



Settlement
Council
of Australia



Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees

DECEMBER 2020

The Settlement Council of Australia and the Good Things Foundation Australia acknowledge the traditional custodians of country across Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to our lands and waters.

About the Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation Australia is a social change charity, helping people to improve their lives through digital. We work with partners in thousands of communities across Australia and the UK.

In Australia, we have built and manage the Australian Government funded Be Connected Network of 3,000 community partners and deliver the \$20 million grants program to support people over 50 to learn essential digital skills. 750,000 people have been engaged and supported by the Be Connected digital literacy program to date.

We coordinate the national digital inclusion campaign Get Online Week which last year supported 26,000 people to get more out of life online. With the support of the Australian Digital Health Agency and our network of community organisations, we are assisting adults of all ages to improve their digital health literacy through our Health My Way program.

Good Things Foundation has run digital inclusion projects in the UK for over eight years through the 5,000 strong Online Centres Network and worked in Australia since 2017.

Learn more about our work: www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au

See our resources for community organisations: www.beconnectednetwork.org.au

About the Settlement Council of Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia is the peak body representing the vast majority of settlement agencies across Australia providing direct services and support to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Our members include organisations large and small, who are committed to the successful settlement of migrants and refugees across the country. Their services range from greeting new arrivals at the airport, through to assisting them to secure housing, learn English, make social connections, access services and find their first job. Australia's settlement services are recognised as being among the best in the world.

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Key Points

Digital Divide

There is a 'digital divide' between newly arrived migrants and refugees and the rest of Australia, in both access to and use of digital technology.

The impact of COVID-19

The online shift to digital-only services, information and activities during COVID-19 highlighted the digital exclusion of newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Benefits of digital inclusion

Digital inclusion supports independence and social connectedness. Benefits include improved access to education and employment, health and wellbeing information, government and financial services, and reduced cost of services.

Digital inclusion for employment, education and training

Within just 3 years, 90% of the Australian workforce is set to require digital skills. Moreover, newly arrived migrants and refugees need to have digital capabilities to access further education opportunities with the increasing trend of education and skills training being provided in a digital format.

English proficiency as a barrier

Language barriers or low English proficiency are significant barriers to digital inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

In-language resources and peer to peer support

In-language digital learning resources must be made available, including in written, audio and video formats. Bilingual support and peer to peer are effective and interactive ways to support digital learning.

Regional exclusion

Migrant and refugees living in regional areas face data and connectivity barriers, which must be improved for regional settlement to be successful.

Access to a device

Many newly arrived migrants and refugees may only have one device for the family, requiring them to share, and have limited time on the device. This can impact each family member's education, employment and social goals.

The importance of familiarity

Initiatives to promote digital inclusion should be available at familiar contact points for refugees and migrants, whether this be through the AMEP program, settlement services, community centres or other contact points.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Provide digital devices to Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) students

Devices should be provided to AMEP students to support their learning. This would promote digital inclusion and also incentivise uptake of the AMEP.

Recommendation 2

Include appropriate digital technology in the Basic Household Goods Package

The Basic Household Goods Package, provided as part of the Humanitarian Settlement Program, should be expanded to include digital technologies – such as laptops and a phone for more than one family member, with an appropriate data allowance for a period of time. This is essential for promoting independence and good settlement outcomes.

Recommendation 3

Improve ICT infrastructure in regional areas

ICT infrastructure, data and connectivity issues in regional areas must be addressed to support digital inclusion. This is particularly important in the context of a desire to increase regional migration.

Recommendation 4

Embed in-language digital mentoring in settlement services

Embed culturally appropriate digital mentoring support within settlement services, expanding on the success of the [Be Connected Program](#), as well as the successes of settlement services delivering digital training initiatives.

Recommendation 5

Translate Good Things Foundation Resources

Good Things Foundation hosts a number of web-based resources that support learners and digital mentors with their digital skills training. These resources could be translated in a number of different languages, making digital learning more accessible to those with low English language proficiency.

Recommendation 6

Provide multiple opportunities for people to learn in different ways

Providing multiple ways for people to learn, whether embedded in an AMEP class, as part of a social activity, through one-on-one support with a digital mentor or completing an online learning course at a time most convenient to them gives learners options to learn the way they prefer.

Introduction

As our society becomes increasingly connected, digital inclusion is more important than ever. Digital inclusion includes being able to access digital technology (considering access to a device, reliable internet connectivity as well as affordability) and also having the confidence, understanding and digital literacy skills to be able to navigate this technology.¹ The benefits of digital inclusion are diverse and wide-reaching across all aspects of society.

However, many newly arrived migrants and refugees face substantial barriers to digital inclusion, and evidence points to a 'digital divide' between newly arrived communities and the rest of Australia when it comes to digital inclusion.² This divide arises from inequalities in both access to and use of digital technology, as well as affordability. The 2020 Digital Inclusion Index states that recently-arrived CALD migrants' digital inclusion fare less well than the broader CALD migrant community.³

This digital divide, while relatively well understood, has been accentuated and highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 saw a large, sudden shift to digital-only services, information, and activities. This sudden shift to online engagement highlighted the lack of digital inclusion in some migrant and refugee communities.

This lack of digital inclusion has significant impacts on newly arrived migrants and refugees' ability to settle fully into their new home. The impacts of digital exclusion on settlement are wide ranging and include disruptions to education, limited ability to engage in employment, and social isolation. In consultations conducted by SCoA, approximately one-third of settlement services, when asked for their key priority issues, listed digital inclusion as a key priority. In addition, when discussing all other key priorities, digital exclusion was often cited as a key barrier to addressing those priorities.

This report examines digital inclusion and exclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees in Australia. It highlights the benefits of digital inclusion and how improving digital inclusion supports good settlement outcomes. The report proposes several key initiatives, which taken together, will improve both the access to digital technology, and the ability to make use of it. This in turn, will lead to increased economic and social engagement among newly arrived migrant and refugee communities.

¹ Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2020), 'About Digital Inclusion in Australia,' available online at: <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/about/about-digital-inclusion/>.

² Alam, K and Imran, S (2015) 'The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee migrants: a case in regional Australia,' *Information Technology and People*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 344-365.

³ Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2020), 'Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index Report,' p. 20.

What is settlement?

Settlement is a two-way process of migrants and refugees adjusting to a new life in Australia, and Australia welcoming migrants and refugees. Successful settlement enables migrants and refugees to fully participate in life in Australia. According to the Settlement Council of Australia's National Settlement Outcomes Standards (NSOS), effective settlement includes migrants and refugees being able to achieve positive outcomes across the following ten areas:⁴

1. education;
2. employment;
3. health and wellbeing;
4. housing;
5. language services;
6. transport;
7. civic participation;
8. family and social support;
9. justice; and
10. finance.

When migrants and refugees are independent, secure and accepted, and demonstrate positive outcomes across these ten areas, they can be said to have 'settled.' Digital inclusion has an important role to play in each of these ten areas.

What is digital inclusion?

Digital inclusion is about access to information and communications technology and the resulting social and economic benefits.⁵ Digital inclusion is not just about computers and the internet. It is about using technology as a channel to improve skills, to enhance quality of life, to support education and to promote economic wellbeing across all elements of society. In today's Australia, digital inclusion is essential to living, working and participating in society. It has four key aspects: affordability, accessibility, skills and confidence. All four aspects are required in order for an individual to truly be digitally included.

In consultations conducted by SCoA in 2020, approximately one-third of settlement services listed digital inclusion as a key priority when asked for their key priority issues, and when discussing all other key priorities, the impact of digital inclusion in achieving addressing those priorities was a common theme.

⁴ Settlement Council of Australia, (2020) 'National Settlement Outcomes Standards.'

⁵Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2020), 'About Digital Inclusion in Australia,' available online at: <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/about/about-digital-inclusion/>.

Benefits of being digitally included

Participation in today's digital economy relies heavily on a digitally-able workforce. The [World Economic Forum](#) and [Australian Government](#), estimate that 90% of the workforce will need digital skills by 2023.⁶ Even now, those that have low digital skills face a barrier when required to search for jobs, retrain and participate in other areas of the workforce requiring greater digital skills.

In terms of social connection, a growing body of Australian and international research (including [Australian Digital Inclusion Indexes](#) 2019 and 2020) highlights the link between digital and social inclusion. Digital inclusion is inextricably linked to social inclusion and the ability to participate fully in today's Australia.

In the experience of Good Things Foundation as National Network and Grants Manager of the [Be Connected](#) digital skills program for the over 50's, 77% of learners said that their social connections increased through participation in the program. This link with social inclusion also has a strong impact on mental health and wellbeing. Social inclusion has been shown to be central to promoting mental health and minimising the disability associated with mental illness.⁷

Additionally, digital inclusion does not just bring individual benefits. It results in broader social and economic benefits related to workforce participation, cost of healthcare provision, education and delivery of government and retail services.

Snapshot: Benefits of Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion brings a range of social and economic benefits. The benefits include:

- greater access to education
- greater social connectedness
- better and safer access to health information and tools to support wellness
- easier access to government services
- easier and safer access to banking and financial services and offers
- reduced costs for telecommunications services and utilities
- reduced costs for retail products and services

⁶ Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Technology (2018), 'Australia's Tech Future: Delivering a Strong, Safe and Inclusive Digital Economy', Canberra, accessed online at: <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-12/australias-tech-future.pdf>; World Economic Forum (2020), 'Jobs will be very different in 10 years. Here's how to prepare', accessed online at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/future-of-work/>

⁷ Mental Health Coordinating Council (2007), 'Social Inclusion: Its Importance to Mental Health,' accessed online at: <https://www.mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/mhcc-social-inclusion.pdf>

Specific benefits for refugees and migrants

Digital inclusion has significant positive benefits for newly arrived refugees and migrants, as highlighted by consultations conducted by SCoA over the course of 2020, as well as other research.⁸ These benefits are described below.

Independence

Digital inclusion supports independence, as well as a greater sense of autonomy and confidence for new migrants and refugees.⁹ The independence that comes from being able to use technology to find information about transport or healthcare services, apply for employment opportunities and access local information and news is essential to support successful settlement.¹⁰

Improved access to education and training

Humanitarian migrants generally report lower levels of educational attainment than the broader Australian population. However, a large share of humanitarian migrants continue to invest in skills deepening and skills broadening upon their arrival within Australia. In 2016, 36% of working age first-generation humanitarian migrants were participating in education and training, compared to 17% for the broader Australian population.¹¹

However, a lack of digital inclusion can have a significant impact on the uptake of further education. Even before COVID-19, there were over 1,000 online education providers in Australia, and this trend is set to continue. Moreover, non-online education options are likely to include significant aspects that require the use of digital technologies. With the increasing trend of education and skills training being provided in a digital format, newly arrived migrants and refugees need to have the digital capability required to access further education opportunities.

Access to technology is also crucial to support school students in their education, by creating new learning opportunities, enabling students to access learning materials online, and providing opportunities for personalised learning environments.¹² However, not having adequate data and devices, having to share devices with family members and not having anyone in the family with digital skills to support online learning can exclude students from technology assisted learning and its benefits.¹³ These inequities were particularly evident in the shift to online learning during COVID-19, as highlighted by research and consultations conducted by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network.¹⁴ Initiatives by settlement agencies, such as homework clubs that provide access to computers and peer support learning, work to address some of these barriers to

⁸ Alam, Khorshed and Imran, Sophia (2015) The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee migrants: a case in regional Australia. *Information Technology and People*, vol 28, no.2. pp. 344-365; Millar A, Baldassar L & Wilding, R (2018) 'The Significance of digital citizenship in the well-being of older migrants', *Public Health*, vol. 158; Leung, L, Finnerly Lamb C and Emrys, (2009) 'Technology's Refuge: The use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees'; Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, (2017) 'Digital Access and Equity for Multicultural Communities', Canberra

⁹ Millar A, Baldassar L & Wilding, R (2018), 'The Significance of digital citizenship in the well-being of older migrants,' *Public Health*, vol. 158, p. 147.

¹⁰ Leung, L, Finnerly Lamb C and Emrys, L (2009), 'Technology's Refuge: The use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees,' p. 26-27.

¹¹ Deloitte Access Economics, (2019) 'Social Impact of Increasing Australia's Humanitarian Intake,' p. 22.

¹² Digital Promise (2019), 'How access to technology can create equity in schools,' accessed online at: <https://digitalpromise.org/2019/04/29/equity-in-schools-access-technology/>.

¹³ National Education Roundtable (2020), 'Education and students from refugee and migrant backgrounds', p.15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

improve digital inclusion and access to education and training, however these do not fully bridge the gap.¹⁵

Greater participation in the workforce

Securing meaningful and sustainable employment is a vital part of successful settlement which can be limited through a lack of digital skills. The positive economic impact to Australia of accepting migrants and refugees is well recognised. Migrants bring a diverse range of skills, qualifications and experience which has the potential to bring enormous value to businesses, economy and society. This benefit continues to increase over time particularly as migrants and refugees settle into life in Australia, finish education/retraining and enter the labour force.¹⁶

There are therefore significant economic benefits to ensuring the path to employment for newly arrived migrants and refugees is well facilitated. Increasingly, even low-skilled jobs require online applications. Moreover, 90% of the Australian workforce is set to require digital skills within just 3 years.¹⁷ It is therefore critical that newly arrived migrants and refugees are supported in their digital skills in order for them to also participate in the workforce.

Refugees currently play a vital role in filling Australian labour market niches that are not filled by other migrant groups, most notably in regional areas.¹⁸ However, effort is needed to remove factors that force migrants and refugees disproportionately into unskilled jobs, such as a lack of skills recognition and lack of digital skills.

Migrants and refugees as a general cohort have a lower income than the rest of the Australian population, and this is particularly significant for humanitarian entrants.¹⁹ Many new migrants and refugees arrive in Australia with skills and aspirations for their careers, but often begin their journey in a job that does not match their skillset or goals. These first opportunities are valuable for gaining work experience, however, the opportunity for career progression is also essential, and digital inclusion can facilitate this. Digital inclusion allows individuals to undertake the range of initiatives needed to progress in their careers, from finding employment and training opportunities, to acquiring the skills required by employers, or learning to run a successful business. Meaningful employment, facilitated through career progression, has several significant benefits including increased income and greater fulfilment, which in turn has a positive flow on effects for family units.

Social connection

Digital connection and internet use for newly arrived migrants and refugees can lead to less social isolation and anxiety,²⁰ and increase social participation.²¹ Newly arrived refugees and migrants frequently use digital technology to connect – for example, by speaking with their

¹⁵ See, for example, CatholicCare Tasmania's 'Light the Way' Study Club, accessed online at: http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CatholicCare_template.pdf

¹⁶ Deloitte Access Economics (2019), 'Social Impact of Increasing Australia's Humanitarian Intake', p. 12.

¹⁷ Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Technology (2018), Australia's Tech Future: Delivering a Strong, Safe and Inclusive Digital Economy', Canberra, accessed online at: <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-12/australias-tech-future.pdf>; World Economic Forum (2020), 'Jobs will be very different in 10 years. Here's how to prepare,' accessed online at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/future-of-work/>.

¹⁸ Multicultural Development Association (2013), 'Assessing the Economic Contribution of Refugees in Australia.'

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019), 'Personal Income of Migrants, Australia,' accessed online at:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/personal-income-migrants-australia/latest-release>; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019), 'Personal Income in Australia', accessed online at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/personal-income-australia/latest-release>.

²⁰ Queensland University of Technology (2012) 'Migrants' use of the Internet in re-settlement,' p. 27.

²¹ Millar A, Baldassar L & Wilding, R (2018), 'The Significance of digital citizenship in the well-being of older migrants, *Public Health*, vol. 158, p. 147.

friends and families in Australia and overseas, connecting with local community events, engaging with organisations, accessing entertainment, engaging with the news and accessing social media.²² During times where individuals are unable to physically meet others to socialise, online contact is especially important. This includes not only during times of lockdown or social distancing, but also when individuals may experience transport barriers, be located in regional areas, or otherwise be socially isolated. Digital connection can be of significant benefit to those vulnerable to social isolation.

Improved access to trusted information

Alongside the benefits of being able to access online content to support successful settlement, digital inclusion can facilitate access to trusted information for newly arrived refugees and migrants. Many trusted individuals and organisations make content available online. If an individual has the capacity to access and navigate online information, they are able to access accurate information from a source they trust. This was highlighted during COVID-19 as being of critical importance to prevent harmful misinformation from spreading. For example, some clients preferred to receive information from known settlement services and community leaders.²³ Technology can facilitate this occurring, whether it be through online video classes, meetings or catch ups, social media or other formats.

Similarly, internet access and ability to use app technology is increasingly required for national and state emergency information, such as bushfire information apps, the AirRater app, live traffic incident reports, the COVID-Safe app and many more. Digital is increasingly the primary method by which governments are able to quickly share accurate emergency information with the population. Fast access to accurate information can mean someone surviving an emergency or not.

Improved capacity of settlement services

Greater digital inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees has significant benefits for settlement agencies, as it has the potential to create efficiencies in service delivery and allow services to spend more time with clients that have more intensive needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many settlement agencies found that some of their clients preferred to connect and access their services online where it was possible. Where clients had access to and the ability to use technology, online options suited some clients better, as it reduced their travel time and supported them in balancing family and caring responsibilities. Some services saw increased engagement in their programs once they moved online. Examples of this are highlighted in the boxes below. These benefits can only be harnessed to the extent that clients are equipped to engage digitally with services.

²² Leung, L, Finnerly Lamb C and Emrys, L (2009), 'Technology's Refuge: The use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees,' p. 30; Centre for Multicultural Youth (2016), 'Settlement in the digital age: Digital inclusion and newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds'; Millar A, Baldassar L & Wilding, R (2018), 'The Significance of digital citizenship in the well-being of older migrants,' *Public Health*, vol. 158.

²³ Pym, A (2020) 'When trust matters more than translation', University of Melbourne, July 2020, accessed online at <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/when-trust-matters-more-than-translation>; Settlement Council of Australia (2020), 'Communicating with migrant and refugee communities during COVID-19', p. 9.

The benefits of going digital outweigh the pitfalls

An AMEP volunteer tutor is finding tutoring remotely beneficial to both her and her student. It has offered an opportunity for both of them to improve their digital literacy skills through exposure to new technology and it has won them over as they see the benefits touching on other aspects of life not just the tutoring sessions. With the student's permission they are recording sessions which means her student can access the lesson repeatedly and revise during the week. Additionally to this the volunteers says recording the sessions allows her to reflect and improve on her lesson week by week.

The volunteer has also requested to take on another student as she now has the time and agility in her daily routine to increase her commitment and wants to respond to the growing need.

AMEP Volunteer, Melbourne Polytechnic:

"My most recent learner introduced me to WeChat, and now we use it routinely to help expand her ability to understand and to practice. She was pre-beginner level when we started together at the beginning of November. Currently we have one face-to-face session and one remote session via WeChat each week. The best thing about carrying out a remote WeChat session, is that we are both able to do other everyday activities, like have breakfast! Our WeChat sessions are at 7:30 in the morning because we're both busy."

On the other hand, newly arrived migrants and refugees who were not digitally literate or did not have access to technology struggled to continue to engage with settlement services. This was a common theme arising from consultations with settlement services. One provider noted that when everything moved online, they faced extensive challenges in engaging with clients due to digital exclusion and many programs had significant drop off. Another settlement agency noted that lack of access to technology was a key issue that prevented them quickly distributing vital health information and information about services out to communities, particularly during the first stage of lockdown. Those who are digitally excluded found themselves more socially excluded and vulnerable during lockdowns.

Digital Exclusion

Digital Nation Australia 2020 paints the picture of some of the groups that are digitally excluded in Australia, the access, affordability and ability factors that impact levels of digital inclusion, and the strategies available to close the digital divide.²⁴

For the more than 2.5 million Australians who are not online, and another 4 million that are limited users of the internet, the education, health, social and financial benefits of being connected often remain out of reach. Digital disadvantage coincides with other forms of social and economic disadvantage, so those that can potentially benefit most from being connected are at greater risk of being left behind. People on a low income, those with less than 12 years of education, live in rural areas, are over 65 and/or have a disability are the most likely to be digitally excluded.

There is data to show that while culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants as an overall group have a relatively high level of digital inclusion, humanitarian entrants and those who are newly arrived often experience digital exclusion.²⁵ This aligns with feedback from settlement agencies, including one AMEP provider who noted that, in general, humanitarian entrants were less likely to cope with a shift to online delivery in the program. In addition, newly arrived migrants and refugees are represented in other groups that experience digital disadvantage, such as people with disabilities, those living in regional and remote areas, and others.

“There is digital poverty out there”

- CEO, Victorian based settlement service

Affordability is a key issue. Research indicates that the poorest 10% of Australians spend 3 times more of their income to be online which only compounds the cycle of poverty and creates barriers to digital inclusion. This was a key theme in consultations conducted by SCoA over the course of 2020, and is discussed in further detail below.

All aspects of our social environment are undergoing digital transformation, including government services, banking and financial, healthcare, education, retail. In this environment, digital exclusion leads to significant social and economic exclusion.

Specific barriers for refugees and migrants

Newly arrived migrants and refugees face particular barriers to their digital inclusion, with research finding humanitarian entrants to be the least digitally connected when compared to other cohorts.²⁶ Several factors that influence migrants and refugees' digital inclusion have been identified, including prior familiarity with technology, affordability of technology, English language proficiency, age, norms of technology use in communities, and the support available to assist their digital technology learning needs.²⁷

²⁴ Good Things Foundation (2020), 'Digital Nation Australia 2020,' available online at:

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/sites/default/files/ausdiginatation2020-a4-office.pdf>.

²⁵ Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2020), 'Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index Report', p.20

²⁶ Queensland University of Technology (2012), 'Migrants' use of the Internet in re-settlement', p. 25.

²⁷ Leung, L, Finney Lamb C and Emrys, L (2009), 'Technology's Refuge: The use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees', *UTS Shopfront Monograph Series*, p.26; Alam, K and Imran, S (2015), 'The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee

Key issues arising from consultation with settlement and other agencies are further explored below.

Affordability

Newly arrived migrants and refugees are often rebuilding their lives after moving to Australia, and have fewer resources, and less savings to start with. This is particularly the case for humanitarian entrants. Affordability can therefore be a significant barrier to digital inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees. This includes both the initial costs of purchasing devices, and ongoing costs of internet access.²⁸ Research has demonstrated that for migrants and refugees, meeting the ongoing costs of technological connection is a challenge, particularly for those on government payments.²⁹ Further, people often unknowingly or unintentionally go over their expected usage or data and get a higher bill than expected, meaning the costs can be substantial, and unexpected.³⁰ This is a highly stressful situation.

Settlement agencies work hard to overcome affordability barriers by sourcing and borrowing technology for their clients to use. During the COVID-19 pandemic, services went above and beyond to try and source technology for clients who were unable to afford it, in order to keep them connected. An example of this is highlighted in the box below. However, there was not enough donated or borrowed technology to meet the need and demand during this time.

Mobilising to source technology

COVID-19 propelled all AMEP delivery toward online environments. To support students to remain engaged in their learning, TAFE providers were able to loan devices to hundreds of students leveraged from local networks, and facilitated through a collaboration with Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC).

CNLC lead a working group which included the local community health service (Co-Health), Melbourne University, City of Melbourne Family Services, Carlton primary School and the Church of All nations. The working group identified the needs within the community and acted quickly tapping into the resources available within their network.

Melbourne University donated refurbished desktop computers which were distributed to CNLC students and families from the local school living in the Carlton housing estate.

There were two distribution rounds, where over 90 computers were distributed. The local primary school was the distribution point. In addition CNLC was able to purchase 10 tablets and 10 dongles through a City of Melbourne local government grant to lend out to students.

CNLC then undertook the step by step guidance via phone to assist students to set up their device and began to support students to build on their digital literacy skills to commence learning online.

migrants: a case in regional Australia'. *Information Technology and People*, vol. 28, no.2, p. 6; Centre for Multicultural Youth (2016) 'Settlement in the digital age: Digital inclusion and newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds', p. 2.

²⁸ Alam, K and Imran, S (2015) 'The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee migrants: a case in regional Australia.' *Information Technology and People*, vol.28, no.2. p. 9.

²⁹ Ibid, p.15.

³⁰ Ibid.

Further, this work was generally labour intensive and, while necessary, it is an inefficient way to secure digital access.

Access to devices and infrastructure

Many newly arrived migrants and refugees face barriers to accessing digital technology. Many may use community facilities such as public libraries or TAFEs for computer access. However, this requires the ability to physically get to the facility during opening hours, which can be challenging for those with family or employment commitments.³¹

Consultations with settlement agencies also indicate that many newly arrived families may own a device and have internet access, but only have one device for the family. This requires them to share, and have limited time on the device, which can impact each family member's education, employment and social goals.

Another key issue around access is for newly arrived migrants and refugees living in regional areas, where data and connectivity issues are a significant barrier. Given the significant push toward regional migration, this highlights the need for data infrastructure in regional areas to be improved in order for regional settlement to be successful.

Digital literacy

Consultations with settlement agencies has revealed that digital literacy is a key barrier to digital inclusion, particularly for those who are newly arrived, humanitarian entrants, and older migrants and refugees. Migrants and refugees arrive with varying levels of digital competencies—while not all will require assistance in improving digital literacy, some will.³²

Settlement agencies indicate that many newly arrived migrants and refugees face significant challenges in navigating online systems, such as MyGov and other online portals. For example, one settlement agency noted that many of their clients do not have an email account, and struggle to set one up, but email is required for access to other systems. However, once the email address is set up, they may not understand how to regularly check it, so they are missing out on important communications and access to systems. Further, some members report that many are comfortable with a small number of platforms, for example WhatsApp or Viber, but may struggle in other platforms and systems. This highlights the multifaceted nature of holistic digital inclusion – it is not just about access to email or being able to use a social media platform.

Language barriers

Language barriers or low English proficiency can be a barrier to digital inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees.³³ Accessing information on websites and online portals can be difficult when this information is primarily in English. Though in-language and translated information is frequently made available, for example on government websites, this information can be difficult to access due to what has been described as an 'English language firewall' by settlement agencies, where several clicks into the website are required to find the translated

³¹ Ibid, p.14.

³² Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (2017), 'Digital Access and Equity for Multicultural Communities', Canberra, p. 5; Centre for Multicultural Youth (2016), 'Settlement in the digital age: Digital inclusion and newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds', p. 2.

³³ Alam, K and Imran, S (2015) 'The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee migrants: a case in regional Australia'. *Information Technology and People*, vol.28, no.2. p. 16.

information or relevant material.³⁴ Language barriers and limited in-language training opportunities can also make it difficult to navigate digital literacy skills development.

Security and privacy concerns

Concerns around security and privacy are a common concern for some newly arrived migrants and refugees. Not having the digital literacy skills and understandings of the systems they may be required to use, differing levels of trusts in government agencies, as well as other privacy and security concerns can result in a reluctance to put personal information into online portals.³⁵ On the other hand, a lack of knowledge around security and privacy can also lend itself to individuals being subject to scams. Greater knowledge around managing security and privacy online can empower individuals to manage their personal information confidently and appropriately.

The impacts of digital exclusion for migrants and refugees

Digital exclusion arising from these barriers can have significant impacts on the successful settlement of newly arrived migrants and refugees. It can mean they miss out on key information, are limited in their ability to engage in education and employment opportunities, and may have a narrower range of services accessible to them.

For example, the below case study shows how a lack of access to technology discourages participation in further education.

Case Study: Arifa

Arifa was a teacher before migrating to Australia. She is a single mother, and is on jobseeker payments. She recently completed her English language tuition through the Adult Migrant English program and is thinking about her next steps. She is considering going back to study so that she can be a teacher in Australia. The family share one second hand laptop. She is worried that she might waste her time and accumulate a large debt by enrolling in studies, only to not be able to devote the necessary hours due to not being able to use the laptop without disadvantaging the children's education. But she also knows that getting secure, gainful employment is important for her own settlement and sense of fulfilment, as well as her kids' future.

An additional impact of digital exclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees is social isolation and disconnection. Alongside access to information and services, technology helps people to connect with others. A large part of being settled in Australia is having a sense of social belonging—however this is difficult to achieve if most of Australia engages socially through a platform not accessed by the new arrival.

³⁴ Settlement Council of Australia (2020), 'Communicating with migrant and refugee communities during COVID-19', p.16.

³⁵ Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (2017), 'Digital Access and Equity for Multicultural Communities', p. 6.

Case Study: Kyaw Win

Kyaw Win came to Australia with his son, and his son's family. Every week, he looks forward to taking the bus to meet with the seniors social group run by his local settlement service. The group provides an opportunity to meet with others of the same cultural background, and talk about common challenges and how they are adjusting to life in Australia. It also gives him the chance to meet people from other cultural backgrounds in a safe and supportive environment. When the COVID-19 restrictions came into effect, the social group stopped meeting in person and moved online. However, he did not know how to use the computer and it was very difficult learning to use the computer without somebody next to him to show him how to do it step by step multiple times so that he can remember. Everybody at home is busy with their own work and study, and can't spend long periods of time teaching him.

The impacts of digital exclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees in Australia were particularly highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Settlement agencies reported that the sudden shift to online engagement and lack of face-to-face services meant that many newly arrived migrants and refugees felt lost, disconnected, and disempowered.³⁶ However, this is only a glimpse of the kind of disconnection these communities could be facing, in an Australia that becomes more digitally-reliant than ever.

³⁶ Settlement Council of Australia (2020), 'Communicating with migrant and refugee communities during COVID-19.'

Recommendations based on what we know works

Consultations with settlement agencies have highlighted several key learnings that work to improve digital inclusion for newly arrived refugees and migrants. Based on this consultation and on Good Things Foundation's work with people that are digitally excluded, Good Things Foundation and Settlement Council of Australia have prepared several recommendations which we believe will improve the digital inclusion of refugees and migrants and enhance their settlement experience and life in Australia.

Having access to technology

Being able to access technology is vital to digital inclusion. This includes access to technology including mobile phones and computers, and enough time to use it as necessary (many newly arrived families may only have one device per family). It also includes access to infrastructure that facilitates technology use, including internet and data access.

Recommendation 1: Provide digital devices to Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) students

One way of addressing the impact of lack of access to digital technology for newly arrived migrants and refugees is the provision of digital devices to participants of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Devices, such as laptops, could be provided to students upon their enrolment in the AMEP to facilitate their English language learning and digital literacy skills.

Providing AMEP participants with sufficient technology to undertake their studies would have the combined effect of improving digital inclusion and increasing the uptake of the AMEP, and therefore support positive settlement outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Include appropriate digital technology in the Basic Household Goods Package

The Basic Household Goods Package (BHG Package), provided as part of the Humanitarian Settlement Program, supports humanitarian entrants in establishing their ongoing accommodation through the provision of furniture and other household goods. In terms of technology, the BHG Package includes the provision of one mobile phone for a family, and no other devices such as laptops or computers.

Though an important first step, one mobile device per family does not meet the current standard for digital inclusion. Expanding the provision of technology through the BHG Package – such as laptops and a phone for more than one family member, with an appropriate data allowance for a period of time, can support greater access to technology for humanitarian entrants.

This is also essential for promoting independence at an individual level. For example, it has been reported that current practice can result in the male in a family unit having the mobile phone, and the female spouse being dependent on him, and having a lack of independent means to communicate. This is particularly problematic in abusive relationships.

Recommendation 3: Improve ICT infrastructure in regional areas

ICT infrastructure, data and connectivity issues in regional areas must also be addressed to support access to technology. This also has benefits for promoting regional migration, as people can then connect with others of their own language/cultural/religious group who may not be located in the same town. It would also allow for easier engagement with services that may not be available in their region, including settlement services.

Meeting clients where they are

Initiatives to promote digital inclusion should be available at familiar contact points for newly arrived refugees and migrants, whether this be through the AMEP program, settlement services, community centres or other contact points. Including digital access and education through existing programs and services can support digital inclusion without creating the extra burden of engaging with yet another service. Many newly arrived refugees and migrants are already engaged in services provided by settlement agencies and AMEP providers, who are used to providing familiar, culturally competent and safe support. Clients' familiarity with how to travel to, access and engage with these services can be harnessed to support digital inclusion.

Integrating digital learning with other activities can support clients to navigate technology as part of their ongoing learning in their settlement journey. Many settlement agencies are proactive and already use technology in sessions such as learning to navigate myGov, social engagement, or as part of their English language learning or Citizenship classes.

Recommendation 4: Embed in-language digital mentoring within settlement services

Embedding in-language digital mentoring within settlement services will be a key strategy for improving digital inclusion. This would expand on the success of the [Be Connected Program](#) and Network of over 3000 community organisations run by Good Things Foundation, as well as the successes of settlement services delivering various digital training initiatives.

This could include having a similar model of digital skills mentoring located within settlement services, trained and supported in digital capacity-building by Good Things Foundation. This program could be tailored to adopt what works – meeting clients where they are, access to in-language support and training, provision of technology, integrating with other settlement or learning activities, and being flexible to meet the various individual needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants. This would leverage both the digital expertise that Good Things Foundation brings, as well as the expertise of settlement agencies, both essential factors to successfully bridging the digital divide.

In language and peer-to-peer support

Digital learning resources must be made available in language. This includes translated resources in various forms including written, audio and video resources, as well as bilingual support as outlined above. Peer to peer support is an effective and interactive way to support digital learning. For example, one settlement agency has found that training youth mentors to support adult learners navigate technology (such as using online portals) has been a successful to support digital literacy for settlement.

Recommendation 5: Translate Good Things Foundation Resources

Good Things Foundation hosts a number of web-based resources³⁷ that support learners and digital mentors with their digital skills training. These include case studies and articles, a digital skills directory, resources to download and print, as well as online learning modules for learners to complete, supported by digital mentors (available from [Good Things Learning](#)).

These resources could be translated in a number of different languages, making digital learning more accessible to those with low English language proficiency, and making in language resources more readily available to bilingual mentors.

Tailored and flexible support

Newly arrived migrants and refugees arrive with various levels of digital skills and access to technology, and therefore have different needs when improving their digital capability. People learn in different ways and some require more intensive support than others. For example, some young people may learn quickly and have greater exposure to technology, while others may need structured activities, and others prefer peer to peer support or social ways of learning.³⁸ It is important to acknowledge this diversity of need and be flexible and responsive to individual circumstances, abilities and needs.

Recommendation 6: Provide multiple opportunities for people to learn in different ways

Providing multiple ways for people to learn whether embedded in a AMEP class, as part of a social activity, through one-on-one support with a digital mentor or completing an online learning course at a time most convenient to them - gives learners options to learn the way they prefer.

Giving different options for learning digital skills and increasing the digital skills of clients also creates efficiencies for settlement service staff, and can free up staff capacity to give more one-to-one support to those with the greatest need. Settlement services could reach more newly arrived migrants and refugees through provision of information and education in digital format, if they are able to provide the digital literacy support to those who need it.

³⁷ These resources can be accessed at: <https://www.beconnectednetwork.org.au/training-resources/all-resources>.

³⁸ Millar A, Baldassar L & Wilding, R (2018), 'The Significance of digital citizenship in the well-being of older migrants', *Public Health*, vol. 158, p. 146.

Conclusion

As Australia becomes increasingly reliant on digital technologies across all spheres of life, equity between newly arrived migrants and refugees and the rest of the population will be dependent on the ability to ensure they are digitally included. The experiences of settlement services, particularly during COVID-19, has been that there is a digital divide between many in migrant and refugee populations, and the rest of Australia. This is supported by evidence showing that certain groups—namely humanitarian entrants and those who are newly arrived, often experience digital exclusion.³⁹ This paper has identified the key issues preventing digital inclusion for all, and provided a number of practical recommendations, which taken together, will help bridge the digital divide.

³⁹ Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2020), 'Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index Report', p. 20.