



23rd July, 2021

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021*.

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.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds make up almost half of Australia's youth population,¹ and MYAN's vision is that these young people are supported, valued, and thriving in Australia.

MYAN works in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies across the youth, settlement, and multicultural sectors at the state and territory and national levels to ensure the experiences and particular needs of these young people are recognised in policy and service delivery. We also provide expert policy advice to government, deliver sector development activities, and support the development of young people's leadership and advocacy skills so that their voices are heard at the regional, state, and national levels.

Proposed changes to waiting periods

MYAN takes this opportunity to respond to the proposed changes to the Newly Arrived Resident Waiting Period (NARWP) for the Carer Payment, Carer Allowance, Family Tax Benefit Part A and B, Parental Leave Pay and Dad and Partner Pay, all of which are being extended from between zero to two years, depending on the payment, to four years. Economic Justice Australia estimates that the extension of the NARWP will affect 13,200 individuals and 45,000 families, including single parent families.²

MYAN is concerned about the social and economic impacts of these changes and we recommend that the bill be rejected. We know that the take up rates of social security benefits by newly arrived migrants is low³ but, like anyone else in the Australian community, newly arrived migrants are vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances like a death in the family, ill health, increased caring commitments or the ongoing impacts of a global pandemic, and must have access to safety nets when the need arises.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au>

² Economic Justice Australia (2021) *Budget 2021-22 Media Release*, May 12 2021 Available at: <https://www.ejaustralia.org.au/wp/media-release/eja-media-release-budget-2021-22/>

³ Productivity Commission (2016) *Migrant Intake into Australia, Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, No.77*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/migrant-intake/report/migrant-intake-report.pdf>, p.316.



Overall, we strongly oppose all measures to limit access to income support and social protections for newly arrived migrants. Access to social safety nets should only and always be determined based on need.

Young people

While we are pleased that these new measures do not apply to humanitarian entrants or to young people arriving in Australia with Orphan visa (subclass 117) and remaining relative visa (subclass 115) under the Family stream, should the Bill be passed we recommend extending these exemptions to young people from refugee-like backgrounds arriving in Australia under complimentary migration streams.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have enormous potential to contribute to, and be engaged in Australian society. However, they can face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities, including language, culture, limited social capital, and unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the service system), racism and discrimination. These factors can place them at higher risk of social and economic isolation, requiring more targeted support in the early stages of settlement.

Many young people arriving through the Family stream of the Migration Program are arriving in Australia to unite with their families who have been humanitarian arrivals in the past and who may not be in a position to support them⁴. Others who arrive under the Family Stream are from the same country of origin as many young people arriving under the Humanitarian Program, and may have experienced similar vulnerabilities relating to their pre-migration experiences, including exposure to trauma.

Despite this, they are not eligible for the same services provided to humanitarian arrivals, including an exemption from these waiting periods. They also have fewer formal structures and supports in place when they begin their settlement journey in Australia.

MYAN supports the findings from the *Joint Standing Committee on Migration*, which found that newly arrived migrants might achieve better settlement outcomes if they are able to access the same settlement support provided to entrants arriving Australia under the Humanitarian Programme⁵. MYAN urges the Committee to consider the specific circumstances of young people arriving from the same country of origin as Humanitarian Arrivals from refugee-like⁶ backgrounds who may arrive in Australia under complementary pathways of protection, such as the Family stream, and extend the NARWP exemptions to this group. Applying a waiting period and denying assistance to people when they actually need it affects the settlement process and marginalises migrants in our communities.

Further, we recommend that the Australian Government expand eligibility for settlement services and supports to all newly arrived young people, particularly for young people from refugee-like

⁴ MYAN (2018) *Submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Encouraging Self-sufficiency for Newly Arrived Migrants) Bill 2018* Available at: myan.org.au

⁵ Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) *No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes*. Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

⁶ People from refugee-like backgrounds are likely to have experienced disruption of basic services, poverty, food insecurity, poor living conditions and prolonged uncertainty; and may have experienced significant human rights violations.



backgrounds, which would contribute to positive economic and social participation and decrease the likelihood of economic disengagement and marginalisation early.

Women at Risk

All levels of government must ensure that vulnerable women and their children have access to services and support based on their immediate safety needs and immediate caring responsibilities, not their immigration status. As the payments that will be subjected to these new waiting periods are provided to people providing care, MYAN is concerned that the majority of people most affected will be women and children. We are concerned these changes will deny critical support people need when raising children and providing caring responsibilities, particularly at a time when Australia's social and economic landscape is still being negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Without access to a safety net at the time of need, women and children risk being trapped into a cycle of poverty.

Safety net

While we are pleased to hear that *"...these arrangements will continue to provide a safety net, including for migrants in potentially vulnerable circumstances and those who are unable to support themselves or be supported by family as planned for reasons beyond their control"* we are concerned that the NARWP will only be waived in extremely limited circumstances. We urge the Committee to ensure that detailed information about these exemptions is made widely available, in language, on multiple information platforms.

Safety nets are critical in preventing poverty and subsequent impacts including homelessness, (including secondary homelessness), insecure and unsafe housing, declining mental and physical health, prohibitive costs of transportation and the inability to pay for training courses

Under these proposed changes, we are concerned that families with young children and carers who face unexpected hardships while subject to a NARWP will not be able to access Special Benefit even as a last resort. Additionally, applying a four-year waiting period for FTB A and B means that the children of more newly arrived migrants will be at increased risk of poverty without access to this safety net.

The many negative and lasting impacts of poverty are well known, not least the link between poverty and domestic violence and that it negatively affects the productive potential of the workforce.⁷ Not only is poverty devastating for the individuals and families experiencing it, poverty also detracts from the Australian economy's productive potential and economic growth, contributes to asset bubbles and leads to an overreliance on debt which can have disastrous implications for the economy⁸.

⁷ Holmes, Anne (n.d) *Some economic effects of inequality* Parliament of Australia Available at: <https://www.aph.gov.au>

⁸ Ibid.



Key Recommendations:

- MYAN recommends to the Committee that the Bill is not passed in its current form.
- MYAN recommends the Committee review the Bill with consideration of the potential damaging impacts on young people with particular vulnerabilities, particularly those from refugee or refugee-like backgrounds who may arrive in Australia with non-humanitarian visas and ensure vulnerable young people are provided with exemptions from any waiting periods.
- In line with this, MYAN also recommends that the Committee integrate a support system similar to that provided to humanitarian arrivals for young people arriving in Australia under the Family stream.
- MYAN recommends that information about exemptions is clear and made available across multiple communication platforms in a range of languages.

Yours faithfully,

Rana Ebrahimi

MYAN National Manager