



Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN Australia)

Submission to
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
References Committee on
**'Issues facing diaspora communities in
Australia.'**

July, 2020

1. About MYAN

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people aged 12-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds. MYAN works in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies at the state and territory and national levels to ensure the recognition of the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in policy and practice.

MYAN provides expert policy advice to government, undertakes a range of sector development activities, and supports young people to develop leadership and advocacy skills.

2. About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia, with reference to the following Terms of Reference:

- Support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations, including government grants and other funding
- Safety concerns among diaspora communities, and means for strengthening the protection and resilience of vulnerable groups
- Barriers to participation in democratic and social institutions
- Opportunities to strengthen communication and partnerships between government and diaspora communities in Australia, and
- Any related matters.

This submission presents the views and opinions of diaspora youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds across Australia. MYAN worked with young people within our networks, whose input forms the main content of this submission. The views expressed by young people are their own, and do not provide a statistically representative view of all diaspora youth. We encourage the Committee to also hear directly from young people, and we are happy to coordinate these meetings.

Diaspora youth are an incredibly diverse group, due to multiple intersecting factors including country of origin, cultural background, migration stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, and age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures, and workforce experience.¹ This diversity is highlighted in the reflections of the young people who contributed to this submission.

¹ VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO and MYAN (2017) Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

Diaspora youth typically negotiate complex, and multiple, political, social and cultural identities. For some young people who were born overseas, they feel more closely identified to Australia than their country of origin, while others speak of feeling connected to multiple countries depending on where their families are from, their country of birth or the countries they have spent an extensive amount of time living or travelling in.

For the purposes of this paper, we use the term diaspora primarily to refer to a *group of people, bound together by a common ethno-linguistic and/or religious identity, who no longer reside in their home country.*²

Please note contributions contained in the submission have been edited for length and/or clarity.

3. Key Issues

The young people who informed this submission have highlighted the following issues as relevant to the matters of this Inquiry:

- Issues with current funding, registration and accreditation processes for smaller, diaspora led charitable organisations
- Racism and discrimination
- Barriers to essential services and supports
- Mental health, and
- Immigration policy.

4. Key Recommendations

- 1) That all levels of government undertake more research on Australian diaspora youth, their families and communities to better inform Government policy and service delivery.
- 2) That all levels of governments increase grant opportunities for diaspora youth to deliver peer-led projects, and develop initiatives to address the issues affecting them, and their communities.
- 3) DFAT review existing requirement for organisational registrations and accreditation based on the revenue threshold/size of the organisation rather than the current one rule for all.
- 4) DFAT and AusAid explore making grants available for diaspora organisations for development of their capacity and capital/IT upgrades.
- 5) DFAT and AusAid explore a new category of Commonwealth grants available to smaller diaspora organisations.
- 6) The Federal Government implement a national anti-racism strategy.
- 7) Strategic, long-term approaches to supporting diaspora organisations and initiatives are needed from all levels of government, alongside one off grants.
- 8) The Federal Government ensure that decision-making on protection claims is both swift and robust.

² G Hugo, 'An Australian Diaspora?' *Internal Migration*, Vol. 44 (1), p. 55.

- 9) The Federal Government ensure that there is access to appropriate mental health support for people who have been detained in detention centres, and ensure that this support is available to all who have spent time in detention, including children and young people.
- 10) The Federal Government ensure that funding is invested in targeted and tailored mental health strategies to respond to the needs of diaspora youth, including those dealing with the impacts of intergenerational trauma.
- 11) The Australian Department of Education work with relevant organisations to develop appropriate educational programs and resources to help Hazara and other diaspora youth, and their peers, learn more about their respective cultures in school.

5. Background

Globalisation has brought about a dramatic increase in the volume and scope of international migration, transforming societies, creating diaspora and developing transnational identities. Australia is home to large and varied youth diaspora populations. As at 2016, 45 per cent of all young people in Australia aged 12 to 24 were from refugee and migrant backgrounds, 49 per cent of Australians had one or both parents born overseas, and more than 300 languages were spoken in Australian homes.³

Australia is one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world, and cultural diversity has become one of this country's most defining contemporary characteristics.⁴ In 2019, every single country from around the world was represented in Australia's population.⁵ Multiculturalism is a central tenet of Australian national identity and an asset to the country in an era of globalisation.

Diaspora Youth from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds

Diaspora youth make important contributions to their communities and play a crucial role in fostering intercultural dialogue, in supporting interregional cooperation and in promoting social cohesion.⁶ As they bridge different countries, cultures and identities, diaspora youth are equipped with a diverse range of strengths and capabilities, which can include being multilingual, having well-developed cross-cultural skills and global networks, and having strong aspirations to achieve educationally and contribute to Australian society.⁷

Young people are more interconnected-economically, environmentally, politically, socially- than ever before. Due to the connections that diaspora youth are able to facilitate across borders, as well as the number of young people who are spending parts of their lives in different nation states, young people are deeply aware of their interconnectedness with people and environments around the globe and their contribution to a global society and economy.⁸

³ MYAN (2019) *Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy* Available at: myan.org.au

⁴ Rajadurai, E (2018) *Success in Diversity-The Strength of Australia's Multiculturalism*

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) *Australia's Population By Country Of Birth* Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au>

⁶ Council of Europe (n.d.) *Diaspora Youth* Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/north-south-centre/diaspora-youth>

⁷ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) Australia. (2016). *Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds*

⁸ MYAN (2019) *Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy* Available at: myan.org.au

Many diaspora youth formulate their sense of identity and belonging via a complex interplay between their migration journey, their place in their families, communities, and broader Australian society, their national and cultural identity and notions of citizenship and nationhood.⁹ For diaspora youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds, belonging is flexible and complex. Many young people in contemporary Australia experience varying forms of belonging to the nation, to local and global communities, to networks of friends and family, and to different cultural spaces.¹⁰

6. Youth responses

Arif, 25, ACT

Akados Society is a diaspora community organisation that provides scholarships and educational grants to young students who are financially and socially disadvantaged. The broader goal of the organization is to utilize education as a means for empowerment of the youth.

Akados Society is a grassroots organization with members and donors from across the community. Our programs assist disadvantaged young members of the community to pursue their education in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Akados also provides a platform for young members of the community to strengthen their connection with, and contribute back to, their country of origin.

There are three issues I would like to raise to the Inquiry:

1. There is insufficiency in the current legislative framework to allow organisations like Akados to realise their full potential. The current system is skewed towards enabling effective operation of the organisations who only operate in Australia or large organisations operating in the international development sector. It is a one size fits all model, and that is where an organization like Akados falls through the cracks.

For example, the process to register as a charity or get accreditation from DFAT is long and complex which places additional resource pressure on small and wholly volunteer run organisations such as ours who have limited resources.

2. There is a lack of funding avenues and grant programs for diaspora organisations to spend on their programs overseas, particularly funds/grants provided by DFAT for which only large organisations with DFAT accreditation qualify.
3. There is a lack of capacity development, training opportunities and resources for newly established organisations for matters relating to governance, financial management, and grants application and reporting.

These challenges are limiting our ability to provide support to members of our community and preventing us from realising our full potential.

⁹ MYAN (2019) *Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy* Available at: myan.org.au

¹⁰ Ibid.

Ways to address these issues:

1. Requirement for various kinds of registrations and accreditation should be based on the revenue threshold/size of the organization rather than one rule for all, particularly requirements concerning governance and policies.
2. More grants should be made available for diaspora organisations for development of their capacity and capital/IT upgrades.
3. A new category of Commonwealth grants (possibly from AusAid and DFAT) should be made available to organisations who are run by the diaspora communities but are small in nature.

Jane, 22, Victoria

I am second-generation Chinese-Australian, born and raised in Melbourne as the daughter of immigrants from Fujian, China. I am a Youth Advisor to the Centre for Multicultural Youth, where I advocate for the needs of young people from migrant, and refugee backgrounds.

Increasing racism has disproportionately affected the Chinese diaspora in Australia – due to geopolitical tensions between Australia and China, as well as the coronavirus pandemic. I note that these impacts apply not only to Australian citizens of Chinese ethnicity, but also to non-citizens, e.g. permanent residents, international students and those who might be on temporary visas. They are too often left out of the conversation, despite being equally or more affected.

Some particular elements of this racism include:

Racial violence and its threats to personal safety. The increase in racial abuse and violence towards Asian-Australians has been well documented by organisations including the Asian Australian Alliance. Many members of the Chinese diaspora in Australia have been direct victims of such incidents, or have limited or changed their activities in public spaces due to the threat, whether perceived or actual, of being victimised. I note that these incidents have particularly affected young Chinese women, as we already experience gendered barriers to safely accessing public spaces, such as fear of sexual harassment.

Many Chinese people in Australia remain strongly attached to China due to family, cultural, or business ties. However, these attachments are increasingly unfairly misconstrued as political ties or as support for the Chinese government, regardless of individuals' personal views on China as a political entity. The media has played a significant role here, often exaggerating and stoking unfounded fears about Chinese people in Australia as "CCP agents" or sympathetic to the "Chinese regime". Consequently, Chinese people in Australia are often forced to bear suspicion and hostility, which has created additional barriers to participation, especially in political institutions or processes.

This increasing racism is particularly concerning for young people because we are still developing our identities and negotiating our connections to our communities. It creates hostile environments that disrupt our ability to feel connected to our families and ancestral cultures. It also makes it unsafe for us to fully embrace or accept our dual cultural heritages in our workplaces, schools and in public domains, compounding the existing barriers to career development and political representation that

young people already experience. This is leading to significant mental health impacts, social isolation, adverse employment outcomes, and a limited sense of belonging.

I firmly support calls for a national anti-racism strategy. While the Federal Government has condemned racial violence against Chinese-Australians, it should go further to prevent Australia-China relations and justified criticisms of the Chinese state from taking the Chinese diaspora in Australia as collateral damage.

The Federal Government needs to take leadership on these issues as it has the responsibility to set and communicate standards for behaviour. However, it needs to collaborate with communities to develop and implement anti-racism strategies because we know our needs best – our expertise is integral to the success of any such policy.

Joseph, Queensland

As a young person from the South Asian diaspora, I currently represent the Indian community as part of the State Youth Council for Multicultural Youth Queensland (MyQ). A number of challenges and cultural issues are faced by diaspora communities, especially in regards to their transition and settlement into Australian society. My submission takes a particular consideration of the Indian diaspora, which is one of the fastest growing diaspora groups in Australia.

Over several decades, the Indian diaspora community has faced a number of hurdles that, historically, have been barriers to social, cultural, and economic development, and that continue to prevent the advancement of individuals from cultural backgrounds across the board. As a result, this has led to a range of systemic issues within the community, as well as a deep distrust of those in positions of influence and power in the government and corporate sector.

The major issues continue to include:

- Racial stereotypes and discrimination
- Economic hardship
- Vocational and employment limitations
- Restricted access to essential services and support, and
- Mental health and medical challenges.

This has affected multiple generations of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, despite relative improvements in social living conditions. In addition, diaspora communities experience divisions that often stem from ethnocentric bias, cultural misunderstandings, and language barriers. Within the South Asian diaspora in Australia, for instance, groups can be divided by language, region, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and the like. This has had a negative bearing on young people from a second and third generational perspective.

From a personal perspective, young people are beginning to take more of a positive outlook and are encouraging greater collaboration and connectivity within their communities, using youth as a driver and connecting point for change. Organisations that support young people from refugee and migrant

backgrounds, such as MYAN, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), and MYQ have been instrumental in fostering collaborative efforts across diaspora communities, which has seen a major improvement in recent times.

Further engagement with youth is necessary for this trend to continue. More opportunities for youth, such as vocational opportunities, educational awareness, diaspora-centric platforms, and scholarships for non-profit and community-driven initiatives would assist in driving positive change forward for long-term impact and growth in these areas.

For long-term, sustainable change to occur within the diaspora communities of Australia, measures must be put in place that offer both young and old opportunities to collaborate with one another and learn and build partnerships with other communities.

Despite the government's best efforts in providing support for diaspora communities, peak bodies and non-profit initiatives need ongoing support to remain viable. For example, organisations such as Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) would benefit from further funding grants; youth-driven initiatives, including Council for Young Africans Living Abroad (CYALA), have been forced to close their doors; and ethnic-specific conferences and platforms, such as the inaugural South Asian Young Leaders Conference, hosted by the Committee for Sri Lanka, have little mobility and growth due to ethnocentric limitations. Strategic, long-term approaches to supporting diaspora organisations and initiatives are needed from all levels of government, alongside one off grants.

Naz, 21, NSW

I am a proud Hazara woman from Afghanistan and am an active youth member of the Kateb Hazara Association Inc. I study a combined Law degree (Arts/Law) at the University of Sydney and I am a youth ambassador for MYAN NSW. I work closely with the youth in the Hazara community in Sydney. In this role, I facilitate conversation about what it means to be Hazara/Australian, the challenges we face in our identity formation and the link we have to Afghanistan. I give talks about the importance of social and political interaction and how we can best utilize our skills to benefit society.

There are a number of issues facing the Hazara diaspora community, including:

- The fracturing of the Hazara identity through countless traumas, experiences in detention centres, persecution, and uncertainty, and how this continues to impact and influence the lives of young people including how they form their identity.
- The centuries long persecution of the Hazara people both in Afghanistan and diaspora communities abroad, has led to an increasing fear of being known as, or identified as a Hazara. This in turn has led to a significant demise of Hazara cultural and social characteristics due to the lack of resources and education. The Hazara identity has become synonymous with 'refugee', 'victims' 'labourers' and slaves', and as such, has stereotyped the Hazara into categories that are difficult to break down. Consequently, this has led to some Hazara youth shying away from wanting to be known, or identified, as Hazara.

- Australian refugee and immigration policy has left many members of the Hazara diaspora feeling re-traumatized by the uncertainty of their lives.
 - Being detained in immigration for years on end both onshore and offshore has reinforced the experience of statelessness that Hazara's have already felt in copious amounts.
 - The detainment and the immigration processes are arbitrary and they have had a severe impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of the Hazara diaspora.
 - Immigration policies like Bridging Visas cause heightened levels of fear and distress amongst Hazara's who reside in Australia, as they remain uncertain every day if their future here is guaranteed or if they will be deported back. The uncertainty, and lack of transparency in the immigration process has led to many Hazara's falling into severe mental distress and some attempting suicide.

These issues significantly harm the morale and mental health of the community members, and young people are often left confused as to their identity, and feeling re-traumatized.

The government and its multiple departments have a significant role to play in responding to these issues, whether that is in funding programs, providing resources to communities, or creating better and more transparent policy.

To address these issues, I recommend:

1. The provision of more transparent immigration policy that has faster processing times so people are not left in 'limbo' and uncertain about their future.
2. Providing more educational resources to Hazara refugees in detention centres so they are able to better integrate into their host countries.
3. Providing mental health support and counselling help to people in detention centres, and after they have been released into the Australian community.
4. Developing educational programs for Hazara children to explore their identity, and support to move beyond the intergenerational trauma.