

REFUGEE YOUTH ISSUES NETWORK OF SA (RYINSA)

REFUGEE YOUTH EDUCATION PATHWAYS POLICY

Background

Young new arrivals from refugee backgrounds are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in society. Some have been child soldiers, some have witnessed or experienced torture and trauma, some have received very little or no formal education or have had their education disrupted, many have lost or become separated from their usual sources of support, including family, friends and familiar networks and some have spent years in refugee camps or immigration detention centres. These young people generally arrive in Australia with no money or worldly goods, with poor English language skills and with little or no understanding of Australian culture and systems. Some arrive alone or with unfamiliar distant relatives and have very few if any sources of support. Adjusting to life in a new country can be very difficult for any migrant but it can be particularly difficult for refugees who have been subject to forced migration. Young refugees in the initial stages of resettlement have to contend with many difficult issues including learning a new language, adjusting to a new culture and systems, coping with pre and post migration experiences of loss, trauma and disruption, making new friends and, for many, helping parents cope with the resettlement process.

Policy Position

It is well known that positive and effective education is integral to the employment, and overall resettlement, of refugees. However, many challenges are restricting young people's education and employment pathways. The Refugee Youth Issues Network of SA (RYINSA) believes that young refugees have the right to:

- Equal participation in secondary and tertiary education
- Equal access to learning programs that are culturally appropriate and address their specific needs
- Equal opportunities for part-time and full-time employment
- Freedom from racism and discrimination in schools, universities and workplaces.

Current Challenges

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on the education and employment pathways of young refugees. However, key service providers have reported that young refugees' needs are diverse and they face numerous barriers in schools, including:

- Limited or no education prior to arrival in Australia
- Low English language skills
- Limited or no understanding of Australian school structures and curriculum frameworks
- Experiences of discrimination and racism in schools
- Limited interaction with other students, which impairs language development and increases isolation and social exclusion
- Limited contact and interaction between parents/carers and schools
- Premature transitioning from New Arrivals Programs to mainstream schools
- Many educators in mainstream schools are unprepared to meet the needs of young refugees

- Limited opportunities for young refugees to pursue higher education for better employment prospects

These barriers force many young people to “drop out”, frequently change schools or prematurely seek employment. Additionally, many young people become early school leavers so they can gain employment and send money to family overseas. The barriers faced in gaining and maintaining employment include:

- Limited knowledge or understanding of pathways to employment
- Inadequate knowledge of Australian workplace culture and worker/employer rights, responsibilities and expectations
- High risk of workplace abuse, bullying and poor workplace safety practices
- Experiences of discrimination, racism and limited opportunities for young refugees
- Insufficient English language competency, little or no formal education and few transferable or marketable vocational skills
- Transport limitations or child care responsibilities compounded by economic disadvantage

Key Priorities

RYINSA’s key priorities are to advocate for:

- Research and evaluation on young refugees’ learning needs and the utilization of resources to support their education and employment pathways
- Extra support for young refugees in schools, including resources such as bilingual support and homework clubs
- More extensive support to be provided following the transition to mainstream schools
- Increased provision of refugee youth specific life skills programs to support their education and employment pathways
- The development of programs that educate and prepare young refugees for part-time and full-time employment
- Training and professional development on the needs of young refugees for all educators in mainstream schools
- Parents and carers to be assisted to be more involved in young people’s education and school communities
- Appropriate counselling programs for young refugees in relation to tertiary education and employment pathways
- Increased provision of sport, recreational and community activities, to break the cycle of social exclusion
- Increased connections between employers and young refugees, through mentoring programs and other strategies
- Community education campaigns and strategies to reduce discrimination and racism in the workplace

