



“Meet Me in the Middle”

Facilitating the Employment of Young
Multicultural people in Post COVID19
Victoria



Foreword



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One of Victoria's greatest strengths lies in the richness of experiences, creativity and expertise of our young people from multicultural backgrounds.

2020 has been no easy feat for Victorians, of which, young Victorians from diverse backgrounds and local businesses have been hit especially hard.

As the Multicultural Youth Commissioner, I am fortunate to have heard from many young Victorians throughout the course of COVID-19. Young people have raised issues including loss of educational progress, declining mental health, increased instances of racism, housing insecurity and increased or continued cultural barriers of entry into the job market – all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The impact that COVID-19 is having and will continue to have on employment of young diverse Victorians is paramount.

This report is a snapshot in time of the voices of two vital aspects to this issue; young diverse Victorians and industry. The report includes a set of recommendations which chart the beginnings of a roadmap to a stronger Victorian economy and minimize where possible the cultural biases and prejudices which still exist in the job market faced by young people from multicultural backgrounds.

These recommendations include tangible actions that we can all take to meet on common ground and create meaningful job opportunities for all young people, regardless of their cultural background, faith or identity.

I would like to thank the numerous young people who gave their time, their voices and their stories to inform this strategic document. Your expertise is incredibly valued and important. Similarly, I would like to thank the businesses who provided their perspectives and insight into employment trends.

This document is intended to be used as a practical reference and tool, and the beginning of a much bigger conversation. A conversation that needs collaborative multidisciplinary approaches in order to create tangible and sustainable solutions and ones which embrace Victoria's multicultural strengths and expertise. Only then, can we remove unnecessary barriers and begin to meet each other in the middle to create an equal, inclusive and prosperous job market for all.



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land. We pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and their ownership of Country. We acknowledge that the land on which we meet is a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Kulin people's living culture has a unique role in the life of this region.

Thank you

This report would not have been possible without the hundreds of young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds that gave their time to share their stories and experiences around multicultural youth employment during the COVID19 pandemic. A sincere thanks to the employers, industry bodies and community groups that also shared their stories.

Statement of Intent

The COVID19 pandemic has disrupted the Australian and global economies at a scale never before seen. This global disruption has resulted in over 230,000 Victorians being placed onto the Federal government's Jobkeeper schemeⁱ, and Victorian unemployment figures are expected to rise to 11% once COVID19 restrictions are liftedⁱⁱ.

Young Victorians are most affected by this economic downturn, with data suggesting that jobs for young people declined by over 11% within the March-June periodⁱⁱⁱ, before even tougher stage 4 restrictions took effect in Victoria.

Young people from multicultural communities have historically faced additional challenges and barriers in relation to the employment market^{iv} and are therefore at an increased risk of disengagement due to a contracting post COVID19 Victorian economy.

Employers in many industries have also had to navigate a period of uncertainty and economic turmoil. Many have had to reduce the number of staff they employ, and many more will review their current and future recruitment practices to ensure they remain viable as Victoria navigates to a new 'COVID normal'.

This report highlights challenges and opportunities confronting young people from culturally diverse backgrounds within the current and post COVID19 Victorian employment market and identifies opportunities for targeted supports that will assist this group in obtaining meaningful, sustainable employment in the future.

NOTE: It is understood that the world will change due to COVID-19 and this report is being prepared during the pandemic. The pandemic may change the way in which people work and live, but the implications of this may not be truly understood for some time.

The report also identifies a number of areas that impact the ability of young people from multicultural backgrounds to obtain employment, such as transport and education and training. The report does not contain an in-depth analysis of these areas, instead focussing on the impact of each on multicultural youth employment.

Who should read this report?

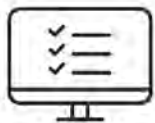
This report contains valuable employment data, as well as the perspectives and experiences of employe and young people from multicultural backgrounds as they relate to the employment market in Victoria under COVID19 restrictions. Young people, in particular those from multicultural or multi faith backgrounds will benefit from the insights and information in this report. Likewise, stakeholders providing services to these young people, such as recruitment, work readiness programs or job services should also read this report.

The report also provides employers with unique insights into the current labour market, as well as the impact that various recruitment methods and tools may have on their ability to attract and retain talented young people from multicultural backgrounds. Employers may also benefit from the examples of good practice identified in this report.

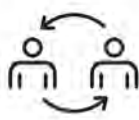
As the report links employment data to commentary from young people from multicultural backgrounds and employers this report may assist government agencies, including those from State, Federal and Local government when framing policy and procurement for youth employment, in particular multicultural youth in the future.

1. Key Findings and Recommendations

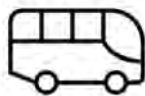
At a Glance:



There will be job opportunities for young people from multicultural backgrounds after COVID19



Employers are looking for candidates with strong interpersonal skills



Transport is a barrier for young people looking for work



There are biases within recruitment processes, and this does disadvantage youth



Recruitment processes are becoming more complex, and applying for jobs is a skill



Employers value skills and experience, but a lot of skills are transferrable

Jobs Growth is still likely post COVID19

Evidence supports a major shift in the Victorian jobs market, but it is clear that there will be jobs growth in a number of key industries and occupations as restrictions lift. The employment 'spike' in some industries, Hospitality and Tourism in particular is likely to be short term before levelling out, where other industries such as Manufacturing, ICT and Health are likely to experience more sustained jobs growth over the next 3-5 years. It is critical that multicultural youth are both aware and appropriately prepared for these opportunities as they arise.

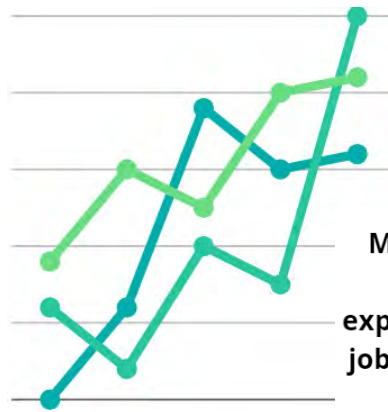
Federal, State and Local governments will all have key roles to play in the economic recovery of the State. This is particularly the case in regard to multicultural youth employment, and all levels of government can champion employment within this cohort through direct employment as well as procurement.

Recommendations:

1. Establishment of local employment taskforces in order to identify areas of employment growth within local communities and disseminate this information to youth and relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. These taskforces must include some industry representation and also should include VET and tertiary education providers, as well as employment services providers. The VMC, Department of Jobs, Resources and Precincts as well as industry, jobs and community stakeholders could all play roles in the establishment and ongoing participation within these taskforces.
2. Establishment of employment targets for migrant and culturally and linguistically diverse youth within Victorian Government, LGA and Federal Government. This would also include the establishment of social inclusion benchmarks that would apply to all procurement and grants programs attached to each Department. The Government and community stakeholders could champion the introduction of these benchmarks to their own employment, procurement, and community grants programs.

Interpersonal skills, not qualifications are the most desirable attribute employers look for

There is clear evidence to support that this is the case, although many pre-employment and work readiness programs fail to adequately prepare young people from multicultural backgrounds to respond strongly to these criteria.



Manufacturing, ICT and Health are likely to experience more sustained jobs growth over the next 3-5 years



VET and tertiary education providers, as well as secondary schools can all play a role in incorporating training relating to the application of interpersonal skills within an interview and work environment into their curriculum. Psychometric tests are also becoming more commonly applied to entry level roles, and young people from multicultural backgrounds have little exposure to these tools prior to applying for roles. Multicultural youth are aware that these traits are important to many employers, but are at a disadvantage in this area when compared to applicants from the broader community.

Recommendations:

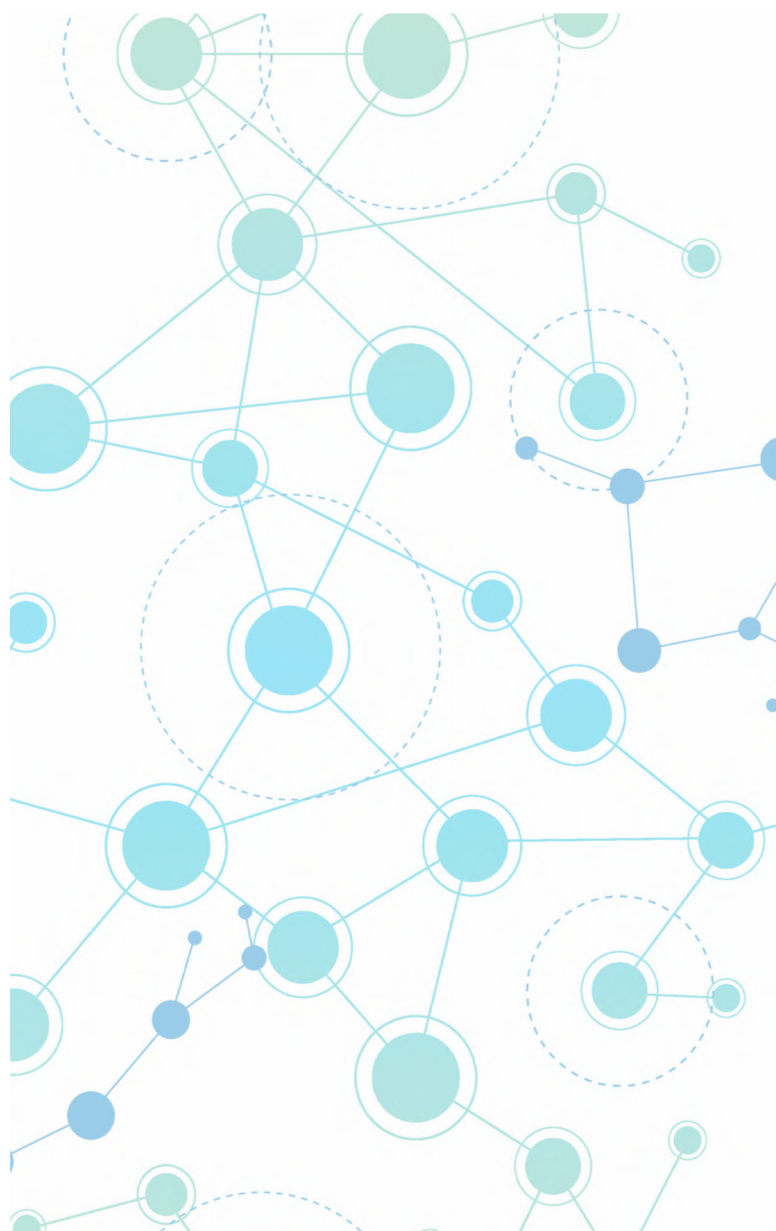
1. Community organisations and RTOs that deliver pre-employment programs should review their course content to ensure currency and integrate real industry exposure into pre-employment courses wherever reasonably practical.
2. VMC should regularly liaise with the Department of Jobs, Regions and Precincts and communicate barriers to employment experienced by multicultural communities, as well as provide feedback on job seeker/employment readiness program elements that provide low (or high) levels of relevance amongst participants from multicultural communities.
3. The VMC should investigate the availability of funding to provide targeted investment towards training and coaching multicultural youth in relation to psychometric testing and behavioural and group interview techniques. This investment may initially be towards a pilot project so as to undertake a cost benefit analysis of scaled investment in this area.

Transport a barrier to multicultural youth employment

Transport continues to be a barrier to young people from multicultural backgrounds that are seeking employment. Transport costs, as well as a lack of infrastructure connecting industrial and residential areas in some of Melbourne's fringe areas and parts of regional Victoria all contribute to this, as do the access to vehicles and driving practice for many young people from migrant backgrounds seeking to obtain a drivers licence.

Recommendations:

1. The Department of Transport should be engaged to investigate options to build the travelling capacity of young people from migrant communities throughout Metropolitan and Regional Victoria.
2. Targeted investment in programs that build the capability of young people to travel to and from work could be highly beneficial in piloting innovative solutions to tackle this issue. Although Local Government Authorities (LGAs) are best placed to invest in such programs at scale, broader stakeholders such as community groups and service providers, as well as the VMC could look into its own capability to deliver innovative solutions to multicultural communities, either through program pilots or at scale. Examples of such programs could include learn to drive programs, or programs such as Cycle of Change^V that provide disadvantaged young people with a mode of transport as well as another targeted education outcome relating to work readiness.



Conscious and unconscious biases still exist within many recruitment processes

These biases also continue to be barriers to employment for multicultural youth in Victoria. Industry and youth consultations have revealed that there are elements of industry actively investing in inclusion programs, and that some of these programs are particularly effective in engaging youth from multicultural backgrounds. This investment is largely confined to employers with high turnover and larger workforces however, and more needs to be done to limit the effects that biases have on the employment prospects of young people from multicultural backgrounds, acknowledging that we can never eliminate the presence of biases within a workplace. Many community groups are also working hard to minimise the effects of biases within the recruitment practices of businesses and could benefit from broader awareness campaigns highlighting this issue.

Recommendations:

1. VMC to work with relevant Federal and State government departments to launch a structured awareness campaign targeting unconscious bias and racism as it relates to the employment of young people. Evidence suggests (through campaigns targeting issues such as mental health and domestic violence for example) that when coupled with ground level activity (which is already being delivered by a number of community organisations) such broad marketing campaigns can be effective in reducing negative behaviours within the broader Victorian community significantly.
2. Continued investment by government in programs specifically constructed to create employment opportunity for young people from multicultural backgrounds. The 'return' created by this investment could be magnified through the delivery of a broader media campaign (see above).
3. The establishment of engagement metrics as well as accountability when recruiting is a consistent element present within the recruitment strategies of all businesses that achieve high levels of diversity within their workforces. State, Federal and Local government departments and agencies should adopt recruitment targets for multicultural youth to champion this behaviour, as well as incorporate like targets within procurement so as to drive these behaviours within the private sector. It should be noted that once established performance must be measured and there must be accountability for achieving these targets within each department/organisation if they are to be effective.





Recruitment methods used by businesses are becoming more complex

As with many skills the ability to perform strongly when applying for a job is refined through practice, and young people from multicultural backgrounds will be further disadvantaged in a job market that will be flooded with more experienced candidates if not prepared appropriately.

Many support services exist for young people looking to refine their resume writing and interview skills, as well as some services that provide practice opportunities with psychometric testing. Many young people from multicultural backgrounds do not access these services, however.

Recommendations:

1. Establishment of a resource library that young people from multicultural backgrounds can use to locate and access the services that are provided within their region.
2. VMC should regularly liaise with the Department of Jobs, Regions and Precincts and communicate barriers to employment experienced by multicultural communities, as well as provide feedback on job seeker/employment readiness program elements that provide low (or high) levels of relevance amongst participants from multicultural communities.
3. The VMC should investigate the availability of funding to provide targeted investment towards training and coaching multicultural youth in relation to current recruitment techniques used by employers, which may include tools such as group interviews and psychometric testing, as well as entrepreneurship and design thinking. This investment may initially be towards a pilot project so as to undertake a cost benefit analysis of scaled investment in this area to be undertaken.

Experience is still highly regarded by employers, and still highly sort after by young people

Prior work experience (or specifically lack thereof) continues to be a barrier to employment for young people. This is especially the case for young people from multicultural backgrounds, who must also compete with cultural biases and other barriers to employment (such as employer biases towards VISA holders for migrants and international students for example). The economic environment in Victoria post COVID19 restrictions will also likely have a significant impact on the number of work experience, graduate and internship opportunities in a number of industries, which will further inhibit the opportunity many thousands of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds will have to obtain valuable experience.



Recommendations:

1. Direct investment by government in a range of capacity building programs will have a significant impact on kickstarting the Victorian economy as well as providing real and practical work experience for multicultural young people at scale. This investment could take the form of direct recruitment, procurement or targeted programs designed to build the capability of young people through the provision of real, practical work experience (including entrepreneurship or social enterprise). When designing these programs government departments should ensure that opportunities are provided for multicultural youth within these programs through the inclusion of and where applicable the establishment of metrics and targets for this cohort within each program.
2. The establishment of a brokerage service for work experience and internships may be an effective service for many young people from multicultural backgrounds, in particular those from migrant backgrounds that many not have had access to work experience (and the brokerage that many Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) provide students) through their secondary schooling. This would ideally be established through a procurement process, and could best sit with LGAs, Department of Jobs, Regions and Precincts or Department of Education and Training depending on the scale of implementation.
3. As many young people from multicultural backgrounds do not fully understand how to communicate their transferrable skills there is significant benefit in the development of further resources to support this. There is benefit in the development of resources to educate young people from multicultural backgrounds on the value of transferrable skills, as well as how to effectively communicate transferrable skills to an employer when applying for a job. This is best lead by stakeholders currently working directly with young people from multicultural backgrounds such as employment agencies, JobActive providers and community groups, and could be supported by government through targeted procurement.



2. Youth and Industry Data Analysis

The Employment Market is likely to be more difficult to break into for multicultural youth

The Victorian economy has taken a huge hit during the COVID19 pandemic, and this has significantly impacted the number of vacancies in a large number of occupations, as well as driven unemployment up, with predictions that the State's unemployment figure will exceed 11% once restrictions are lifted^{VI}. These two factors point to much more competition for jobs, and multicultural youth will be competing against more mature aged and experienced candidates for a number of roles as the economy stabilises.

Despite this, there will be opportunities for multicultural youth to gain meaningful and sustainable employment in a post COVID19 employment environment, but this will only occur at scale if we act to appropriately prepare our multicultural youth to identify these vacancies and present as high quality candidates for the roles that they apply for, as well as address many of the barriers to employment our multicultural youth are encountering.



Where will the jobs be?

Although there has been a significant economic downturn resulting from COVID19 there are several indications that young people from culturally diverse backgrounds will have sustainable employment opportunities within a number of industries within a post COVID19 Victorian employment market.

Hospitality and trades have been the hardest hit areas in terms of employment throughout COVID19 restrictions, with reports of up to 80% of hospitality workers and up to 70% of traditional trade apprentices affected in Victoria during the pandemic.

Also of note is the effect that the economic downturn is likely to have on the number of graduate jobs advertised, as larger organisations consulted during this project have reported that they are likely to suspend graduate programs as a method of cost saving as they recover from budget deficits caused by the pandemic. This will have a profound effect on an already challenging employment space for multicultural youth, only 3% of graduate applicants have been successful in obtaining a graduate position in 2019^{VII}.

Finally, we must be mindful that although many job vacancies are advertised through jobs boards such as Seek, CareerOne and others, many jobs are not advertised online at all. In fact, research suggests that up to 40% of jobs are not advertised on on-line jobs boards or websites^{VIII}. This trend is likely to continue as the Victorian economy recovers from COVID19 restrictions, and could impact youth in multicultural communities throughout the State if they solely rely on online resources when looking for work.

Despite the short-term downturn in employment growth is anticipated in a number of industries, and multicultural youth if appropriately supported can capitalise from this.

So where will the jobs be post COVID19? Here are some key industries to look out for:

Health Care and Social Assistance a key industry for jobs growth

The 2019 Industry Employment Projections report released by the Australian Government Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business identifies the Health and Social Assistance industry as the largest contributor to Australian jobs growth over the next 4 years. This unlikely to change due to COVID19, and the pandemic may in fact contribute to further jobs creation in this industry. It may come as no surprise to many of us that nurses have been the most frequently advertised vacancy during the COVID19 pandemic, and that occupations within the Health and Social Assistance industry comprised 4 of the top 10 most advertised jobs (source: Seek). Accompanying this data a large proportion (29%) of young people from multicultural backgrounds surveyed within this project are either employed or seeking employment in this industry – a good indication that a pool of candidates is available to capitalise on this growth if appropriately supported.

ICT and Technology: +36,000 Victorian jobs

The Australian Computer Society's annual *Digital Pulse* report identifies over 36,000 new ICT jobs within Victoria by 2025, with the total jobs within the ICT area, accounting for 7.8% of all jobs within the State^{IX}. Many of these jobs are highly paid and highly skilled. Victoria has approximately 5,500 international students currently undertaking tertiary studies in ICT or related technology fields – and of note the number of total university graduates in ICT and related disciplines is unlikely to meet employment demands. There is scope for many young people to upskill now to take advantage of this employment growth, and as well as university vocational and TAFE study pathways are a viable option to entry into technology careers. It should also be noted that the Start Up ecosystem, in Victoria has suffered from a short-term decline in the availability of investment in the technology industry. Start Up investment is likely to continue to remain comparatively weak in Victoria in the short-medium term, which will have a flow on effect to the growth of some start-up businesses (particularly new or emerging start-ups that may rely more heavily on investment) over this period.

40%

of jobs are not advertised on on-line jobs boards or websites.

29%

of young people from multicultural backgrounds surveyed within this project are either employed or seeking employment in the Health and Community Services industry.

36k

new ICT jobs within Victoria by 2025.

Education and Training +12.2% 129,300 jobs nationally

As well as the obvious and critical roles that education and training providers play for young people it should be noted that the education and training industry itself is predicted to grow, creating employment opportunities within it.

The key area of this industry will likely be Victoria's Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. This is due to uncertainty around the international education and training market stemming from COVID19 outbreaks in a number of Australia's key education feeder countries (India for example), as well as a sizable investment from the Federal Government through a \$2 billion skills package. Many of these new jobs will be created once COVID19 restrictions end in Victoria and will likely include both entry level (ie administrative and support) as well as professional and graduate opportunities for multicultural youth.

Most-needed workers	Current rank	Change since Feb
Nursing-All roles	1	0
Warehousing, Storage & Distribution	2	+4
Aged & Disability Support	3	+5
Automotive Trades	4	+3
Administrative Assistants	5	-3
Sales Representatives / Consultants	6	-3
Physiotherapy, OT & Rehabilitation	7	+2
Childcare & Outside School Hours Care	8	+4
Chefs / Cooks	9	-4
Retail Assistants	10	0
Developers / Programmers	11	-7

**The pandemic caused a dramatic shift in Australia's priorities. Source: Seek, 10/9/2020*

What do employers look for when hiring?

In order to ensure that multicultural youth are appropriately prepared for today's job market, it's important to understand the expectations that employers have of applicants. This includes the skills, traits, behaviours and values that they're looking for when interviewing as well as the methods that employers are using to assess these traits in applicants. This will enable schools, education and service providers to best prepare multicultural youth to best convey their strengths and suitability to employers for the roles they apply for.

Employers, peak and professional bodies, Australian Apprenticeship Support networks (AASN) and industry associations representing the ICT, Community Services, Automotive, Hospitality, Manufacturing and Trades, as well as youth and community groups, job active providers and Registered Training Organisations (RTO)s were all consulted within this project to provide their perspectives on what industry are looking for in applicants applying for entry level roles, as well as the tools and methods employers are using to assess these traits.

What Industry said:

Interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate effectively, as well as convey a positive attitude were deemed as the highest priority for employers that were consulted. This is confirmed by the Australian Association of Graduate Employers 2020 employer survey, in which 96% of employer respondents rated interpersonal skills as highly desirable in applicants.

Employers and employer groups that were consulted within this project also confirmed this, overwhelmingly responding with the same views.

This doesn't mean that qualifications are not valued however! Many roles require applicants to have a minimum level qualification prior to applying, and those that don't have this prerequisite often list some sort of prior qualification or skill as highly desirable. Having prior qualifications is particularly relevant to graduate and professional jobs, employers will also often look for 'outstanding' or 'above average' grades when screening applicants for these roles. Importantly feedback from Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers has been that traditional trade employers are also looking for young people to have completed a pre-apprenticeship (which is an entry level skills training course for each trade) prior to commencing an apprenticeship. These are not pre-requisites for trade apprenticeships, but young people who have completed a pre-apprenticeship are generally looked at favourably when they apply.



96%

of employers rate interpersonal skills as highly desirable in applicants.

Employers also stated that they expect all applicants to have done some research about their organisation prior to applying for a job with them, and that sadly many candidates arrive at interviews without having done this. An appropriate level of knowledge about the organisation and job prior to attending an interview would usually include a knowledge of the organisation's mission (ie what they do and why) as well as a basic knowledge of where the job the young person is applying for fits into that mission. Employers stated that all of that information and research can often be found on their website and within job descriptions.

So, if all you need to do to impress an employer is communicate well, why do many young people from multicultural backgrounds find it difficult to obtain employment? According to industry, the key is the ability to showcase skills and strengths. Like many things in the business and employment world, the ability to showcase one's skills, strengths and suitability for a job is a learned skill. Although there are many stakeholders that provide young people from multicultural backgrounds (and young people in general) with resume and interviewing training, there is still a disconnect between the training provided within many (not all) of these courses and the expectations of employers. Employers still feel that many young people, particularly young people from multicultural backgrounds are under-equipped when applying for roles with them and are often unable to effectively demonstrate their skills and strengths throughout the application and interview process.

It should also be noted that the recruitment process itself is designed to reduce the number of candidates for a job at each step, and that all recruitment processes will contain inherent biases for this very reason (as they are designed to provide the organisation with one or more 'preferred' candidates). As employers adopt more complex recruitment processes, which there is evidence within all industries consulted to suggest it is, young people that have not had experience navigating recruitment – in particular cover letters, resumes and interview techniques, but also increasingly psychometric testing will be further disadvantaged by the recruitment process itself as they inevitably fail to make the short list of candidates within each phase.

"I feel that employers put a lot of pressure on young people to be shrink wrapped to fit their company on day one." - Jenny

What Young People said:

By and large the young people from multicultural backgrounds consulted provided similar feedback throughout the consultation phase, and the skills, attributes, and values that they identified were largely in line with the preferred traits that employers listed, although youth placed an additional emphasis on employers' desire for work experience, work history and prior qualifications.

Young people also reported that many businesses are employing a range of additional tools such as video screening, psychometric tests and behavioural questionnaires as part of the interview and screening process, and that these tools can be daunting and discourage many young people from multicultural backgrounds from applying for such roles.

Young people from multicultural backgrounds also reported that they feel that although the interview processes of many employers have changed and evolved, the preparation that they receive through many work ready courses has not changed sufficiently to prepare them for these more modern recruitment practices. This is particularly the case when it comes to how prepared multicultural youth feel when confronted with behavioural questions and group interviews – particularly video interviews and screening. Given that data from employers heavily trends towards communication, behaviours and teamwork as the key attributes that employers are looking for youth to demonstrate within the recruitment process, and that those metrics are commonly designed to evaluate these attributes, the under preparedness of our multicultural youth to perform strongly in these areas is a key contributor to the low number of employment outcomes within this group.

"I think there's a definite gap in resume writing, CV's and interview skills. Young people definitely need more training in this area."

"I feel that there's a lack of tailor-made job ready programs out there." - Prehashini



What are the main barriers to employment that exist for Multicultural Youth?

It must be said that many of these are not 'new' and have been referenced in many reports about youth and multicultural youth, including the recently published *Interim Report on Youth Employment* by the National Youth Commission. Through analysis of industry and youth data as well as consultations with these groups and associated stakeholders this report identifies current and perceived barriers to employment that multicultural youth are experiencing, as well as industry observations and behaviours that impact multicultural youth seeking employment, and this data forms the basis of the recommendations contained within this report.

Transport:

What Young People said:

Inadequate transport to and from work remains a barrier to employment for multicultural youth, particularly those young people that live in Melbourne's fringe or in regional Victoria. The issue of transport unfortunately appears multifaced, and youth reported several areas within the broader issue of transportation that contribute to barriers to employment:

Difficulties getting a license

The costs associated with obtaining a license are often high for multicultural youth, particularly those young people who live in households that do not have access to a family car and/or licensed driver to practice with. In many cases multicultural youth are unable to obtain a license due to an inability to pay for sufficient driving lessons or an inability to log the required number of hours practice required. This then inhibits the ability of these young people to commute to and from work as they will often need to rely almost exclusively on public transport to commute.

Requirement to travel distances to get to work

This often stems from a lack (or perceived lack) of job opportunities within the local area. Young people from multicultural backgrounds that are looking for work within their chosen industry are applying for positions that are a long way from where they live – sometimes up to two hours away, and often requiring multiple trains, trams or busses to get to. This then becomes a deterrent to applying, although many young people from multicultural backgrounds still will apply for jobs a significant commute away.

Inadequate or costly public transport

Youth within regional Victoria commented on gaps within the public transport networks that made travel to some workplaces, in particular those on either new industrial estates or those on the fringe of the nearest major population centre. Also reported as a barrier to employment was public transport timetabling – buses in particular were reported to run outside the shift requirements of employers in some industrial estates, limiting the ability of young people to get to work on time due to the unavailability of public transport at that time.

The cost of public transport for young people from multicultural backgrounds, particularly those not engaged in study or otherwise eligible for concession fares is a significant barrier to employment. Young people reported 'running the gauntlet' of fare evasion when travelling to and from interviews and work prior to receiving their first pay purely due to an inability to pay for transport through benefits. Fines issued to young people for fare evasion then become a deterrent to continuing to attend interviews and in some cases work.

*"A requirement or a lot of jobs is to have a registered driver's license, something I'm still working on." -
Phuong*

What Industry said:

The issue of transport was less of a priority for employers, the barriers from industry's perspective centred largely on the impact (or often perceived impact) on productivity and work because of transport difficulties. The primary concern of employers as it relates to transport is the ability of the employee to arrive at work on time. Although there were some examples of employers taking steps to assist young people that had transport barriers with this, these examples were the exception rather than the norm in most industries. One notable exception was traditional trades, where it is not uncommon for an employer to pick an apprentice without a license up from home and carpool to the job site (as long as the apprentice lives locally). Some employers noted that they would not progress applicants that lived more than one hour away from their workplace – highlighting that distance from work is an area of unconscious bias that businesses as well as young people from multicultural backgrounds must be aware exists.

"We don't really look at applicants that live more than one hour away."



46%

survey respondents believe that ethnic background, faith or culture are barriers to employment.

"I found it really hard to get my foot in the door with my VISA limitations." - Neria

Best Practice Example: Metro Trains

Metro Trains has set targets to employ 4.5% of its workforce from socially disadvantaged or under-represented groups, which include individuals from refugee or migrant backgrounds. The key factors that have influenced Metro's ability to consistently exceed these targets have been to embed social inclusion into the 'business as usual' employment practices throughout the organisation, as well as provide consistent and transparent communication and training to staff throughout the organisation regarding the benefits of social inclusion as well as highlighting and promoting awareness of unconscious bias throughout its staffing and management teams. All staff attached to recruitment at Metro Trains are both aware and accountable for achieving social inclusion KPIs, and inclusion targets.

Biases within recruitment processes:

What Young People said:

All youth consultations, as well as 46% of survey respondents believe that ethnic background, faith or culture are barriers to employment. The most common bias reported by young people was their name on resumes, with multicultural youth citing a number of examples where the omission of their name on a resume resulted in an interview with an employer, where the exact same resume submitted to that employer with their name on it was rejected. Similar examples were provided by multicultural youth in regard to VISAs - even where the young person made it clear on their application that their VISA enabled work.

Conscious and unconscious biases are not just evident within the pre-screening process, however. Multicultural youth that attend interviews, particularly with businesses that may have predominantly Anglo-Saxon workforces feel significant pressure to conform with the 'cultural norms' of that workplace, slang and jokes for instance, in order to present as a fit for the job. Interview panels that do not include some cultural diversity can also be intimidating for young people from multicultural backgrounds and affect their confidence as well as their ability to present well.

Lastly many young people from multicultural backgrounds felt that a large number of jobs are awarded to people that were networked with the employer prior to the job being advertised, and that their smaller networks placed them at a disadvantage when it came to looking for work.

What Industry said:

Industry largely acknowledge that biases exist within the recruitment process and take varying measures to ensure that biases effect their recruitment. Particularly pleasing to note was a trend across large businesses consulted to focus on the cultural diversity of their workforces. These employers noted that the adoption of recruitment targets and accountability (including measurement of manager/divisional performance against these targets) were key metrics that impact the cultural diversity of their workforces. Large employers that set cultural diversity targets also implement training programs to support these within their broader workforces, these relate to cultural awareness, unconscious bias or both.

With the exception of some large employers most of the businesses consulted did not set targets or attach metrics to the cultural diversity of their workforces, however. Although there was a general willingness from industry to provide employment opportunities to young people from multicultural backgrounds, businesses largely confided that they will only do so if that young person is considered a 'best fit' for the organisation, measured through the performance of the applicant through the recruitment and selection process. As noted elsewhere in this report many of these processes contain embedded biases as well as practices that discourage multicultural youth from applying or progressing their application.

“The ability to speak a second language is a competitive advantage within the recruitment process”

Increased complexity within recruitment processes:

What Young People said:

The application and interview process can be a complex and intimidating one for multicultural youth. Young people from multicultural backgrounds must not only navigate an application process, group and one-on-one interview but now often must also navigate processes that may include the use of tools such as psychometric tests, or video and phone screens. All of this is intimidating and uncomfortable for young people from multicultural backgrounds, who are often interacting with these tools and methods for the first time when applying for that job. Although they generally have a good understanding of what employers will be looking for when recruiting multicultural young people feel like they are under-equipped and under-prepared when applying for jobs – particularly when it comes to interview and assessment questions relating to measuring communication and behaviours. They expect that applying for jobs post COVID19 restrictions is going to be more difficult in an already highly competitive space for entry level jobs.

Another element of the recruitment process that young people from multicultural backgrounds identified as intimidating was the use of recruitment panels by employers, particularly when there is a lack of cultural representation on these panels. This can be off-putting for young people from multicultural backgrounds and give these applicants a perception of a workplace that will not be culturally sensitive or accommodating. This feedback aligns with research that shows that culturally and gender diverse recruitment panels help to reduce

unconscious bias and promote inclusion^{xii}.

“I feel pressured to ‘banter’ or be on the same wavelength as my Aussie colleagues. It’s a large insecurity.” - Cindy

What Industry said:

There is some considerable variance in the recruitment methods and merit criteria used by employers when recruiting for roles in which young people may be suited.

Nearly all industries consulted advertise for roles and short list applications before interviewing and reference checking candidates, the only notable exception being traditional trades – who may not always advertise their vacancy. It appears that businesses in industries with either fewer vacancies or fewer applicants employ less complex recruitment processes- whereas the application process for most graduate roles will be complex, consisting of up to 8 steps prior to the candidate receiving a job offer.

All current recruitment tools compare individual performance against established benchmarks, so it should be noted that there is almost certainly an element of bias attached to these tools that will likely disadvantage applicants that sit outside the pre-defined norms of the testing parameters. This is particularly the case when looking at tools that benchmark behaviours, including psychometric tools and other methods of assessing an individual’s ability to communicate or behave in a certain way.

The use of technology within the recruitment process, which may include the use of video screening or psychometric tests is becoming more common and is no longer limited to recruitment for graduate positions.

The use and application of these tests varies considerably across industries, with psychometric testing much more likely to be found within recruitment processes for graduate level jobs, and less likely within industries such as hospitality. Where these tests sit within the recruitment process, as well as the weight that employers attach to them also varies – some businesses require applicants to undertake psychometric testing pre-interview and use tests to shortlist candidates, while others use these tests as a form of validation post interview.

Some support services, such as Australian Apprenticeship Support Network providers utilise psychometric testing when providing young people with career advice. As these services are delivered to young people free of charge they are a viable way for young people to gain experience with these tools. Some online job search sites and recruiters also provide practice tools for candidates.

Of the employers consulted within industries that did not utilise technologies such as video screens or testing tools (such as hospitality) these industries often incorporate practical or behavioural elements into the recruitment process. This may include activities such as role plays or trials – where the applicant is exposed to elements of the role and their responses to challenges, as well as the way that they apply themselves to the work are evaluated by the employer. The way that young people are judged within these trials varies considerably, with some employers looking for a general attitude and aptitude in line with their values and others an element of technical proficiency and initiative.



Many employers will only introduce candidates to their overall process once they have progressed their initial application, making it difficult for young people from multicultural backgrounds who may not have much experience applying for jobs to adequately prepare.

"It's really important for applicants to follow the instructions within a job ad. I won't consider applications that haven't responded to the selection criteria and included a CV and cover letter." - Industry

Prior work experience, 'soft' and transferable skills:

What Young People said:

Multicultural youth who were consulted within this project as well as an overwhelming percentage of survey respondents were very aware of the value of prior work experience when applying for new job roles.

Respondents found it difficult to gain this experience prior to COVID19 restrictions and reported that opportunities have become more limited within the restriction period.

Multicultural youth remain largely optimistic about their opportunities to gain experience once restrictions ease however, with 64% of respondents feeling positive about their ability to find work in the future, and 29% worried

about their ability to find a job once restrictions end^{xiii}.

Internships and volunteer work are heavily prioritised by young people from multicultural backgrounds seeking to obtain relevant work experience. Many young people feel that the only way to obtain relevant experience is to gain it through one of these channels, and report that both internships and volunteer work gained is largely unpaid.

This is particularly the case when looking at young people living in Victoria on VISAs, who are further starved of opportunities to gain paid work experience within their chosen field and are exposed to a greater risk of exploitation. Young people look to education providers (either tertiary or VET) to provide them with access to these opportunities to gain work experience, although many are left to seek these opportunities for themselves, either due to a lack of relevant placements or the short duration of placements.

'Soft' or transferable skills gained from employment in industries other than their preferred one were less prioritised by the young people consulted within this project.

Many of these young people instead talked about these jobs as 'survival jobs' – jobs that they had taken in order to maintain an income to live on. Retail and Hospitality were the largest providers of these jobs for multicultural youth, although 'gig' jobs such as restaurant/food delivery were also present. While it is clear that more needs to be done to increase the number of work experience opportunities available to young people from multicultural backgrounds, there is also an opportunity to work with these young people to enable them to better showcase their experience and transferrable skills to employers.

It is also clear that many young people from multicultural backgrounds are not aware of the full breadth of employment opportunities available to them, and many are unaware of other 'non-traditional' or 'non-linear' ways to achieve career success if their primary approach fails. Entrepreneurship, as well as vocational pathways are largely viewed as pathways that are largely ignored by young people from multicultural backgrounds, and many report that this stems from a general steering away from these pathways when receiving careers counselling and advice at school, as well as direction and pressure to pursue tertiary studies and professional careers from immediate family.

"It's really unfair that so many businesses expect you to complete so much unpaid work experience Internships should be paid." - Andrew

What Industry said:

The employers that provided intern or work experience programs for multicultural young people that were consulted within this project confirmed that many such programs have been put on hold within the COVID19 restriction period, and that a predicted economic downturn could delay the reimplementation of many (but not all, Metro Trains being a notable example) such programs.

When asked about prior work experience, and why employers view this as important the response was somewhat unexpected: employers look for young people to identify skills, behaviours and values and relate them to the role being applied for. Employers consulted were much more interested in identifying that an applicant has the desired skills, behaviours and values for a role than whether they have a pre-determined number of years' experience.

So why do employers list prior experience as a requirement for so many 'entry level' roles?

The answer, it seems lies with a general distrust of skills acquired within education programs – specifically that employers are looking for a level of skill proficiency from young people that are largely not present on the graduates (tertiary and VET) that apply.

Attaching a requirement for additional practical experience for applicants is therefore a way for these employers to gauge practical proficiency as well as theoretical knowledge. Employers are open to young people demonstrating relevant experience in non-linear ways, however. Most industries were open to applicants who could demonstrate that they had transferrable skills, and that these were valued equally highly as those skills obtained within their industry. The key element here is how the applicant presents their skills, values and experience at interview, and how well they relate these to the role that they are applying for. Employers also said that young people generally do this poorly and are much more likely to speak to why they need a job than articulate their value to the organisation that they are applying for a job with.

"I'm not really looking for young people with hospitality experience. I want them to show me that they're confident, well presented and want to give great customer service."

64% of respondents are feeling positive about their ability to find work in the future, while 29% are concerned about their ability to find a job after restrictions end.



Networks and Networking:

What Young People said:

The Young people from multicultural backgrounds who had been successful in gaining employment within their chosen fields stressed the importance of networking and attributed strong professional and peer networks to their success. Most multicultural youth are aware of support services and organisations that provide services to help them gain employment, although young people are much more likely to seek help from their peers than access these services, usually seeking assistance from a service provider after being referred by one of their peers.

Many young people communicate within a social and/or community bubble, and this also extends to networking. This can be an area of strength for many, it was evident that many of the young people consulted within this project communicate and collaborate heavily on their friends and community, and that this translates into a collaborative approach to seeking employment in many cases. An opportunity exists to work with young people from multicultural backgrounds to expand their professional networks, as this is an area that most young people feel that they are lacking in. Although most acknowledge that a strong professional network is extremely valuable when seeking employment, there is a general lack of understanding around how to build contacts within their chosen industry and leverage their professional network to capitalise on opportunities within it.

Mentoring is another area that young people from multicultural backgrounds view as highly valuable, although few reported that they had access to a mentor or knew how to get one. The most important support role that a mentor can play for multicultural youth regarding employment is to provide genuine feedback and coaching pre and post interview.

"It's not just about experience. In order to just get a casual job, you have to know someone, otherwise you're out of the loop." - Rebecca



What Industry said:

Employers also rely on their networks when looking to employ and are likely to look to internal staff, as well as the networks and connections of these staff when recruiting prior to advertising a vacancy. These behaviours are likely to continue to impact the number of youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds within these businesses, as these youth will not ever be aware of many of the employment opportunities these employers present if they are not networked with young people already employed within them.

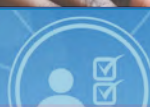
This can also work the other way. Employers in some industries (hospitality, retail, cleaning) as well as some employment programs will actively seek to build networks with local community groups in order to attract young people from multicultural backgrounds within them.

Mentoring is an area that many employers see value in, and mentors have been employed to support young people in a number of different industries under a number of varying structures. In the absence of structured programs many mentoring relationships tend to be volunteer based.

Employer organisations, professional bodies and industry groups may offer access to paid or volunteer mentors for multicultural youth employed or studying within their associated industry.

In almost all cases the primary purpose of mentoring provided by industry is to either assist an organisation with employee retention or to increase the capability of the mentee. This leads to a longer-term benefit to young people from multicultural backgrounds that are looking for employment, and according to some peak bodies this can lead to many young people becoming disillusioned with mentoring after they have participated in it for some time but have not been employed as a direct result.

“Mentoring is certainly something that has been effective or young people in our organisation.”



3. Methodology

The data used within this report has been collected through several publicly available datasets and verified through youth, community and industry consultation:

1. Youth and Industry Data scrape

Relevant reports and data were sourced from a range of stakeholders, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), industry and professional bodies, youth advocacy networks, multicultural community and advocacy groups and other relevant stakeholders. Data within these reports was then sorted into data assembled prior to COVID19 restrictions taking effect (pre-COVID19 data) and data assembled after COVID19 restrictions took effect. All data was then cleaned, and data and reports that had been superseded removed.

2. Youth and Industry Consultation

All data was then checked for currency through 20 youth and industry group consultations and individual interviews as well as a youth survey. These sessions were used to ensure that issues, barriers and opportunities presented within the reports referenced were still current, and particular focus was applied to data drawn from pre-COVID19 sources. Consultations and surveys were also used as a mechanism for feedback from youth, industry and stakeholders on current best practice in regard to the engagement of multicultural youth in employment.

3. Build a current landscape

Consultation and Survey data was then combined with the data scrape to build a current landscape of the issues, barriers and opportunities facing multicultural youth within the Victorian employment market in the COVID19 restriction period. Data relating to future employment trends was compiled.

4. Assembly of report and recommendations

This report was then assembled, outlining the key issues and opportunities presented to multicultural youth within the COVID19 Victorian employment market. Recommendations presented within this report take into account data (including economic data) accessed through the youth and industry data scrape, as well as highlighting areas of best practice identified within the consultation and survey phase where applicable.





NOTES on Data:

Definition of 'Youth'

It should be noted that there are several discrepancies in the data sets assembled for use within this report. This is primarily due to broad definitions around 'youth'. By defining youth as 15-25 year old this report attempts to capture the experiences of the majority of multicultural young people attempting to access full time employment for the first time as either school or university leavers, as well as the many thousands of young people employed part time while undertaking study or underemployed.

Availability of State specific data, and use of national data sets

Victorian jobs and employment data has been used where available, although national data sets have been used where current jobs and employment data has either not been readily available, or where national jobs and employment data supersedes Victorian reports in terms of currency.

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- Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc
- Foundation for Young Australians
- Jesuit Social Services
- Jobfind
- Kids Under Cover
- LaTrobe Community Health Service
- Loddon Campapse Multicultural Services
- MAS National
- Metro Trains
- Melton Youth Network (MYN)
- Micare and Wyndham Community and Education Centre
- Migrant Information Centre
- National Youth Commission Australia
- North Melbourne Football Club
- Reach Foundation
- Sarina Russo Employment Services
- South East Community Links
- Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council Inc
- SYN Media
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- Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
- Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet - Office for Youth
- Wangaratta Rural City Council
- YMCA Victoria
- Youth Activating Youth
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
- Youth Disability and Advocacy Service



About Adam Clarke

Adam is the Director of Adam Clarke Consulting and has 20 years' experience within the employment and training sector in Australia. Throughout this period, he has worked to provide career opportunities for young people, particularly within traineeships and apprenticeships through the coordination and operational roll-outs of several Australian Apprenticeships Support Network (AASN) providers and associated programs. Throughout his time in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector Adam has been a trusted advisor to both Federal and State Governments.

In addition to this Adam has been an advocate for businesses, assisting many businesses in developing and executing their domestic and international growth strategies, as well as connecting them to emerging talent where growth facilitates employment.

As an independent consultant Adam continues to provide strategic and operational advice to Federal and State Governments in relation to employment and training, as well as businesses and other relevant stakeholders, such as peak and professional bodies.





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