

# FOSTERING GLOBAL DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP:

## Diaspora Youth in a Connected World



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## Acknowledgements

The research contained in this report was conducted on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri, Darug and Gadigal peoples. We pay our deepest respect to their elders past and present.

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# Executive Summary

This report presents findings from our ARC Discovery project: **Fostering Global Digital Citizenship: 'Everyday' digital practices of diaspora youth in a connected world [DP190100635]**. The core aim of the project was to understand whether diaspora youths' digital media practices fostered expressions of global and digital citizenship. Further, the project aimed to investigate how civic digital practices can be better supported through digital citizenship educational policy and programs, delivered predominantly through Australian high schools.

These aims are focused on improving the inclusion and participation of diaspora youth by generating an evidence base regarding their digital and global citizenship practices and capabilities. Based on the evidence gathered in this report we have made recommendations and indicated how these can be integrated with current curricula.

**The study was conducted in three stages.**

## Stage 1

A review of the digital citizenship policies/programs of 679 Australian secondary schools.

## Stage 2

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 diaspora youth recruited through multicultural youth services in Victoria and NSW. 12 key adult stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of Digital Citizenship education, or whose work supports diaspora youth across NSW and Victoria, were also interviewed. A further 11 diaspora youth, some of whom participated in the interview process, were invited to participate in ethnographic activities conducted over several months in 2020-2021.

## Stage 3

An online survey conducted with 376 diaspora and non-diaspora youth, aged 13-18, recruited through one public school in New South Wales (NSW) (de-identified), and Dynata survey panels (national).

# Key Findings

## Digital Citizenship Practices and Perspectives of Diaspora Youth

Overall, and contrary to dominant framings of diaspora youth which have constructed them either as victims or perpetrators of social media misuse, the young people in this study demonstrated **critical and cautious thinking in relation to their social media use**. This was shown through their desire to take responsibility and support global change movements addressing racial injustice and structural inequality, and to advocate for the communities they belonged to. They were also keen to take their time before sharing content that could contain misinformation or lead to negative feedback and harm toward others.

When asked how they defined digital citizenship, participants **conceptualised the digital citizen as a subject who protects their digital identity while also taking responsibility for their own, and the broader, global community**. They did so by being **respectful, learning about different cultures, and raising awareness of factors that could negatively impact young people**. These factors were also more broadly conceptualised than in the school curricula, and often related to wider 'social and discursive struggles' (Emejulu & McGregor, 2019) such as the struggle for **racial justice, environmental justice** or the **impact of wars** that strip away young people's rights to safety, freedom and protection.

While some indicated that online participation had led to **encounters with problematic content**, they often spoke about these issues from their own experiences, which were **more nuanced and went beyond typical stranger danger, sexting and cyberbullying** concerns of adult stakeholders. For example, participants **focused on harms such as doxing or hostility and abuse** arising from users who exploited the ability to maintain anonymity in online environments. They also discussed how this regularly exposed them to toxic online cultures, misogyny and racism. But rather than withdraw, participants often found ways to stay engaged through 'quieter' acts of citizenship (Yue, Nekmat

and Beta, 2019), which were often learned informally and through negotiation with peers.

While participants didn't show strong interest in issues related to formal electoral politics (38% of diaspora youth were interested, compared to 62% indifferent), they had a **broad interest in global social issues that affected them and their communities**, even though these topics were rarely reflected in school digital citizenship curriculum. 67% of survey participants indicated that **they were concerned with global social issues**, with the top three concerns they engaged with online being **racial discrimination and prejudice, environment/climate change, and mental health and wellbeing**. The impact of global wars emerged in in-depth interviews and ethnography, with the war in Ukraine and the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan affecting participants at the time of data collection, particularly those belonging to impacted communities. These concerns and associated principles of social justice and collective action resonated across participants' engagement with digital communities of all kinds, including popular culture driven fandoms.

Participants were **concerned about engaging in issues online via public and visible 'acts' such as creating and sharing content** on one's own profile. 40% of survey participants never or rarely engaged with social and political issues by posting, commenting or sharing content publicly. In-depth interviews and ethnography provided some insight into the reasons for this, with participants outlining their **fears that they weren't knowledgeable enough, or that they might accidentally share misinformation**. This was also combined with fear of their political preferences being exposed to the wrong people (e.g. family members, friends) who might get upset at them. To guard against these unwanted outcomes, **participants described 'quiet' acts, including following and liking news and influential accounts** (journalists, influencers, activists) without commenting and sharing. This allowed them to learn about what is happening in the world and to become informed without exposing themselves to negative feedback.

Participants also set up private messaging groups to discuss topics that they didn't want made public. Some participants discussed **creating safe spaces for public discussion** by moderating harmful speech and banning users who violated these rules in digital communities and fandoms on platforms like Discord.

Participants also demonstrated a keen **awareness of how algorithms curate the content that they see and engage with in their social media feeds**. They understood not only how content is personalised to their preferences, which they perceived to increase their susceptibility to misinformation and biased worldviews, but that, depending on who they followed and what content they liked, their feed could become dominated by upsetting news and visual content. This caused distress and poor mental health for some. But rather than withdrawing their engagement, they described **'slowing down'** and engaging in practices such as **curating their feed** to include more diverse perspectives, **doing their research** before posting or **taking time out** as an act of mental health self-care. These actions, which we describe as **acts of 'slow digital citizenship'** functioned as an antidote to the incessant flow of information through participants' social media feeds, and encouraged more critical, cautious and thoughtful engagement.

### Adult Stakeholder Perspectives

Stakeholders' understanding of digital citizenship education and its pedagogical value reflected broader societal trends that have moved away from viewing digital citizenship as a means of fostering digital civic participation and, instead, tend to apprehend it from a **deficit and risk framing**. This prioritises **teaching young people** digital and technical literacy skills to **keep their information private and safe**, rather than focusing on building political and civic literacy to assist them to engage in and shape safer and better-informed online communities. This was a view strongly held by **educators and policymakers** who consistently viewed diaspora youth and digital citizenship through a 'risk and safety' paradigm. However well intentioned, this paradigm framed diaspora youth as vulnerable

and non-agentic, and often overlooked their capabilities in creating and maintaining safe digital communities, and in raising awareness of and mitigating against other social harms such as racism.

The inclusion of the perspectives of **multicultural youth support workers** added much needed nuance to this discussion. They regarded the **young people** they supported as **capable and critical makers of social media**, who **use social media to express their identity and to advocate for their community**. Multicultural youth workers believed **digital media empowers diaspora youth to build transnational connections of support and care**, and they felt that acknowledgement of these skills and literacies was lacking in school environments.

Finally, the project found that **digital citizenship policies** and their implementation in schools, the school **curriculum**, and broader federal and state **laws** did not support the practices and knowledges exhibited by diaspora youth in the study. Instead, their approach towards all young people, but specifically diaspora youth, was **heavily skewed** to view them as a population 'at risk' from digital harms and misuse. This perspective supported policies and curricula focused on **minimising risk and harm**. The extent to which digital citizenship education, broadly conceived, is now focused more on controlling and managing young people's exposure to digital harms **rather than supporting their ability to engage in the world confidently** is further evidenced by the recent decision of the Australian government to ban social media use by young people aged 16 years and under. This will complicate the recent Australian curriculum review (ACARA, 2023) which strengthened digital literacy capabilities in school curricula. The negative impacts will be particularly felt by diaspora youth, for whom social media is an integral part of how they maintain connections with transnational family, friends and diaspora community, and is critical to how they practice forms of civic engagement and participation.

# Recommendations

- 1** To broaden reductive framings of digital citizenship in school curricula by developing a capability and digital rights-based model and connecting digital citizenship programs and curricula more purposefully with global citizenship education. This will support diaspora youth to use digital technologies to engage confidently with the world and have a say in issues that affect them and their communities.
- 2** To increase recognition of diaspora youth capabilities by digital citizenship educators, designers and school leadership, which would strengthen their development, and likely contribute to the creation of more respectful and safer digital environments and communities.
- 3** To broaden the private and public actors involved in digital citizenship curriculum development and delivery to include multicultural community and advocacy organisations, especially those that are youth-led. In doing so, the experiences of multicultural communities are centred in the design of curriculum. This will reduce unintended consequences of framing diaspora youth, parents and communities as being more 'at risk' than other youth populations, which can lead to stigmatization and the withdrawal of voices essential to realising and building safer digital communities.
- 4** To move away from top-down models of digital citizenship education and instead co-design curriculum with diaspora youth and community leaders. This will ensure a more wholistic, inclusive and culturally safe curricula.
- 5** To require social media platforms to implement mechanisms such as time limited feed scrolling and better labelling of content to assist young people's own mental health self-care and counter-misinformation strategies as described in the report. This can support diaspora youth to stay engaged and connected to community while encouraging regular 'time outs' and 'slow' digital citizenship practices.
- 6** Building upon the recent Australian Curriculum Review, which introduced a Digital Literacy General Capability (previously ICT), we recommend that strengthening curricula and capabilities linking digital literacy and digital citizenship more closely with global, civic and digital rights be included in future reviews.



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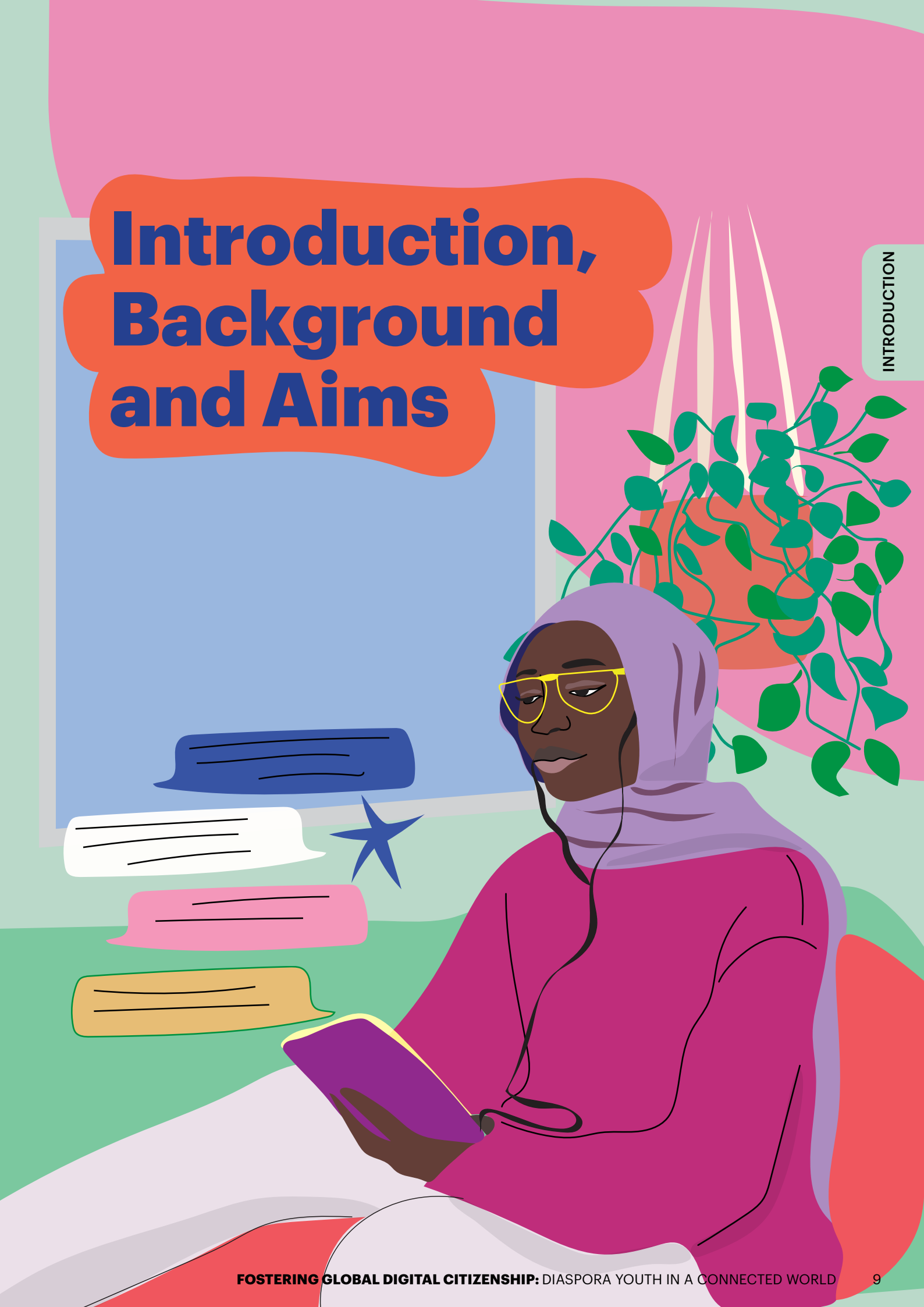
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# Introduction, Background and Aims

INTRODUCTION



## What is Digital Citizenship?

Digital citizenship is an urgent educational priority in an information age. It refers to engagement in civic participation in and through digital platforms and understanding social responsibilities to others online (Choi, 2016; Hintz, 2017; Isin & Ruppert, 2020; Mossberger et al., 2008). Building on, but moving beyond notions of digital literacy or resilience, it ‘marks a shift to thinking about online practices as fundamentally social and community-based practices, as opposed to purely individual ones’ (Third et al., 2014, p. 7). As McCosker et al. (2016, p. 1-2) note, ‘in the context of ubiquitous technology, the digital is now a part of, rather than apart from, citizenship and an implicit component of new claims to cultural rights, inclusion and participation’. A digital citizenship approach is thus interested in young people’s political and civic capacity to build respectful online communities, promote digital inclusion and active participation, and in understanding ‘how digital infrastructures can support a wider ‘civic culture’ (Couldry et al., 2014, p. 615).

Organizations working across the youth, digital media and education sectors have argued for greater digital literacy and citizenship education of children and young people so that they can harness the educational, civic and economic opportunities of an increasingly connected world. The intersection between global and digital citizenship has also become important to policymakers seeking to develop programs that foster safe, responsible, equitable and inclusive digital citizenship, often by partnering with tech industry and human rights organisations (ACARA, 2012; UNESCO, 2015; Tan & Park, 2016). Aiming to equip young people with the skills to engage in cross-cultural dialogue; a core value and practice of global citizenship (UNESCO, 2015); these programs have sought to harness the capabilities young people develop through their digital participation to foster these aims. Such aims are also informed by a strong emphasis on the digital rights of the child, youth-led civic participation, and intercultural understanding and learning (MCEETYA, 2008; Wierenga & Guevara, 2013; UNESCO, 2015).

While early digital citizenship scholarship and programs focused on the opportunities that digital technologies present for broadening young people’s participation in society (Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal, 2007), recent decades have seen significant shifts away from this approach. In the late 2010’s, digital citizenship education turned towards risk- and safety-focused responses, following wide media coverage of instances of cyberbullying and digital misuse (Livingstone & Third, 2017; McCosker, 2016). Designed to control online dangers and keep young people safe, these shifts meant digital citizenship became oriented away from opportunities for the exercise of civic participation and digital rights, towards educating young people about internet safety, privacy and security, and cyberbullying prevention (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021; Jones & Mitchell, 2016). While this ‘turn’ responded to a specific need, critical scholarship has argued that young people are no longer perceived as global citizens-in-making, and instead are reimagined as at-risk individuals—either a risk to others online, or vulnerable and in need of protection themselves (Harris & Johns, 2021; Black et al., 2022; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021).

**In the late 2000s, digital citizenship education turned towards risk- and safety-focused responses, following wide media coverage of instances of cyberbullying and digital misuse.**

## Digital Citizenship Policies and Curriculum

These criticisms have been raised in relation to Australian educational policies and curricula, where this online safety focused paradigm has become firmly established. In part, this focus has been informed by the establishment of the Federal e-Safety Commissioner in 2015— ‘the world’s first government agency committed to keeping its citizens safer online’ (Australian Government, n.d.). Originally developed in response to parents’ calls for better protection of their children online, the scope of the e-Safety Commissioner has continued to expand, with recent additions to the Commissioner’s remit including online safety education for women, First Nations, and LGBTQIA+ communities. While the office of the e-Safety Commissioner performs important work in the Australian context, its focus on protection and online safety rather than digital literacy and digital citizenship has at times, overshadowed these other educational priorities.

On the other hand, Australian educational scholars and curriculum authorities continue to acknowledge the benefits of digital literacy and digital citizenship education. This is demonstrated by the 2021 review of the Australian Curriculum, which strengthened the focus on ‘digital literacy’ as a learning outcome which should be taught wholistically across the school curriculum (ACARA, 2021). Nonetheless, there is still a strong focus on ‘online safety’ in the revised curriculum (ACARA, 2023). It is also significant that this reframing of digital citizenship as digital literacy and online safety involves a pivot from the relational, collective possibilities of ‘civic participation’ towards a more individualised, and risk-based framing

of digital technology. Recent moves by federal and state governments to legislate a ‘social media ban’ for under-16s (Albanese & Rowland, 2024; Johns, 2024; Given, 2024) further gesture toward increasing efforts to not just manage online behaviours to create safer digital experiences, but to curtail, contain, and ultimately cut off young people’s access to many major digital communication technologies, which will have significant flow on effects on their ability to participate in the broader society.

Importantly, the shift toward a risk and bans approach, while reflected in the policies of other nation-states, has had a different emphasis in some settings, most notably in Europe, where digital citizenship and digital literacy educational priorities have not followed the same risk and safety trajectory seen in Australia. Instead, the Council of Europe has strengthened attention to young people’s capacity for democratic participation in digital citizenship education, with programs designed to ‘provide young citizens with innovative opportunities to develop the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary for every citizen to participate fully and assume their responsibilities in society’ (Council of Europe, n.d.). More broadly, European policy and curriculum development has centred citizenship and participation rights, while attending to other civic learning competencies including global citizenship, intercultural understanding and media literacy (McDougall et al., 2018, p. 31).

## Digital Citizenship Scholarship

Scholars have also called for a renewed focus in digital citizenship education on young people's digital rights, participation, and an easing of the focus on protection that has developed over the past decades (Livingstone & Third, 2017; Harris & Johns, 2021). Doing so, they suggest, may require being open to more expansive and 'radical' definitions (Emejulu & McGregor, 2019; Choi & Christol, 2021) of digital citizenship, as that which may encompass broader social justice orientations, collective identity formation, everyday practices and social action beyond those facilitated by participation in more conventional, national, or formal political institutions.

Risk-oriented policy frameworks are contested by scholarly and conceptual frameworks which account for the ongoing civic and political significance of young people's everyday digital practices. For example, Vromen et al. (2016, p. 523) have theorised emerging youth civic and political engagement practices—or 'everyday making citizenship norms'—as 'creative, horizontal and ad hoc'. Others have found that young people's social media use may further facilitate, collaborative and networked modes of civic engagement (Xenos et al., 2014). This is further illustrated by Caron's (2017, p. 656) argument that young people's social media engagement enables them to 'create and sustain a youth friendly space for public discussions where they can address a social problem that affects them' (see: Harris et al., 2022, p. 146), and by Collin et al.'s (2011) finding that young people's engagement with social media may facilitate new capacities for community building and civic connection.

Here, 'acts of citizenship' have emerged as a useful way to conceptualise these informal, everyday citizenship practices (Isin & Ruppert, 2015; McCosker, Vivienne & Johns, 2016; Yue, Nekmat & Beta, 2019). As McCosker et al. (2016, p. 7) argue, citing Isin (Isin, 2008; Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin & Ruppert, 2015) this views digital technologies as sites which enable novel claims and actions, 'opening up new possibilities for minority voices, narratives and representations to gain visibility and contest their marginalization within national frames'.

These may take the form of more public and visible 'acts' such as participation in digital activism and social change movements (Vromen, 2017), engagement in online debate regarding issues such as climate change (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021), and Black Lives Matter (Choi & Park, 2023). Or it may take the form of less visible or 'quiet' acts where self-expression and practices of cultural and gender representation (Yue, Nekmat & Beta, 2019; Henry, Vasil & Witt, 2022), and the creation of digital safe spaces for social identity formation (Johns, Byron, Cheong, Wijaya & Afifi, 2022) are fostered.

**'acts of citizenship' have emerged as a useful way to conceptualise these informal, everyday citizenship practices.**

## Digital Citizenship and Diaspora Youth

Young people's everyday acts of digital participation take on particular significance in the case of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and specifically 'diaspora' youth, as we define young people who maintain transnational connections with family and community. As recent scholarship from Europe and Australia suggests, these young people express particularly strong civic and political engagement in their everyday digital practices and social media use (Kenny, 2016; Vromen et al., 2016; Wyn et al., 2018). Research has also noted the salience of global digital capabilities in relation to young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Here, studies have highlighted the transnational and global awareness of migrant youth (Harris & Johns, 2021), alongside their skilled engagement with digital technologies to support the maintenance of overseas family and community networks, and their own or their family's 'settlement' process in Australia (Caluya et al., 2018). However, they are predominantly perceived through a risk rather than strengths-based approach.

A focus on diaspora youth is particularly important given that this cohort has been apprehended in limited ways in relation to digital citizenship policy and framing in Australia; with diaspora youth often being defined as especially 'at-risk' subjects in need of protection (Caluya, Borovica & Yue, 2018; Harris et. al, 2022, p.137). Here, risks associated with exposure to violent content, such as radicalisation (Caluya et al., 2018; Harris & Johns, 2021) and mediated hate speech (e-Safety Commissioner, n.d.) have seen them constructed either as victims or perpetrators of social media misuse. Thus, diaspora youth have often been positioned in policy discourses through what is increasingly recognised as 'deficit framings', focused on their perceived lack of digital capabilities and safety, and their need for training, protection, and adult management (Livingstone & Third, 2017, p. 665). A lack of digital literacy skills among migrant and refugee parents has also been of central concern to Australian policy discourses of digital safety. There have been significant anxieties at the prospect of young people's digital activities becoming insufficiently supervised, managed, or controlled by adult guardians, and thus rendering them particularly vulnerable to online harm (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021).



There is also a dominant focus on barriers that young people may face in accessing opportunities for digital engagement in the first place. This is not to discount the digital disadvantages experienced by newly arrived migrant and refugee youth, including prohibitive costs of digital devices and Internet (Kenny, 2016). However, diaspora young people's agency and competencies are often overlooked when they are predominantly perceived as being subject to a double digital divide: facing both digital disadvantage compared with other young Australians, and an intergenerational divide between their digital skills and their parents and elders, as has been increasingly acknowledged (Caluya et al., 2018).

While recognising the need to address the barriers and disadvantages faced by diaspora youth, scholarship has increasingly drawn attention to the stigmatizing effects of these framings (Harris & Johns, 2021; Caluya et al., 2018). More critical approaches to refugee and migrant background young people's digital engagement have emerged in media literacy programs in Europe and other global contexts. Here, scholarship has recognised diaspora youth as capable civic and political actors who use digital media to overcome barriers associated with the settlement process (Bozdog, 2022; Bruinenberg, Sprenger, Omerovic and Leurs, 2021), to connect with communities locally and transnationally; to create networks for support and action on social issues; to act as digital brokers for their parents and grandparents (Leurs, 2015; Worrell, 2021); to speak out and organize against discrimination and racism; and to negotiate and advocate for their social and cultural belonging and citizenship—for instance, by contesting racial stereotypes (Fu, 2018; Choi & Christol, 2021; Harris & Johns, 2021; Xu & Zhao, 2022) and through identity expression (Fu, 2018; Xu & Zhao, 2022).

Further, diaspora youths' use of digital media to foster social networks and communities for less explicitly political purposes has also been recognised as an important mode of civic participation. This includes to maintain relationships with family and community overseas; foster their cultural identity formation and expression; and connect with informal support networks for social challenges in their lives and the lives of those around them, including mental health and racial discrimination (Caluya et al., 2018; Johns, 2014; Harris & Johns, 2021). Indeed, the globally and digitally connected lives of diaspora youth may be understood as so relevant to understanding new and emerging forms of youth civic and political participation precisely because of the everyday and informal nature of their globally networked digital engagements. Here, diaspora youth are recognised as uniquely positioned to contribute toward new forms of online political and civic engagement because of the local and transnational networks that they participate and act in (Vromen et al., 2016; Harris & Roose, 2014; Harris & Johns, 2021; Caluya et al., 2018). These new forms of participation are what our conceptualisation of 'global digital citizenship' in the lives of diaspora youth thus seeks to develop and explore.

## Project Aims

This project aims to recentre diaspora youth voices and agency by asking what it is that diaspora youth do in their 'everyday' digital media practices – not just as individuals but as participants in globally connected diaspora communities- that fosters their digital citizenship. By asking these questions, we aim to pay attention to the social and civic capabilities and potential of this cohort's digital participation. The project addresses the following aims:

1. To identify the types of digital media practices Australian diaspora youth (aged 13-16) from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds engage in.
2. To explore what types of citizenship orientations and skills are fostered through these digital media practices.
3. To compare how the findings align with, or depart from, conceptualisations of digital citizenship as it is currently defined by policymakers and implemented in existing Australian school curricula and programs.
4. To create evidence-based benchmarks and recommendations to inform digital citizenship school-based programs that enhance their inclusivity and relevance for a culturally diverse student population.



# Research Design

The project commenced in February 2020 but due to COVID-19 restrictions and school closures, it was delayed and then re-designed as it originally relied on collection of data in schools.

The research design consisted of three stages:

## Policy Review

(2020, updated in 2022):

A policy review was conducted based on a systematic desk review of 679 secondary schools (public and independent), representing almost 20% of all Australian secondary schools. This was done to identify whether they had any digital citizenship related policy and if so, what kind. It used a discourse analysis of policy materials to identify three models of digital citizenship education (discussed in Policy Review).

## Interviews and Digital Ethnography

(2020-2021):

26 diaspora youth participated in semi-structured interviews<sup>2</sup>.

Interview questions asked participants about their perspectives on digital citizenship policy and education programs and their own everyday digital citizenship practices, including use of social media to engage with social and political issues.

A further 11 diaspora youth, some of whom participated in the interviews, were invited to participate in a digital ethnography conducted over several months, which was supported by the [Indeemo](#) social research platform.

Ethnography involved participants sharing their daily social media practices and issues that they were passionate about by uploading:

- diary entries
- photos
- videos
- screen-recordings

Finally, interviews were held with 12 adult stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of digital citizenship education, or those whose work supports digital participation of diaspora youth across NSW and Victoria.

## Survey

(2022):

Based on insights gathered from Stages 1 and 2, a survey was developed and completed with 376 diaspora and non-diaspora youth (13-18 years old).

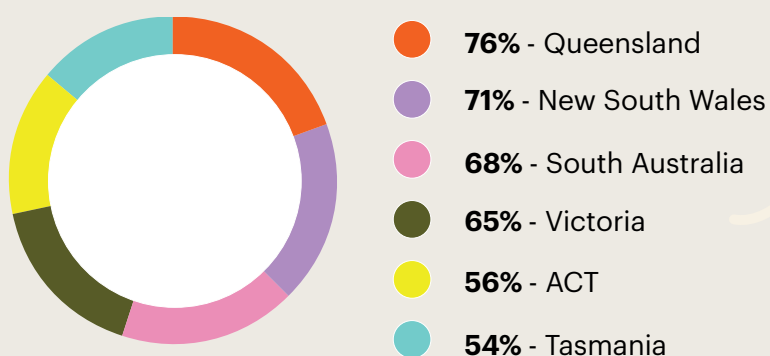
- participants recruited via a public high school and Dynata survey panels (national-level)
- questions were about social and political concerns, on-line engagement with these issues, and perspectives on digital citizenship education.
- descriptive findings showed differences and similarities between diaspora and non-diaspora youth.

- 
1. Dynata were chosen as they offer a recruitment program that could increase the cultural diversity of their recruitment pool, which helped us in reaching a good sample of diaspora youth participants
  2. Participants aged 13-21 were recruited through multicultural youth services in Victoria and NSW, as well as a panel (Dynata1). The selection criteria required participants to meet the age requirement (originally 13-18, and later expanded to 21) and to have one or both parents or grandparents born outside of Australia.

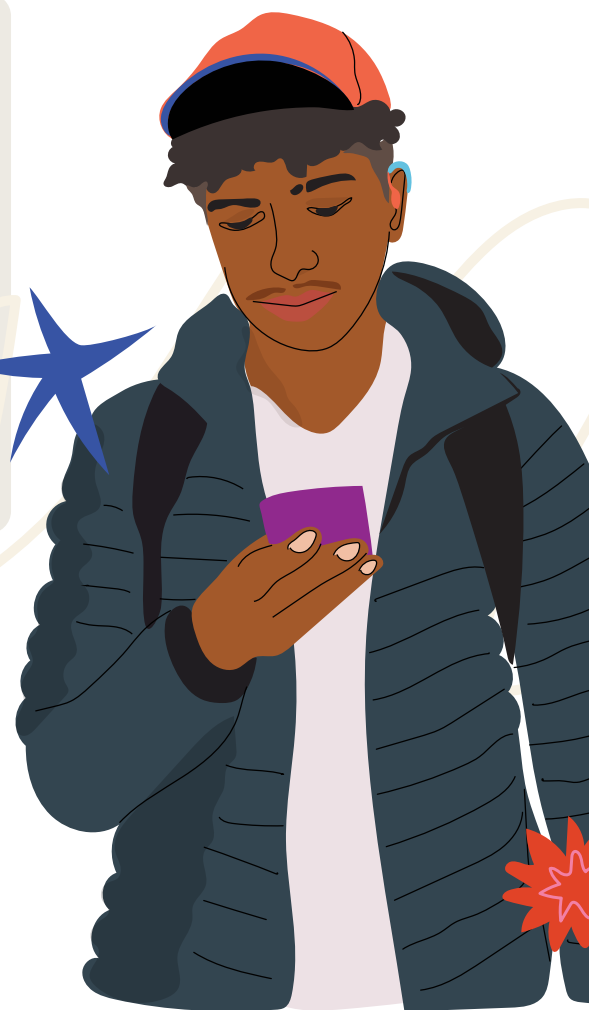
# Policy Review

The policy review found that only 64% of Australian schools had digital citizenship-related policies<sup>3</sup> on their websites. States and territories with the highest percentage of schools with digital citizenship-related policies were as follows:

**Figure 1:** States and territories with the highest percentage of schools with digital citizenship related policies



The analysis identified three analytically distinct models of digital citizenship education contained in related school policies. These are considered distinct because of key differences in: how they view students, how they view digital technologies, and what the policy aims to do. The three models are summarised in the following table alongside their prevalence.



3. There were very few school policies that used the term 'digital citizenship'. Policies related to digital citizenship that were included were social media policies, mobile phone policies, technology policies, and cyberbullying and harassment policies. The term 'digital citizenship-related policies' is used as an umbrella term for any school policies substantively pertinent to digital engagement.

Digital Citizenship Education Model	Students identified as	Digital technologies	Aims	Prevalence (among schools with digital citizenship policies)
<b>Educational</b>	Learners	Distractions to concentration or knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To minimise distraction in class and maximise concentration</li> <li>• To harness learning opportunities by maximising access to knowledge for study and learning digital literacy</li> </ul>	95%
<b>Risk/Threat</b>	Victims and/or perpetrators	Risky or dangerous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To protect students from sexual content (pornography) and sexually dangerous people (grooming)</li> <li>• To minimise access to potentially dangerous threats</li> <li>• To minimise the use of digital technologies for cyberbullying and harassment</li> </ul>	70%
<b>Civic</b>	Citizens	Civic space and platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promote civic interactions for the betterment of local, national and international communities</li> <li>• To promote social harmony and to contribute to society more broadly</li> </ul>	2%

When the prevalence of each model of digital citizenship is compared among schools with related policies, the educational model (95%) and the risk/threat model (70%) significantly outstrip the civic model (2%). This aligns with research that has warned about a shift in the Australian educational landscape towards a largely risk-based approach, but it also demonstrates that, rather than replacing an educational approach, these two models co-exist.

The results highlight a significant lack of regard for a civic-based model in school policies. Given our findings on young people's digital practices, outlined below, this is a lost opportunity to connect with the ways diaspora youth use digital technologies to maintain transnational communications and connections, build communal networks, learn about issues, express their views and participate in society.

# Youth Findings: Survey

The survey of 376 diaspora and non-diaspora youth inquired into views of digital citizenship education, social and political interests, and if and how they engage with these issues online.

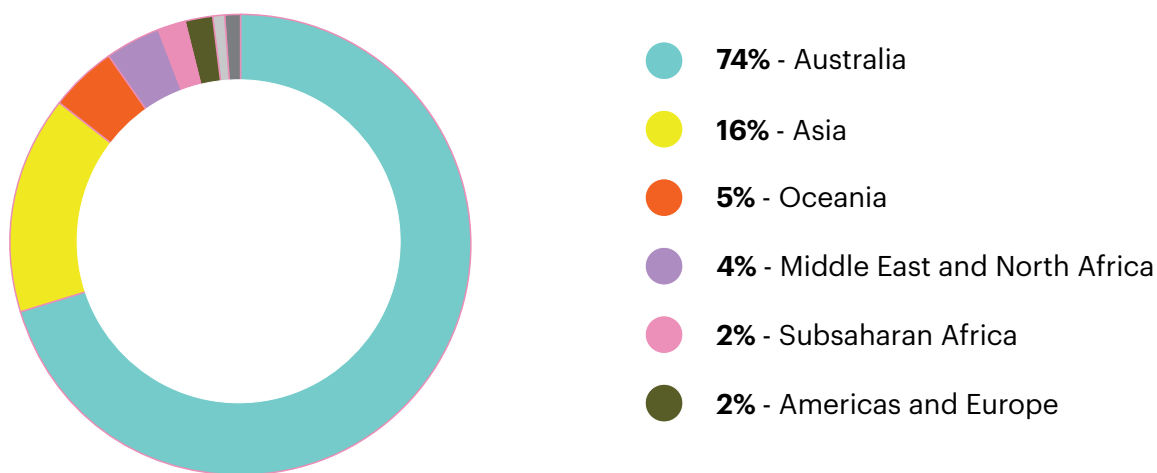
INTRODUCTION



## Key Demographics

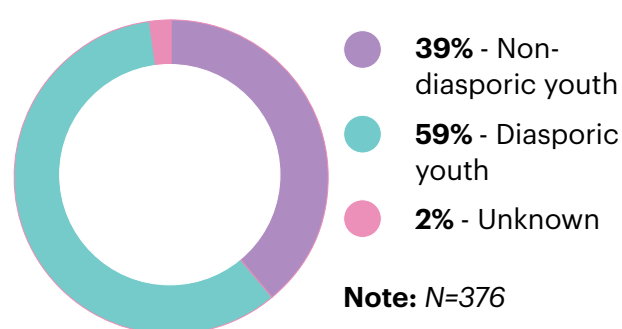
275 of survey participants were born in Australia and the other quarter of participants were born in 33 countries across Asia, Oceania, Africa, the Americas and Europe. Most of the overseas born were born in countries geographically close to Australia, including in South-East and South Asia and Oceania (see Figure 2, below).

**Figure 2:** Country of birth of youth participants



**Defining diaspora youth:** To operationally define 'diaspora' youth, the survey relied on countries of birth. For purposes of analysis, we distinguished between those participants who had one or more overseas-born parents (hereafter defined as diaspora youth). Following this definition, 59% of our participants (n = 223) were designated diaspora youth (Figure 3) and 39% non-diaspora.

**Figure 3:** Diaspora youth and non-diaspora youth breakdown



There are some limitations with the definition of diaspora youth, however. First, this means that a white Australian with one parent born in the UK is considered 'diaspora', while a third generation Asian Australian would not, even though the former may be treated like they belong in Australia while the latter may face significant discrimination and harassment. This is because colourism, that is, racism based on physical appearances including skin colour, continues to shape Australian daily life. Second, this definition does not distinguish between ethnic communities or individual families in Australia that retain significant diasporic ties even across multiple generations, from ethnic communities and/or individual families that may quickly lose those ties or are escaping from such ties. The term 'diaspora' suggests an ongoing connection to 'the homeland', which is considered as such. Those who no longer think of their birth country or their parents' birth country as 'home' are generally not considered 'diaspora' in this sense.

However, this level of detail and nuanced distinction and interpretation is not possible to capture in large quantitative surveys. This is difficult to both measure and is also confusing for a general public, let alone young people, who are not always educated on these differences even while such nuance characterises their lived experience. As a result, country of birth has been the best proxy measurement.

This is further evidenced in the survey by other indicators of cultural and experiential difference:

- Diaspora youth participants were more likely (more than 90%) to have family overseas, in contrast to non-diaspora youth (40%).
- Linguistically, more than 90% of non-diaspora youth only spoke English at home. By contrast, among diaspora youth, 40% spoke both English and at least one other language at home, and slightly under 20% of diaspora youth did not speak English at home.
- Diaspora youth also differed from non-diaspora youth in terms of their citizenship status (Chi-Square = 27.3;  $p < 0.001$ )<sup>4</sup>. While virtually all non-diaspora youth were Australian citizens, about 75% of diaspora youth were Australian citizens. About 14% of diaspora young people were permanent residents of Australia. Approximately 7% held dual citizenship.
- Finally, in terms of religion, diaspora and non-diaspora youth had significant differences in their religious affiliations (Chi-Square = 39.042;  $p < 0.001$ )<sup>5</sup>. Although both non-diaspora and diaspora youth had comparable Christian populations (40%) diaspora youth were significantly more likely to belong to a non-Christian religion, primarily Islam (20% of diaspora youth vs 2% of non-diaspora -youth), Hinduism (7% vs 0.8%) and Buddhism (4% vs 1%).

In short, while country of birth may not be an exact measurement for defining diaspora populations, it is the best measurement currently in use by national level statistics and correlates well with other markers of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

4. Because of relatively low numbers of participants who were not exclusively Australian citizens, we created a dichotomous variable ('Australian citizenship only' and 'Other citizenship status') to test whether the relationship between citizenship status and diaspora and non-diaspora youth was statistically significant.

5. Because of relatively low numbers of non-Christian religions, we grouped 'Agnostic' and 'No religion' ('Agnostic and no religion') and Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and 'Other religions' ('Other religions') to test whether the relationship between religion and diaspora and non-diaspora youth was statistically significant.

## What Does School Teach Them About Digital Citizenship?

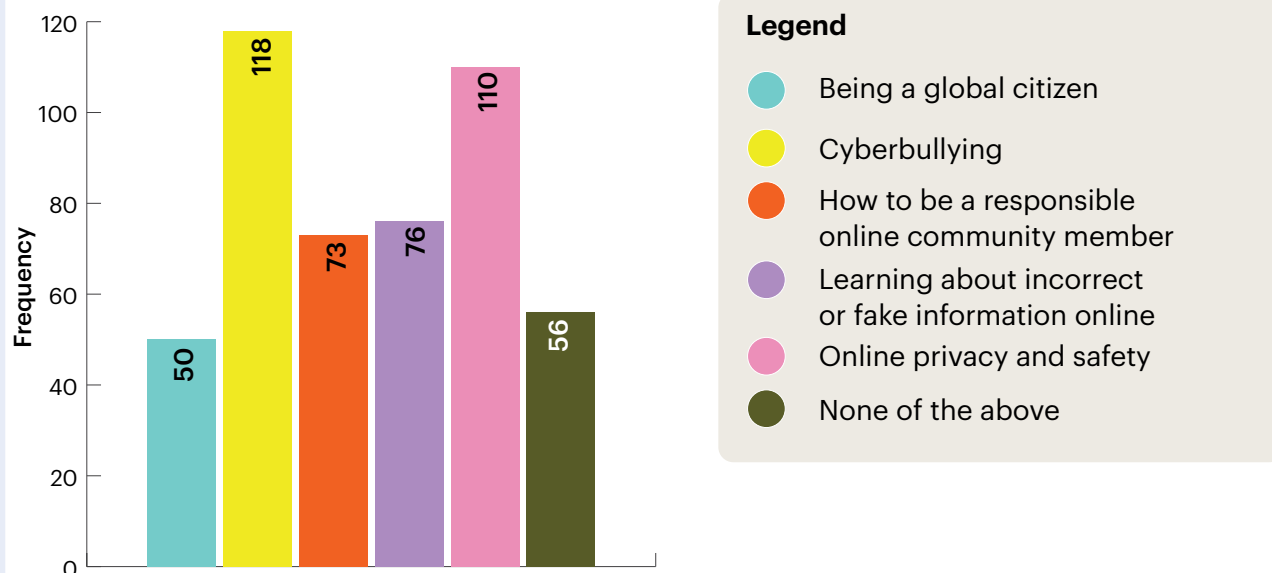
Participants were asked about the digital citizenship education topics covered in the school they currently attend, allowing multiple responses from a provided list of topics. The most covered topics were reported to be (in descending order) 'Cyberbullying' and 'Online privacy and safety', followed by 'How to be responsible in an online community' and 'Learning about incorrect or fake information online'. The least covered topic was 'Being a global citizen'. There was no statistically significant difference between diaspora and non-diaspora youth responses (See figure 4).

Participants then reported which topics they found the most important, and which they wanted to learn more about. Most nominated online privacy and safety as the most important, followed by cyberbullying, although this was one of the topics they least wanted to learn more about. The topics students most wanted to learn about was again online privacy and safety, followed by learning about incorrect or fake information online, and thirdly, 'being a global citizen' although the latter was the least covered topic in school. There was no statistically significant difference between diaspora and non-diaspora youth responses.

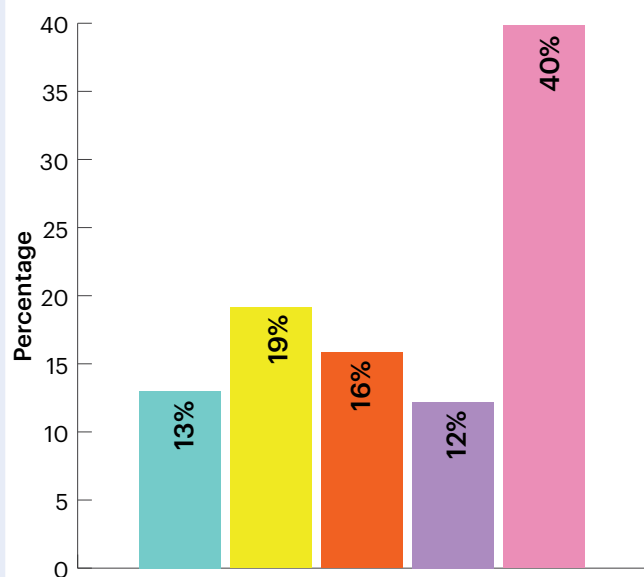




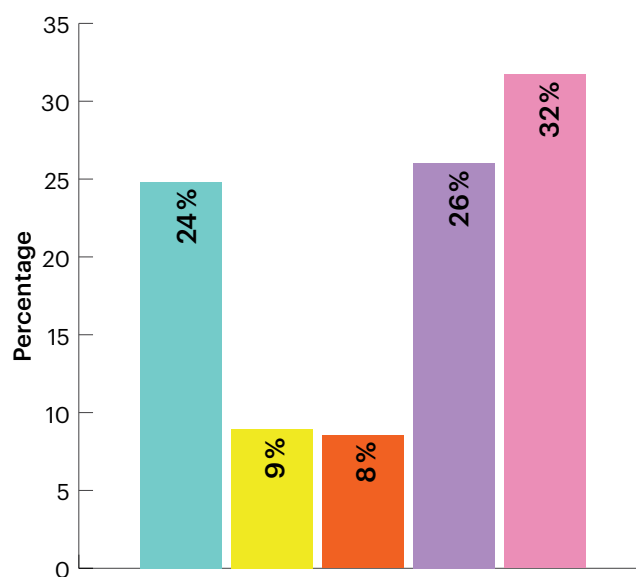
**Figure 4:** Topics young people learn about in school



**Which of these topics do you think is the most important?**



**Which of these topics do you most want to learn more about?**



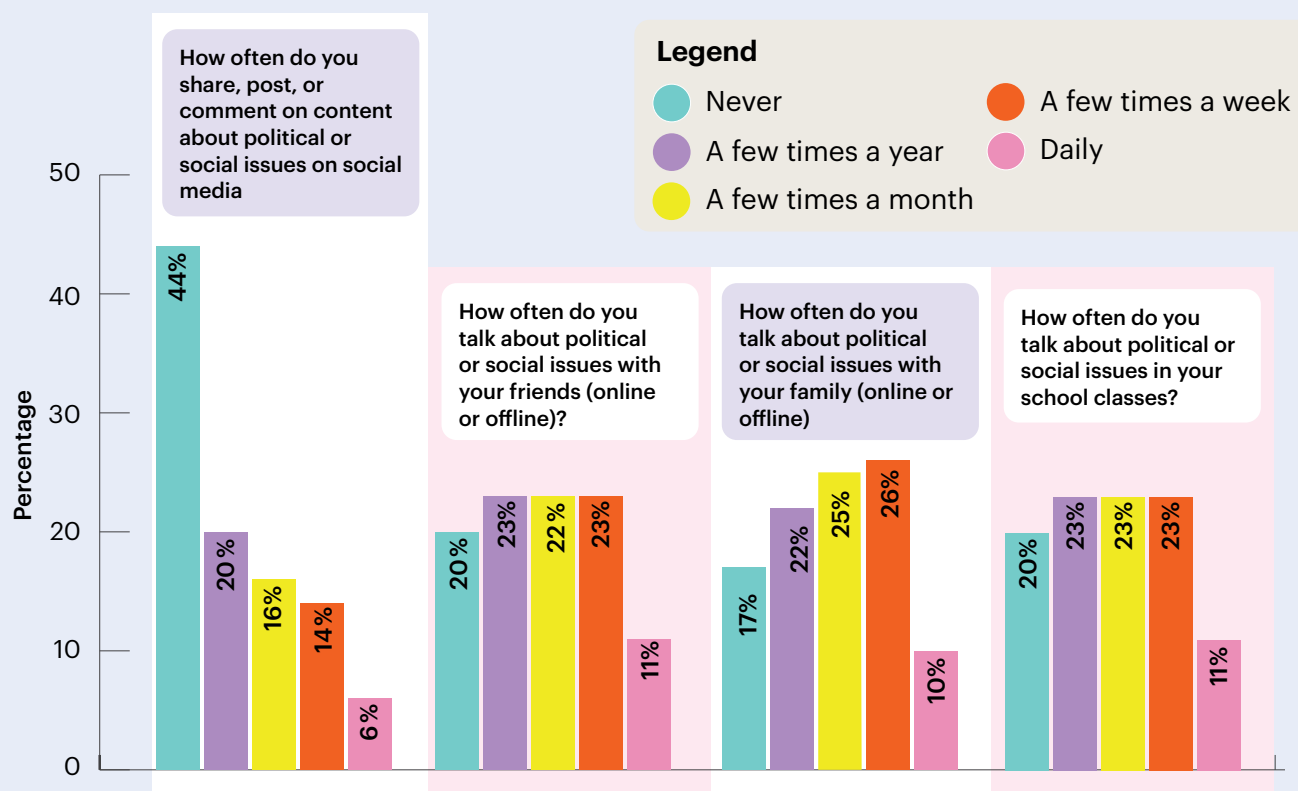
## Interest and Engagement as Citizens

Participants were asked about their interest and engagement in issues before we explored how this was expressed online. The survey made clear it was inquiring into interest in both political and social issues while acknowledging that young people tend to feel alienated from formal politics and under-report their interest and engagement when matters of public concern and civic debate are categorised as ‘political’ alone (Harris, 2009). ‘Political issues’ were defined as relating to politicians and government decisions. ‘Social issues’ were referred to as problems that affect everyday people in society. We first kept the two categories separate, to ascertain if there was any difference in reported interest. Consistent with much previous research, overall, there was higher interest in social than political issues among our sample. 67% of participants reported interest in social issues compared to 44% who reported interest in political issues. Reflecting their well-documented marginalisation from

formal political processes and forums where diverse young people fail to see themselves and their interests represented, there was lower interest in political issues among diaspora youth (38% were somewhat or very interested), while just over half (53%) of non-diaspora youth indicated they were somewhat or very interested.

We then inquired into their offline and online engagement and discussion around political and social issues taken together. The sample as a whole was more frequently engaged in discussions with friends and family (on- and offline) and with schoolmates, thus in known and contained contexts, than in sharing, posting or commenting on such issues on social media (see Figure 5). This suggests that they are more wary of expressing views in digital publics than amongst trusted and familiar networks. There was no statistically significant difference between diaspora and non-diaspora youth in this regard.

**Figure 5:** Frequency of political engagement on social media and other contexts



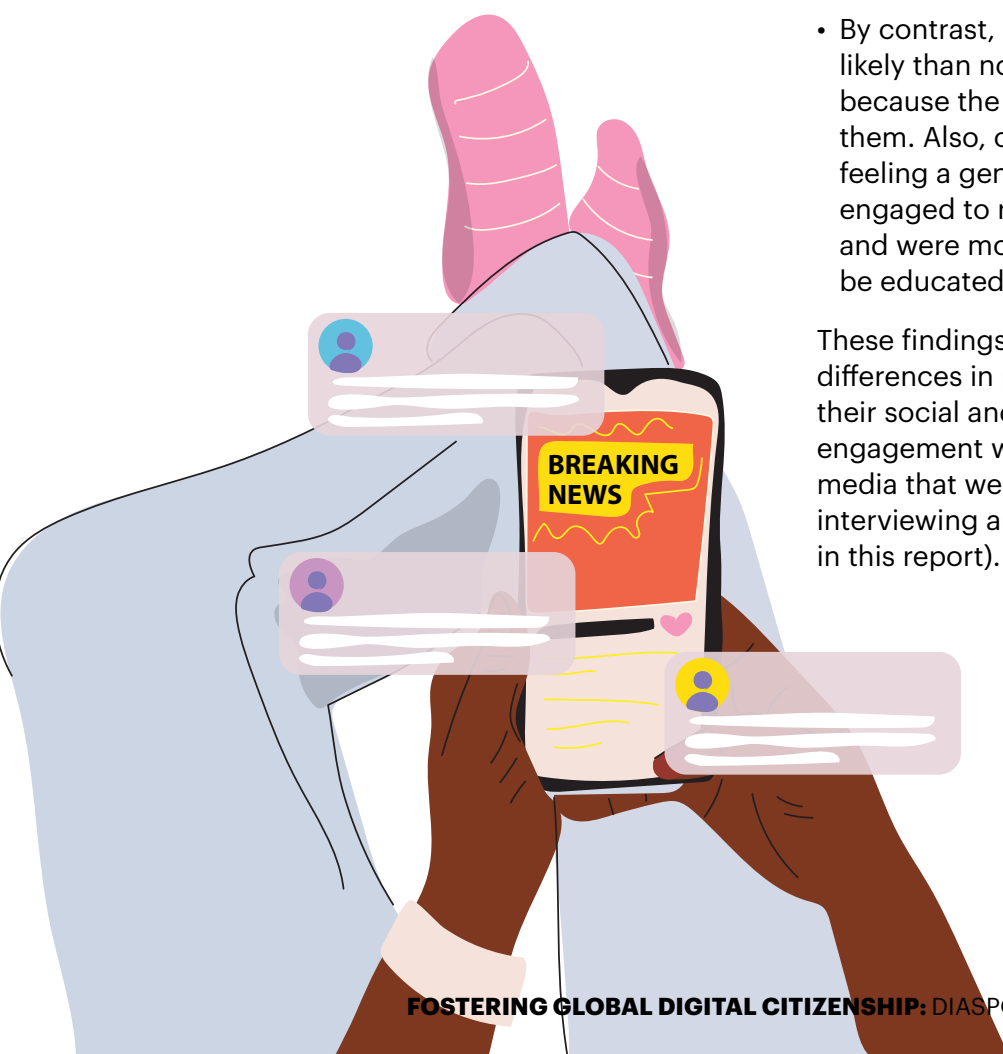
While 44% of survey participants reported that they never shared, posted or commented on political and social issues on social media, a much larger proportion: 352 of the 376 participants nevertheless reported that they still engaged with social and political issues online indicating that other forms of engagement were being practiced. This suggests that the majority engaged with social and political issues online in less visible ways more reflective of 'quiet' and what we later describe as 'slow' acts of digital citizenship. We asked participants to name the social and political issues they engaged with on social media, allowing for multiple, open-ended responses. These were categorised into 8 codes, with the most common response being issues related to:

- 1. Racial Discrimination and prejudice**
- 2. Environment/climate change, and**
- 3. Health and wellbeing**

When asked why these social issues mattered to them, the most common reasons were: because they wanted a more equal world, concern for the future and because it affected them or people close to them. When comparing the most common codes between diaspora and non-diaspora youth, the following was visible:

- A similar number of diaspora and non-diaspora youth identified wanting an equal world, being personally affected, care for the environment, and concern about war as reasons for their interest. Even though an equal number of diaspora and non-diaspora youth said they were interested because they were personally affected, non-diaspora youth were more likely to reference climate change, whereas diaspora youth were more likely to reference discrimination.
- There were slightly more non-diaspora participants than diaspora participants that named a generalised concern for the future, for others, or that the world in general was in danger.
- By contrast, diaspora youth were much more likely than non-diaspora youth to be concerned because the issues affected people close to them. Also, only diaspora youth mentioned feeling a generational responsibility to be engaged to raise awareness of these issues, and were more likely to mention the need to be educated on these issues as a result.

These findings suggest some qualitative differences in participants' reasoning behind their social and political interests and their engagement with these issues on social media that we investigated through in-depth interviewing and ethnography (explored later in this report).



## Types of Content and Engagement

To understand what young people are engaging with online, and given their propensity towards less visible practices of digital citizenship, we asked participants to list 3 organisations, hashtags or accounts they follow or use to learn more about the issues that they are interested in online. *Organisations* refer to established for profit and non-profit organisations such as news outlets, the World Health Organisation, the WWF, and some businesses (i.e., Ecostore). *Hashtags/ issues* include hashtags and broad issues mentioned by the participants, such as #blacklivesmatter or health. *Accounts* refer to the social media accounts of individuals participants

followed, such as influencers, journalists, politicians or celebrities on social media (i.e., Bernie Sanders) and social media native news profiles, such as @shityoushouldcareabout or @feminist. In this category there are also mentions of social media in general (i.e., Twitter, Tik Tok). The most cited category among diaspora and non-diaspora youth is organisations (with 122 mentions and 71 different organisations), followed by *hashtags/ issues* (101 mentions with 68 diverse hashtags/ issues) and individual accounts (65 mentions of 46 profiles). The most frequent mention is #blacklivesmatter (18 mentions).

**Figure 6:** Word cloud of all organisations, hashtags/issues and social media profiles young people engage with online



**Note:**  $N=228$  (by 112 participants)

Values (organisations, hashtags/issues or social media profiles)=185

## Organisations

66 diaspora and non-diaspora participants mentioned one or more organisations in their responses, accumulating 122 mentions of 71 different organisations. Overall, the frequencies for each organization is quite low, which demonstrated great diversity in the organisations young people followed. The most cited is 7News, followed by the World Health Organisation, 9News and ABC News. These results demonstrate, first, that young people engage with a significant diversity of organisations in online interactions. Second,

despite some popular concerns that young people may not be engaging with news, a majority of respondents named not only news/media outlets but also mainstream news outlets. Also, given that this is the largest frequency and value, it also demonstrates that young people are still engaged with 'official' sources of information (news and nonprofit and community organisations). As shown in Figure 7 (below), the organisations diaspora youth followed were consistent with the broader sample.

**Figure 7:** Word cloud of organisations diaspora youth engaged with online

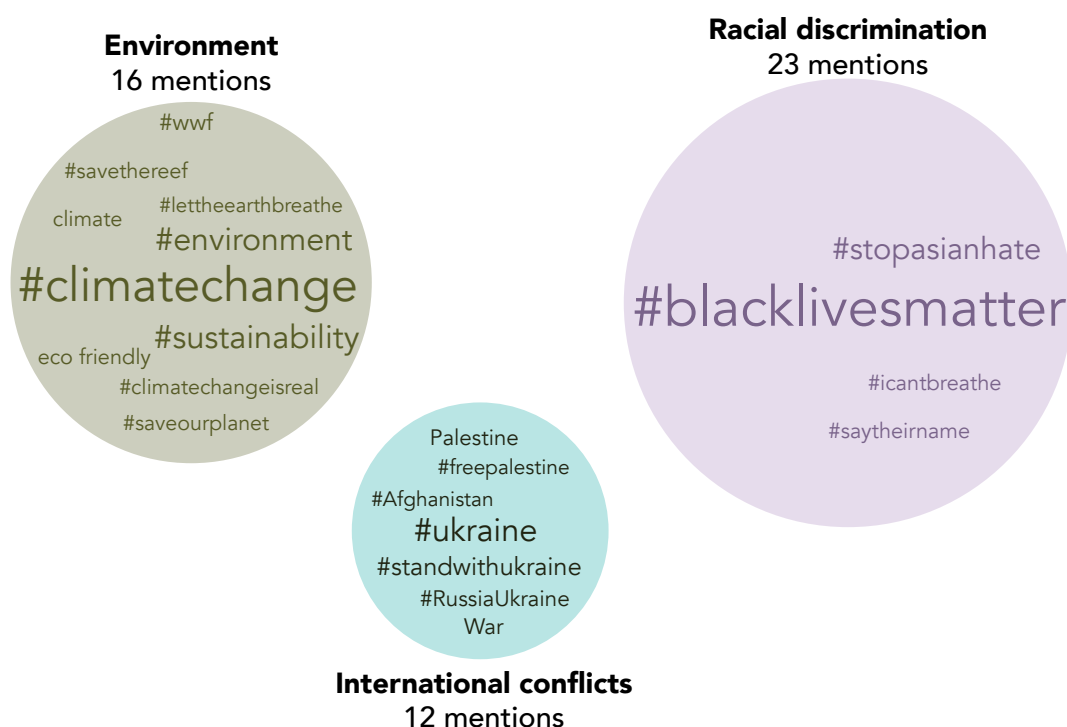


## Hashtags / Issues

Another way to think about engagement with online content is through engaging with hashtags and issues, rather than through more 'official' channels such as news/media and nonprofit or community organisations. Using hashtags or searching for issues reflects the ways we engage with the digital technologies

and social media in everyday life. Hashtags can help organise and promote popular or current topics and conversations on social media. Also, hashtags and keyword searches often allow us to see 'behind the headlines' or to see things the media has failed to report on.

**Figure 8:** Cluster of hashtags/issues young people engage with online



The results demonstrate an overt engagement with contemporary global political issues, such as Black Lives Matter movement (18 mentions alone), climate change and the #stopasianhate hashtag that circulated as a result of anti-Asian violence in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Because hashtags and issues can be actively searched and are also used to curate conversations, they indicate a level of agency and thus investment in these issues. While these issues were of common interest to diaspora and non-diaspora youth, some differences were

noted. For example, diaspora youth tended to engage with hashtags relating to countering racial injustice and racial discrimination than non-diaspora youth who cited #BlackLivesMatter but not Black Lives Matter related hashtags such as #saytheirname and #icantbreathe. #Stopasianhate was only cited by diaspora youth participants. #FreePalestine was cited by diaspora youth more frequently than #istandwithukraine which was cited by non-diaspora youth more frequently.

6. 'Issues' was combined with 'hashtags' because the participants' answers do not always refer to hashtags. Sometimes the respondents mention issues, such as *climate*, *war*, or *health*. For this reason, hashtags and issues are considered together.





# Youth Findings: Interviews and Digital Ethnography

26 diaspora youth participated in interviews on digital citizenship definitions, policy, education, and their own digital citizenship practices. 11 diaspora youth participated in a digital ethnography using an app to share social media screen-recordings, take screenshots, and create diary entries and video commentary on issues they cared about. For a table of participant information see Appendix A.



# How Do Diaspora Youth Define Digital Citizenship?

Not all young people who participated in the interviews or ethnography were able to confidently define what it meant to be a digital citizen, which is unsurprising given the contested and vague policy context outlined in the Introduction. This was apparent across all age groups, but particularly amongst younger participants, aged 13-15 years old, who often deferred to frameworks of risk and online safety as taught in the curriculum and as is the dominant approach in school policies.

For older participants, responses were more nuanced and related to three main elements which differ in subtle ways to the topics most often taught in schools. These were:

## 1. Acting respectfully and responsibly toward others:

Some participants described digital citizenship in similar terms to citizenship, with the concepts of rules, respect and responsibility commonly used.

*There's like certain rules you have to uphold, and things are like expected of you. So, you sort of just have to be like responsible with what you're doing or what you're saying and things like that.*

**(Ashley, 16)**

## 2. Protecting your digital identity:

While online anonymity was noted as sometimes enabling irresponsible and disrespectful behaviour, participants were also concerned about sharing their own identity online for fear of being doxed or exposed to other forms of digital misuse.

*If you want to use social media, a massive, one of the biggest responsibilities, I guess [...] is being safe online [...] not exposing like personal data, like home address, credit card numbers, etcetera.*

**(Louis, 15)**

### 3. Raising awareness of social and political issues:

Digital citizenship was explained by referring to young people having a voice on issues that mattered to them, with some participants finding the concept of digital citizenship to be closely aligned with political activism. As two participants observed, this was important because unlike adults who can participate through voting and the economy, social media is one of the few ways young people can participate in society.

*Like for a digital citizen probably be a lot of people like activists, online activists, like causing change or like helping others online as well*

**(Heidi, 16)**

*As younger people, we realise, oh, we have beliefs and stuff too, we need to share them. And then when they realise they can't do it in public they migrated online. So, I believe that's more where digital citizenship came from... because obviously adults, they can do it through voting*

**(Sujith, 14)**

Having a voice online was sometimes related to raising awareness of social and political issues impacting and harming marginalised communities around the world. Noor, who came to Australia on a humanitarian visa from Afghanistan, said that sharing posts about the devastation of war and conflict in Afghanistan was important to her to raise awareness among her peers.

*This is the issues that come on my page every day, #afghanlivematter, I do share and react on this feed because it's important for all of us to know what is happening all around the world, especially in AFGHANISTAN, how innocent child and family are being killed for no reason, how Taliban trying to rule on Afghan.*

**(Noor, 15)**

Participants whose families were impacted by violence and censorship (in theirs or their parents' country of origin) felt strongly that having a digital voice was a privilege that wasn't freely shared by every young person in the world, and that if you have this privilege, you have a responsibility to use it. Yasmina, of Persian heritage, felt that digital citizens in Australia should use their freedoms to advocate for others less privileged.

*I think it's important for the citizens of Australia to raise awareness and protest about stuff ... because they're a free country and they have the access to like using information... I feel like if you had that access, you should ... also raise awareness for people who ... don't have that same opportunity*

**(Yasmina, 18)**

# What Issues do Diaspora Young People Care About and Engage With?

While the issues diaspora young people were concerned about were diverse, three issues were spoken about the most. Unsurprisingly, these corresponded closely to the survey results, with the addition of war and global conflict as a key matter of concern:

1. **war and global conflict**
2. **climate change**, and
3. **racial injustice**

We suggest this was due, in some part, to the interviews taking place at the beginning of the Ukraine war, while the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban was a context that strongly impacted several participants in the interviews and ethnography who had family members living in Afghanistan. During the ethnography, some participants shared content posted by activists on hashtags such as #AfghanLivesMatter or #Afghanistan (see Figure 11).

*In this time of my life, I mostly care about my country that would be destroyed in any time and for those poor people who are sleeping in the streets and already count I as a dead due to having no hope that they would be alive. I care about those mothers whose daughter have been taken by Taliban. I care about the flag that gonna be down anywhere soon. #AFGHANISTAN*

(Noor, 15)

Others sought to raise awareness of political suppression with the aim of creating change.

*I feel like the issue is something that's been lasting for years ever since the Islamic revolution happened and people are like are dying every day and getting abused ... in Iran and I feel like the world just closed their eyes to it because it's become a norm in the Middle East for this stuff to happen. And so, people don't really care about it anymore. And I try to, to the best, I still try to raise that awareness.*

(Yasmina, 18)

**Figure 11:** Collection of images from participant Instagram feed



These responses indicate how deeply affecting these issues were for participants who had family overseas directly impacted by war and global conflict. Social media was often the sole outlet for them to learn more, raise awareness and share their voice.

The second most mentioned issue was climate change and the environment. The currency of the climate change issue needs to also be contextualised in relation to the #StudentStrike4Climate movement that had led to school walkouts prior to the pandemic and was a trending issue while the interviews took place. This helped to raise awareness and encourage participation.

*Oh, there was one time where a lot of people in our school, the corridor was full of people waiting to get like a ticket to say that they could go to a protest because it was like the really big climate change one.*

**(Melanie, 13)**

*So, I wasn't really exposed to [...] I mean, I was aware of like climate change and global warming and things like that, but I wasn't aware of the urgency and the scale of which it was happening until I came here [to Australia]. And then I remember in 2019, the climate strike happened. I saw my friends literally leaving school for it. And I was like, but your grades! [...] but eventually I kind of just came around and I realized like, oh, this is actually really important.*

**(Charlotte, 19)**

The third most discussed social issue was racial injustice, primarily focused on the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag movement, which went global in 2020. Several participants made local connections to police brutality and deaths in custody experienced by Aboriginal Australians, while experiences of racism directed at Asian Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic also saw the hashtag broadened to include recognition of racism toward people of Asian appearance.

*I did mention before that I'm not very politically active, but if it was an issue that I was really passionate about, like for example, the Black Lives Matter movement. I was really, really disturbed by what I saw on the news on social media. And ... I did openly express how I was disturbed on my own social media account.*

**(Charlie, 16)**

*I'm very passionate about #BlackLivesMatter I'm very passionate about #AsianLivesMatter. I'm passionate about all social injustice kind of stuff.*

**(Devi, 17)**



# Everyday Practices of Digital Citizenship

Participants highlighted how social media platforms Instagram, Tik Tok and WhatsApp have become increasingly important, providing tools to raise awareness of issues that concern young people. While activism and public support for hashtag movements could be considered a form of 'active citizenship', in this study participants also engaged in 'quieter' practices aimed at creating spaces where they and their friends could discuss issues privately, to feel safe and supported and avoid forms of hostility and hate.

Digital and social media were also used to connect socially with friends and family and enabled young people to participate in

online communities where diaspora identity, culture and community was affirmed. Diaspora youth were also mindful of how cultures of personalisation, immediacy and speed – driven by platform design - made engaging critically with content more difficult. To this end, some participants spoke about slowing down, doing their research and resisting sharing content that could be false or misleading. We call these acts of slow digital citizenship. We divide the findings into these three categories: active digital citizenship, quiet acts of digital citizenship and slow digital citizenship to explain young people's everyday digital media practices.

## Active Digital Citizenship

### Creating, finding and sharing information

Some participants felt that the practice of creating, seeking out and sharing information online was a key practice of digital citizenship, one which required young people to think critically about the materials they create or find on social media and to take responsibility for whether they share or not. In doing so, they spoke of taking account of how content they share impacts online users and communities. While this is a key attribute that digital and media literacy education in secondary school aims to foster, often young people in the study felt that they weren't taught these skills and instead learned from peers.

*When I think of digital citizens, I think people who use the internet actively for research and for finding stuff and for sharing stuff, responsibility—in a responsible manner. And yes, these things, I wouldn't say my school really taught me those stuff. I think it was something you start to learn by like talking to your friends and just by yourself, rather than school having to do much either.*

**(Yasmina, 18)**

Yasmina was also active in creating and sharing content on platforms like Instagram, often with the aim of extending conversations focused on social inequality. Often these conversations started at the local school or neighbourhood level, and focused on issues them and their peers were dealing with.



*For my school committee, if my school did something which was either unfair or it was really like, it was good and I wanted my friends to participate in it, I would either post on Instagram or just send a post on our group chats on Instagram as well, just to like show other students ... about that thing. And if you could do something to stop it and stuff*  
(Yasmina, 18)

But by far the most common practice was resharing content created by other people (often influencers or activists) to try to boost the visibility and virality of an issue. Young people were literate about how algorithms work to drive the visibility of content through likes and shares, and often participated by sharing Instagram posts they came across. For Yasmina, the significance of using her account for this purpose was increased owing to her family in Iran not having access to the same news due to censorship.

*My main sort of platform for the political things is Instagram. I follow two main people. There's one journalist who posts stuff that people send in from Iran when people are getting abused by the government or that people would get killed and all those sorts of issues that Iran has, they record and they send it to her and she posts them. And I repost her posts on my story so that people can see and sort of raise awareness about these issues. And also like if other people post stuff about other political issues around the world for like justice, equality, racism and all of that, I also repost their posts on my story. Sort of to get people to understand what's happening around the world, especially those who don't have access to a lot of stuff like my family in Iran.*

(Yasmina, 18)

Sometimes, participants shared content with a specific hashtag to drive engagement and raise awareness of a particular issue. As reflected in the survey findings, the most shared hashtag was #BlackLivesMatter, closely followed by #AsianLivesMatter or #StopAsianHate.

*#StopAsianHate has been going on everywhere on my stories everywhere. And I do make sure to go click on that post and like the posts to acknowledge that I am reading it and I do read it. I sometimes do share political stuff myself... I'm very passionate about #BlackLivesMatter*

(Devi, 17)

But while these practices were associated with positive forms of engagement, some participants accused their peers of sharing content with a hashtag without knowing very much about the issue and often trusting the validity of the content rather than researching it more closely. One participant regarded some forms of sharing as 'performative' – being done for personal reputation rather than trying to raise awareness - while participants also spoke about the need for people to verify the information that they are sharing for this practice to lead to 'meaningful action', indicating that careless or thoughtless sharing can lead to misinformation and fake news being spread through people's networks:

*You'd probably need to do a bit more...research... there was this term I just learned recently... I think it's like 'performative'. Like, if you just do something for the sake of likes or whatever, it's just, 'support social cause' for the sake of it. ... that's not the greatest thing for digital citizenship.*

(Lexi, 18)



*Meaningful action. Maybe... taking the time to learn about something and then make sure that I'm telling people what I believe is right. But not forcing it onto them, taking time to make sure that what I'm reading is true instead of fake spreading, like fake news.*

**(Samantha, 15)**

### Calling out bullying, racism and hate

While creating and sharing content on social and political issues was the main active digital citizenship practice described, two participants also spoke about calling out online actors as another practice that they related to digital citizenship. One participant mentioned that in school classes on cyberbullying, the class was taught to call out bullying on social media platforms.

*If you see like any cyberbullying or any like harassment going on there, or if you see someone sharing something like inappropriate, or if you see anyone like abusing, abusing how they're using technology or how they're behaving digitally. Kind of like tell them that's wrong.*

**(Samantha, 15)**

Another participant described calling out racism and hate speech as the digital citizen 'act' that she mainly engaged in, although there was also a tension in this practice, with Devi recognising that sometimes it could be conceived as a form of digital hostility or trolling, which can have harmful consequences.

*What kind of digital citizen am I? I'm someone who will call that person out. I'm not afraid to start an argument online. As long as I know in my heart that I am right ... I always share every time I'm having like a clash online or something, always with my friends, I get their input to make sure that what I'm about to do is the right thing. So, I never just, and I never say bad stuff like directing hate towards the person, but more so directing hate towards what the person said [...] then I realised I'm also pushing my agenda on them. So, I know—I am still discovering myself and stuff. But as for feeling safe, you're absolutely right. Like I want to call people out. But then I realized, how do I do this without sounding obnoxious and rude and mean.*

**(Devi, 17)**

## Quiet Acts of Digital Citizenship

While the above section deals with practices of digital citizenship that are oriented toward the public creation and sharing of content – often for reasons of becoming informed or informing others, activism and advocacy – other practices were also captured which more closely resembled what have been described in the literature as ‘quiet acts of citizenship’ (Yue, Nekmat and Beta, 2019). Such quiet or hidden acts included moderating online community and acting in ways to create ‘safe communities’ online, recognising and affirming political content by ‘liking’ rather than publicly sharing, talking to friends in private chat or on messaging apps to learn more about an issue, following influencer accounts while also becoming aware of how algorithmic bias shapes the information one is exposed to. Quiet acts also extended to fostering and sustaining friendship groups, supporting transnational family connections and engaging with diaspora community on social media. Consistent with the survey results, while many young people didn’t engage actively with social and political issues by commenting, posting or sharing on social media, there were other practices that the participants spoke about that they found more meaningful.

### Creating safe spaces

The most discussed practice associated with digital citizenship was the creation of safe spaces, which participants discussed in relation to setting up private groups or private accounts for the purposes of discussing topics they didn’t want made public. Often these groups and accounts were considered ‘safe’ not only because they were private, but because they only consisted of close contacts, including family members and close friends.

Discussion around creating safe spaces also concerned creating safe community discussion in public and semi-public conversation settings. One example of this was moderating digital communities and fandoms on platforms like Discord and Reddit, to maintain civil conduct. For example, a moderator of a Discord server

for first year university psychology students reflected on how important the server was in nurturing bonds during the COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face education. But tensions arose on the server as students also used it to talk about topics of the day and share their political views. This led to often polarising political discussion. Reluctantly, the participant/moderator banned political discussion in order to maintain safety and civility, particularly for trans community members who had been receiving hate:

*It was about trans people in sports... so I think one person was very strongly against it. ...and a couple other people I think ganged up on him.... So maybe being respectful and mindful of that, but also not being rude or degrading, so creating a safe and non-hostile environment would be a responsibility online.*

**(Charlotte, 19)**

This indicates the challenge of how to moderate online communities to ensure that dialogue is safe and respectful, while also balancing this objective with allowing people to express their views.

While being an admin or moderator of a group, page or server implied added responsibility to moderate and make decisions about what constitutes safe and respectful conduct, other participants instead moderated their own speech on platforms where diverse and passionate voices on contentious issues were often shared. By doing so they sought to provide an antidote to the types of toxic, polarized discussion on these platforms.

*I always try to use the appropriate vocabulary and sentences that doesn't offend anyone else. And guess I have to make sure it's not offending to anyone else unless they're being silly about it ... Like if someone is supporting the dictator governments, I wouldn't care how I use my sentence towards them because I know they're wrong about it. But about cultural and religious stuff I always make sure I use stuff that aren't offensive to anyone else.*

**(Ahmed, 15)**

### Liking, not sharing

As reflected in the survey findings, while participants were sometimes reluctant to post publicly on social and political issues they often instead 'liked' content to acknowledge their support for a post or issue. These descriptions were often accompanied by admissions that they rarely shared content.

*I liked this post because I was glad for America that there is now a new president [Biden], but I did not share the post as I assumed my close friends was already aware of the news*

**(Charlie, 16)**

*I like a lot of posts, and I send them to friends, but I'm a little bit too scared to publicly share a lot of them.*

**(Charlotte, 19)**

When describing the decision to like but not share, participants spoke of their fear that they weren't knowledgeable enough, or that they might accidentally share misinformation. This was also combined with fear of their political preferences being exposed to the wrong people (e.g. family members) who might get upset at them.

*This is because I do not have a clear understanding of the issue yet... But I still feel connected to this because it is happening to my people in Punjab and therefore, I felt the need to acknowledge it!*

**(Devi, 17)**

*My parents aren't necessarily supportive of my views. So that's another hurdle, I guess. They're hesitant because I know that a lot of my family are on Instagram. And so, I'm just like, do I really want them to know about this? ... So ... it's a little bit of a gamble every time.*

**(Charlotte, 19)**

### Talking to friends, reading, learning

While fear of not being knowledgeable enough or backlash were common reasons why participants avoided publicly sharing their views, this didn't mean that they were disengaged. Instead, our research showed that participants learned about issues that concerned them by talking to friends online. As some participants told us, this was a powerful way to stay engaged even if they felt that they weren't knowledgeable enough to share their views publicly, or that their voice was not being heard. By sharing views amongst trusted peers, they were taking steps toward being able to express a view more confidently.

As these comments makes clear, sharing political materials and opinions in private with friends was exciting for many participants and acted as a gateway to becoming more actively engaged later.

### Following content creators

On the other hand, some participants told us that their friends were scattered along the political spectrum of interested and knowledgeable to not caring about politics and social issues at all. Considering this, they felt it was counterproductive trying to have a quality conversation with friends. This is where some participants instead decided to follow influencers, journalists and activists to become more knowledgeable about politics.

Zahra and Alexis followed influencers and journalist accounts on Twitter to increase their knowledge, allowing them to become more informed.

*I went and made the Twitter [account] and I followed the areas that were giving... news about what's happening in Afghanistan, because I wanted to be... as well as educated, also aware of like, what was actually happening... I'm not there, but that's where I'm from so it's... It was important.*

**(Zahra, 17)**

*I follow a few pages that are like Chilean run pages. And then I follow some that are run by like Chileans who live overseas and translate it to English ... I'll look up like Chile, like they just got a new president. So, I like looked up about that on Twitter instead of Instagram, sometimes easy to look up a topic on Twitter than on Instagram.*

**(Alexis, 21)**

Devi followed a Punjabi feminist influencer online, which was important to her to feel engaged with her culture and issues that affected her as a woman. As with other participants, engaging with this content shaped her own views on practices of misogyny, and inspired her decision to start creating content and calling out misogyny and hate online.

*She's like a feminist, I guess, but more so she's Indian...She's Punjabi like me and there's a lot of misogyny in my culture [...] and she was someone who was calling it out, you know, like harassment and stuff. She would expose the people who sent her messages [...] there was this one person. And he sent her a really explicit message. And she went full out on the video. She exposed them, she emailed the school and everything. And I was like, wow, you can do this. I realized like, wow. And then I think he got punished or whatever. I don't know what happened to him. I don't care. I was just shocked by the fact that she did that. And I read the comments. Everyone's like, yes, go girl, I was like, who is this person who has the confidence to do that? I was like, wow. And so, I followed her and she's amazing. And so, the fact that she's also Punjabi like, you know, kind of just I vibe with her.*

**(Devi, 17)**

She also considered Tik Tok to be a great platform for following influencers and learning about community issues through them. For example, she claimed that she became aware of many issues in her community through following Punjabi content creators on Tik Tok. It is through this process that she describes being immersed in and nourished by 'brown community'.

*I do get a lot of the brown community on it as well. That's what we call ourselves I guess, and it's just like, there's a lot of social issues on there as well. A lot of people like just make videos, just talking and stuff.*

**(Devi, 17)**

### Local and transnational connections

Social connection and sharing intimate bonds with friends and family was also facilitated through social media networks, a factor that was essential for maintaining social bonds and mental health and wellbeing, increasingly so during the COVID-19 related lockdowns. Many of these were local connections, with diaspora youth speaking of how important WhatsApp, Messenger, iMessage, Snapchat, Discord and Instagram were for maintaining connections with friends during the pandemic.

*My friends and I used WhatsApp, and we had a little kind of like group chat and we all just talked about school, about assignments, helped each other out. So occasionally I'd call my friends, text them. And then when ... restrictions were easing a bit more like I'd maybe go for a walk with one or two of them ... go for a bike ride. So, I was still in touch.*

**(Louis, 15)**

*School friends. It's usually Snapchat or unless they send me stuff on Instagram because that's where we send stuff to each other... But mostly Snapchat*

**(Yasmina, 18)**

*I mostly communicate with my friends so it is either Discord and Instagram, Instagram has ... a shared chat and then with my friends, we've got a dedicated [Discord] server where we can just talk on and go through like the channels we've created.*

**(Yingying, 17)**

Since WhatsApp allowed large groups of people to participate in a chat simultaneously, it could be tailored for work and school networking. Two participants spoke of how essential WhatsApp was for them to make friends with their classmates during the many lockdowns in Melbourne. They stressed that they almost bonded more tightly than if it had been a normal school year, by sharing memes, photos and other personal content with each other, even if it was out of boredom and loneliness.

*I joined a new school in year nine. And basically, that school goes from year 9 to year 12, so everybody who came that year was new to that school. So, the first year of everybody trying to get like together and make friendship groups they basically had to go on online. The weird thing was, when we got back to school. I feel like our like whole year level was bonded like really well, even though it was online. And I feel like if it wasn't online, we wouldn't have bonded as well as if it was.*

**(Sujith, 14)**



*We've all like bonded, I guess, over like two years of being in the same class and being in high school, I think over quarantine, we were all kind of bored. So, we just kind of texted on the chat. We have like lots of very strange inside jokes for our class and people like, they send things of like, their pets, or like art projects... or just like random, just really weird memes, whatever. It's really just whatever they find. They send it there. And I think our class has probably messaged like two times, three times more than what I felt we did before quarantine, because now we're like connecting. And I think as a class we bonded a lot more than we would have had it not been COVID.*

**(Kelly, 13)**

Aside from local social connections and intimacy, participants also shared that social media allowed them to maintain transnational connections with extended family overseas and with diaspora community. Sujith said that WhatsApp functioned as a digital hub for synchronous co-presence with family overseas, with voice and video calls replacing the telephone as a communication technology that families gather around or are called to, in order to speak to loved ones.

*We'll be together and then we'll decide to call like an uncle or auntie from overseas, but sometimes one person might just call and then they were like, 'come, come uncle's on the phone' and then everybody will gather around, and we'll end up talking anyway.*

**(Sujith, 14)**

Some participants also stressed WhatsApp's popularity in the regions where their extended families were located. This had led it to become a default diaspora communication platform.

*It's easier to use WhatsApp when talking to people overseas. So, I have family like in China and in Singapore, and I think it's just an easy way cause it's like accessible for all of us.*

**(Audrey, 16)**

*In Malaysia, WhatsApp is really popular. Whether it's talking to your teachers or your friends, your family, I think just everyone uses WhatsApp there now.*

**(Heidi, 16)**

In terms of the practices young people engaged in to maintain transnational family connections, passive activities such as participating in group calls and group messaging were the most frequent, but several other participants also discussed how they engaged in what has been described as 'digital brokering' (Worrell, 2021; Leurs, 2015), by sharing platform and culturally specific digital cultural artefacts (Tik Tok videos, memes, humour, stickers) that enabled communication to flow between generations, and across language and cultural barriers.

*I do tend to use the mix of both [English and Chinese] because I'm not proficient in Chinese... but with emoticons that you see on WeChat, or typically on the Chinese internet, they diverged into a different internet culture than the West... even memes have a different context... when I want to express something and I don't know how to express that, I just look up the memes that are like very commonly used in China. My friends and cousins know about the context.*

**(Amber, 18)**

*My aunties share voice recordings in Punjabi and broken English. Cause yeah, they can't type English. And a lot, a lot of heart emojis... My grandmother, she just replies to all my statuses... with heart emojis... I shared this [see Figure 11] to my family chat... I just send memes and jokes. So, Pizza Hut... Hut means move in Punjabi. I normally share Indian related jokes.*

**(Devi, 17).**

**Figure 11:** Tik Tok cultural humour



The extent to which young people put effort into learning a new internet language and to navigate platforms foreign to their everyday use to maintain family connections emphasises a particular set of skills and labour involved in these brokering activities.

## Slow Digital Citizenship

Several participants also spoke about another 'act' of citizenship that was becoming more important in a context where platforms are designed to personalise content to users to keep them constantly engaged and captured by the feed. This was reflected in practices where they sought to slow down the barrage of content they engaged with on a daily basis which frequently contributed to overwhelming feelings. This often involved stepping away, or having 'time out', to think critically and fact-check content. We describe these as acts of 'slow' digital citizenship.

### Becoming aware of algorithmic bias and resisting or pausing engagement

Participants felt that it was their responsibility to not only become informed but to think critically about how the content that they encounter on social media is selected for them, with participants acknowledging that their feed is mostly co-curated, but in a way skewed toward platform interests, although they also spoke about choices they could make to improve the quality of information they see.

*I personally became more aware of things and how I need to be more critical of issues when I read about them rather than just look at them from biased view, like on social media... so when I'm on social media... I take an active approach as to judge what I'm seeing... I have to take an active approach as to know what things I have to follow or what I shouldn't follow.*

**(Amber, 18)**



Amber also highlighted the way that platform algorithms curate content to user's personal preferences. Considering this 'bias' they employed practices to make sure that they didn't get stuck in echo chambers where they weren't encountering different points of view.

*I never use social media for reading news because I know how biased people's perspectives can be, particularly because ... I follow a very narrow set of individuals and groups, so that doesn't make for a very unbiased perspective. It's very easy for me to just fall into that rabbit hole of a very closed viewpoint. So, I always use, like, I go on websites to read news like The Guardian or like the New Yorker or like the ABC, the Conversation, they're news sites that I can trust their judgment in to provide a very analytical and non-biased viewpoint... I never use social media for news.*

**(Amber, 18)**

Tik Tok was singled out by several participants as curating content for users based on their likes and profile information. Although participants also demonstrated awareness that sometimes they were exposed to content related to their geo-location rather than strictly their own preferences.

*With Tik Tok, because it's, you know, the For You page it's adjusted for you and because it recognized me as like an Australian and I guess, with all of the voting that's gonna like occur soon [Australian federal election, 2022] I've seen, like posts about political leaders.*

**(Yingying, 17)**

## **Mental health support and self-care**

There was an ambivalent stance taken to mental health support on social media, with participants finding important mental health information and community online as a result of algorithmic cultures supporting such topics, as well as practices of following health and wellbeing influencers. While participants were mindful of criticisms of influencer culture, where the self-branding strategies of influencers and the intimacy they create with their audience is often seen as inauthentic and driven by economic self-interest, Lexi regarded online mental health influencers as an approachable first contact that initiated her into more formal help-seeking.

*I'd say thanks to Instagram and Tik Tok ... it made me realize I should ... probably seek help, you know? Like, wow, like this is insane ... it does validate me, and it pushes me to like, oh, I should probably like see someone... so I [now] see a school psychologist and in my mind she's really good. And I think a part of it is probably got to do with the influence of social media.*

**(Lexi, 18)**

For many young people, influencers like these were just one feature of a shift in digital cultures - away from toxicity (often associated with polarising topics like politics) and towards creating safe spaces and strategies that prioritised self-care. But while sometimes this meant seeking support online, at other times participants made the decision to withdraw as a part of their strategy of mental health self-care, what we regard as slowing down for mental health.

*I acknowledge it and I like the posts [politically motivated] and I am engaged in it, but I don't like it. I don't like it because it's negative all the time. That's why I spend most of my time on my...private account with just my friends and just my influencers. I hardly look at my main account because it's just social issues and it makes me sad, but I do acknowledge it cause it needs to be acknowledged and it needs to be dealt with, I think.*

**(Devi, 17)**

Other participants also discussed similar strategies of self-care prompted by their exposure to political issues that made them feel 'sad'. For example, Stephanie's decision to seek out more 'inspiring' content, like art, was driven by a desire to escape the sad feelings they associated with political engagement.

*Even though I have... like strong opinions and I like care about things... I don't like seeing like anything about like politics or like the real world and everyone like shares stuff and it just, it just makes me really sad. Cause you know... I mostly use it [social media] to like make friends, but also like look at art and stuff and you know, I want to like see things that are like cool and like inspiring. Same with YouTube. I decided to try to stop watching YouTube because all the videos I watch are about like social issues and stuff. It makes me sad. I don't know why I'm doing it.*

**(Stephanie, 18)**

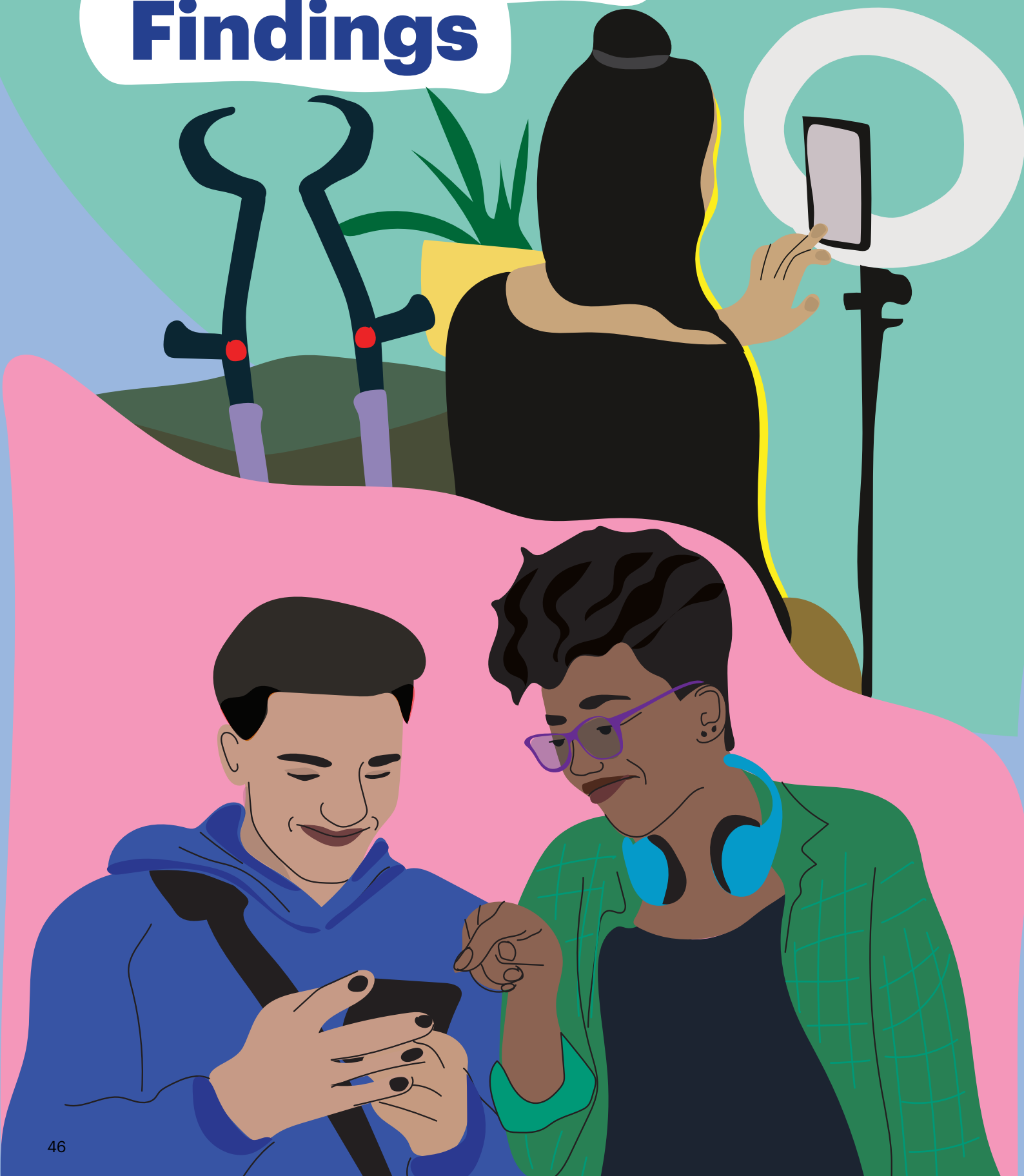
For Zahra who had arrived in Australia as a refugee from Afghanistan, the importance of sharing content from political influencers and activists to raise awareness of what was happening in Afghanistan was balanced by an awareness of the personal cost of becoming too invested, including feelings of grief and frustration. She decided to no longer watch the news for this reason.

*When you open your social media, especially around those times, every time, every morning that I opened my social media, there was nothing but news from all over like, you know, Afghanistan and everyone had something on their story, and it was quite... despite the fact that it was heartbreaking, it was, you know, it was something that we couldn't...I couldn't do anything. I actually, I give up on following the news because it was so frustrating...So I actually don't know what's happening in Afghanistan right now*

**(Zahra, 17)**

While it is easy to see these forms of withdrawal as disengagement, such a view limits our understanding of the practices of self-care and help-seeking that have emerged as a priority among diaspora youth when confronted with content that can promote worry and depression. For participants who were politically active, some of these self-care strategies functioned like a safety outlet that allowed them to keep being active, but in a more limited capacity at times.

# Stakeholder Findings



**Stakeholders from federal government, education (public and private) and multicultural youth services sectors took part in semi-structured interviews for the project. Stakeholders were asked to share their understanding of what digital citizenship means: as a concept and practice, and its place and framing within Australian school education.**

The findings reveal a disconnect between diaspora youth and adult stakeholder understandings of what digital citizenship means, how it is practiced and how it should be taught in schools. But some other more nuanced differences also emerged in relation to how digital citizenship was conceptualised, how it was framed pedagogically and how diaspora young people's needs were understood according to the occupation, seniority of role, and the different remit of each of the stakeholders interviewed.

## **How do different stakeholders define digital citizenship?**

### **Risk and Online safety**

Educators and policymakers consistently framed their responses to what digital citizenship education was by referring to risks and dangers associated with the online world and diaspora youths' position as more 'at-risk' than other young people. An indication of the extent to which digital citizenship has become redefined by concerns related to online safety and digital misuse was that the concept of 'digital citizenship' was barely discussed by stakeholders, or it was regarded as a layer on top of online safety, which was the main educational priority. This was explained by Dale, a government stakeholder.

*Our focus is more so online safety, so online risks, but also... social and emotional wellbeing. This is something that's sort of... this idea of digital citizenship, it's quite popular across states and territories, but you know, it's one component along with social, emotional learning, online safety, understanding online safety risks and harms as part of our best practice online safety education program that should be delivered in schools.*

**(Dale, policymaker)**

For educators, digital citizenship was more broadly conceptualised, and encompassed notions of equity in educational access, digital literacy as well as online safety. For example, Patricia, a school principal we spoke to, discussed her school's investment in Google classrooms. As she told us, this ensured that students at her school (a low socio-economic school in Sydney) had the same access to digital technologies and the same employment opportunities as students in other parts of Sydney. But despite her having this concept of digital technologies which related them to outcomes including equity and access, most of the discussion around digital citizenship education centred on digital misuse and how to limit the distracting and destructive potential of digital technologies in the classroom and at home. In discussing what types of risks and harms the school was concerned about, 'sexting', cyberbullying and harassment, as well as distraction in the classroom and at home were raised as concerns.

*They're sitting in their bedrooms at night, under the covers and on their phones. And 'he said, she said', and sexting and all that other stuff that goes into that world. And then the next day, or usually Monday, it comes out here... We tend to only deal with it when it actually comes into the school and causes disruption here ... but it is really challenging, to the point that last week we are starting to look at where we go with this?*

**(Patricia, school principal)**

Some risks were so serious that police involvement and legal proceedings followed, such as an incident of online sexual grooming of a student by a stranger, which ended up in court. Dealing with incidents such as these meant that leaning toward the protection and 'control' side was often a practical necessity for principals, who had to balance student educational needs against welfare concerns. While Patricia lamented the absence of a focus on the civic dimensions of digital media use,

she felt her role was more often taken up with 'putting out spot fires'.

### **Taking responsibility versus bans on use**

Banning mobile devices in schools has become a controversial policy in Australia and globally, with supporters arguing that it reduces student distraction and increases learning and wellbeing, as well as reducing cyberbullying. Critics, on the other hand, have argued that there is insufficient evidence correlating mobile phone bans with improved student learning and wellbeing, arguing in some cases that harms outweighed the benefits (Campbell & Edwards, 2024). This was also reflected in our study, with Patricia implementing a mobile phone ban at her school, while Brian, a regional Google Classrooms educator, argued that digital citizenship education should be focused on encouraging young people to act responsibly with technology rather than removing it.

*Digital citizenship can help develop students' knowledge and understanding of how they participate responsibly in digital environments, how to manage negative social behaviours, helping them with identifying risk of harm as well as looking at how they can build up a skill set... of prevention strategies and proactive coping strategies when something does go wrong online... because it's not a matter of if something goes wrong... so making sure they have that strong toolkit of how to manage their lives online.*

**(Brian, educator)**



He viewed digital citizenship as no different to other models of citizenship, where ‘you have roles and responsibilities’ and you need to ‘act those out’ for the good of the whole.

*We’re still talking about digital citizenship as though it’s different to citizenship. Citizenship is being a decent person, doing the right thing and, you know, understanding that you have roles and responsibilities in society, and acting those out in ways that are kind and respectful... I don’t know why it should be different just because it’s digital.*

**(Brian)**

### Digital literacy and access

A junior teacher, Cameron, felt that there should be more investment in participatory learning and digital literacy in high school, and he was frustrated by the absence of more meaningful discussions around these topics in student lives. He claimed that opportunities to harness the benefits of technology for learning, including learning to be a citizen, were lost because senior teachers and leaders were ‘scared’ of tech.

*Senior exec at our school and a lot of the people that are in those higher positions, that are deciding the programs that we do, are just not very tech savvy. And they’re just not from that generation that this is something that they’re even concerned—really know much about ... there’s this fear of technology at the moment, from teachers. There’s this giant fear of... social media... teachers are scared, scared by it.*

**(Cameron, educator)**

This view was supported by Eric, a private educator, who wondered if the failure to integrate a more literacy and participation focused curriculum wasn’t due to the limitations of teachers’ own digital literacy.

*That’s probably the biggest challenge, is teachers who are uncomfortable or without the understanding... it’s not their natural space. A lot of them aren’t digital natives for lack of a better word. And so, I know for a fact that a lot of schools... and this is something I’m working on...is trying to share with them how digital citizenship and online safety is not just a one-off session.*

**(Eric, educator)**

## How is digital citizenship implemented/taught?

### Outsourcing digital citizenship education

Part of Patricia’s frustration of not being able to do more in terms of the ‘civic’ aspects of digital citizenship education (as earlier discussed) was also due to operational challenges, such as budgetary restrictions and staffing workloads. These concerns had resulted in her school becoming increasingly dependent on outsourcing digital citizenship education to external actors from the private and government sector. One such example of this outsourcing was discussed by Eric, a former primary school teacher who had set up a business with a partner (a child psychologist) focused on delivering online safety and digital citizenship programs for schools. Eric claimed that, for risk-averse schools, due diligence when hiring experts often meant hiring operators accredited through the e-Safety Commissioner’s office, which oriented programs toward an online safety focus. He also made sure that he had received this accreditation.

*I had seen it advertised on their website (e-Safety Commissioner) and on socials. And so, I wanted to make sure I was sort of - on point for them. So, I applied myself as a business. It came down to having personal references from schools... showing work samples... and joining the community. We now meet quarterly as 'trusted E-Safety Providers'*

**(Eric, educator)**

Patricia also spoke about her school using the services of the Police School Liaison Officer to run ad-hoc digital citizenship trainings during school assemblies.

*One of the things we use is our PSL, which is our Police School Liaison Officer, and she comes in and talks about it (digital citizenship) from the legal perspective. She is straight down the line. Here are the consequences of misuse. You need to protect yourselves. You need to protect yourselves from people online and you need to protect yourself as an online user and how you manage that world.*

**(Patricia, school principal)**

As these examples show, by outsourcing digital citizenship education to external actors, digital citizenship education had tended to become more narrowly focused on risk and safety, with junior teachers like Cameron left to take initiative themselves to teach young people digital literacy skills.

## **Siloing of digital citizenship education in the curriculum**

At a policy level, other limitations in terms of where and how in the Australian school curriculum digital citizenship education and online safety was being taught was also identified as a barrier to enhancing the civic dimensions of digital citizenship education. Stakeholders discussed making a submission to the Australian Curriculum policy review (2021) where they recommended online safety education be integrated holistically across different areas of the curriculum but they also spoke of why programs continued to be siloed into PHPE and ICT.

*the Australian curriculum consultation review at the moment, they do rely on online safety being delivered through the HPE curriculum and also through the digital technologies learning areas. And that's backed up with the personal and social capability and the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) capability. So, in our submission, we went through and identified how we could strengthen online safety education, but also said that we really feel that online safety shouldn't be taught in a siloed way. It should be taught across all key learning areas and all teachers should be teachers of online safety.*

**(Dhara, policymaker)**

As an outcome of the curriculum review that occurred a year after the completion of our data collection, we acknowledge that Digital Citizenship has become more aligned with the Digital Literacy General Capability, and we make further recommendations for how future curriculum reviews could focus on a more global, civic and digital rights focused framing.



## How do stakeholders view the needs of diaspora youth?

### Racism and youth 'at-risk'?

As previously mentioned, government stakeholders focused primarily on reducing online harm and making digital environments safer. They produced research and tailored materials at communities who were at more risk of harm, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQIA+ community organisations being consulted on the development of materials.

*We have research with a lot of different communities that say that there are certain individuals or certain communities who do come across the online harms to a greater extent. And that's why we try to develop resources to help those different communities [...] We do know that for example, the LGBTQI and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are impacted by online hate at twice the rest of the population*

**(Dhara, policymaker)**

When explaining possible causes of this increased exposure to harm for these communities, however, structural issues and supporting collective action to confront them were not discussed by government stakeholders, who focused on a more individualised risk and protection framework.

Stakeholders from the multicultural youth services sector took a different approach, suggesting that the harms young people face online can't be externalised onto individuals or 'bad actors'. Rather, they acknowledged that racism was experienced by young people every day, including in educational institutions. This led diaspora youth to experience barriers in relation to their educational attainment, while it also led them to feel less confident in expressing their cultural identity.

*It does make the experience a lot harder to settle because for example, at some educational institution, if they face it, it does make the experience difficult. It impacts their education... they still have that feeling that they still look different then they will be looked at differently all the time. And then when they become adults, somehow, they look at it and like when their horizon widens a bit, they realize that I should not be shy from or ashamed from my own identity. And I should be proud of who I am and bring on my own culture.*

**(Bella, multicultural youth worker)**



## Digital and literacy divide

Policymakers and educators cited numerous concerns regarding diaspora youth and online safety, among them being concerns that parents of diaspora youth lacked the digital or English literacy to sufficiently monitor their children's digital media use and impose limits, which was felt to expose diaspora youth to higher levels of risk and harm.

*Not all young people have support at home or at school. We work with a diverse lot of communities... who might not have the access to getting an adult in their life, who they can actually go to. We always, always having the educators telling us that parents need upskilling...*

**(Dhara, policymaker)**

*We've heard this from a number of schools that those kids of parents where English is a challenge, they are often more at-risk because of what they're getting up to... So, we've been told by principals that those kids are the ones being exposed to more content online that is inappropriate*

**(Eric, educator)**

The complexity around these issues are yet to be fully unpacked in the scholarship (for a nuanced approach see Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021), but we do consider that some perspectives can extend the 'at-risk' framing of diaspora youth, which often denies recognition of capabilities and agency, to diaspora youths' parents and even whole communities who are constructed as failing, for a variety of reasons, to meet standards of 'good' digital citizenship.

Educators and multicultural youth service workers also discussed the impacts of an ongoing digital access divide. This was a particular issue for refugee youth, who often lived in single device households. As Patricia claimed.

*At the beginning of COVID [...] we did an audit of all our students. So, we asked who had access to devices at home. We had a year 12 student who was doing her assessment task on her mobile phone. And we were aware that there were families for a whole lot of reasons, who did not have devices in their home or there was one device amongst a number of people, including parents who are also working from home*

**(Patricia, school principal).**

While Patricia highlighted these concerns, multicultural youth service workers added that the divide was not just an access issue, but that diaspora youth also had responsibilities to family members at home that made it difficult to concentrate solely on their learning.

*Even if you've got access to a device, it doesn't mean you've got access to a space you can study. And you know, and if you're an older sibling with younger siblings, you're often taking in all those responsibilities and young people's caring responsibilities. And I think particularly for young women that we heard that again, you know, that that's something that they often take on*

**(Siobhan, multicultural youth worker)**

Both multicultural youth stakeholders and educators acknowledged that mobile phones played an important role in overcoming barriers for refugee families and other diaspora youth from low socio-economic households, but while multicultural youth service workers fundraised to address this infrastructure gap, Patricia instead was considering the impacts at her school of the introduction of the mobile phone ban, particularly on International students who were attending the school as part of the New South Wales Intensive English Centre scheme, and where mobile phones were a vital resource for them to stay connected to their parents and families.

*The issue was also discussed beyond contexts of learning with social connections and alienation also being identified with lack of access to Internet and digital devices. The problem was so acute that during the pandemic one multicultural youth service worker did a "community call out" and "got devices that were broken and managed to refurbish and give them out, and then we did a fundraiser campaign, I think we raised \$5000, so we would purchase internet dongles and internet plans for young people, so they could maintain all these social connections"*

**(Bella, multicultural youth worker)**

*One of the issues in terms of the international students is because of time zones. There are only certain times when they can talk to their friends and their family at home. So, if you go out in the playground at lunchtime, you'll see them on their phones. And so, what we really want to happen, which is them out in the playground, talking and communicating with each other, they're not doing that. They're sitting on their phones... that's a bit of an issue for us. How do you try to strike the balance of looking after their well-being needs because some of the kids here who are the internationals, they're here all by themselves.*

**(Patricia, school principal)**

## Youth digital capabilities and leadership

Despite issues regarding the digital divide, multicultural youth service workers tended to highlight the capabilities diaspora youth acquired as they navigated transnational and local networks on digital and social media. From this perspective, diaspora youths' digital comfort and literacy in these spaces allowed them to address the needs of older members in their community who were less digitally literate. This was highlighted by Ali, who spoke about social media and youth advocacy.

*The young people are making change. To go forward is to really build the capacity, to build that leadership capacity of young people so that they're able to advocate because I think young people have enormous, like I said, I've been really amazed. Assumptions that "oh, they are really lazy. And they don't active—" They are very resilient, and they can get out of every situation, overcome every situation. And they really want to do something for their community. They want to be a voice. It's just about giving them the tools and resources they need.*

**(Ali)**

To harness these capabilities Ali had designed participatory and, in some cases, co-designed programs, not always focused on digital skills and participation, but where these skills and capabilities often emerged and were encouraged.

*It's very participatory-based, and we have some really cool, very participatory-focused tools. And it's all about that. Helping young people to identify their needs and challenges and goals*

**(Ali)**

By supporting youth leadership on issues that mattered to them the outcomes were also clear to Josua, who specifically highlighted Pasifika young people's projects that he observed during COVID-19. Here social media was used to support older family members, and to ensure that they were not swayed by misinformation regarding vaccinations.

*A lot of our young people took the lead when we first went into lockdown around COVID safety and they, they actually developed some video clips talking around protocols of safety... the youth leadership stepped up*

**(Josua)**

He also spoke of a mental health program that was driven by the youth advisory board of their organization that aimed to address mental health issues and tailor an approach that would be 'culturally responsive and appropriate'.

*There has been a program that really came from the youth advisory group... around mental health saying that we want to see far more happening in this space and we need to be having conversations with young people, conversations with our communities, conversations with mental health services as well [...] It's kind of yeah... improving mental health literacy and reducing stigma. But also working with the mental health service system as well to look at how can it be more culturally responsive and appropriate for young people*

**(Josua)**

What this tells us is that diaspora youth are adept at recognising their own needs and gaps in service and educational delivery and have been quick to use digital networks and tools to design their own response. Patricia also spoke about a student-led initiative at her school inspired by students' online engagement in Black Lives Matter. Two student leaders asked if they could lead a response to some incidents of racism at the school.

*They asked if they could do an anti-racist... this is extraordinary... a structured lesson plan. They went to NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority) and they found out how to write a lesson plan, and they delivered that, as a team, to every class in school. We had a big day where we had a walk against racism, and after they delivered the lesson, they asked students to write on a post it note something positive they learned.*

**(Patricia)**

While being taken as a positive example of how diaspora youth were leading change, this also demonstrates the insufficiency of current digital citizenship education in schools, where a focus on sexting and other interpersonal forms of 'harm' were often addressed while issues concerning structural racism and inequality were left to students' own initiative.



# Key Takeaways





Following the completion of the data collection and analysis we synthesized the findings from research stages 1-3 to identify several gaps and opportunities which inform our contribution to the scholarship and opportunities for revising school policies and curricula. These are presented below:

## Gaps

Our research shows a worrying disconnection between how digital citizenship is framed pedagogically in Australian schools, and how diaspora youth conceptualise it through the lens of their own experiences, needs and aspirations. Digital citizenship is conceptualised by educators and policymakers in relation to legal and individualised concepts of misuse and 'online harm' (e-Safety Commissioner, n.d.; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). This informs curriculum development, which is centred on the skills young people need to protect themselves and their personal identities online, and how to alert responsible authorities (teachers, police) to threats often perceived as interpersonal in nature (i.e. cyberbullying) (Jones & Mitchell, 2016). While early conceptualisations of digital citizenship saw digital technologies as extending opportunities for young people to participate in public life and have a voice on issues, in its framing in current school policy and education, a reductive focus on personal safety has become the norm (Bucholz et al., 2020; Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). This has been further evidenced by Federal policy responses focused on banning social media use for young people aged 16 years and under and banning mobile phone use in the classroom. However well intentioned, we argue that this has negative implications for all young people, but especially diaspora youth, who are framed as vulnerable and non-agentic, and who are no longer supported to use social media and digital technologies to build their civic and political knowledge and capabilities.

In this report we also highlight the manner in which a reductive focus on online safety in school policies and curricula overlaps

with operational pressures that schools are under, particularly during COVID-19, which led teachers and principals to allocate resources more often toward 'putting out spot fires' and where digital citizenship education was increasingly outsourced to the private sector. The implications of this, while potentially impacting all young people, is, we argue, more acutely felt by diaspora youth who were more likely to be constructed as 'at-risk' subjects by stakeholders in this study (Caluya et al., 2018). This occurred through referencing of policy research where diaspora youth were framed as more likely to become victims of bullying and harassment, while anecdotal reports identified them as being regularly exposed to online harms and inappropriate content as a result of their parents' lack of digital literacy and supervision. We argue, along with community stakeholder organisations, that the implications of this deficit framing and its lack of nuance is the likely increase of stigmatisation and exclusion of diaspora youth from feelings of belonging to the school community and the broader society, leading to social harm and possible withdrawal and disengagement.

Another important implication of these findings is that current school curricula fail to recognise the capabilities diaspora youth regularly exhibit in their daily digital interactions with family and community (Caluya et al. 2018; Leurs, 2015; Fu, 2018). Some of these capabilities were highlighted by multicultural youth service workers, whose knowledge is often overlooked by research, but importantly connected diaspora youths' digital acts to concepts of citizenship, social inclusion, advocacy, resilience, and leadership. They highlighted diaspora youths'



capabilities in using digital media to advocate for older community members who were less digitally literate, and to contest social inequity and injustice in the broader society, and in online communities (Leurs, 2015; Choi & Christol, 2021; Harris & Johns, 2021).

This perspective resonated most strongly, however, in interviews and in-depth exploration of diaspora youths' digital acts and practices, where digital citizenship was conceptualised and informed by a sense of social responsibility to advocate for their own and the broader, global community, to learn about other cultures, and to raise their voice against harms that were also more broadly conceptualised than in the school curricula' (Emejulu & McGregor, 2019). To address these harms, diaspora youth used their digital voice to raise awareness and engage in collective struggles and acts where they advocated for their own community and for principles of human rights.

These principles were evident across their engagement with digital communities of all kinds, including popular culture driven fandoms, as well as through 'quieter' acts of citizenship (Yue, Nekmat and Beta, 2019) such as engaging responsibly with contentious social and political topics that may induce backlash and negative feelings by taking responsibility for the language they use, to make sure it doesn't offend, or by withdrawing to private or carefully moderated communities on social media. The findings also reflect diaspora youths' keen algorithmic awareness and literacy (Burgess, Albury, McCosker & Wilken, 2022), which often prompted them to engage in acts of 'slow' digital citizenship to

avoid the pitfalls of algorithmic bias. Platform algorithms were perceived to make young people susceptible to misinformation, bias and distressing content which contributed toward poor mental health. But rather than this leading young people to disengage, participants in the study demonstrated agency in navigating these potential harms by being careful which accounts they liked and followed, and slowing down and taking time out, so they can continue to perform advocacy and learn about social issues in a less hurried timeframe.

It is timely and important to broaden reductive framings of digital citizenship in school curricula to develop a capabilities – and rights-based – model. This requires moving beyond 'at risk' framings of diaspora youth to instead recognise them as agentic actors who are already engaging in practices which centre social responsibility and social justice (Choi & Cristol, 2021). Support and recognition of these capabilities by school leadership would only strengthen their development, and likely contribute to the creation of more respectful and safer digital environments. Further, by focusing on narrow conceptions of 'harm' and developing teaching and resources that protect against it, there is a danger that other harms arise as an unintended consequence, such as stigmatisation of diaspora youth, parents and communities, and possible withdrawal of voices critical to realising and building safer digital communities. To address this, we suggest the following recommendations for stakeholders in the design and delivery of digital citizenship policies and curriculum.

# Recommendations

- 1** To broaden reductive framings of digital citizenship in school curricula by developing a capability and digital rights-based model and connecting digital citizenship programs and curricula more purposefully with global citizenship education. This will support diaspora youth to use digital technologies to engage confidently with the world and have a say in issues that affect them and their communities.
- 2** To increase recognition of diaspora youth capabilities by digital citizenship educators, designers and school leadership, which would strengthen their development, and likely contribute to the creation of more respectful and safer digital environments and communities.
- 3** To broaden the private and public actors involved in digital citizenship curriculum development and delivery to include multicultural community and advocacy organisations, especially those that are youth-led. In doing so, the experiences of multicultural communities are centred in the design of curriculum. This will reduce unintended consequences of framing diaspora youth, parents and communities as being more 'at risk' than other youth populations, which can lead to stigmatization and the withdrawal of voices essential to realising and building safer digital communities.
- 4** To move away from top-down models of digital citizenship education and instead co-design curriculum with diaspora youth and community leaders. This will ensure a more holistic, inclusive and culturally safe curricula.
- 5** To require social media platforms to implement mechanisms such as time limited feed scrolling and better labelling of content to assist young people's own mental health self-care and counter-misinformation strategies as described in the report. This can support diaspora youth to stay engaged and connected to community while encouraging regular 'time outs' and 'slow' digital citizenship practices.
- 6** Building upon the recent Australian Curriculum Review, which introduced a Digital Literacy General Capability (previously ICT), we recommend that strengthening curricula and capabilities linking digital literacy and digital citizenship more closely with global, civic and digital rights be included in future reviews.

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# Appendix A:

## Youth Participant profile

Interview ID	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	State
Participant 1	Melanie	Female	13	Indonesian-Australian	NSW
Participant 2	Charlotte	Female	19	Indonesian- Australian	NSW
Participant 3	Devi	Female	17	Indian-Australian	VIC
Participant 4	Sujith	Male	14	Indian-Australian	VIC
Participant 5	Anne	Female	13	Greek Australian	NSW
Participant 6	Ashley	Female	16	Indian-Australian	VIC
Participant 7	Zahra	Female	17	Afghanistan-Hazara	VIC
Participant 8	Mohammad	Male	13	Afghanistan- Hazara	VIC
Participant 9	Noor	Female	15	Afghanistan-Hazara	VIC
Participant 10	Aisha	Female	13	Afghanistan-Hazara	VIC
Participant 11	Lila	Female	14	Afghanistan-Hazara	VIC
Participant 12	Samantha	Female	15	Malaysian Chinese- Australian	NSW
Participant 13	Charlie	Female	16	Indian- Australian	WA
Participant 14	Audrey	Female	16	Indonesian-Australian	NSW
Participant 15	Amber	Female	18	Chinese-Australian	VIC
Participant 16	Heidi	Female	16	Malaysian Chinese- Australian	NSW
Participant 17	Stephanie	Female	18	Vietnamese-Australian	VIC
Participant 18	Yasmina	Female	18	Persian- Australian	NSW
Participant 19	Oscar	Male	15	Scottish-Australian	NSW
Participant 20	Yingying	Female	17	Chinese-Australian	NSW
Participant 21	Alexis	Female	21	Chilean-Australian	NSW
Participant 22	Louis	Male	15	French-Australian	NSW
Participant 23	Kelly	Female	13	Chinese-Australian	NSW
Participant 24	Alicia	Female	13	South African-Australian	NSW
Participant 25	Annabel	Female	18	American-Australian	NSW
Participant 26	Ahmed	Male	15	Scottish-Australian	NSW



# Appendix B:

## Stakeholder Workshop and Feedback

On 21 October 2022 we invited stakeholders from the New South Wales Department of Education, Victorian Department of Education and Training and the e-Safety Commissioner's Office to a hybrid stakeholder workshop at the University of Technology Sydney. The aim of the workshop was to present our findings to stakeholders and then to invite them to participate in workshop activities where they reflected on three key findings of the research and addressed challenges for how they may be addressed or implemented in their workplace.

- To what extent do these findings resonate (or not) with the work you do at your organisation or with diaspora youth?
- What new resources or training addressing these findings do you think would support DC skills/capacity building among diaspora youth in your sector?
- What would enable or limit the ability to implement these at your organisation?

Ideas from these discussions were submitted on Padlet boards, allowing thoughts to be captured in the moment. Padlet boards were also distributed to participants following the event for any further ideas to be added. Responses were provided anonymously. A summary of the responses to three key findings is represented below, and inform the final recommendations tabled in this report:

**Finding 1. diaspora young people are engaging with social issues on social media and find that this aspect of digital citizenship is not discussed in schools, which tend to focus more on cyberbullying and online risk and safety.**

- To what extent do these findings resonate (or not) with the work you do at your organisation or with diaspora youth?

Firstly, invited stakeholders acknowledged that this finding 'resonated with their own work' but they also stressed that their organisational role was evolving, such that they were no longer simply focused on cyberbullying, but also 'stranger danger', digital footprint and identity and digital literacy. There was acknowledgement that 'some of the issues young people note aren't reflected in digital citizenship education, but they may be discussed in other settings', including in broader civic and citizenship

education. Finally, it was acknowledged that 'gaps among teachers [knowledge] in terms of what social/civic education entails' means that teaching this curriculum is 'challenging'.

- **What new resources or training addressing these findings do you think would support DC skills/capacity building among diaspora youth in your sector?**

Two Stakeholders acknowledged that teaching global digital citizenship as an aspect of digital citizenship education may be assisted by the introduction of an International global citizen course or credential. It was suggested that this could be 'extra-curricular and non-compulsory', such that it would contribute to young people's leadership credentials, with young people being certified as a 'global digital citizen' at the end of the course. This could also be assisted by professional development for teachers. Other suggestions were cross-curricula links for digital citizenship curricula with other parts of the curriculum. Three stakeholders suggested 'co-design' of global and digital citizenship education with young people so that 'deficit examples of why tech are bad' are balanced with using 'tech for community and individual wellbeing' and to 'amplify voice'.

- **What would enable or limit the ability to implement these at your organisation?**

The most pressing concern among stakeholders was the 'overloading' of teachers if a new demand on an already overloaded curriculum was introduced. There was also concern that the addition of these curriculum changes on teachers may mean that these additional aspects may end up being a 'box-ticking' exercise on top of the existing curriculum.

**Finding 2. Stakeholders spoke of a 'siloing effect' with digital citizenship usually being aligned with HPE and Digital Technologies learning areas in the curriculum, meaning that digital citizenship education often focuses on digital safety and wellbeing to the exclusion of civic and citizenship content.**

- **To what extent do these findings resonate (or not) with the work you do at your organisation or with diaspora youth?**

There was broad agreement with this finding, but some stakeholders noted problems with how citizenship gets taught in the curriculum too. Some stakeholders suggested that the training currently associated with digital citizenship should be referred to as 'online safety' to avoid confusion. Further, it was suggested that digital literacy education and intercultural understanding should also be strengthened in the curriculum.

- **What new resources or training addressing these findings do you think would support DC skills/capacity building among diaspora youth in your sector?**

Stakeholders suggested that digital citizenship education needs to be distributed across the whole curriculum, i.e. in English. Of course, changes to how it is taught would need considerable professional development for teachers in order for new curricula to be broadly adopted. One suggestion was the development of a toolkit, 'like short lesson plans'. Such toolkits, stakeholders suggested, have been designed in Victoria for political issues, but none for the digital aspect of politics. Although it was also acknowledged that promoting these toolkits to teachers was difficult. One stakeholder also spoke of a new program (and possible model) around democracy and civics which was co-designed with teens in Victoria, while another said that students often led on designing resources referring to social media (in terms of activism and student engagement) and that they required little teacher involvement.



