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**Young Migrants**  
**Potential in Building Bridges of Cooperation between Societies Towards**  
**Development**

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## Introduction

The Catholic Church in Australia has been at the forefront in providing pastoral care to migrants. In more recent years pastoral care to migrants has become more specific especially in relation to unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Australia and to international students. Pastoral care to asylum seekers and refugees is largely a pastoral care that focus on youth. Both the teaching and the practice of the Catholic Church have been advocating in support of the plight of migrants and refugees, especially the most vulnerable among them.

As migration has developed reaching the present extraordinary dimension, not everyone seeking to migrate fit the categories provided by within immigration laws and policies. Children and youth are amongst the most vulnerable of immigrants seeking protection from war-torn countries.

Migrant children and youth represent a challenging aspect of the pastoral care of the Church while being at the centre for policy, advocacy and services.

Young migrants have enormous potential to contribute to building a more prosperous and fraternal global society. Indeed, youth is itself an excellent asset.

The following presentation will focus on young migrants between the age of 12 and 24 and will look more closely on the Oceania region where I live in Australia.

I hope to bring to your attention some of the hopes and challenges that young migrants experience when establishing a new life in a new country often very different to that of their country of birth in many ways. Important issues for most young migrants due to their stage of life include their relationships with their family and hopes for how they will contribute to the world.

For the majority of young migrants, how they contribute is greatly influenced by their education and participation in the labour market. It is these three major areas:

relationships, education, and working life where young migrants most vividly build bridges between societies as they engage with the people they live and work with.

### **Catholic social teaching on Young Migrants**

Catholic social teaching provides some understanding and resources on the pastoral care of young migrants. In most contexts, Catholic social teaching on migration generally applies to young migrants however there are instances where young migrants are specifically the focus. An early example can be found in *De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* (DPMC). The Church emphasises that amongst the different groups of migrants, foreign students call for special consideration and care as they are far from home without an adequate knowledge of the language, at times without friends and often with a scholarship that is insufficient for their needs. Helping foreign students has historically and continues to be an important field of pastoral action.<sup>1</sup>

A more recent example is the 96<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees message focusing on minor migrants and refugees. In his message, Pope Benedict XVI, recalled that as a child, Jesus himself experienced migration for, as the gospel recounts, in order to flee the threats of Herod, he had to seek refuge in Egypt together with Joseph and Mary (cf. Mt 2:14).<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict affirmed the need to recognise the rights of children as equal to the rights of adults. Pope Benedict expresses his hope that proper attention be given to minor migrants who need a social environment that permits and fosters their physical, cultural, spiritual and moral development. He recognises that young migrants living in a foreign land without effective points of reference generates countless and sometimes serious hardships and difficulties for them, especially those deprived of the support of their family. Pope Benedict also singled out young migrants seeking refuge who, for

various reasons, are fleeing their own country, where they are not given adequate protection. He affirmed again the need for careful evaluation and coordinated action by implementing appropriate measures of prevention, protection and welcome. Pope Benedict reminds us to ensure that any concrete interventions be first nurtured by faith in the action of grace and divine Providence. In this way hospitality and solidarity to strangers, especially if they are children, become a proclamation of the gospel of solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Australian context**

When we speak of migration it is not possible to generalise the individual experiences that each young migrant has and to place these all under one roof. With this in mind I wish to describe some of the aspects of migration which are common to the experience in Australia.

Australia is a migration country. Our indigenous brothers and sisters arrived on the land over 40,000 years ago. Their deep traditions, culture and spiritual connection to the land remains with us today. In comparison, modern migration flows to Australia only began just over 200 years ago when the British pursued a penal colony on Lane Cove, an area which is today part of Sydney. After a predominantly British and Irish migration, Australia began to become more diverse after World War II when thousands of war-torn refugees made the journey by boat to make their home in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

Since then, war and persecution has continued to shape migration patterns to Australia with notable examples from Asia, particularly Vietnam, several South American nations in the 1980s and more recently from parts of Asia such as India, the Philippines and China, Africa and the Middle East. The Australia we see today

has over 6 million migrants representing about one quarter of our population and around 45% of Australians were even born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas. Australia is a story of migration and multiculturalism. Our multicultural policy was deliberately chosen and pursued from about 1970s onward. Before this time the policy was to assimilate into a predominantly white Australian society.

### **Australia Multicultural Policy**

I wish to elaborate on Australia's multicultural policy because it is particularly different to the multicultural policy that is pursued in several European countries.

in 1997 the Australian Government appointed a National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) to develop a report that recommended a policy and an implementation framework for the next decade, aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity was a unifying force for Australia.

This report, *Australian multiculturalism for a new century: Towards inclusiveness*, was launched by the Prime Minister, John Howard, on 5 May 1999. It made recommendations about improving and refocusing multicultural policy.

In response to this report, the Australian Government tabled its multicultural policy statement, *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, in Parliament in December 1999.

The *New Agenda* supported most of the NMAC recommendations, highlighting the need for Australian multicultural policy be a unifying force and relevant to all Australians.

## Current multicultural policy

The government's current multicultural policy statement, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* was issued on 13 May 2003.

The policy reaffirms the fundamental principles of the New Agenda for Multicultural Australia, and sets strategic directions for 2003-06.

Australia multicultural policy vision is reflected in the four principles that underpin multicultural policy:

- **Responsibilities of all** - all Australians have a civic duty to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish
- **Respect for each person** - subject to the law, all Australians have the right to express their own culture and beliefs and have a reciprocal obligation to respect the right of others to do the same
- **Fairness for each person** - all Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity. Social equity allows us all to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia
- **Benefits for all** - all Australians benefit from the significant cultural, social and economic dividends arising from the diversity of our population. Diversity works for all Australians.

The new policy statement also maintains a commitment to the goal of communicating the relevance of multicultural policy to all Australians. However, it responds to changing times and needs with some new strategic directions and focuses. It gives particular emphasis to:

- **the goal of community harmony and social cohesion**

- **the government's access and equity strategy, which aims to ensure government services and programs respond to the realities of Australia's diversity**
- **promoting the benefits of our diversity for all Australians.**

In 2011, Chris Bowen, the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship delivered a speech titled *The Genius of Australian Multiculturalism*. Part of his motivation in speaking on the subject was comments made by German and British political leaders who described multiculturalism as a policy which had "utterly failed".<sup>5</sup>

To many people, multiculturalism is seen as just a diverse group of people living in one country relatively harmoniously. Multiculturalism can often be seen superficially in terms of different foods and traditional dress. With this limited view of multiculturalism it is easy to think that multiculturalism just happens. Many people believe that as migration continues and becomes more diverse, that a multicultural society will naturally follow. It is of course not so simple. In Australia, multiculturalism describes a social situation, while multicultural policy describes a well-defined, thoroughly thought through, and deliberate response by the government to pursue social cohesion in an ethnically diverse society.

At its core multiculturalism involves relationships between people. Like all good relationships, they need to be worked on and continually nurtured; they demand a commitment to key values such as understanding, compassion, acceptance and support. Values can be expressed and demonstrated in an unlimited number of ways, they are not limited to one particular culture or exclusive to one particular religion. This is perhaps the key element of social cohesion in a multicultural society and something that Australia achieves by hinging our multicultural policy on respect for Australian values.

At its inception in the late 1970s Australia's multicultural policy was founded on the following core principles as described by Prof Jan Pakulski in 2013:

1. social cohesion, understood as national integration, that is, making structural provisions within our national institutions to arrange the allocation of resources and provide a platform for resolving conflicts
2. equality of opportunity and access.
3. The freedom to choose and maintain one's own cultural identity understood as, the sense of belonging and attachment to a particular way of living and
4. the social duty of shared responsibility for, commitment to and participation in society

Australia has a principled approach to multiculturalism. It widens the choice of Australian lifestyle to allow immigrants to maintain their original cultural traditions, social attachments and identities, but expects in return that all minority groups (both migrant and non-migrant groups) will be tolerant of each other, loyal to the laws of Australia and participate in society. These conditions protect the common justice system, the shared political system, and the single official language.<sup>6</sup>

Australia's multicultural policy is also citizenship based. To fully participate in Australian society, it is necessary to take a pledge of commitment as a citizen.<sup>7</sup> For many migrants, citizenship can be obtained in a relatively short amount of time, for example many skilled migrants who are employed can be granted citizenship in as little as four years.

In addition Australia's multicultural policy has been politically and historically supported by both of Australia's two major political parties.

The discussion so far might be surprising to many of you here today as Australia is now infamous for one of the most despicable and un-accepting asylum policies in the world. I'll speak more about this, however it is important to note that while Australia's migration program has been as high as around 200,000 people per year,

the number of people coming by boat in search of refuge has been in the very low thousands. It is unfortunate and indeed tragic that our principled values based approach to multiculturalism has not extended to our asylum policy.

## **Young Migrants in Australia**

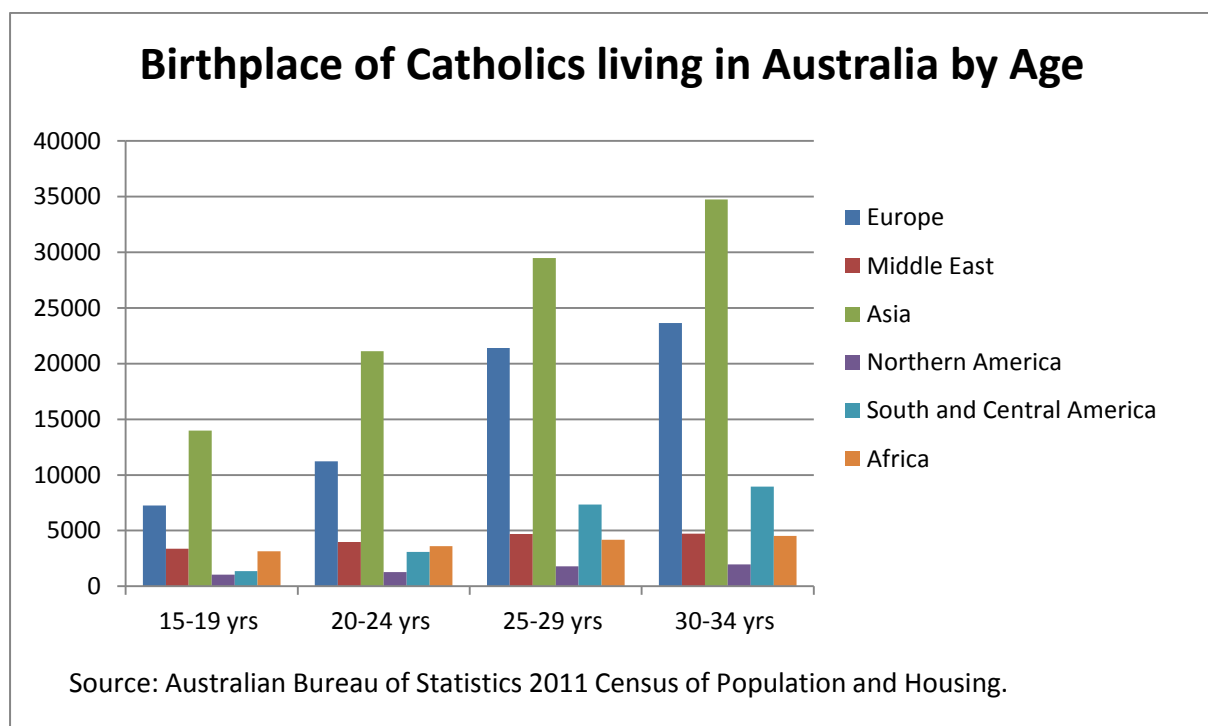
I have briefly spoken about our multicultural policy to describe the social landscape which young migrants find themselves. In Australia, 25% (or one in four) of all youth aged 12-24 are either from or have at least one parent who was born in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Country (henceforth CALD) in comparison to Australia.<sup>8</sup> In Australia the CALD youth population has grown at a faster rate over the past five years compared to the total and Australian-born population age 12-24. The growth reflects immigration of youth to Australia from CALD countries and includes many different types of migrants such as students, workers, family members of people already living in Australia and also a relatively small number of people who came to Australia as humanitarian migrants.<sup>9</sup>

## **Education**

Of the 95% of CALD youth aged 12 to 17 are enrolled in full or part-time education and this rate is higher than other population groups including the Australian-born youth population (93.5%). Some 58% of CALD youth aged 18 to 24 are enrolled in full or part-time schooling compared to just 39% of the Australian-born population. CALD youth aged between 18 and 24, have lower rates of employment compared to the Australian-born population. Most people across age groups in both the Australian-born and migrant born groups are living in a single family household,

including over 90% of those aged 12 to 17. Although the proportion is small, CALD born youth have higher rates of living in multiple family households compared to the Australian-born.<sup>10</sup>

The Catholic population in Australia has also been boosted by migration to such an extent, that the Catholic Church is the largest faith community in Australia. As can be seen in the Graph below, the majority of young Catholics migrating to Australia are from Asia and Europe.<sup>11</sup>



## Employment

Young migrants, many of whom have had limited educational or employment opportunities in their home country, can pursue these possibilities in Australia. A recent study on The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second-Generation Humanitarian Entrants by Prof Graeme Hugo, found that migrants coming to Australia through the humanitarian program had the youngest age structure of all migrant groups. The average age of refugees coming to Australia was

21.8 years which means the majority of their working lives will be spent in Australia. Refugees arriving in Australia have fled from extraordinary hardship and traumatic situations and on top of this face additional challenges in adapting to a new culture, language, and many lack education and knowledge about Australia's labour market. For these reasons migrants and humanitarian entrants experience lower levels of workforce participation in the first few years upon arriving in Australia. However as time passes the workforce participation level of humanitarian entrants converges towards the Australian average, and in the second-generation there is an increase in the labour force participation rate and a decrease in the unemployment rate. It is also important to note that many humanitarian entrants will take up opportunities to study. The first generation arrivals that complete their education in Australia also tend to have a higher level of workforce participation, often higher than the Australian-born.

### **Young refugees and asylum seekers**

Unaccompanied young migrants have particular challenges. Australia has received increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people particularly young men migrating to Australia through the humanitarian program. Those less than 18 years of age, referred to as Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs), receive targeted support due to their status as minors. However once these young people turn 18 years old, they are consequently no longer eligible for these specialist services, despite the fact that they still often need intensive support.<sup>12</sup>

A recent study conducted by the Centre for multicultural youth reveals some of the more acute challenges and difficulties young migrants face. These challenges include having to learn English, recommencing school or education, finding employment,

securing stable, appropriate and affordable housing, adjusting to unfamiliar systems and a new culture, separation from extended family and friends, and rebuilding new social networks.

Young people who arrive in Australia at 18 years of age or older without immediate family members do not have eligibility for the high-level support that UHMs are entitled to, and yet they can still be highly vulnerable. Young migrants who are 18 years of age and over require services that are sensitive to their needs both as young people at a unique stage of adolescent development without their families present, and as refugees from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.<sup>13</sup>

Children and young people currently comprise just under two thirds of humanitarian entrants in Australia; in 2011-2012, 64.5% of humanitarian entrants were less than 30 years of age. Over half (53%) of young people who were granted humanitarian visas in 2011-2012 were aged between 18-25years.<sup>14</sup>

Access to education and training is vital for young people from refugee backgrounds as it enables them to build a better life in Australia and become productive members of society. Though it can be challenging for them to engage in these pathways, it can be even more difficult for those who arrived in Australia at a later age. There is limited time for them to catch up on critical literacy and numeracy skills that the younger group may be able to acquire through school, before having to progress into further educational avenues. Home tutoring could potentially provide part of the solution to improving the literacy and numeracy for this group.<sup>15</sup>

Unaccompanied young people who are 18 years of age or over lack the supportive structure of family, and therefore face a lack of financial support to continue education. Not only do they have to cover the costs of living and education, but they are also relied upon to send money home to their families, or to pay off debts

incurred from their travel to Australia. This often results in young people withdrawing from foundational English language study, which negatively impacts their overall settlement and future opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

Participating in community life through sport, recreation and social activities is a key element to good settlement. It not only benefits physical and mental wellbeing, but can promote trust, facilitate settlement and transitional support, and helps to build social networks. In addition, these sort of activities provide young people with the chance to develop skills that can assist them in other parts of their lives. However, the financial cost, and at times, the culture of the group concerned prevents such young people from being able to participate.<sup>17</sup>

Obtaining employment in Australia can be very challenging for unaccompanied young adults, due to a combination of limited English skills, interrupted education, not holding a driver's licence, and a lack of formal qualifications, social networks and work experience in Australia. Despite these barriers, employment is particularly important for this group of unaccompanied young people as many are the sole providers for their family back home or in transit countries.<sup>18</sup>

Increasingly it is becoming difficult for young unaccompanied migrants to find suitable housing. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are six to ten times more likely to be at risk of homelessness compared with Australian born young people. Due to the difficulty of finding affordable housing, as well as the widespread issue of financial constraints, there is a high prevalence of overcrowding. One youth team leader working in settlement services reported that:

*"You can have 12, 13, or 15 young people live together in a 3 bedroom place. They say 'It's the only way we can survive and have some money left to send home.'" -Youth team leader, Settlement service, Northern region<sup>19</sup>*

## **Young international Students**

Australia has a large number of international students who come to study at university and tertiary level. They experience significant challenges in their education and personal life. In 2011 the Australian Catholic University conducted research interviewing and recording the experiences of several international students to get a better understanding of the challenges they face. Many of the participants experienced anxiety, depression, family and relationship issues, financial stress, grief, health and medical issues, parenting and carer responsibilities, pressure to succeed, stress, and difficulties achieving a good work, study and life balance.<sup>20</sup> Financial stress was the most frequently recorded challenge. This is in part due to higher tuition fees which must be paid upfront, high cost of living in cities where universities are such as Sydney and Melbourne, visas restrictions which only permit international students to work 20 hours per week and of course, the need to study for the majority of the time each week also limits the amount of time students can work, many of whom will only take up employment opportunities on holidays and weekends.

## **Relationships**

Many young migrants form particularly strong peer relationships with other people from similar cultural backgrounds and experiences migrating to Australia. These relationships can prove critical to providing one another with social and emotional support, forming shared household arrangements, providing information on linking one another to services or useful resources. However the strong reliance on peers, without the protective scaffolding of family, can create pressures of its own. The

very fact that these young people can identify so strongly with one another due to their shared experiences is also potentially a source of relationship difficulties, given their shared levels of vulnerability and the distinct challenges they face. It is evident that although their peer relationships can provide a real source of strength and support, these alone are not adequate, and they may at times need the support of professionals or adult mentors who can assist them to navigate these relationships. The important role that adults can play is supported by adolescent research on resiliency, which highlights that a caring nonparent's adult is the most common protective factor amongst resilient youth.<sup>21</sup>

### **Connection to the community**

Having a sense of belonging to the broader community in Australia is critical for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in terms of their overall sense of identity, well-being and being able to access opportunities and contribute to the community around them. Sadly, however, many young migrants do not always experience this sense of welcome and belonging in their day-to-day lives. For example many young migrants will experience general racism that can exist towards those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this, the debate around asylum seeking in Australia has also further created hostility in public attitudes towards certain ethnic groups and this undermines any sense of belonging young migrants may feel towards the Australian community. A frequent occurrence for young migrants from refugee backgrounds when observing the treatment of others from their cultural background was a sense of fear and anxiety for their own future. There remains an urgent need for greater education in the Australian community to increase understanding around asylum flows, migration in general, and awareness of the experience young migrants face and ways that people

can reduce discrimination and promote mutual learning and respect. Nonetheless there are also many positive reports of community members demonstrating real acts of kindness and generosity towards young migrants. Supporting connections with the broader community is critical to assisting young migrants to develop a sense of belonging and access to social capital that exist within the community many opportunities are available through community groups, sports, mentoring programs, volunteers or carer relationships. The various relationships that young migrants make with people in the broader community greatly reduce their sense of social isolation and help young migrants to develop new networks and open up future opportunities and access to resources.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Australia advocates for better government response to migrant youth. Some research identify best practices and efforts to focus on young migrants.

What helps young migrants to become themselves bridges of cooperation and development? Pastoral practice recognises four areas that seem to recur in the experience of youth and their families towards development. the four areas are:

**Family:** for migrant youth, the family is of the utmost importance, even if not physically near. Migrant youth find it that they have more motivations to succeed if there is a family to support them.

**Community:** to feel welcome within a community offers a sense of belonging. Many witness to the fact that belonging to a Community such as a youth group within a migrant chaplaincy has helped them to become more self-confident and assertive towards the larger community. It is a matter of fact some leaders in various

responsibilities within the broader Australian society began their journey from within a migrant youth group.

***Human resources and talents:*** the receiving society has a responsibility to strengthen and enhance the gifts and talents that migrant youths can offer to the society.

***Church:*** the faith community has a responsibility to find the young migrants and to reach out to them. We need to convert from a mere offer of assistance and support, albeit necessary, to an attitude where the migrant youth finds within our church structures the place where to express their faith and to share their experience. Very many of the youth in our parishes come from important experiences of faith and involvement in the Church back home. Some have suffered humiliation and persecution for the sake of their faith. Very often, these young Christian are left at the margin, thus inhibiting the possibility to become potential bridges of faith also for their youth mates whose faith practice has lowered down and has become irrelevant.

On the other end, pastoral practice suggests that where there is no family, due particularly to family breakdowns and where there is no opportunity to become a part of a community migrant youths are inhibited to bring about the connection that offers to them an effective bridge on which to walk from one end to another.

During the immediate past years, in Australia, we have assisted to a growing less generous welcoming attitude that has a great impact on young migrant. The strengthening of an indefinite and mandatory detention for asylum seekers who arrived on the Australian coasts by boats is but a tragic example of this. Countless studies and reports insist on the often irreparable psychological harms that prolonged and indefinite detention is causing to young migrants.

Many who have left home under threats, but in the hope to find a land of possibilities and development in Australia, are now being detained and are unable

to achieve a legal migration status in Australia, thus finding themselves unable to contribute to the society.

To make of young migrants “potential in building bridges of cooperation between societies towards development” calls for dialogue and collaboration across various sectors including the society, the government and the church. Formation and information are essential, but the various sectors need also to implement effective practices.

Cooperation and development are dynamic forces that need a constant monitoring, sharing and exchange of information aiming at practices that would effectively offer to our migrant youth to further the possibility to become bridges of cooperation and development.

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