

Global Compact for Migration Review: Youth Consultations **AUSTRALIA Report**

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Introduction

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) Review addresses the issues of migrants globally and is committed to achieving well-managed and appropriate migration. The GCM is founded in cooperation and full respect for human rights by developing guidelines on the protection and just treatment of migrants. Although Australia abstained from committing to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in August 2018, it is still committed to being a destination country for humanitarian and other permanent and short-term migration through its own formal programs. Australia has implemented two formal programs to facilitate the arrival of migrants:

- **The Migration Program** for skilled and family entrant
- **Humanitarian Program** for displaced migrants and those in humanitarian crisis situations such as conflict and poverty.

The Migration Program

Migration has enriched Australia socially, culturally, and economically and has contributed strongly to productivity. Australia continues to be a major destination country for migrants for jobs and education as a result, the Australian government has implemented The Migration Program. The program ensures that the country continues to attract highly skilled migrants and to balance the needs of the Australian economy and its major sectors such as infrastructure and white collar and service industries. The program also ensures that it supports Australia's security, economic and social cohesion objectives.

Humanitarian Program

The Humanitarian Program consists of an onshore and offshore component. Onshore provides protection to onshore irregular displaced migrants. However, **onshore irregular displaced migrants who are offered temporary humanitarian visas – including unauthorized air and sea travel – are not included in this program.** Offshore is divided into two categories:

- UNHCR referred: Refugee Category
- Special Humanitarian Program (SHP – for individuals subjected to substantial discrimination).

Australia's net overseas migration in 2019 was 210, 700 which is 16.5 percent lower than previous years.¹ 140,366 of those were granted skilled and family permanent visas in 2019-20, 18,762 were granted humanitarian visas granted in 2018-2019 and 2,029,721 held temporary visas in Australia on 30 June 2020.² International students take the lead, with 189,477 people holding temporary visas in 2019,

¹ "Australian Migration and Population Dashboard," Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2020, <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/migrationdashboard>.

² "Australian Migration and Population Dashboard."

an annual increase of an average of 8-10 percent.³ However, the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply declined the international students in Australia, with just 8521 by December 2020.⁴

Conducting this national-review on the issues of migration have been timely. The current changes in migration policy by the current federal administration, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have identified that young migrants (below the age of 30), displaced migrants, asylum seekers and international students are the most vulnerable regarding the uncertainty about migrants in Australia.

The United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY) Australian working group for the GCM conducted 14 consultations throughout January 2021. Consultations were held with youth involved in youth-led and youth focused organisations covering a multitude of sectors. These sectors include: international students, irregular displaced migrants, migrant youth advocacy groups, migrant youth support, mental health awareness and advocacy groups, and bridging services. The purpose of these consultations was to speak directly with youth in Australia, engaged in the migration sector to form a holistic overview of migrant perceptions of policies and practices pertaining to migration in Australia.

The consultations focused on youth perspectives and asked for the implementation of four specific objectives of the GCM:

- **Objective 2:** Minimise the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin.
- **Objective 15:** Provide access to basic services for migrants.
- **Objective 17:** Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration.
- **Objective 18:** Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences.

The results of the consultations are summarised in the policy brief below.

Overall Themes and Key Recommendations

2.1 Key Themes

Lack of communication and transparency from national governments and key stakeholders

Migrants experienced inadequate communication about their rights, entitlements, and what was expected of them:

- International Students were not made aware that their working rights limited them to 20-hours work per week.

³ "Australian Migration and Population Dashboard."

⁴ "Australian Migration and Population Dashboard."

- International Students were not initially provided with adequate information about additional funding sources available to them, or provided with appropriate career advice for a future in Australia following their tertiary studies.
- Migrants were not provided with adequate information about health services, or were unable to seek important medical care due to high costs or lack of resources.
- Migrants had difficulty accessing resources that provided valuable visa information. This includes information for further visa options upon the completion of their initial entry visa.

A notable disparity in the truth of migrants experiences in Australia and the information available to the general public, leading to feelings of generalised marginalisation

- Migrants largely felt that Australian society was not adequately educated about the benefits associated with greater migration and diversity in Australia.
- Migration is highly beneficial to Australian society for both social and economic purposes. Societal perceptions of migration show that many members of the public do not have a fact-based perception of migration in Australia.

Difficulties related to the transferring of previous skills and qualifications from the country of origin

- Migrants experienced high fees when trying to transfer overseas qualifications to Australian qualifications.
- Migrants experienced extreme difficulty transferring qualifications. Many were forced to change careers or complete qualifications again at high costs.

2.2 Key Obstacles and Challenges

- **Unclear Information:** This often left migrants disenfranchised and unsure about how to solve common issues associated with migration. E.g appropriate visas, how to access healthcare and career options.
- **Language barriers:** This often left migrants with limited working opportunities, specifically in the field they were previously trained. Australia provides access to language resources for newly arrived migrants, however these resources do not last long enough for migrants, especially those of low English proficiency upon arrival, to attain a high enough level for long term professional employment.
- **Limited recognition of skills and qualifications:** migrants are often forced to complete tertiary studies in Australia, despite previously acquiring these in their country of origin. They are often left with no choice but to turn to alternative or unskilled labour. High costs associated with transferring qualifications, where this is possible, are often unaffordable for newly arrived migrants with few resources and limited finances.

Objective 2: Minimise the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin

Australia is predominately recognised as a destination country in the APAC region. The effects of COVID-19 have left Australian borders closed since March 2020, affecting the large flow of migration into the country. Australia appeals as a destination country due to the promise of greater work opportunities, education, healthcare, and high standard of living. This standard of living is not always achievable to migrants due to factors such as limited resources upon arrival, difficulty integrating, limited work opportunities or low English proficiency. These barriers often limit migrants from living the life in Australia they had envisioned, as well as putting them at risk of exploitation. The Asia-Pacific region is home to approximately 32% of trafficking victims assisted by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), who work in combination with the United Nations.⁵ Australia must work collaboratively with our neighbours to reduce these numbers and ensure that people are not arriving into Australia through the means of human trafficking or finding themselves in these conditions post-arrival.

Exploitation may be further exacerbated by precarious visa conditions, limited knowledge of workplace rights, or abusive homelives. Youth, particularly international students, are even more vulnerable to exploitation due to limited personal financial resources and restrictive work options in Australia. A lack of transparency about the conditions that many migrants face in Australia leaves many migrants with a feeling of distrust or betrayal. To work cooperatively in the APAC region, Australia can invest resources into more collaborative programs between countries. This could work to improve living standards in origin countries, minimising the need to migrate. Australia can also invest further resources to make the migration experience more beneficial for individuals.

3.1 Key Initiatives

- During the research process, we found many organisations with subdivisions focused on assisting various elements of the migratory experience for youth.
- Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS) offers counselling services for young migrants (25-30) who have suffered trauma and help them to recover and adapt to their new society. This takes an appropriate mental health approach, as the Australian mental healthcare model has been described by migrants as culturally inapplicable to them.

3.2 Key Recommendations

Youth call on the government to provide greater clarity in their approach to migration. This is essential in furthering understanding for migrants and the wider community about the benefits of safe and orderly migration. This simultaneously promotes diversity in Australian society. As the national

⁵ IOM UN Migration, 'Key Migration Facts in Asia Pacific

government's current approach to migration remains largely unclear, combined with a marginalising media portrayal of migrants.

Youth call on the government and relevant stakeholders to engage closely with the migrant community in order to engage those with lived experiences and base policy upon their unique requirements. This calls for more one-on-one engagement to understand the complexities of the migrant's current migration journey. This also requires further recognition that migration is a broad term requiring a multitude of approaches.

Youth call on the government to acknowledge its role within the Asia-Pacific region. This action requires the national government to consider the regional repercussions of not providing further assistance to its neighbours. This requires the national government to prioritise the means in which people enter Australia to prevent cases of trafficking and exploitation.

Objective 15: Provide access to basic services for migrants

In consultations, youth stated that Australia is diligent in ensuring there are basic services available for migrants. Several barriers, however, inhibit migrants from accessing these services. These barriers most commonly include disorganised presentation of information, few translation options, or information being spread across several platforms. This comes in the form of relevant information being spread across several sources, many of which are difficult to navigate for those with limited English capacity or knowledge of the Australian system. One way to assist young migrants to encourage migrants to be self-sufficient, as well as seek out relevant information for themselves and their families, is to have a comprehensive database with all of the most important information in one place. This database should be available in the most prominent languages in Australia, after English.

Services should be accessible and affordable for all migrants, whether on temporary or permanent visas. Services should be culturally appropriate, with translators readily available where required. Language barriers should never prevent migrants from accessing essential services such as healthcare, mental healthcare, education or employment opportunities. Where rural settlement is encouraged, migrants should have these facilities accessible without too high a cost, financial or time wise.

4.1 Key Initiatives

- Youth & Children counselling through organisations such as STTARS

Accessibility Considerations:

- free/volunteer - keeps the services accessible
- Eligibility criteria keeps the services available to irregular displaced migrants

- Provide a long-term service - as long as necessary
- Youth advocacy and capacity building through organisations such as MYAN. These organisations advocate on behalf of migrants to improve awareness of their conditions; helping bridge the gap between those with lived experience and those in power.
- Youth have created self-governing organisations, such as Bridging Us, to assist migrants in accessing resources such as:
 - Career planning and education advice
 - VISA assistance
 - Mentoring
- Youth have formed organisations to compact the effects of COVID-19 on International Students.
Services:
 - Keeping international students up-to-date on relevant COVID-19 information through forums and social media
 - Provide meals for students in need
 - Campaigning authority bodies to acknowledge the struggles of international students in Australia during COVID-19
- Youth are involved with organisations focused on capacity building in migrant youth. These organisations provide programs for building capacities such as:
 - Public speaking
 - Personal empowerment through art and culture

4.2 Key Recommendations

Youth call on the national government to provide a greater and more thorough access to basic services for migrants. This is necessary to create a holistic and applicable support system that caters for the specific needs of various migrant groups. Migrants are currently encouraged to settle in rural areas so as to minimise overcrowding of major cities. This needs to be balanced with appropriate infrastructure for migrants in rural areas who require specific services only available in metropolitan areas. Governments should also lessen the eligibility criteria for accessing basic services.

Youth call on governments to reevaluate existing services, including their eligibility requirements. Intensive language education for new migrants is available within the first few years of settlement. New migrants, including expectant mothers and new mothers, often are unable to access these services in the initial period. This leaves them at a large disadvantage against immersion in Australian society.

Youth call on national governments and associated stakeholders to reevaluate current mental health facilities available to migrants. Current mental health resources are often culturally inappropriate. Mental health services should be reevaluated, especially for at-risk communities and those who have suffered trauma in their country of origin or in the migration process. To facilitate this, governments can begin by initiating research into effective, long-term solutions for victims of trauma migrating to

Australia. This should involve individual consultation processes, as well as the consideration of the varying cultural backgrounds of migrants.

Youth call on national governments and associated stakeholders to promote the education of languages widely spoken in Australia, aside from English. Multilingualism promotes greater communication in both personal and professional contexts, greater sharing of knowledge and wisdom and promotes diversity.⁶

Youth call on governments, stakeholders and the media to adjust the portrayal of migrants in Australian media to one based on fact. The Australian government can call large media sources to reevaluate their portrayal of migrants to minimise their stigmatisation within Australian society. The current stigmas surrounding migrants and migration affect migrant livelihoods by:

- Making it difficult to find employment or access necessary resources
- Limiting access to healthcare, including mental health services

Youth call on governments to provide avenues for feedback from migrants as a way of making their voices heard in Australian society. Many migrants in Australia face exploitative and difficult circumstances. Migrants are often faced with precarious situations which mean that by speaking out about their circumstances, they risk visa revocation or a loss of support or funding. Anonymous feedback platforms are a way to effectively gather information about areas for improvement, without endangering the well-being of migrants by disclosing their identities.

Youth call on governments to restructure the provision of services to migrants in rural communities. Current structures are in place to encourage migration to rural areas in an effort to promote economic growth and minimise overcrowding in metropolitan areas. In order for this to be effective, infrastructure must be in place to ensure that migrants can access government run services. These include mental health facilities, translators and interpreters, affordable housing and mentoring. These amenities are essential for an appropriate quality of life that migrants may be missing by settling in rural areas.

Objective 17: Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration

Evidence-based approach to migration and an actual portrayal of migrants and migration shaping public discourse and policy have received mixed appraisals and criticism. Perceptions and attitudes towards migrants in Australia have been influenced by global affairs. The Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre have noted a rise in discrimination and racism towards the Chinese and Asian communities due to the

⁶ Annury, Muhammed N, "Promoting Multilingualism in the Classroom: A Case Study of the ELT Program." 86

COVID-19 pandemic⁷, while terrorism and portrayal of the conflict in the Middle East have resulted in a rise of racism and discrimination against the Arab and Muslim communities in Australia.⁸ Furthermore, young stakeholders have noted that perceptions and attitudes towards migrants are poor due to lack of promotion of migrants, education and misinformation reported by the media. This has led some migrants to feeling isolated or not having a sense of place/belonging.⁹ However, consultations have suggested that there are apparent improvements made by local governments, organisations to promote and advocate and provide excellent services to migrants by providing spaces and community events for communication and interaction, Especially in areas of education and cultural events.

Research orientated organisations based on migration have stated there is a lack of evidence-based discourse on migration that is being shared with the public and other migration focused sectors and that there is a lack of communication and clarity between the government, migrants and organisations. Furthermore, lack of clarity provided by the government has left migrants feeling isolated, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which time mental health has become a large issue in the migrant community.

5.1 Key Initiatives

- Migrant-run organisations have focused on providing education on diversity in schools and sharing personal stories with the community.
- Youth-led organisations, advocacy groups and movements that are working to tackle issues on racism and discrimination, especially migrants of colour, and irregular displaced migrants.
- Youth-led organisations, advocacy groups and movements have promoted awareness and more communication of migrants, especially in the workplace.
- Regular announcements and press releases by youth organisations in regard to the perception of migrants. Often providing support or condemnation where issues have affected the diverse community.
- Organisations have provided support to migrants who have been affected by the negative attitudes towards migrants.

5.2 Key Recommendations

Youth call on governments to promote inclusive, evidence-based education and representation of migrants in formal infrastructures and mainstream media. Most perceptions and attitudes towards migrants are formed through mainstream media sources such as the news and public statements by politicians. Promoting trivial and stereotypical narrative of migrants is not only misguided but may be harmful. Providing evidence-based information and education will reduce discrimination and racism in the workforce.

⁷ Benier, Kathryn, Matteo Bonotti, and Joe Collings-Hall. "Hate Speech in the Time of COVID-19". Monash University, July 27, 2020, 1. <https://doi.org/10.26180/5f1e6276f038d>

⁸ Poynting, Scott; Briskman, Linda. 2018. "Islamophobia in Australia: From Far-Right Deplorables to Respectable Liberals" *Soc. Sci.* 7, no. 11: 213. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7110213>

⁹ Benier, Bonotti and Collings-Hall, "Hate Speech in the Time of COVID-19" 2.

Youth call on governments to have a stronger input in facilitating and promoting inclusion of migrants in national and community programming to bridge the gap between migrants and local communities.

Implementing programmes with the support of the government tackles racism and discrimination. Programmes also foster relationships and promote mutual understanding, especially in the early years of developing children which may reduce racism and discrimination in schools, communities, and employment. Programmes may be implemented in schools similar to successful campaigns such as drugs and alcohol and fire safety. Further, it will also provide a sense of belonging for temporary and permanent migrants which will provide for a better mental wellbeing.

Youth call on the government to facilitate and promote strong use of evidence-based approach to policy making and appropriate cooperation with other migration organisations and sectors. More collaboration with mainstream and grass-root organisations, especially in areas such as employment and education. Youths also call on the government to be more present in communication with the migrant community and organisation and close the gap with meaningful discussion.

Youth urge the government to prioritise intersectionality within migrants. This is encouraged through policy making discussion. Rather than representing or being the voice of migrants. Governments should include people of migrant backgrounds to be policy makers and to create appropriate and accurate policies that reflect young migrants. Especially those who are both seeking temporary and permanent residency. This will not only foster stronger communication and trust, but also allow migrants to navigate the system with peace of mind.

Youth call on the government to provide security and support for temporary migrants. Migrants have provided both social and economic benefits to Australia. However, with the impact of COVID-19, the rise of racism and discrimination and with the added attitude of the current government administration, young migrants, especially international students, have become aware of their vulnerability, leading them to experience anxiety and a deteriorated mental wellbeing.¹⁰ Young migrants have been exposed to the constant threat of being sent home, leaving many young migrants vulnerable. The government should not only provide clear information on the status of temporary migrants, but also provide economical support to ease the pressure on temporary migrants and also to ensure that they continue to benefit the Australian community in a positive manner.

¹⁰ “We’re not all like that: How Dissociation Perpetuates Negative Stereotypes.” Bridging Us, 2020.
<https://www.bridgingus.com.au/insights/dissociation-article>

Objective 18: Invest in skills development and facilitate the mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competences

For many years, the Australian government has pushed to allow migration of professionals and highly skilled persons to meet the shortage of skills required by the Australian Labour Market. Migrants, including irregular displaced migrants, have strongly contributed their skills, knowledge, and expertise in these areas. However, youth consultations have highlighted that migrants face barriers to secure employment in their respective fields due to their temporary status and visa, the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, lack of English proficiency, lack of local experience within the country, and lack of network and knowledge of the Australian Labour Market. The status of migrants as temporary residents has hampered their ability to gain secure employment as some employers are reluctant to hire migrants due to visa limitations, causing job discrimination.

In addition, irregular displaced migrants face different barriers due to their pre-migration experience such as trauma and persecution that may affect their ability to gain secure employment.

6.1 Key Initiatives

- Youth organisations have provided volunteer and work opportunities to allow young migrants to gain local experience and promote viable job opportunities.
- Youth organisations have provided workshops for skills development. For example, writing workshops and entrepreneurship skills, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where employment is difficult to gain.
- Youth organisations have provided tailored services for migrants and international students such as resume writing, education and planning pathway, and networking opportunities.
- Youth organisations have worked to educate non-migrants, especially employees, to build understanding, appropriate relationships, and reduce racism and discrimination in the workforce.
- Youth have organised events for the opportunity to network.
- Youth have launched petitions to advocate on behalf of international students to access service and support from the government - extend the limit of working hours.

6.2 Key Recommendations

Youth call on governments and relevant stakeholders to streamline recognition of foreign qualifications and certifications. Migrants face significant challenges in having qualifications recognised. The process it takes to apply for qualification recognition is complex, time consuming and costly and therefore, has discouraged some migrants from applying and caused them to restart their qualification from the beginning. Governments and relevant stakeholders should partially recognise qualifications, this will not only encourage migrants to apply for skill recognition, but also allow them to gain local

experience that meet Australian standards and can contribute to gaining full skills recognition, this may include further training and education such as upskilling, and hands-on experience.

Bilateral communication is needed globally to ensure that migrant qualifications meet Australian Standard and to ensure what further steps needed to bridge the gap prior to migrating. Programs may include some that are already implemented such as foreign driver's license schemes.

Youths call on governments and relevant stakeholders to implement a central integrated platform that is clear and accessible. Lack of communication between the government, organisations and services, and migrants has been a core issue in navigating the migration system in Australia. A central integrated platform ensures that information on Australian migration policies, visa situation, employment opportunities, and financial support are up to date and accessible. This may be in the form of a digital platform where migrants can continuously access, or a booklet given to migrants on arrival. Further, a central integrated platform needs to be accessible in various languages to accommodate migrants.

Youth call on governments to ensure access to English language classes and language consultants. This is essential to facilitate integration of migrants. Language classes should be advertised at all stages of the migration process. English Language classes need to consider different educational needs such as age, proficiency, and language (e.g. business, school, and daily life). Most importantly, adequate funding has to be provided to public and civil society actors that already offer these services to make them affordable and facilitate access to young migrants who lack financial resources. Further, **governments and relevant stakeholders should facilitate the need for language consultants in the workplace** such as interpreters to aid in the transfer of skills.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this report, migration has had a positive economic, social, and cultural impact on Australia. Migrants have demonstrated their resilience and adaptability to new challenges in order to create a new life in Australia. The Australian government is requested to commit to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. In doing so, Australia can maintain its commitment to the UNHCR and the protection of its migrants. By working cooperatively with neighbouring countries in the Asia Pacific region, Australia can contribute to a fair and just protection of migrants. Further, migrants should have the opportunity to utilise their skills and experience on arrival, the ability to access services with peace of mind, and be able to experience a life in Australia free of racism and discrimination.

In order to provide a safe and comfortable setting for migrants in Australia and the Asia Pacific region, the government and relevant stakeholders should commit to a future relationship based around communication, transparency, respect, and acknowledgement. Migration is a broad term, and encompasses many varying circumstances in which people find themselves in Australia. A generalised

commitment to communication and safety ensures that the transition period and time in Australia runs smoothly and works for the benefit of all parties.

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