to social media. Social media often translates information that is accessible on other interfaces, like government websites, into more accessible or engaging formats for their audiences. This sometimes gives better exposure to intended audiences than traditional sources. A good example is the recent increase in use of multicultural and youth-facing organisations' social media platforms to promote government public health messaging – such as the recent national social media campaign about vaping information targeting multicultural youth.<sup>93</sup> Once young people are removed from platforms, alternative communication strategies must be developed to ensure continued access to vital information.

### Support for Regaining Access to Social Media

Once young people are able to access social media at the age of 16, they may lack the digital literacy and analytical skills required to navigate platforms safely. The ban does not address the issue of building the skills and knowledge of newly arrived and multicultural young people and families to safely navigate social media and engage online. Programs to support this transition and equip multicultural young people and families with skills to use social media safely will be necessary.

### Emerging Challenges

Privacy remains an ongoing concern despite, and for some, because of the ban. A ban requires a significant amount of data to be collected, especially for age verification technology, raising concerns about data collection practices with minors and data security risks, such as identity theft, fraud, and unsolicited marketing. The ban does not address platform regulation issues and safety concerns, especially in regards to data security. Without meaningfully regulating platforms, and demanding stronger safety measures, existing risks and concerns are likely to grow.



**Families:** An inclusive term that encompasses parents, carers, guardians, kin, and families of choice, recognising the diverse relationships and support networks that contribute to the care and wellbeing of children and young people.

# Conclusion

Australia's decision to legislate a social media ban for under 16-year-olds represents a significant intervention in the digital lives of young people. While the policy is driven by legitimate concerns, this research highlights that a blanket ban is unlikely to address the nuanced challenges facing multicultural and newly arrived young people, and risks creating additional barriers to their participation and settlement without further intervention.

The findings underscore a need for a more balanced approach that prioritises robust digital safety measures without sacrificing young people's rights to access information. Instead of restricting access, there is an urgent need to do more to ameliorate the lack of action from technology giants to ensure platforms are 'safe by design', for all of us.<sup>94</sup> As Australia moves forward

to implement this legislation enforcing the ban, it is essential for governments and organisations to invest in consultation and research to inform inclusive, evidence-based strategies that ensure safe and equitable digital participation for all young people. A comprehensive approach to implementing the ban will need to consider the particular needs of this cohort of young people and their supporters. This should include education, community engagement and holistic support systems to better protect and serve the needs of diverse multicultural young people. With greater content moderation, platforms being designed to be safe, and tailored digital literacy programs. Without this, the ban is unlikely to achieve its aim to make safer digital spaces for young Australians.





## Annexure 1: Methodology

This research adopted a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative consultations and scan of relevant literature.

However, research highlights that multicultural and newly arrived young people are not a homogenous group, and many newly arrived young people and those experiencing higher levels of financial stress face barriers to digital access that impact upon their use.<sup>95</sup> As such, it is necessary to recognise that needs will be shaped by each young person's unique perspective and identity, and to consider the role of intersectionality in shaping experiences.

### Literature Review

Australian and international literature was reviewed to construct a clear picture of the existing understanding about the use, benefits and risks of social media in relation to multicultural and newly arrived young people. This scan reiterated the centrality of social media for connection, identity and civic participation for young people. Despite these benefits the literature also identified the risks of social media, with studies documenting the adverse impacts on young people, however there was little evidence about the nuanced experiences of this particular cohort. The literature has been used to inform the discussion and findings within this paper.

## Data Collection

In November 2024, CMY conducted targeted surveys of multicultural young people to explore social media usage and perceptions of the proposed ban. Additional insights were gathered through interviews and focus groups with CMY staff who were also parents, as well as a coordinator of a parent group. Preliminary findings were published in November 2024.<sup>96</sup>

There were a total of 13 responses analysed from the survey with multicultural young people. A total of 14 responses were received, but one respondent was over 25 years old and this response was excluded. Of the remaining 13 respondents, the median average age was 17 years old. Majority of the respondents were woman or female identifying (n = 2). Three respondents identified as man or male, and two respondents identified as non-binary. Majority of respondents spoke English at home (n = 9) and over a third spoke a language other than English at home (n = 4). The respondents were from a variety of geographic locations, with representation from both metropolitan and regional Victoria.

From January to March 2025, a survey with newly arrived young people was conducted. To facilitate participation, the author attended a homework club and an English language school to support students to complete the survey, and documented relevant discussions.

A total of 14 responses were received for the survey of newly arrived young people. Four respondents were over 25 years old and these responses were excluded, analysis was conducted on the remaining 10 responses. A majority of respondents were in the age bracket 18 – 24 years old



(n = 9), and one respondent was 15 years old. A majority of respondents had arrived in Australia in the last 12 months (n =8), and one respondent had arrived in 2022 and one pre-2016. The majority of respondents identified as man or male (n =6) and three identified as woman or female (n=3), one identified as non-binary. We did not ask respondents additional demographic questions so as to make the survey more accessible for this cohort.

All surveys were promoted through CMY's social media channels. The survey questions were developed from the Victorian Government's 'Engage' Survey about the proposed changes to social media age limits.<sup>97</sup>

A survey for parents was conducted in November 2024, however limited responses (n=1) required adoption of alternative methods for understanding parent perspectives. Consultations were conducted with parents and those who work with them between November 2024 and May 2025. A total of seven multicultural youth and settlement workers were consulted, this included three who were parents from multicultural backgrounds with children under 16 years of age, all other participants were actively working with young people in the family context and/or in parenting programs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the original survey questions as a guide, interviews were recorded and transcribed to support analysis for key themes.

All participants provided informed consent, and for those under 16, parental consent was obtained. Data was analysed using thematic analysis, with key themes identified collaboratively by the research team.

Qualitative data from consultations and surveys informed the use of direct quotes in this paper, while survey responses underpin the analysis presented. In June 2025, the author presented the research findings and recommendations to the Victorian Multicultural Youth Alliance (VMYA), seeking validation from settlement sector representatives regarding the consistency of these findings with sector experience. Their feedback has helped to shape the recommendations.

### Limitations

Reflecting on the findings, it is important to note that participants represent a small sample size, and the young people we spoke to are not representative of all young people from refugee and migrant or newly arrived backgrounds. As such these findings can be indicative only.

There are also limited quotes from newly arrived young people due to the nature of how the survey was conducted, and English language barriers. As such, the report heavily relies on quotes from multicultural young people.

Further, majority of newly arrived respondents were 18 -24 years old, and as such the age ban will not affect them, and their perspectives likely reflect this.

## Annexure 2: Findings

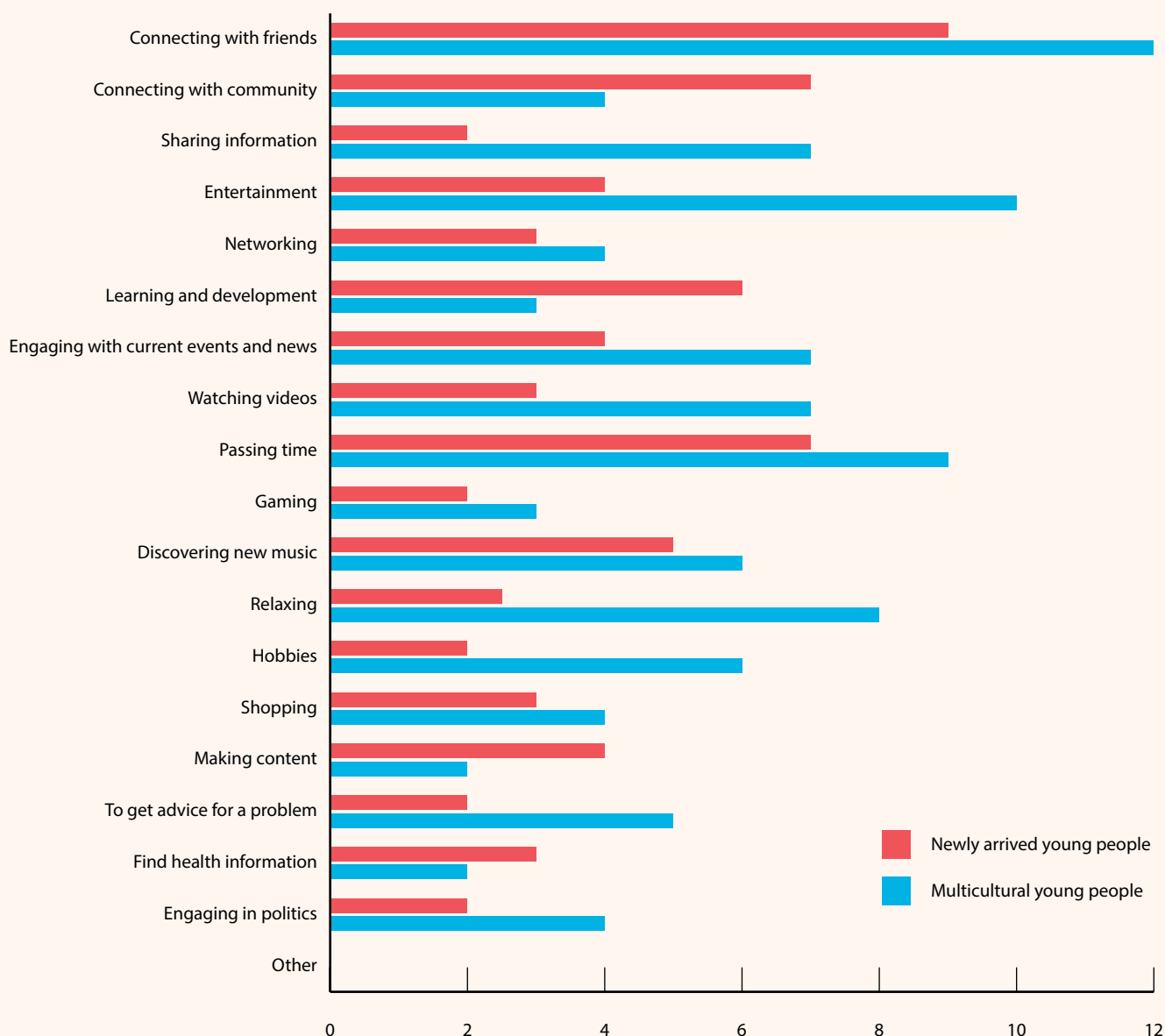
We conducted a mixed methods approach to collecting data. This included administering two surveys, one with multicultural young people (MYP) (n=13), and one with newly arrived young people (NAYP) (n=10) to understand their perspectives of the Social Media Ban. This was complimented by consultations with both parents/carers and workers (n=7). Consultation notes and open text survey responses have been included as deidentified quotes to contextualise survey findings and offer further insight to survey responses.<sup>98</sup>

### How young people use social media

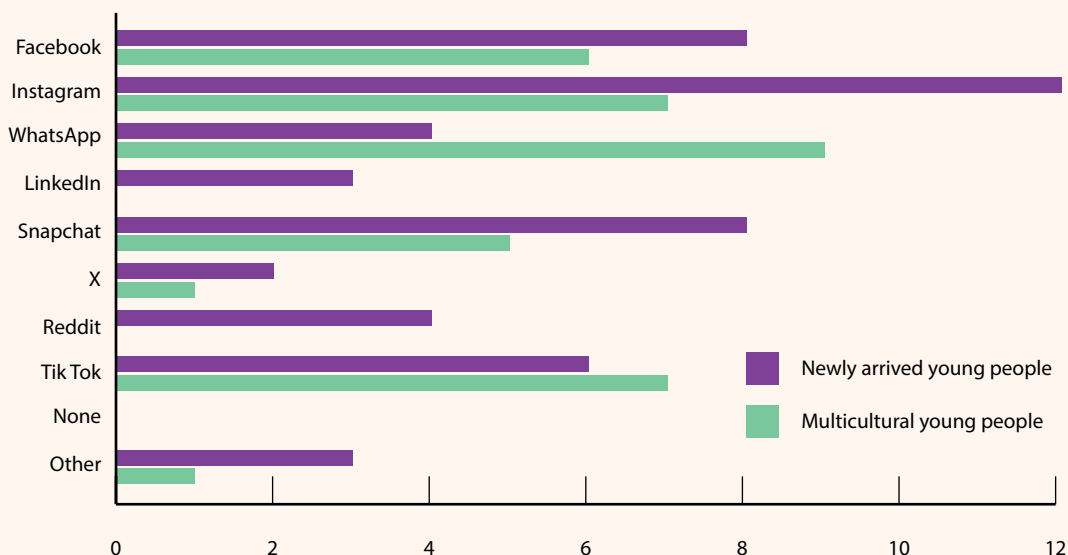
Both newly arrived young people (NAYP) and multicultural young people (MYP) predominantly used the same platforms, with MYP using some additional platforms. The most popular platforms for both cohorts were Facebook and Instagram, followed by TikTok and Snapchat. However, MYP were more likely to use additional platforms including LinkedIn and Reddit.

NAYP used social media for varied purposes, with majority of respondents noting they used it to connect with friends (90%, n = 9), connect with community (70%, n = 7), watch videos (70%, n = 7), and for learning and development (60%, n = 6). This cohort also noted they used social media platforms to obtain advice on a problem, to find health information, for self-expression, and to learn about news and current events. MYP however, most commonly used social media to connect with friends (92%, n = 12) and for entertainment (77%, n = 10) and were more likely to use it for engaging in politics (30%, n = 4) and to get advice on a problem (38%, n = 5) than NAYP.

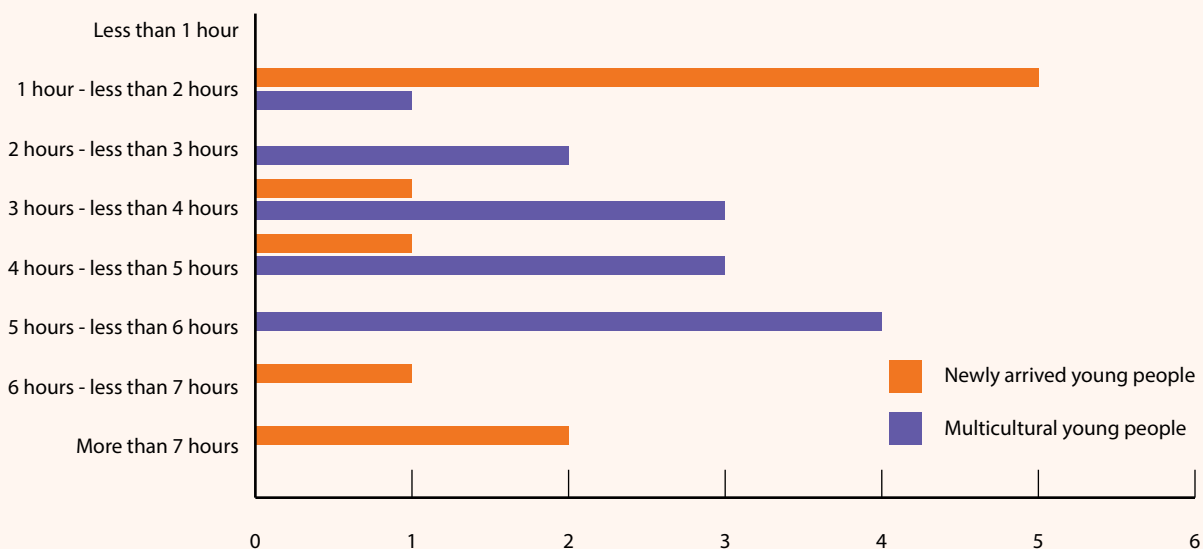
### Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural young people reporting what they use social media for



**Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural young people reporting the platforms they use**

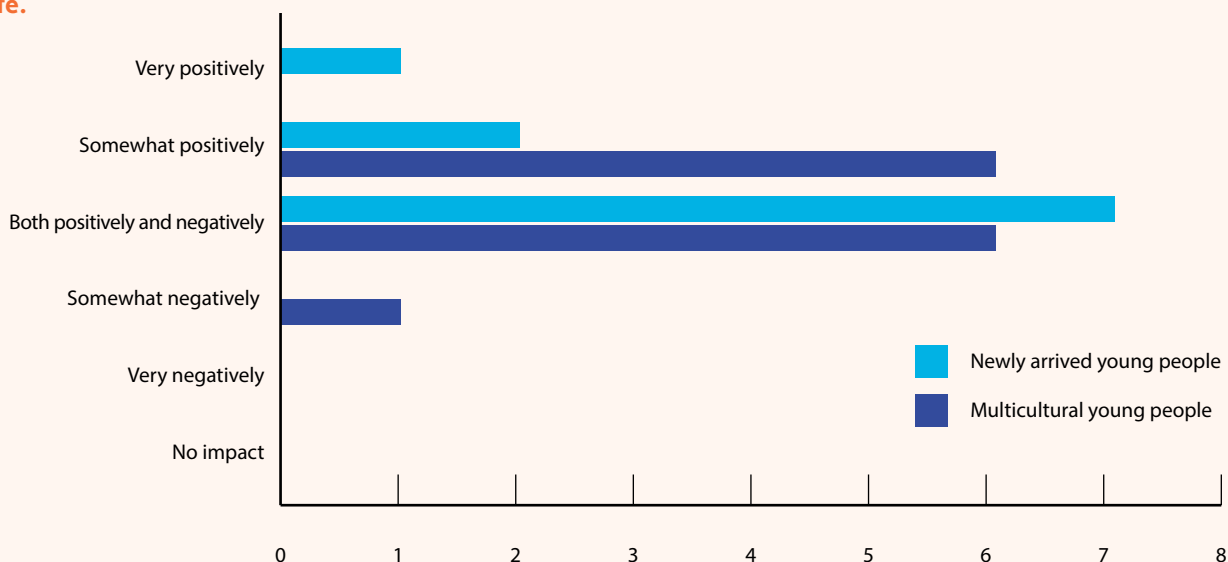


**Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting time spent on social media daily.**



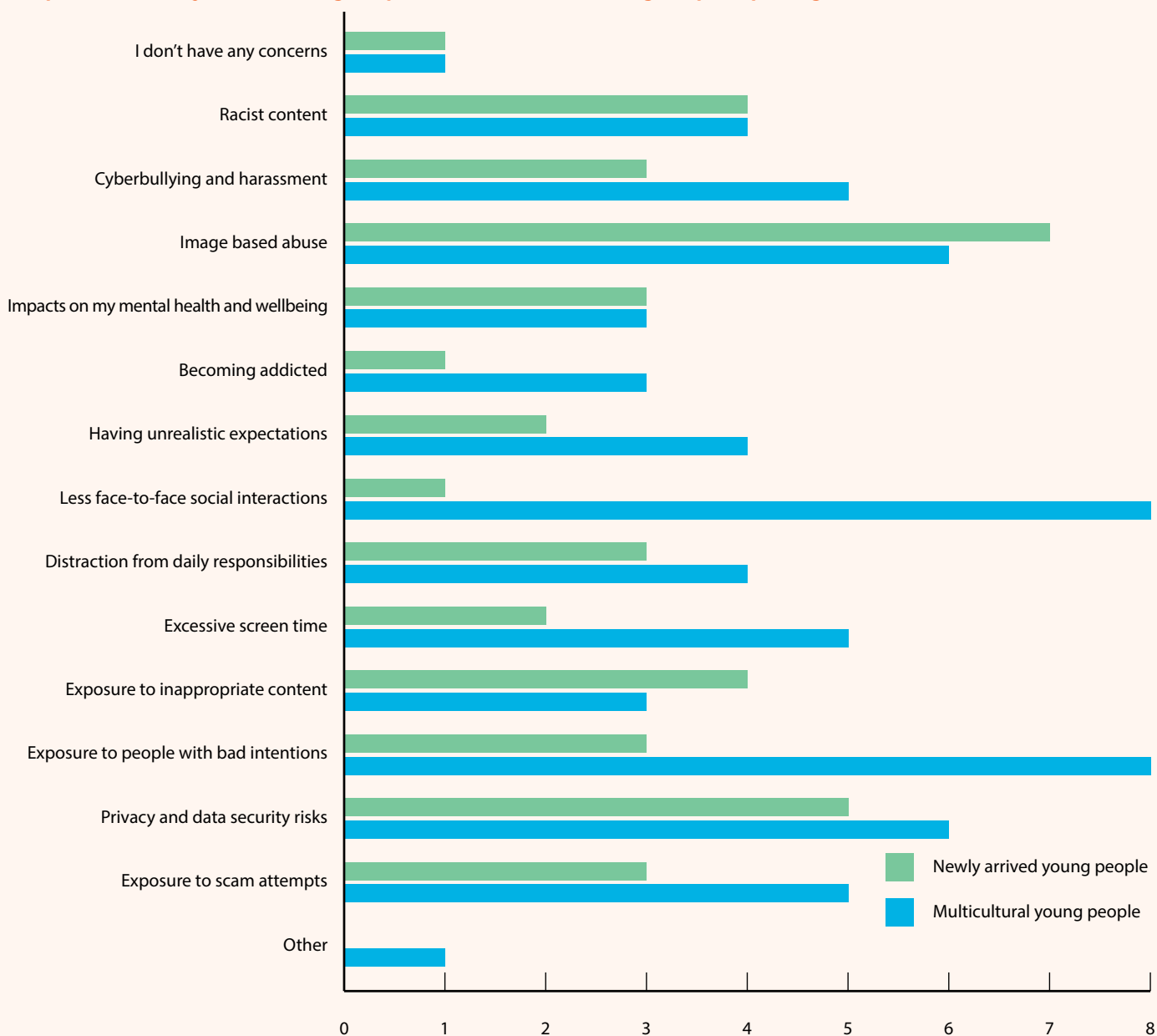
Time spent on social media varied greatly among young people. Half of the NAYP reported spending 1-2 hours daily on social media (50%, n = 5), followed by a quarter who reported they spend more than 7 hours daily on social media (20%, n = 2). This contrasted with MYP who reported spending more time on social media overall, with most spending 4 hours (23%, n = 3) and only one young person spending 1-2 hours (8%).

**Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting the impact of social media on their life.**



Most NAYP (70%, n = 7) and MYP (46%, n = 6) reported that social media impacted their lives both positively and negatively. However, overall, both cohorts were more likely to consider social media as being more positive than negative.

**Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting their worries about social media**



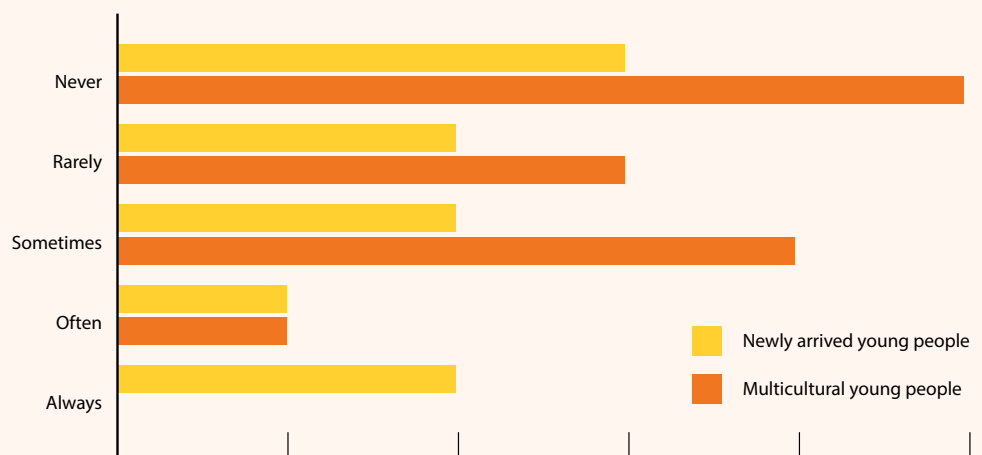
## What are young people worried about on social media?

NAYP and MYP shared core concerns about social media, identifying privacy, exposure to inappropriate content and racist content and the impact of social media on their mental health as significant worries. However, MYP were also concerned about excessive screen time and becoming addicted to social media. In contrast, NAYP were more likely to be concerned about exposure to people with bad intentions and social media as a distraction from daily responsibilities. Looking at the data, key concerns of MYP relate to the addictive nature of platforms, whereas NAYP were more concerned about interpersonal risks.

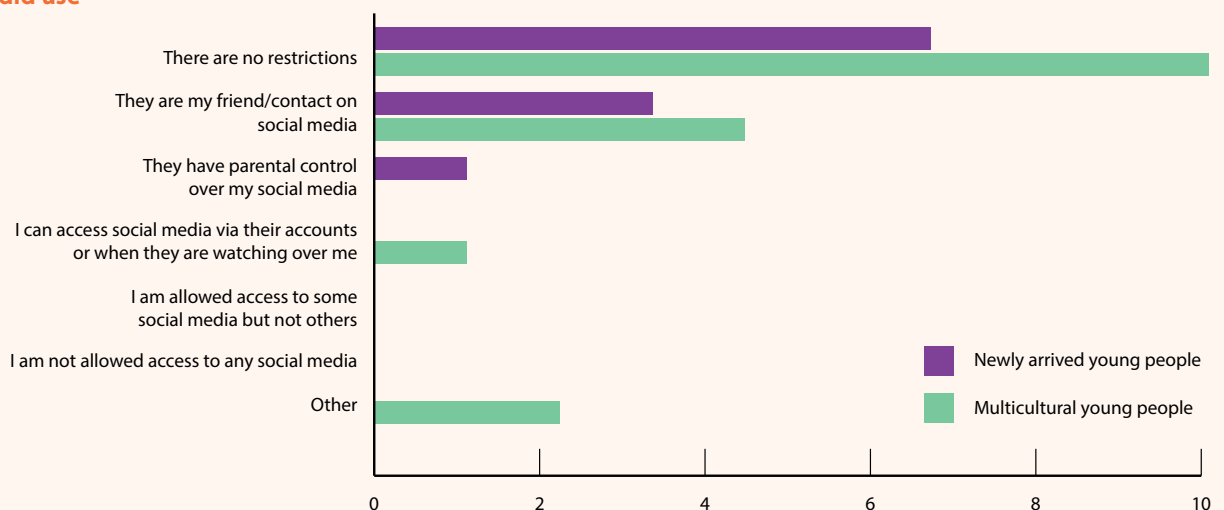
## How do young people engage with parents and carers about their social media use?

Both NAYP and MYP reported limited engagement from with their parents/carers in their social media use. 50% of NAYP (n = 5) and 61% of MYP (n = 8) reported rarely or never speaking to their parents/carers about social media (Fig. 11 & 12) and most reported that they had few or no restrictions on their use imposed by parents/carers (Fig. 13 & 14). This may be attributable to the fact that majority of respondents were over 16 years old. However, survey respondents who were under 16 years old also reported that they rarely spoke to parents/carers about their social media use.

### Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting the frequency they speak to parents/carers about social media



### Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting how their parents manage their social media use

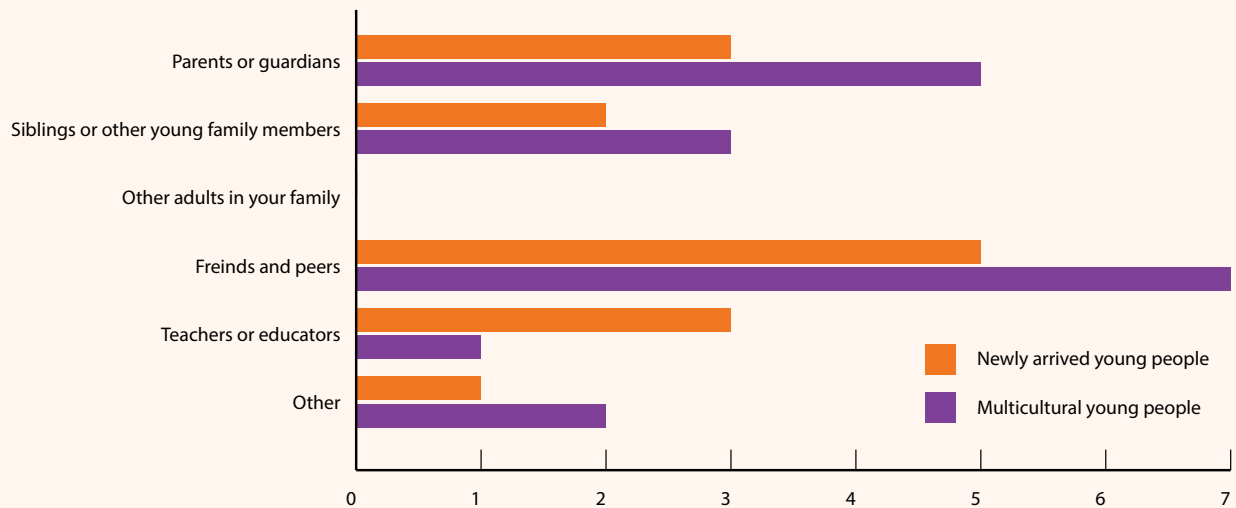


Parental management of young peoples' social media, where it did occur, was often limited to being a contact on platforms (e.g. a Facebook friend) or setting basic limits (such as restrictions on screen time or time limits on devices). NAYP were more likely to describe familial attitudes as 'hands off' compared to MYP who reported a higher prevalence of their parents/carers engaging in some form of active oversight.

Of their social media use, parents/carers of multicultural young people shared that they sometimes felt ill-equipped to support their children's digital needs and required greater education and support themselves.

In conversations and interviews with young people both MYP and NAYP cohorts reported relying on themselves, friends or siblings for advice and support alongside of their parents.

## Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting who they speak to about their social media use



## What do people think about the social media ban?

The following analyses open text survey responses from all cohorts to the question 'what are your thoughts on the proposed Social Media Ban'.

Multicultural parents expressed divided views on a social media ban for young people. Many welcomed the ban, citing difficulty managing their children's online use as a key reason. Others felt capable to support safe use but said they lacked the proper tools and resources to do this, and a ban had little effect on this.

Multicultural young people, however, largely opposed the ban, advocating for platform-level content controls rather than restricting access.

Newly arrived young people were more supportive of the ban but often confused it with a broader phone ban, indicating possible limited understanding of the distinction.

When asked 'what would young people prefer?', survey respondents suggested: 'tailored feeds', 'empowering education', 'real world skills', 'customisable platforms', and 'content moderation'.



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- 'What do you use social media for?'
- 'What if anything, worries you about social media?'
- 'How do your parents/carers engage with or manage your social media use?'
- 'Who do you speak to if you have questions or concerns about social media and what you are seeing online?'

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