



HIDDEN TALENT: SKILLED REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

A research report from the Fairfield Emerging Communities Action Partnership (FECAP)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Selena founded Humans Like Us in 2019 to connect people supporting refugees in their working life. She facilitates roundtables of the Australian Employer Network for Refugee Inclusion, a peer network of companies and government agencies who have welcomed refugees into their workforces.

Previously, Selena was the National Manager of the Friendly Nation Initiative at the Migration Council of Australia. During that time, Selena authored the Australian Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees, a collaboration with the Tent Partnership for Refugees.

Selena has over 20 years' experience as a public sector investigator and researcher, and deep expertise in improving the way government functions in practice. Selena has edited 14 public reports and authored 3 others.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Fairfield Emerging Communities Action Partnership (FECAP) was established in August 2000 to identify and address the needs of Fairfield's populations of newly arrived, small and emerging communities of humanitarian, refugee and other migrant backgrounds. FECAP aims to facilitate the full participation and social inclusion of these groups through community development and advocacy initiatives.

In 2020, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on economic activity in Australia, FECAP recognised the need to better understand their clients' experiences in trying to find employment.

FECAP commissioned this research project to:

- obtain information from clients about their experience looking for work
- analyse the information obtained from clients by reference to empirical data and literature about Australian labour market conditions, recruitment trends and how employers fill job vacancies in practice
- explain the underlying causes of the barriers clients commonly experience in navigating the Australian labour market
- propose recommendations for change that will enable FECAP member organisations to better assist clients to achieve suitable and sustainable employment.

This research aims to give service providers, government agencies, local, State and Federal governments deeper insight into the challenges experienced by newly arrived migrants in seeking employment, in order to better assess the efficacy of their current approach, policy, programs and services, and consider different models of support.

The project used a mixed-method approach, including:

- a survey of 189 newly arrived refugees and migrants who were looking for work (48% of whom lived in Fairfield City)
- qualitative interviews with a select group of survey respondents (13 Arabic-speaking people from Iraq and Syria)
- consultations with 6 FECAP member organisations.

CHARACTERISTICS AND BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

Almost 80% of the job seekers surveyed are highly educated and have professional qualifications: 40% had University qualifications (PhD, Master's or Bachelor's degrees), and another 40% had diplomas and trade qualifications. The cohort was very diverse, with the most common professions being engineering, health (including doctors) teaching, and also included jewellery making, accounting and air traffic control. Many of them had many years of experience in their field of expertise.

A select group of 13 people who had completed the survey (8 men, 5 women) were interviewed to gain insight into some of the different experiences that humanitarian entrants from Iraq and Syria (who have arrived since 2015) have had of looking for work in Australia. The group comprised people from each age group, different occupations, different qualifications, some who had completed courses in Australia and some who had not.

THE CHALLENGES FOR THE PEOPLE SURVEYED AND INTERVIEWED

The survey showed that, when asked to nominate whether certain factors posed a barrier to finding a job, the most common factors were qualifications recognition (45% of respondents nominated this as a barrier) and having no local work experience (40% of respondents). 21% said that English was a barrier.

Most respondents did not nominate their job search skills or computer skills as a barrier. Most respondents also did not experience difficulties with the logistics of commuting to work, or with health or injuries.

Interestingly, the survey revealed that almost half the respondents had studied some form of professional or upskilling course after they had arrived in Australia in an effort to improve their chances of securing work, but this did not appear to lead to much better employment outcomes.

LABOUR MARKET BARRIERS

At present, labour market conditions in Australia continue to be relatively sound, with high demand for labour across a range of industries. In these economic circumstances, it would not be unreasonable to assume that job seekers with professional work experience and qualifications would be able to easily find work and continue their careers in Australia.

Unfortunately, employment outcomes for highly qualified job seekers can be worse than for those less qualified. This research project found that the barriers experienced by this cohort in securing work, both in their field of expertise and otherwise, are complex.

One challenge is that there are different ways to enter different occupations. Knowing how to find one type of work does not always help someone find another type of work. This means that job seekers need tailored and personalised advice to help them find employment opportunities in their particular field of expertise.

Another problem is that the most common ways of helping job seekers – teaching them formal job seeking skills (e.g. how to write a CV, cover letter, application, interview skills) – are not sufficient in themselves to enable job seekers to secure work.

Instead, skilled applicants find more success if they are supported to improve the quality of their applications, to better demonstrate their suitability for a particular role.

The research also found that alternative pathways to work that are available to skilled workers, beyond formally advertised positions, remain unknown to these job seekers. One in five vacancies are filled through informal networks – word of mouth. The narrow social and professional networks of newly arrived migrants and refugees particularly limits their capacity both to find out about these vacancies and to learn specific know-how about how recruitment works in their particular field of expertise.

Another problem is that newly arrived migrants and refugee applicants are less competitive because overseas work experience and qualifications are systematically devalued by Australian recruiters.

Finally, service providers supporting migrants and refugees are themselves lacking in expertise of the labour market, so are unable to provide their clients with the targeted assistance they need.

INTERVENTIONS THAT SUCCEED FOR A HIGHLY SKILLED COHORT

The skills and experience of qualified refugee and migrant job seekers present a pool of talent that could be utilised for the benefit of the Australian economy with the right interventions.

While settlement services for newly arrived humanitarian entrants are well-established, there is currently an absence of coordinated government policies that focus on supporting this skilled workforce to successfully integrate into the Australian economy.

This research has found a number of employment programs and initiatives that achieve strong outcomes for skilled migrants and refugees. This includes programs run by some employers to proactively include skilled refugees and migrants in their workforces, in recognition of the talent that lies within this cohort. There are also a range of social enterprises and charities providing the tailored and targeted support that this cohort needs to find work that matches their skills and experience. This includes mentoring and career coaching, work experience and training opportunities in specific fields.

These programs share key design features that:

- provide person-centred multi-layered support with each individual's life and career (e.g. connecting them to buddies, supervisors, English language tutors, mentors)
- expand people's social networks,
- deepen their technical understanding of their field of expertise and how recruitment works in that field
- involve collaboration between business and community sector organisations, each bringing their own particular expertise.

The employment outcomes these initiatives achieve are impressive, with some placing 80% of participants into ongoing work.

Although the programs discussed in this report currently operate at a small scale, their models offer governments and policy makers tried and tested approaches that could be adopted to improve employment outcomes for more skilled migrants and refugees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers can learn the lessons from the successful employment programs and initiatives discussed in this report, and focus their efforts on:

- supporting clients to build their personal networks and skills to find work through informal pathways
- connecting clients to programs and supports tailored for skilled migrants and refugees, as described in this report

- connecting clients to recruitment companies with expertise in recruiting into particular fields
- developing specific programs or initiatives specifically tailored to help skilled migrants and refugees.

This may require service providers to build the capacity and knowledge of their own workforce about the labour market and recruitment, possibly through hiring recruitment specialists into their teams, training existing staff and building their awareness of government resources and other support networks that already exist.

It is recommended that Governments, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, consider policy settings:

1. that encourage employers to welcome migrants and refugees into their workforces and that enable employers who already do so to scale up their efforts.
2. that facilitate the development and sharing of best practice between employers, to encourage and support more employers to welcome migrants and refugees into their workforces.
3. that provide more financial support to those charities and social enterprises specialising in programs that connect migrant and refugee workers with employers, including options for improving their integration into the funding available within the Commonwealth Government's New Employment Services Model.

Government agencies are employers themselves. It is also recommended that:

4. Government agencies, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, review their own hiring policies and practices, and consider developing programs to welcome migrants and refugees into their workforces, that incorporate the key design features of successful employer-led programs as described in this report.

In recognition of the employment outcomes achieved by the social enterprise sector, it is recommended that Governments, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, consider policy settings:

5. that provide greater financial support to work integration social enterprises that employ and support migrants and refugees into skilled occupations, including options for improving their integration into the funding available within the Commonwealth Government's New Employment Services Model.

It is also specifically recommended that:

6. Fairfield City Council consider establishing a collaboration with relevant Commonwealth and State government departments to develop or adopt a mentoring program tailored for skilled migrants and refugees living in and around Fairfield, who are looking for work in skilled occupations.
7. The Commonwealth government explore options for facilitating additional partnerships between service providers and the recruitment industry to provide customised support for skilled migrants and refugees to find work in their field of expertise.

8. The Commonwealth government provide financial and other support to enable service providers supporting migrant and refugees to build workforce capacity and knowledge about the labour market, recruitment and other programs that offer tailored support to skilled migrants and refugees.

CONCLUSION

Having a job is an essential part of building a new life in a new country. Migrants and refugees who are highly qualified and educated can be successfully integrated into the Australian labour market with the right support.

Successful models already exist but operate on a small scale. At their heart are design features that help to expand people's social networks, deepen their technical understanding of their field of expertise and how recruitment works in that field, and provide multi-faceted support with their lives and careers.

Service providers can improve the support they provide to clients by referring them to existing initiatives and adopting key design features of successful models.

Investment from governments to enable existing initiatives to scale-up and amplify their impact, would grow the economy (tapping into under-utilised skills and experience), unlock a source of talent for businesses, and enhance social cohesion. Welcoming into the workforce the skills and experience that migrants and refugees offer, benefits not only those individuals and their families, but also the businesses they work for, the colleagues and friends they make in their working lives, the economy and Australian society as a whole.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

The Fairfield Emerging Communities Action Partnership (FECAP) was established in August 2000 to identify and address needs presenting to Fairfield's populations of newly arrived, small and emerging communities of humanitarian, refugee and other migrant backgrounds. FECAP works together on community development and advocacy initiatives, to facilitate the full participation and social inclusion of these groups. FECAP is a forum of service providers and emerging communities that collaborate to increase access and improve the quality of service delivery to emerging communities in and around Fairfield Local Government Area.

Employment is a significant part of social inclusion, and many FECAP clients struggle to find sustainable work that fully utilises the skills they brought to Australia. Research has found that after 1½ years in Australia, only 17% of humanitarian migrants were in paid work¹, and after 4 years², only 32%³. Just over 39% of those with a job were working in a casual position and another 33% had permanent jobs⁴.

In 2020, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on economic activity in Australia, FECAP recognised the need to improve their understanding of their clients' experiences in trying to find employment.

FECAP commissioned this research project to:

- obtain information from clients about their experience looking for work
- analyse the information obtained from clients by reference to empirical data and literature about Australian labour market conditions, recruitment trends and how employers fill job vacancies in practice
- explain the underlying causes of the barriers clients commonly experience in navigating the Australian labour market
- propose recommendations for change that will enable FECAP member organisations to better assist clients to achieve suitable and sustainable employment.

This research aims to give service providers, government agencies, local, State and Federal governments deeper insight into the challenges experienced by newly arrived migrants and refugees in seeking employment, in order to better assess the efficacy of their current approach, policy, programs and services, and consider different models of support.

THE RESEARCH

The project used a mixed-method approach, including a survey of 189 migrants and refugees (almost half who live in Fairfield), qualitative interviews with a select group of 13 survey respondents, and consultations with 6 FECAP member organisations.

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS SURVEY

FECAP developed and administered the Employment and Skills Survey, which was emailed randomly to refugees, clients of FECAP members and migrants from a refugee-like background. Respondents had between 3 August and 16 October 2020 to complete the survey online. The survey comprised 29 questions (listed in full in Appendix A), asking people about their home country work experience, qualifications and education, their job search and upskilling experiences in Australia, their confidence with English, computer skills, their attitudes to commuting, and their attitudes to relocating to a regional area for work. It was completed by 189 respondents.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SELECT SURVEY RESPONDENTS

To organise in-depth interviews, 25 survey respondents were asked by telephone if they would be willing to be interviewed. 13 people said yes and were available. The purpose of the interviews was to explore respondents' particular experiences in looking for work in more depth.

In selecting who to call for an interview, the focus was on humanitarian entrants from Iraq and Syria who had arrived since 2015. Most refugees living in Fairfield are from those two countries, and other research indicates that this cohort have experienced particular difficulties in finding work. In addition, the volunteer staff who were available to conduct the interviews spoke Arabic, which enabled the interviews to be conducted in the first language of respondents.

The group was selected to ensure representation from each age group and similar numbers of men and women. The group also included a broad range of people with different experiences, based on their survey responses. This included people who had worked in different occupations and had different qualifications (for example, engineers, nurses and teachers), as well as people with no work experience or qualifications. The group included people who had completed courses in Australia and those who had not.

Questions were tailored to each interviewee, based on their responses to the survey. There was a particular focus on exploring people's experiences in trying to find work in Australia in the occupation in which they had previously worked, and/or using their existing qualifications. The questions also explored their experiences with completing courses in Australia as a pathway to employment and their familiarity with using digital technology to find work.

The template questions are listed in full in Appendix B. Each interviewee was asked a subset of those questions that were most relevant to their experiences.

Some interviews were conducted in person, others by telephone. The interviews were deliberately conducted in an open-ended semi-structured manner, to enable particular themes to be explored with people who had indicated they had had certain experiences (through their survey responses).

To give interview subjects the opportunity to express themselves more confidently, volunteers at CORE Community Services, fluent in Arabic and English, conducted the interviews in the subjects' mother tongue, Arabic. The notes written down by the volunteer interviewers were an English description of the Arabic responses of each interviewee.

CONSULTATION WITH FECAP WORKING GROUP

FECAP Working Group members were consulted in April 2021, through the circulation of 13 questions (listed in full in Appendix C) to all members. The questions were designed to explore their knowledge of labour market opportunities and organisations that help migrant and refugee job seekers. Participation was voluntary and 6 responses were received.

LIMITATIONS

Most of the respondents were not employed, so the survey does not include the perspectives of people who have succeeded in their search for a job, or people who are working for the number of hours that they would like.

The survey was administered online, so it does not include responses from people who do not have an email, internet access or a certain level of digital literacy and confidence navigating an online survey.

The survey asked whether the person was working but did not ask for more information about their current job, if they were. There were assumptions made, based on the answers to other questions, whether someone's current job was in the person's original field of work.

Due to the small number of qualitative interviews, the information provided has been included as illustrative of individual experiences, rather than representative of the experience of cohorts. The interviews were also conducted with Arabic speakers, as this was the language spoken by the volunteer staff who were available to conduct the interviews. The interviews therefore did not explore the experiences of survey respondents from other language groups.

The volunteer interviewers did not record and translate any direct quotes from interviewees. Instead, case studies have been included based on an English description of the Arabic responses of the interviewees, as translated by the bilingual interviewers.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Individuals participating in the survey and interviews have provided their responses confidentially. This report does not contain any information that could identify any specific individuals. All case studies have been de-identified.

CHAPTER 2: THE PEOPLE SURVEYED

This chapter discusses the data about the people surveyed and interviewed, including the levels of qualifications and work experience they had in their home countries.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There were 189 respondents to the survey, 57% male, 43% female. They were from all age groups, with 86% between the ages of 25 and 64.

Almost half of the respondents live in the Fairfield Local Government Area (LGA), and another quarter live in the neighbouring LGAs of Canterbury-Bankstown, Campbelltown, Penrith, Liverpool and Blacktown (see figure 1). Many had not been Australia for very long, with 40% having lived here for less than 3 years, and almost 20% having lived here for 6 years or more (see figure 2).

They came from 40 different countries, with the most common countries being Iraq (39%) and Syria (14%). There were 54 different languages spoken by respondents at home, with 37% speaking Arabic.

Figure 1: Residence

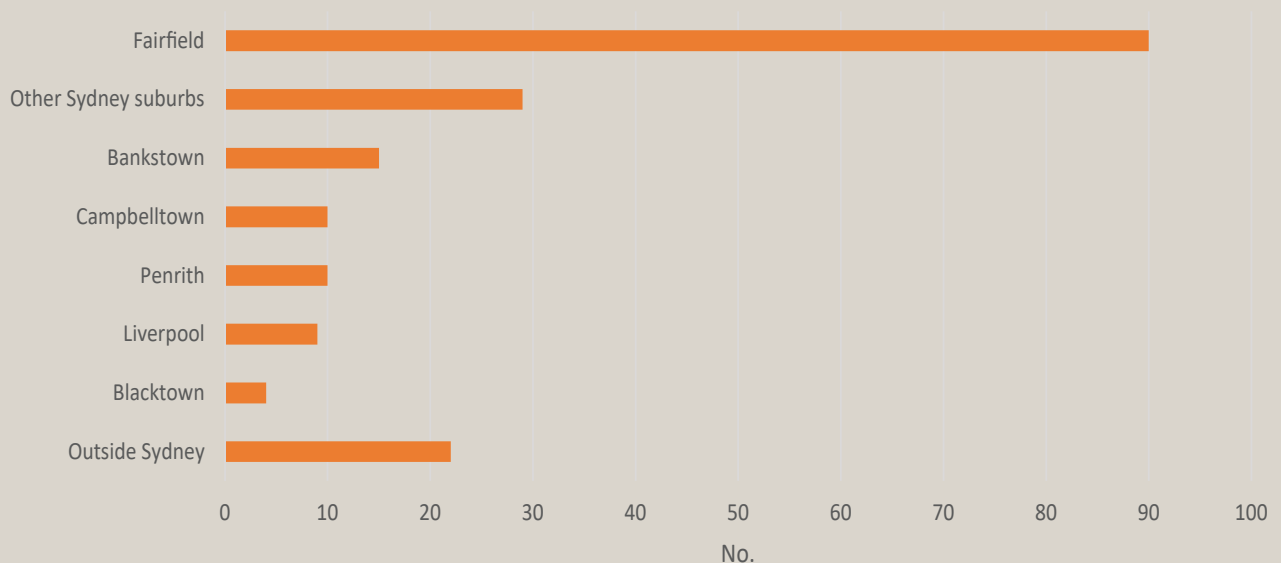
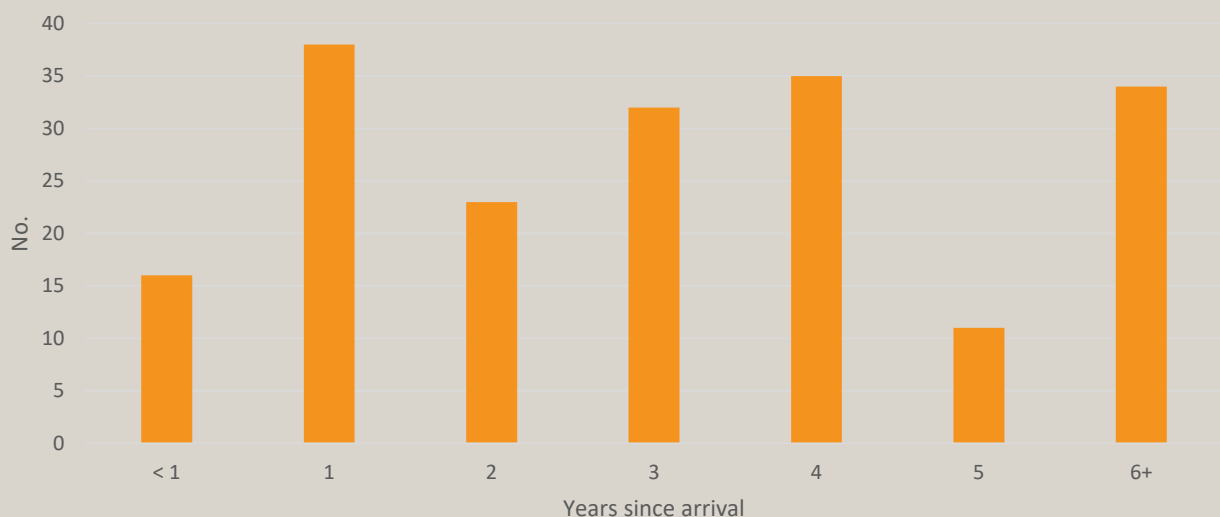


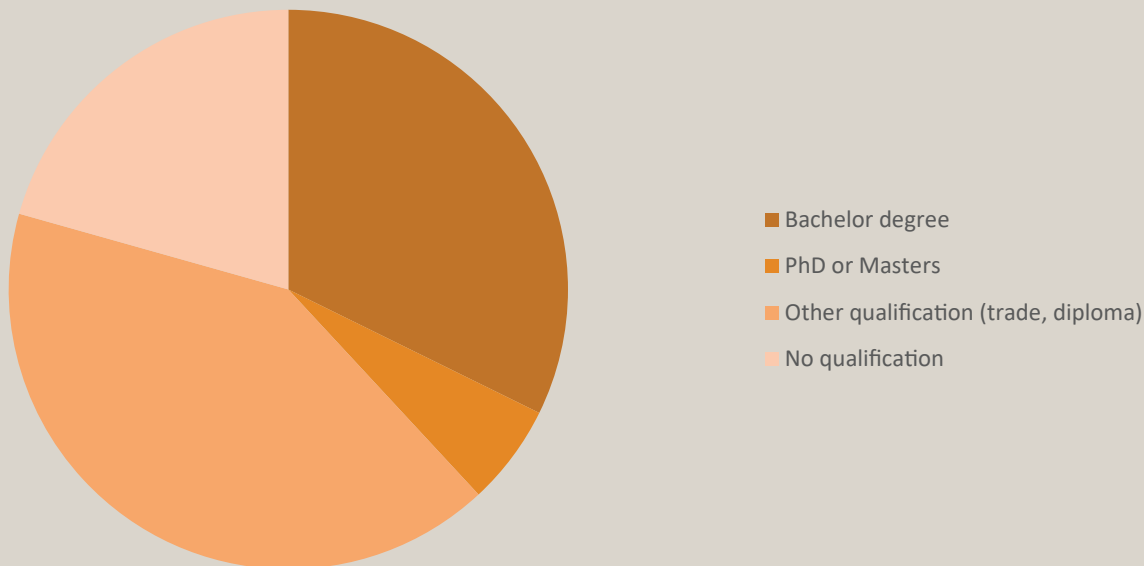
Figure 2: Years since arrival



LEVELS OF QUALIFICATIONS FROM HOME COUNTRY

Almost 80% came with qualifications from their home country. Almost half of those with qualifications had university qualifications (PhD, Master's or Bachelor's degrees) and the others had diplomas, trade and other professional qualifications (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Level of qualification



WORK EXPERIENCE IN HOME COUNTRY

Three in every four people (74%) had worked in their home country. Their employment was very diverse (see Table A).

Table A: Number of respondents working in different occupations

Engineers	19	Electrical	3
Healthcare workers, incl. nurses, scientists, pathologists	14	Government workers	3
Teacher	13	Community Services	3
Administration	10	Finance	2
Retail	10	HR	2
Trades	10	University lecturers	2
I.T.	8	Mechanic	2
Accountant	6	Air Traffic Controller	2
Hairdressers and barbers	5	Apple	1
Manufacturing	5	Architect	1
Doctor	4	Driver	1
Jewellery	4	Hospitality	1
Agriculture	3	Logistics	1
Banking	3	Marketing	1
Business	3	Monitoring & evaluation specialist	1

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SELECT GROUP WHO WERE INTERVIEWED

A select group of 13 people who had completed the survey (8 men, 5 women) were interviewed. Their case studies illustrate some of the different experiences that mainly humanitarian entrants from Iraq and Syria (who have arrived since 2015) have had of looking for work in Australia. The group comprised people from each age group, different occupations, different qualifications, some who had completed courses in Australia and some who had not.

Table B: Demographics of select group of interviewees

Country of origin	Gender	Age group	Year of arrival	Home country work experience/ qualification
Syria	F	25-34	2016	Customer service officer in library
Iraq	F	25-34	2018	None
Iraq	M	25-34	2017	Nurse
Iraq	M	25-34	2017	Pharmacist
Syria	F	35-44	2016	Customer service at a telecommunications company; Bachelor of Economics
Egypt	M	35-44	2016	Engineer
Syria	M	35-44	2017	Accountant; Degree in Business Administration
Iraq	F	45-54	2016	Laser hair removal
Iraq	F	45-54	2016	Owned her own hospital pathology laboratory
Iraq	M	45-54	2016	University lecturer for 14 years with PhD in Parasitology
Iraq	M	45-54	2017	Civil engineer
Syria	M	55-64	2015	Owned a toy store and worked in a pharmaceutical company
Syria	M	55-64	2017	Doctor

CHAPTER 3: CHALLENGES FOR THE PEOPLE SURVEYED AND INTERVIEWED

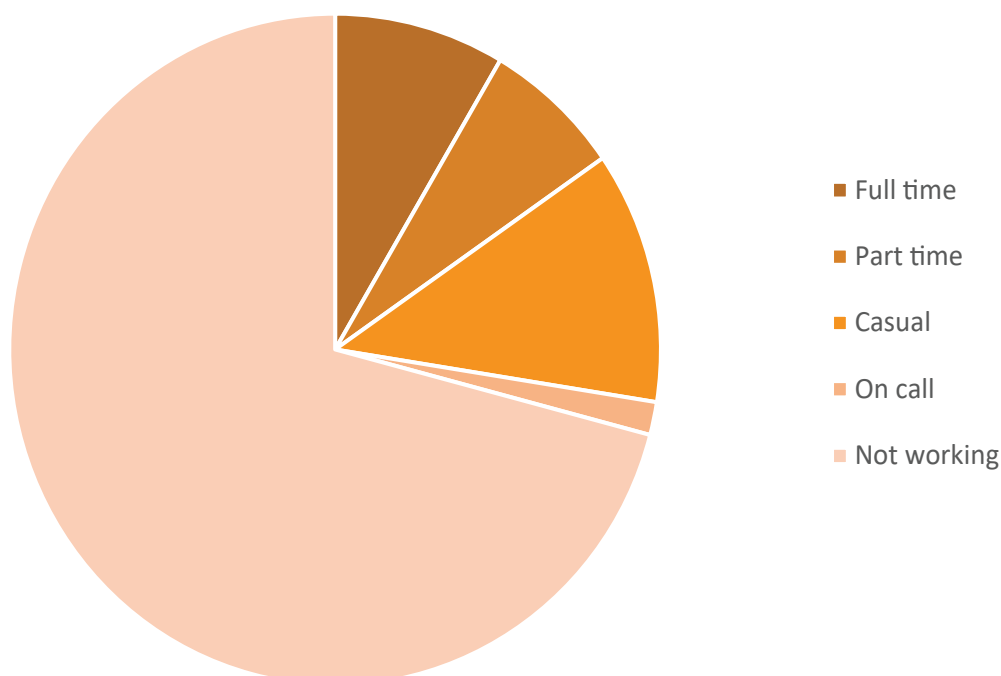
This chapter discusses the key barriers and challenges that the people surveyed and interviewed experienced in their search for work, as revealed through their responses. The aim is to give readers a better understanding of the common experiences of this cohort. Chapter 4 discusses how the complexities of the labour market, particularly for professionals, and the informal ways employers fill vacancies in practice, create different barriers for refugee and migrant job seekers. Chapters 5 and 6 outline some successful interventions that have achieved better employment outcomes for this cohort, and discuss recommendations for improving the support that could be provided through practice and policy changes.

HOW MANY WERE WORKING

Everyone who completed the survey was looking for work, and most of the questions were focussed on their experiences in looking for work. However, as it is a common experience to be working while also looking for a more suitable or more desirable job, the survey asked the respondents if they were working.

Over 70% of respondents were not working, and almost 30% were. The most common type of work was a casual job, and some had full-time or part-time work. See figure 4

Figure 4: Number of respondents working



BARRIERS TO FINDING WORK

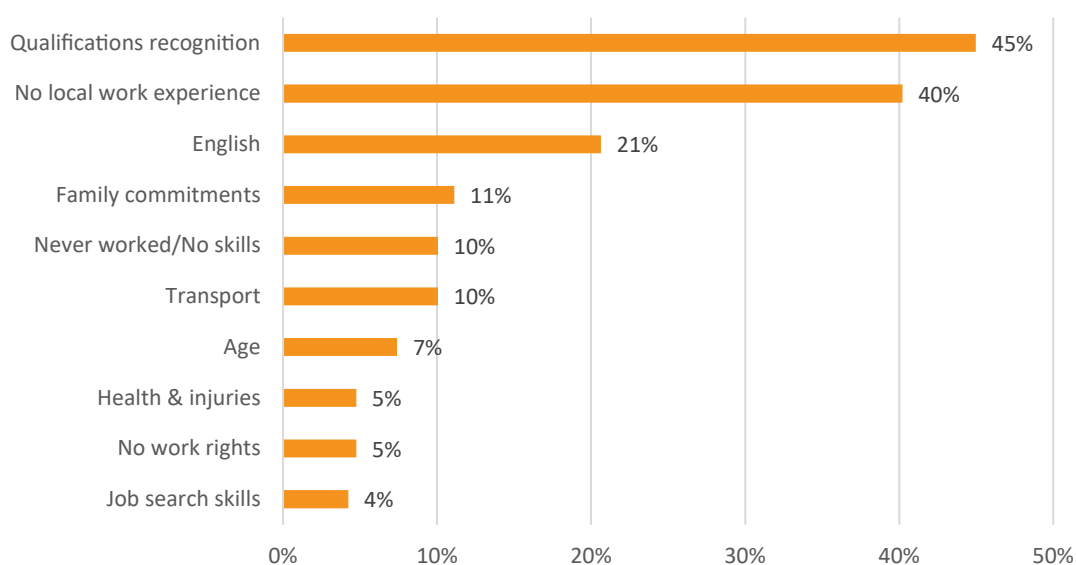
When asked to select whether certain listed factors posed a barrier to finding a job, 45% nominated qualifications recognition, and 40% nominated having no local work experience. See figure 5.

Significantly, only 4% nominated issues with their job search skills. When asked about their computer skills, 87% said they were “Good” or “Excellent.”

When asked about their level of English, only 7% said it was not good, and only 21% perceived that it was a barrier to finding a job. People can also have different levels of spoken and written English proficiency. For example, one person interviewed said that although he understands English, and knows how to read and write in English, he struggles to speak the language.

These different barriers are discussed in greater detail in the rest of this chapter.

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who nominated that these were barriers to finding a job



QUALIFICATIONS RECOGNITION

As reported in chapter 2, 80% of the respondents to the survey were highly qualified and most had experience working in their home countries (see figure 5 and table A).

A key challenge for professional migrants and refugees trying to work in their field of expertise in Australia is that it is difficult to have their overseas qualifications recognised.⁵

Only 43% of the survey respondents with qualifications have had them recognised in Australia. It is possible that this percentage is even lower, as some respondents who answered “yes” to this question may have misinterpreted a letter from the then National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) stating that their qualification is comparable to a certain Australian degree, as being recognition of their qualification. In FECAP’s experience, employers recruiting for staff with certain qualifications do not consider applicants with such letters as having their qualification recognised in Australia.

Those interviewed had a range of perspectives and reactions to the difficulties of getting their qualifications recognised.

One person was resigned to the reality that Australian authorities wouldn’t recognise their qualification (e.g. case study 1), and another felt it was too difficult to get a job in their field of expertise so decided not to seek recognition (e.g. case study 2). One person did not feel it was worthwhile trying to get their qualifications recognised, given their age and language (e.g. case study 3) and another was deterred by the cost (e.g. case study 4). One person who was interviewed did try to get their qualifications recognised (e.g. case study 5).

Case study 1

A pharmacist from Iraq said that he didn't have enough documents and, for the medical science field, it was difficult for Australian authorities to recognise a degree from another country. Instead, he obtained a certificate 4 in Health Administration and a Certificate 3 in Community Pharmacy, to refresh his knowledge and get some experience. He paid someone \$150 to create a professional CV for him. He worked as a Quality Administrator and in administration for 10 months, but was not working at the time of interview.

Case study 3

A 57-year-old doctor from Syria, who had practised for 25 years, had not tried to get his qualifications recognised because of his age and language skills.

Case study 2

An accountant from Syria decided to change his field of work, studying a Certificate 4 in Community Services, because this opened up lots of different fields of work for him, not just being an accountant. He decided not to get his accounting qualifications recognised in Australia because it is difficult to find jobs in accounting and he was interested in community services.

Case study 4

A university lecturer from Iraq with two PhDs, one in Parasitology and the other in Pathology, did a Certificate 4 in Pathology as the easiest path to start again in a familiar field. He said that he lost everything, including all his money, to ISIS, and was not able to get his qualification recognised as this would have cost him a lot of money.

Case study 5

An engineer from Egypt is in the process of registering as an engineer because he doesn't want to change his career.

NO LOCAL WORK EXPERIENCE AND NO OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE

Two in every five respondents said that having no local work experience was a barrier to finding a job. The university lecturer from Iraq with two PhDs (referred to in case study 4) has applied for various jobs, but "no one accepted him because he has no prior work experience. No agency is even willing to call or see him."

One in every five respondents nominated English as a barrier to work. A 2020 report on the settlement experiences of refugees in Fairfield similarly found that "[a] lack of English language skills was a frustrating barrier to employment for both men and women.... many adults had little opportunity to practice English language with others, either at a workplace or through social and community interactions. Learning English on the job was particularly noted as an important site of building language proficiency."⁶

THE UNFULFILLED PROMISE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

This research showed that people who had undertaken further study did not appear to have much better employment outcomes than those who hadn't.

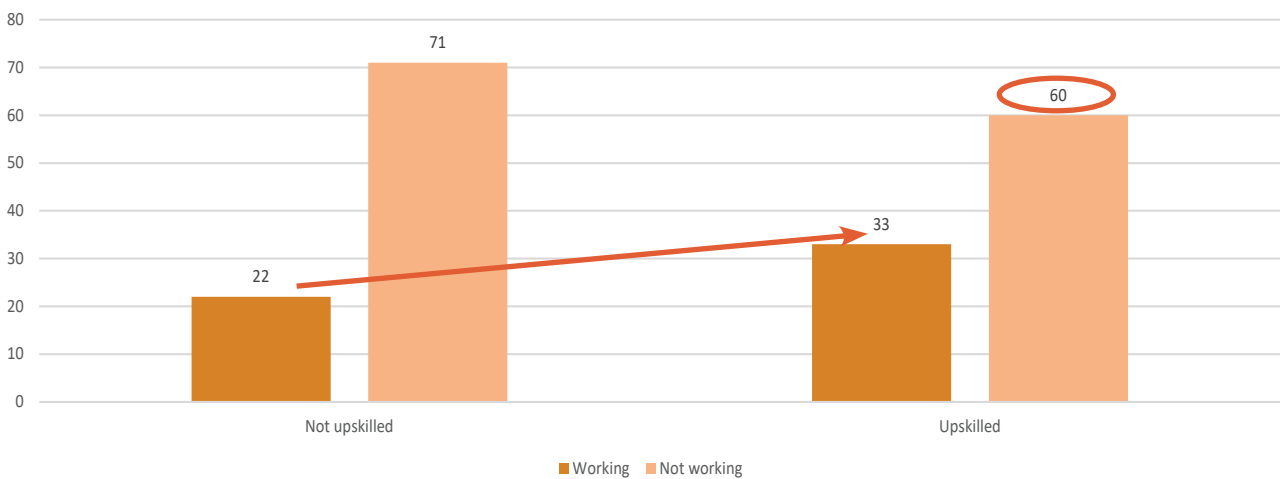
Almost half the respondents had studied some form of professional or upskilling course after they had arrived in Australia. These included completing Certificate courses at TAFE, studying for Master's degrees and Diplomas.

One survey respondent said:

"I did ... lots of qualifications in Australia between Certificate IV and Diploma levels."

The survey found that studying courses did not give people a much higher chance at finding work. As figure 6 shows, although more of the 189 respondents who had completed a course have a job (33 compared to 22), there were still 60 respondents who had done so but were still not able to find a job.

Figure 6: Impact of upskilling on employment outcomes



Some of the people interviewed had tried to obtain Australian qualifications to continue their career but were not successful (e.g. case studies 6 and 7), and others had tried to re-skill and move into a related field (e.g. case study 8).

Case study 6

A pathologist from Iraq, who owned her own pathology lab and also worked in the hospital, did a Diploma in Laboratory Technology and 3 Certificate courses (Certificate III in Pathology Collection, Certificate III in Laboratory Skills, Certificate IV in Laboratory Techniques) to try to restart her career in Australia. She was not working and doesn't know anyone who works in the profession.

Case study 7

The university lecturer from Iraq who decided to re-start his career here in Australia by studying a Certificate 4 in Pathology (referred to in case study 4), has unsuccessfully applied to be a volunteer and for a range of paid roles, including as a receptionist, and administrative worker.

Case study 8

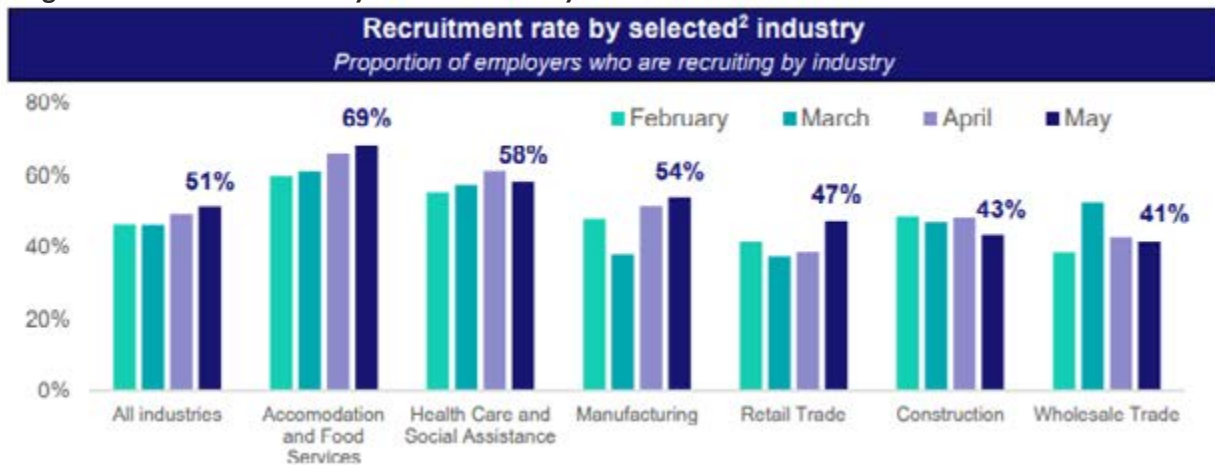
A woman from Syria, aged 25-34 years old, who had worked in Lebanon in customer service at a library, completed a Diploma in Community Services because she liked her customer service job and felt this would be similar. She is currently on jobseeker.

Recent research based on interviews with refugees about their employment experiences similarly found that:

“for none of the refugees we interviewed did obtaining local qualifications lead, in any straightforward or direct way, to employment. Indeed, several interviewees...drew attention to what they saw as the false promise of vocational training in this respect.”⁷

The research included an examination of which courses respondents studied, to see if the reason vocational training did not lead to employment was because people had studied courses where there are few jobs. The opposite was the case. The most common courses that people studied were retail, community services (health care and social assistance), hospitality, business administration, construction. As figure 7⁸ shows, notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, as of May 2021, employers had been recruiting in all of those industries.

Figure 7: Recruitment rate by selected industry



² Note: Some industries are not reportable due to small sample sizes.

Source: National Skills Commission (Australian Government), Recruitment Insights Report – May 2021, p. 2.

FECAP members observe that some migrants and refugees come from countries where having a university degree alone guarantees a secure job in the public sector. It is possible that some people undertake further education on a mistaken assumption that this will lead them to related employment. For example, one FECAP member knew of several clients who had studied criminology at TAFE, in the mistaken belief that this might give them a pathway to working as a lawyer.⁹

Some migrants and refugees may have developed a misunderstanding that a pathway to work in Australia is to replicate the model they are familiar with at home: study to gain a qualification and enter the related workforce. But in the Australian labour market, having a qualification is not enough to find a job.

THE LOGISTICS OF WORK

The logistics of work (e.g. organising transport, juggling caring responsibilities) can present a barrier to work. People might restrict their job search to only include jobs that are located within a shorter commute from home, if they don't have access to a car, public transport, or don't feel comfortable or confident travelling too far. Over two-thirds of the respondents to this survey did not appear to experience this issue to a large extent, with the data showing that:

- 78% have a drivers' licence.
- 66% say they have their own transport (this could be a motorbike, car or bicycle).
- 54% say they can travel 45 minutes or more for a job.
- 61% say they would relocate for a job.

Interestingly, the figures for the 90 Fairfield residents were slightly different. While a higher proportion of them had a drivers' licence (90%), a lower proportion of residents:

- had their own transport – 36%
- said they can travel 45 minutes or longer – 39%
- would relocate for a job – 47%.

Those interviewed shared a range of attitudes to commuting. When asked what they felt about travelling for over an hour for work, some people told us that “the main important thing for me is finding a job, I will do my best to reach that point” and they were “happy travelling by public transport”. But others said that “one hour for a mother with three kids is too long” and that they “prefer to work near to their house”. Two people said they had a 5-minute walk to their jobs in Syria.

CHAPTER 4: UNDERLYING LABOUR MARKET BARRIERS

This chapter explains what this research project has revealed about the particular difficulties highly skilled migrant and refugee job seekers experience when trying to find work in Australia and the underlying causes of these difficulties.

Chapter 5 outlines some targeted strategies that have achieved better employment outcomes for this skilled cohort, and chapter 6 suggests ways service providers could better support this cohort in their search for work and recommends policy interventions government could consider.

INTRODUCTION

As reported in figure 5 (chapter 2), the majority of the people surveyed came with qualifications from their home country, including PhDs, Master's, Bachelor's degrees, diplomas, trade and other professional qualifications (80%); and had also worked in their home country (74%). The respondents included engineers, nurses, teachers and accountants, as well as an air traffic controller.

Research shows that, for refugees, the higher the level of education, the worse the employment outcomes.¹⁰ Many people end up in 'survival' jobs, forced into working in areas that were unsuitable.¹¹ A 2020 report on the settlement experiences of refugees in Fairfield observed that:

"Fairfield adults reported being told to downgrade their expectations about employment in Australia in relation to the qualifications they held from their country of origin...as one young Iraqi male said, 'educated people are struggling the most in Australia, because there are no educated jobs around.'"¹²

Another report contrasted this experience with the expectations people had before their arrival in Australia:

"most ... were quite optimistic about the opportunities that would be available to them, ... how easily they would be able

to continue their previous career, and how quickly they would find employment. ... These high expectations and career ambitions...were often based on the skills and qualifications [they] brought with them, and the years of professional experience they had achieved before being forced to leave their homes. ... [and they] naturally assumed that the contribution they could make to the Australian workforce would be welcomed by the government and by employers."¹³

This chapter aims to provide a deeper explanation of the reasons for poor employment outcomes for this cohort. A more focused understanding will enable the development of more effective and targeted strategies. The potential benefits to individual job seekers, employers and the Australian economy are considerable, with one report estimating that the economy would be \$250 million larger in 10 years if the skills of migrants were better utilised.¹⁴

This chapter discusses the following issues in more detail:

1. Finding and securing work is different for different occupations.
2. Formal job seeking skills are not enough to find and secure work – people need help with the quality of their applications.
3. There are alternative pathways to work, and many of these remain unknown to these job seekers because of their narrow social and professional networks.
4. Overseas work experience and qualifications are systematically devalued by Australian recruiters.
5. Service providers supporting migrants and refugees are themselves lacking in expertise of the labour market, limiting the assistance they can provide.

FINDING AND SECURING WORK IS DIFFERENT FOR DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS

The survey found that the most commonly discussed barriers to finding work are qualifications recognition and a lack of local work experience.

However, the recognition of someone's overseas qualifications does not in and of itself lead to the opportunity to find work using that qualification. A recent report documenting the job-seeking experiences of refugees found that:

“For many professional refugees, however, the path from recognition of qualifications to actual employment seemed highly uncertain, and several of the people we spoke to expressed scepticism about the value of pursuing such arduous and expensive accreditation processes when the rewards were so uncertain and examples of failure so abundant.”¹⁵

Even a recently-trialled government program specifically aimed at helping skilled refugees to re-start their careers by developing individualised career pathway plans and providing financial support for the cost of the qualification recognition process, the Career Pathways Pilot¹⁶, only helped 19% of participants find work in a similar role to their job before migrating to Australia.¹⁷

These experiences point to other labour market impediments that prevent professionals from participating in the labour market for their field of expertise.

In simple terms, there are different ways to enter different occupations. How a person finds work as an aged care worker is different to how a person finds a parks ranger job, or work as a sales assistant, a public servant or a factory worker. Knowing how to find one type of work does not always help you find another type of work. This makes the labour market extremely difficult for newcomers to navigate without assistance, and also explains why generalised advice about how to find work is insufficient. Instead, to successfully find and secure work in their particular fields of expertise, individual job seekers require specific advice about where those vacancies are made known and the usual pathways to working in those fields.

The restrictions to entry are even tougher for higher-paid professional occupations, like engineers, lawyers and doctors. People with foreign credentials are explicitly restricted from participation, through so-called ‘labour market shelters’ (such as accreditation bodies and professional associations)¹⁸, making it impossible for an experienced professional to transfer their skills into the same profession without undertaking full local accreditation first. This might be possible for a young practitioner, but others, like the 57-year-old doctor with 25 years’ experience who was interviewed (case study 3), are unlikely to ever be able to continue their career.

Chapter 5 discusses some examples of employment programs that have tried to address this problem by creating pathways for people to continue in their original career even though they have not had their overseas qualifications recognised.¹⁹



Photo by mentatdgt from Pexels

FORMAL JOB SEEKING SKILLS ARE NOT ENOUGH – PEOPLE NEED HELP WITH THE QUALITY OF THEIR APPLICATIONS

The most common supports provided to refugee and migrant job seekers involve helping them with:

- creating a resume / curriculum vitae (CV)
- finding vacancies through online recruitment platforms, e.g. Seek, Indeed
- writing cover letters and applications to apply for a job
- interview skills.

Some of the people who were interviewed for this project had attended courses, events and classes with service providers, such as Navitas, TAFE, SSI and CORE, to learn about how to find a job, how to create a CV and how to do an interview.

This support is valuable, as these recruitment processes are completely unfamiliar for many newcomers from Syria and Iraq.²⁰

However, these support services, together with the mutual obligation requirements of jobactive²¹, requiring welfare recipients to apply for a high number of jobs (20) each month, create the perception that the way to get a job is to have a CV, send a lot of applications, and eventually someone will hire you.

By contrast, the evidence shows that having these documents and skills is not sufficient to find work in Australia, particularly not for newcomers, and especially not for those looking for work in their field of expertise. A recent report on the employment experience of Syrian and Iraqi refugees observed that “formal job seeking strategies tend to be extremely ineffective for refugee jobseekers.”²²

One reason is that people who apply for jobs through online jobs platforms frequently compete with hundreds of others. Newcomers, whose CVs cannot show they have any local work experience, are often screened out at early stages of the recruitment process, whether by human recruiters or AI systems programmed to pick up key words or previous experience doing similar work.²³

A further problem is that 20 applications per month translates, on average, to one application every working day. Writing a competitive job application, particularly for a professional job, is not straightforward. It can take many hours to research the position, the employer, and then write an application that highlights how the applicant’s skills and experience are a good fit for the job. Writing a competitive application in English also takes a level of proficiency in written English that over 50% of refugees in Australia say they do not have.²⁴ This requirement therefore incentivises people to focus on the quantity rather than the quality of their applications or how suited they might be for a particular job.

In these multiple ways, the jobactive system makes it particularly difficult for those with higher qualifications to apply for, compete and secure jobs commensurate with their experience. More support is required for people to improve the quality of their CV and applications to better match the requirements of the vacant job. Chapter 5 discusses how some specialised employment programs provide this support.

The general inadequacies of the jobactive system to meet the specific complex needs of newly arrived migrants and refugees have been discussed in other reports.²⁵ For example, a 2021 report observed that:

“...from refugee jobseekers’ point of view... the Jobactive model is clearly the most inadequate form of support refugees encounter... structural issues such as staff-to-client ratios, the absence of specialised assistance and the heavy focus on compliance mean that Jobactive support generally fails to help refugees find employment.”²⁶

A 2019 report explained the problems in this way:

“Many refugees to whom we have spoken bemoaned the inadequate level of personalised assistance they receive... Often they are expected to apply for jobs for which they are not adequately prepared. This emphasis on compliance serves to undermine the job seeker’s confidence and, over time, creates a sense of hopelessness. It undermines self-esteem...Unfortunately, too many refugees find themselves trapped in employment which offers no chance to use their experience and develop their capabilities.”²⁷

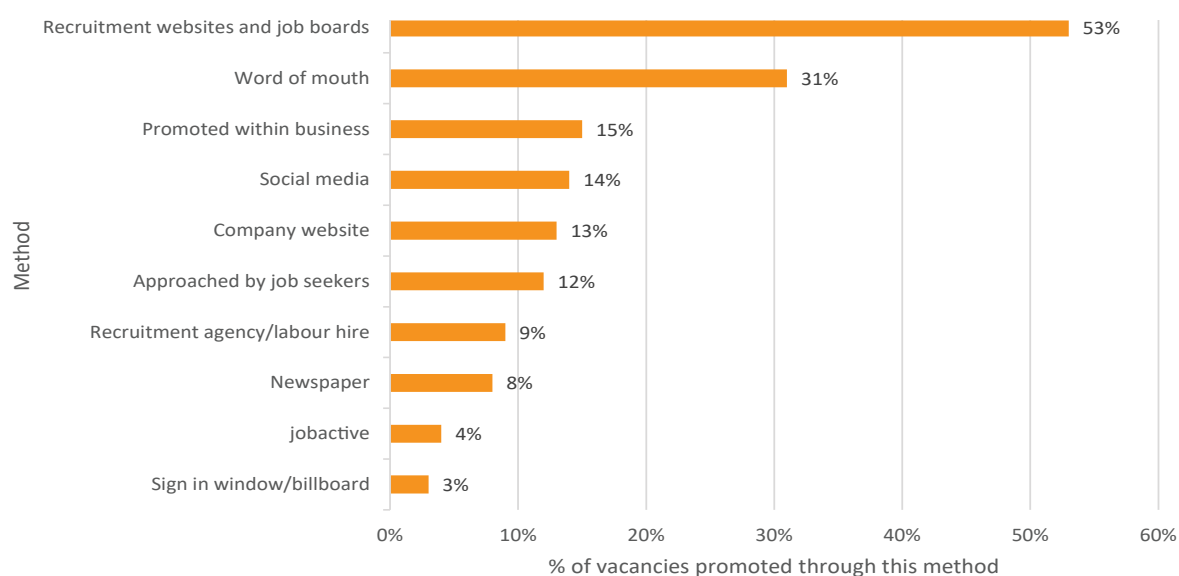
FINDING WORK IN WAYS OTHER THAN APPLYING FOR ADVERTISED VACANCIES

An additional problem is that only 4% of job vacancies in Australia are promoted through jobactive²⁸. For the vast majority of vacancies, employers use other connections or connectors to find applicants, with about one in five vacancies (19%) not ever formally advertised.²⁹ This includes asking existing employees and networks if they know friends or family who are available to work. As figure 8 shows, around 31% of vacancies are promoted through word of mouth and 15% are promoted within the business.

Other informal methods employers use include recruiting job seekers who approach them directly (12%) or placing a sign in their shop window (3%).³⁰

When vacancies are advertised, this happens online: although 53% are recruitment websites and job boards, another 13% are on the company's website and 14% are through social media (e.g. Facebook). Some employers also sought assistance from private recruitment agencies or labour hire firms (9% of vacancies).³¹

Figure 8: Recruitment methods used by employers, 2019



Source: National Skills Commission (Australian Government), Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences: 2019 Data Report and Recruitment methods – 2019 trends.

KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER PATHWAYS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

People interviewed were asked a range of broad questions to give them a chance to tell us about the kind of advice they'd been given and the knowledge they had about looking for work. These included:

- Are you with a jobactive provider? Tell me how they have helped you find a job as [former occupation], or any other job. What did they advise?
- Have you asked for help from anyone else? What have they done to help?
- Who has helped you look for work? What did they advise?
- Tell me what you know about where [former occupation] can find work, and how to look for work in that occupation in Australia?
- Tell me how you look for other jobs? Tell me how you apply for jobs? Has anyone helped you with your CV and shown you how to write an application?
- Explain how you would use a computer or your phone to find a job vacancy?

Interviewees talked about:

- using Google, Seek, Indeed, online websites, Facebook and searching for job agencies,
- applying for jobs online,
- using their phone to apply because that was easier, receiving help to write their CV and write applications, and
- receiving no help from anyone.

These answers indicate that there are many aspects of the Australian labour market that remain unknown to these job seekers. Even with relatively high digital literacy – 87% of survey respondents said their computing skills were good or excellent – without better knowledge and understanding of the labour market, their ability to use those skills to find work is limited.

Most significantly, no one interviewed appeared to have any knowledge of:

- how they might research a company, industry or field of interest, to better tailor an application or understand where to find vacancies,
- how they might find job vacancies on a particular employer's website,
- the importance of connecting to networks of people working in the industry or field where they were interested in working, and how to use social media sites (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook) to do this, or
- how they could seek assistance from the professional recruitment and labour hire industries (there are 7,000 companies in Australia with expert knowledge of matching candidates to job vacancies).³²

Only one person showed an understanding of the need to tailor applications to a particular vacancy.³³

Only two people interviewed knew about one organisation that offers recruitment services specifically for migrant and refugee job seekers³⁴ but they did not know about any others.

LIMITATIONS OF A SMALL SOCIAL NETWORK

A significant problem that restricts newly arrived refugees and migrants from entering the labour market is that their local networks are narrow or non-existent.³⁵ Most of them have left behind their family, friends and social network from their neighbourhood, school, university and work.

When they arrive in Australia, their social network is often limited to a community or family network from the same culture, language and/or religion. Some might get to know workers in migrant services, fellow students and English teachers from the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)³⁶, and public servants who deliver government services.

Beyond these narrow circles, opportunities to grow their social and professional networks are very limited. When 31% of vacancies are promoted through word of mouth, this chasm between the networks of people recruiting for jobs and the networks of newcomers presents a missed opportunity, not only for the job seekers but also for employers.

Academic research indicates that “merely having social networks does not increase the likelihood of refugee workforce integration”³⁷; instead “it is the structure and composition of refugees’ social networks that matters.”³⁸ This research project found that not knowing anyone who works in a job seeker’s field of expertise seriously impacts their ability to find work in that area. Because different occupations recruit their workforces differently, getting to know people who actually work within a desired occupation or signing up with a recruitment company that specialises in the workforce needs of that occupation, will help job seekers to better understand the way recruitment in that occupation works.

This deeper understanding equips people to more confidently locate suitable job vacancies, better understand the technical language of recruitment and better tailor their applications.

There are a number of mentoring programs in Australia that aim to address this issue, discussed in chapter 5.

DEVALUATION OF OVERSEAS WORK EXPERIENCE

Even those people who are able to find relevant vacancies in their field of expertise, and have the skills to lodge a quality application, commonly face another common problem. These are the deeply ingrained prejudices within standard recruitment processes that devalue any work experience from a different country. A recent academic article observed:

“This form of marginalization often stems from ... standards that position knowledge from developing countries as inferior and incompatible.”³⁹

The result is that even experienced workers with high English skills are rarely able to compete with other applicants with the same level of experience but who have worked in Australia.

A recent report that interviewed 40 refugees about their employment experiences observed that:

“This is not merely a problem for highly educated university graduates, however. Refugees in occupations as diverse as truck driving, house painting, accounting, engineering, dentistry and ophthalmology all reported these kinds of experiences. For many refugees, this near universal experience of being so consistently undervalued in fact represents a kind of discrimination.”⁴⁰

This echoes findings from other settlement countries as well, with one article describing ‘systemic discrimination’, whereby the past qualifications, experience and educational backgrounds of refugees are denied, restricting entry to the desired job market.⁴¹

This puts job seekers in a difficult situation. If they cannot compete against peers because their commensurate work experience is devalued, then if they want to continue working in their field of expertise, they need to apply for an entry-level job, even if this does not match their level of experience.

For some, this is seen as an opportunity to learn Australian workplace cultures and norms, as a stepping-stone to advance back to their pre-migration level of seniority. One employer has observed:

“Some people who come into our entry level roles

are really intelligent and highly qualified, but they just want a foot in the door.

It’s a good soft entry and we have opportunities for people who want to move into management roles given their capabilities.”⁴²

However, this is not always a successful strategy. Recruiters can be wary of applicants who apply for positions below their level of seniority (albeit in another country), preferring less experienced locals who they assume will be easier to train.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LABOUR MARKET: SERVICE PROVIDERS

This research project also found another challenge, which is the lack of expertise amongst service providers helping with other aspects of the lives of migrants and refugees, in navigating a very complex labour market.

FECAP Working Group members were consulted by circulating a list of questions (see Appendix C), and 6 responses were received.

Some questions asked about their knowledge of a range of Commonwealth government tools and resources that have been developed to help job seekers. Three had no knowledge of any of them. The other three knew about some of them, but only one had ever used or helped a client use them. That respondent wrote that “certain / relevant information [was used] in presentations [by] our teachers...”

Working Group members were also asked about whether they knew about certain social enterprises that specialise in connecting migrants and refugees with employers, and others that offer assistance to start their own business. All 6 had heard of some of them, and 4 had referred their clients.

Finally, Working Group members were asked whether they knew about certain freelancing platforms, and whether they had talked to their clients about e-commerce. Half had heard of some of the freelancing platforms, and half hadn’t. Only two people had talked to their clients about freelancing, and only one about e-commerce.

Chapter 5 discusses the ways service providers could build their own capacity to assist their clients in their working life, either through upskilling, hiring for expertise or partnering with other organisations that have expertise in navigating the labour market.

CHAPTER 5: INTERVENTIONS THAT SUCCEED FOR A HIGHLY SKILLED COHORT

This chapter explores interventions that have successfully supported newly arrived refugees and migrants in their search for work. In particular, these issues are discussed:

1. What tailored support for skilled migrant and refugee job seekers looks like (employer-led programs, work integration social enterprises, mentoring and coaching).
2. The issue of the devaluation of overseas experience by recruiters.
3. Assisting people who want to start their own businesses.

WHAT TAILORED SUPPORT FOR SKILLED MIGRANT AND REFUGEE JOB SEEKERS LOOKS LIKE

In Australia, there are a number of social enterprises and charities with growing expertise in providing individualised support for migrants and refugees looking for work in skilled occupations. In this section, 3 models of support are discussed:

- A. Employer-led programs
- B. Work integration social enterprises (WISEs)
- C. Mentoring and coaching

A. EMPLOYER-LED PROGRAMS

This research project found examples of employers who have partnered with social enterprises and charities to deliver employment programs for skilled migrants and refugees. This section discusses those programs that have successfully helped many of their participants secure ongoing work, commonly in their field of interest, and the characteristics of those programs that underpin their success.

The longest-running programs are at two of Australia's largest banks:

- ANZ's partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Given the Chance Program⁴³

began in 2006 and offers 6-12 month paid placements for disadvantaged migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. There have been 250 participants over those 14 years, and over 230 have moved into roles at ANZ. In recent years, ANZ has expanded from Victoria to NSW and Tasmania.⁴⁴

- NAB's African Australian Inclusion Program, a partnership with the Jesuit Social Services since 2009, offers 6-month paid placements for skilled migrants and refugees from African countries.⁴⁵ Of the 503 people who have participated in the program over those 12 years, over 80% have found ongoing employment with NAB or another company.⁴⁶ As of January 2020, about 50% of participants were still working at NAB.⁴⁷

Other examples include⁴⁸:

- GHD, a multi-national company that provides engineering, architecture, and environmental and construction services, has offered 39 internships (which run for 12 weeks) to refugees and asylum seekers in partnership with Career Seekers since 2016. Over 50% have transitioned into permanent roles.⁴⁹
- Service NSW's Refugee Internship Program (offering a 3–6-month placement) began in 2017. As of 30 June 2020, 61 refugees had been employed in the program, and 90% of interns transitioned into ongoing roles at Service NSW.⁵⁰
- Woolworths, in partnership with Community Corporate, has provided employment opportunities for over 200 refugees since the employment program's inception in 2016.⁵¹
- Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP), a large rail infrastructure project in Melbourne⁵², has provided 30 cadetships to refugees and asylum seekers through its Engineering Pathways Industry Cadetship (EPIC), with many securing work with its 10 partner construction companies (e.g. MetroTrains)

In Fairfield, the Career Pathways for Refugees in Health program (a partnership between CORE Community Services, TAFE NSW and South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD)) was delivered in 2020. TAFE designed a course tailored to the needs of SWSLHD, teaching around 50 participants the specific skills they needed to work in particular roles in the hospital. Participants also learnt about NSW Health recruitment processes and had the opportunity to gain work experience. At the end of the 2020 program, 7 participants applied for positions at Fairfield Hospital, and all received job offers.⁵³

This research also gave us an example of an employment program success story. Of the people interviewed, one person was working, and this was through participation in the Career Seekers program, to which he was referred by CORE Community Services. He was also able to get his qualification recognised with the help of Settlement Services International. The person was a civil engineer from Iraq, 45-54 years old, and found work as a project manager.

Not all participants in employer-led programs secure ongoing work at the end. Indeed, the Career Seekers internship⁵⁴ (12 weeks) and IKEA's Skills for Employment Program (an 8-week work placement)⁵⁵ are deliberately designed as temporary experiences (securing ongoing employment is a bonus, not an expected, outcome). Participants are nonetheless better equipped to navigate the Australian labour market at the end of these programs. In particular, they benefit from:

- having Australian work experience – giving them a better understanding of Australian workplace culture and norms, and filling a gap in their CV
- local contacts and a local work referee – expanding their network
- industry-specific knowledge and language
- self-confidence and feeling empowered, more knowledgeable and self-sufficient to continue their search for work.

Although each employer-led program is different, they share 4 common characteristics that give participants the support they need.

First, each program is driven by the employers' workforce needs. This increases the likelihood that the employment is sustainable and not reliant on an

employer's charity.

Second, each program is delivered in partnership with a community organisation (usually a charity or social enterprise) with expertise supporting refugee and migrant newcomers. This means that individuals have access to expert support for issues that might impact on their working life, but which are not issues that employers would generally be familiar with (e.g. having family members living in war zone).

Third, participants are provided with individualised and multi-disciplinary support in their working life. Most are supported by their manager, a peer or buddy, and a more senior mentor.⁵⁶ They are also supported by the community partner.⁵⁷ This commonly includes a form of pre-placement training⁵⁸ and future-focused career coaching or planning.⁵⁹ This helps to build the person's network, their confidence, self-sufficiency and capabilities to meet new people and make new friends.

Fourth, the participant's manager and colleagues are provided with pre-program training⁶⁰ and can access ongoing advice from the community partner.⁶¹ Employers benefit by being better prepared and equipped to welcome someone who has very different life experiences and familiarity with a different work culture. It is a foundation from which strong, positive relationships can form. Being able to provide their staff with the specialist support they need also manages the risk of mishandling or misunderstanding an unfamiliar situation because they lack experience in working with staff with refugee experiences. For example, a windowless office or loud noises in a workplace might cause unspoken psychological distress to someone who has escaped a war zone or been tortured, but this might manifest in their behaviour and be interpreted as a performance issue. Experienced community organisations help employers navigate issues of this nature.

TECHNICAL SKILLS AND INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC ENGLISH

A key benefit of participating in these employer-led programs is addressing technical skills gaps that some skilled migrants and refugees have.

Some industries in Australia operate with much higher levels of technology and digital processes than in people's home countries. In a 2019 report on the settlement experiences of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, one informant said:

“For example, for those refugees who hold accounting qualifications from overseas there is a possibility that back in their country they didn’t work with accounting software like MYOB, Zero and SAP, and you cannot work in accounting field in Australia if you don’t have these skills.”⁶²

Industries also use technical vocabulary that people must learn to effectively work in their field. One of the best ways to learn this special vocabulary is on the job. In a 2020 report on the settlement experiences of refugees in Fairfield, one informant said:

“Work environment would encourage me to learn the English that is related to my occupation.”⁶³

A manager at John Holland, an infrastructure and property company that designed an employment program for disadvantaged jobseekers (including refugees), observed that:

“refugee employees often need more support upfront to learn industry-specific language and practices in Australia. With time, however, refugees have been incredibly valued contributors on John Holland projects and many have progressed quickly to senior roles.”⁶⁴

An example of a refugee employment program with a clear focus on teaching participants technical skills and practices is the Sustainable Employment Program at Allianz (a partnership with Settlement Services International). The program offers cadets rotational placements in 1-2 business areas over 12 months, support to identify a suitable permanent role to move into at the end of their cadetship, and also includes:

“an onboarding and integration program to support their career development, which includes:

- developing their English communication skills
- specific Divisional inductions and technical training; and
- basic insurance training and general business acumen.”⁶⁵

Similarly, the programs at ANZ and NAB have enabled many refugees who previously held senior positions across the banking industry overseas⁶⁶ to re-start their careers; giving them the opportunity to learn the way banking works in Australia, English vocabulary relevant to the industry, and the different ways people communicate within the banking industry.

Interestingly, neither the ANZ nor NAB programs are designed specifically to assist people with previous experience in banking to restart their careers, although people with that background would understandably be very interested in participating.

By contrast, the LXP’s EPIC program, developed in 2019, was designed specifically to create opportunities for the construction industry to reach a talent pool of overseas-qualified engineers, and opportunities for those engineers to re-start their careers.

It is delivered through a partnership with over 10 construction companies and provides an 18-month work-and-study model. Refugees or asylum seekers who hold overseas qualifications as engineers are hired to work as site level engineers (a low-risk position) and complete a Graduate Certificate with Swinburne University at the same time. The program is unique in two ways:

- it runs longer than any other program – 18 months, and
- it tackles the qualifications quandary that many migrants and refugees face by creating a pathway for engineers to re-start their careers as engineers without going through the time and expense of trying to get their overseas qualifications recognised.

A key part of the Career Pathways in Health program was a vocational language component that taught participants language and vocabulary specific to the health sector, and insight into the culture and standards of a hospital workplace.



B. WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Work integration social enterprises (WISEs) are businesses that exist primarily to fulfil the social purpose of providing employment or pathways to employment for those at greatest disadvantage in the labour market.⁶⁷ They often focus on systemic disadvantage, providing work and support to specific cohorts.

Some examples of social enterprises in Sydney and surrounds that employ migrants and refugees specifically, include the following:⁶⁸

- The Bread and Butter Project is a wholesale bakery that supplies sourdough bread and other baked goods to retailers and hospitality venues. They offer 6–8-month traineeships, which include on-the-job bakery training, TAFE accreditation, English-language tutoring and individualised support to secure sustainable ongoing employment. They have employed 55 trainees since 2013, with close to 100% going onto sustainable employment with companies such as Harris Farm and Tip Top.⁶⁹
- The Social Outfit is a retail fashion store selling hand-made clothes and accessories. They employ women to work in their workshop sewing and designing products for sale. Since 2014, they have employed 47 people, with 35 transitioning into further employment. Another 57 people have gained work experience.⁷⁰
- Green Connect operates a farm that grows and sells organic food, a waste consultancy, labour hire and an op shop.⁷¹
- CommUnity Constructions provides construction services including tiling, painting, air-conditioning and post-construction cleaning.⁷²
- Parliament on King café and catering,⁷³ and Uma Curry & Roti restaurant.⁷⁴
- Colombo Social: Lankan Bar and Kitchen restaurant.⁷⁵

Other social enterprises in Sydney that provide pathways to employment specifically for refugees include Career Seekers⁷⁶, Community Corporate⁷⁷, TQN Personnel⁷⁸, Refugee Talent⁷⁹ and Connections Australia⁸⁰.

Research by the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne and Westpac Foundation found that well-run WISEs produced higher and better employment outcomes than mainstream employment services for people experiencing significant disadvantage, increased

people's social and financial capital and improved well-being for individuals and communities.⁸¹

WISEs that achieve effective employment outcomes share the following key design features.⁸²

First, they are centred on the individual – they generally offer flexibility and understand the structural barriers and life circumstances that can make employment challenging at first. They better understand the needs of each member of staff over time.

Second, they are integrative – they integrate employment supports with education or training, and coordinate access to other services (e.g. mentoring) that focus on building each staff member's individual capabilities, skills and capacity to secure sustainable work.

Third, they are collaborative – they operate with strong community partnerships and networks that help connect their staff to different social, work and personal development opportunities.

Fourth, they are adaptive – being typically small to medium businesses, they have greater ability to provide more personalised support and adopt to new opportunities and needs.

Research also shows that labour productivity in WISEs is the same or higher than that of other small and medium businesses.⁸³

C. MENTORING AND COACHING

This research project has found that, like skilled job seekers who have participated in employer-led programs, those who have broadened their networks by participating in mentoring programs have also found greater success in securing employment. The following mentoring programs – which connect people to mentors in their field of interest or similar professions – are of particular relevance:

- Perth's Kaleidoscope Mentoring Program⁸⁴, which was implemented under a partnership between 3 local councils and the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, and funded by the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments, began in 2018 and was modelled on a successful Canadian mentoring program for migrants, the TRIEC (Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council)⁸⁵ Mentoring Partnership program.
- Sydney's City East Mentoring Program⁸⁶, run by the not-for-profit City East Community College since July 2016.⁸⁷

- The Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP)⁸⁸, and Refugee Mentoring Program⁸⁹ run by AMES, a large settlement agency in Melbourne.⁹⁰
- CREATE refugee career clinics, an initiative of Deakin University (started in 2020).⁹¹

The outcomes for some of these mentoring programs have been impressive. For example:

- 78% of participants in the Kaleidoscope mentoring program secured jobs within their field of expertise within 6 months of completion.⁹²
- Over 58% of the 400 participants in Sydney's City East Mentor Program achieve employment in their profession within an average of 5 months of being matched with a mentor.⁹³
- 89% of participants in AMES' SPMP had found work shortly after attending the program, and of these, 64% were in a professional position.⁹⁴

The mentoring programs include the following key elements.⁹⁵

First, participants are carefully matched with mentors who have a minimum of 2 years' experience working in their field of interest or related field, to ensure participants gain specific knowledge and insight about career pathways within that profession/industry.

Second, the mentor and participant are in regular communication for a fixed time period (e.g. once a week/fortnight for 2-6 months) and have clear goals to achieve.

Third, the mentor's assistance commonly includes helping the participant tailor their CV and cover letter for the specific field, how to use social media platforms (particularly LinkedIn) to find and apply for jobs, share information about Australian workplace culture, the best places to network, where and how to look for vacancies, introduce them to their own industry contacts, and support them to compete for a job if they identify an opportunity.

Fourth, mentors attend introductory induction sessions to build their cultural competency and better understand the particular barriers that newly arrived refugee and migrant job seekers commonly experience in the labour market.

Fifth, participants attend introductory sessions on generalised job seeking skills, including how to prepare CVs and applications, and interview skills.

This research project also found a relatively new initiative run by Glow Up Careers,⁹⁶ a professional coaching and recruitment company. They run an accreditation program

for career coaches, and the program includes a module whereby participants provide free career coaching to refugees and asylum seekers.⁹⁷

Research from overseas also shows that having a broader community network helps employment outcomes. For example, between 70% and 90% of refugees settling in Canada through their refugee sponsorship scheme (where a sponsor group of ordinary community members provide financial, emotional and settlement support to refugee newcomers in their first year after arrival) find employment within that first year.⁹⁸ Although this scheme is not yet available in Australia, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia is running a Group Mentorship Program to connect recently arrived refugees with local community volunteer groups who provide practical support, friendship and connections to wider networks, to supplement government-funded settlement services.⁹⁹

As discussed above, successful employer-led initiatives also heavily emphasise professional mentoring by colleagues within the organisation and/or career coaching.

COMMENTS

The limitation of these employer-led programs, work integration social enterprises and mentoring programs is that each of them operates at a very small scale, and competition for places is high. Some programs are only available to people living in their geographical area and who meet certain eligibility criteria.

There is also a limited range of professions where employer-led programs are available, although Career Seekers' list of participating host employers is diverse.¹⁰⁰ Social enterprises also operate in a limited range of industries which do not require tertiary qualifications – e.g. hospitality, retail. On the one hand, this increases their capacity to be able to help people from a broader range of occupational backgrounds. On the other hand, their capacity to help someone with tertiary qualifications to re-start their career in that field of expertise is limited.

However, outlining the key elements of these successful models in this report aims to equip service providers with the information they need to better evaluate the support they are currently offering to their clients in their search for work.

There is also an opportunity for governments at all levels, who want to make an impact on employment outcomes in Western Sydney (and in particular the Fairfield area), to consider policy settings they could adjust to support existing programs to expand and encourage the establishment of more programs to assist more job seekers. These recommendations are discussed below.

COMBATTING DEVALUATION OF OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE

A significant additional benefit of employment and mentoring programs is that Australian colleagues and mentors of skilled migrants and refugees develop a better understanding of their talent and experience, and the barriers they face. Some become strong advocates and supporters and would themselves be more likely to interview and/or hire an internationally trained professional.¹⁰¹

Broad issues like systemic devaluation of overseas experience in recruitment are difficult to address. One approach is to raise awareness; for recruiters to better understand how their organisation could benefit from that experience rather than seeing it as a deficiency. Activities like involvement in a mentoring or employment program, that enable people to develop a one-on-one relationship with another person, are small scale, but have a significant impact on the individuals concerned.

ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO START THEIR OWN BUSINESS OR WORK FOR THEMSELVES

The Australian economy includes growing opportunities to earn a living outside of a traditional employer/employee relationship. The gig economy, with online platforms enabling people to earn money as a freelancer or attract advertising revenue by being an influencer on social media platforms such Facebook and Instagram, could be an attractive source of income to migrants and refugees who have the knowledge and skills to participate.

Almost a fifth of survey respondents (18%) were interested in starting their own business. This is consistent with research from 2017 that found that “migrants who arrived under a refugee visa had a rate of entrepreneurship of 9.3 per cent, nearly double that for migrants who arrived under a family visa (5.7 per cent) and more than double that for migrants who arrived under a skilled visa (4.3 per cent).”¹⁰²

General digital literacy and literacy in English for day-to-day living is not sufficient to help people navigate the online world of freelancing, the gig economy and the informal social network-based jobs network (such as Facebook posts by businesses looking for workers).

The work that can be found on freelance platforms is diverse. For example, AirTasker includes jobs such as assembling furniture, home gardening, shopping for a party. However, people who do not have the additional skills of navigating and understanding an online freelance platform, are excluded from participating in this labour market. This challenge is similar to the problem that some people experience in navigating the recruitment process – that the level of English they need to apply for a job, or participate in an interview, is higher than the level of English they need to do the job itself.¹⁰³

Job seekers who are interested in this kind of work could be supported to develop specific digital and English skills to find and navigate platforms where they can find work as contractors or freelancers.

There are also a number of social enterprises and charities that provide targeted support for migrants and refugees interested in starting their own business. For example:

- Thrive Refugee Enterprise offers microfinance loans to refugee and asylum seeker entrepreneurs and education about the Australian business market.¹⁰⁴
- Catalysr¹⁰⁵ offers intensive entrepreneurship programs for migrants and refugees, which includes expert business mentors and a network of participant alumni.
- Settlement Services International’s¹⁰⁶ Ignite program supports refugees to start their own business.
- Migrant Women in Business¹⁰⁷ supports and nurtures migrant women with nano or micro businesses.
- Welcome Merchant¹⁰⁸ promotes refugee and asylum seeker entrepreneurs on Instagram and through an online marketplace, many of whom do not have the resources for advertising their goods and services.



CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses suggestions for ways services providers in the migrant and settlement services sectors might improve the support they provide to people they are supporting, to help them find work. Recommendations are also made for the consideration of government.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

Recent guidance to organisations providing support to refugees and vulnerable migrants as part of the Commonwealth Government's Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program¹⁰⁹ discusses the whole-of-organisation change and integrated approach that settlement service providers must adopt if they are to facilitate greater economic participation for their clients.

A number of settlement service providers already provide targeted employment programs embedded within their support model.¹¹⁰ However, as this research found, other service providers who help migrants and refugees to address other aspects of settlement not directly related to employment, may not themselves be very knowledgeable about the labour market. Many nonetheless do their best to help their clients in their efforts to find work, however this support is generally limited to building people's formal job seeking skills (CV, cover letters, interview skills). As these efforts do not address the multiple barriers that these job seekers face when applying formally for advertised position, they rarely lead to successful employment outcomes.

Instead, it is recommended that services providers focus their efforts on:

- supporting clients to build their personal networks and skills to find work through informal pathways
- connecting clients to programs and supports tailored for skilled migrants and refugees, as described in this report
- connecting clients to recruitment companies with expertise in recruiting into particular fields, and

- developing specific programs or initiatives specifically for skilled migrants and refugees.

This may require building workforce capacity and knowledge about the labour market and recruitment. One way to do this might be to proactively employ recruitment specialists into their teams. Another way might be to train existing staff. Some service providers have been doing this. For example, the employment team at Multicultural Australia (a settlement organisation in Brisbane) recently undertook career coaching accreditation training with Glow Up Careers.¹¹¹

Self-directed learning is also possible, with many government resources already freely available, including the following:

- Jobs Hub¹¹²
- Labour Market Information Portal¹¹³
- Find Employers Hiring Now¹¹⁴
- Job Jumpstart¹¹⁵
- Jobs Board¹¹⁶
- SkillsRoad¹¹⁷
- Jobactive videos about interview practice¹¹⁸
- Jobactive playlists about looking for work¹¹⁹
- National Skills Commission research on workforce shortages.¹²⁰

Service providers could also raise awareness amongst their staff of digital platforms such as DivTal¹²¹ and Connections Australia¹²², which all aim to match migrants and refugees with employers who want to attract job seekers from those backgrounds. This research project found some culturally specific professional groups that support each other, such as the African Professionals of Australia¹²³ and Muslim Professionals Association¹²⁴, to which service providers could refer clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

As discussed in chapter 5, different models of customised support for skilled migrants and refugees exist, but operate on a small scale. With financial support, a number of these initiatives could be expanded to benefit more people.

Investing in programs that help this particular cohort to integrate into the labour force is a worthwhile investment. The economic value of enabling migrants and refugees to continue their professional lives – fully utilising their skills and experience – is substantial. Research estimated that the economy would be \$250 million larger in 10 years if the skills of migrants were better utilised, due to increases in productivity flowing through to economic outputs and consumption,¹²⁵ and reducing the economic costs of unemployment (welfare, public and community services). The investment also produces significant social impacts – having a skilled population gainfully employed, gaining self-confidence, self-sustainability, and contributing to Australia’s prosperity.

EMPLOYER-DRIVEN AND EMPLOYER-SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

There are many examples of employer-led and employer-supporting initiatives in Australia and other countries that specifically encourage and support employers to welcome refugees into their workforces.

These include community partners and employers working together to develop and share best practice in immigrant employment, for example, Humans Like Us¹²⁶ and the Australian Employer Network for Refugee Inclusion in Australia; the Hire Immigrants initiative in Canada¹²⁷; World Education Services in the USA¹²⁸; and the international charity, the Tent Partnership for Refugees.¹²⁹ Activities include local employers acting to “reframe employment practices” and “implement systemic workplace change,”¹³⁰ the development of resources specifically designed for employers,¹³¹ and the creation of opportunities for employers to meet peers and discuss common challenges, strategies and best practice.¹³²

Some of these partnerships are supported by governments or employer peak bodies. For example:

- In Canada, from 2015 to 2017, the Syrian Refugee Jobs Agenda Roundtable of employers, employment and immigrant serving agencies

and government representatives was convened under the leadership of a Senator of the national Parliament, with a goal to increase Syrian refugees’ access to employment opportunities in the Greater Toronto area that utilised their skills and experience.¹³³

- In Austria, “the public employment service, NGOs, sector councils and employers gather labour market information and promote good matching via career guidance and effective work placements under the competence check program for the occupational integration of refugees.”¹³⁴
- In Germany, “local chambers of commerce provide advice and training to [small and medium enterprises] on issues related to the implementation of work-based learning programs, employment and internships involving refugees. The initiative is supported by a network of enterprises experienced in training and hiring refugees that share their experiences and provide advice to peers.”¹³⁵

Governments in other countries have also encouraged employers to hire refugees through the payment of financial incentives. For example:

- In Sweden, “larger private sector employers that take in at least 100 refugees receive tailored support and package solutions from the public employment service under the ‘100 Club’ initiative.”¹³⁶
- In Denmark, companies that recruit refugees, or their family members, receive a bonus worth €5300 (if they hire within the 1st year of residency) or €4000 (if it’s in their 2nd year).¹³⁷

Elements of these successful initiatives could be adopted in Australia, with the support of government. It is recommended that:

1. Governments, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, consider policy settings that encourage employers to welcome migrants and refugees into their workforces and that enable employers who already do so to scale up their efforts.
2. Governments, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, consider policy settings that facilitate the development and sharing of best practice between employers, to encourage and

support more employers to welcome migrants and refugees into their workforces.

3. Governments, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, consider policy settings that provide more financial support to those charities and social enterprises specialising in programs that connect migrant and refugee workers with employers, including options for improving their integration into the funding available within the Commonwealth Government's New Employment Services Model.¹³⁸

GOVERNMENT AS EMPLOYER

Some Australian government departments and agencies have themselves implemented programs to welcome refugees into their own workforce. For example:

- Service NSW runs the Refugee Internship Program.¹³⁹
- In 2016-17, the NSW public sector offered 100 public sector jobs to recently-arrived refugees.¹⁴⁰
- Randwick City Council and several Victorian State government departments, including the Department of Health and Human Services, have offered internships for refugees in partnership with Career Seekers.¹⁴¹
- Fairfield City Council offered 2 weeks of work experience to refugees, through the Refugee Work Experience Pilot Project (2017-2020), in partnership with Navitas.¹⁴²

There are significant opportunities for governments to directly support the integration of migrants and refugees into the workforce. It is recommended that:

4. Government agencies, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, review their own hiring policies and practices, and consider developing programs to welcome migrants and refugees into their workforces, that incorporate the key design features of successful employer-led programs as described in this report.

WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

There is an opportunity to increase the number of people that WISEs can help, by supporting WISEs to expand.

Currently, their capacity is limited because they bear the cost of wraparound support for each employee (with complex needs) to secure sustainable employment.

At the same time, they are commercial operations competing against other for-profit companies. The cost of this wraparound support means that their operating costs are higher than their competitors.

On average, social enterprises have a funding gap equivalent to 19% of revenue.¹⁴³ Funding for operating expenses is one of the most significant barriers to scale. As they grow, the associated costs of that support also grow.

In the language used in the Commonwealth Government's New Employment Services Model (NESM), WISEs act as both Provider (responsible for providing development support to disadvantage job seekers) and Host or Employer (the people they support are direct employees).

Government support could enable WISEs to offer their successful model of support to more migrant and refugee job seekers. In particular, consideration could be given to enabling WISEs to be paid under the NESM when they deliver the employment outcomes sought, both as a Provider of support and as the Employer. Practical suggestions for how this could be implemented are discussed in the response of the Alliance of Social Enterprise Networks Australia (ASENA) to the Exposure Draft for the NESM 2022 Purchasing Arrangements.¹⁴⁴

Governments can also consider partnering with social enterprises through a Payment by Outcomes model, whereby government payments to the organisation supporting job seekers are linked to achieving long-term employment outcomes (e.g. the person has stayed in a job for 18 months, their work hours have increased during that time, and they are satisfied with their work). This model contrasts to elements of the current jobactive system, where government payments to organisations supporting job seekers are linked to completion of activities (e.g. the person has met their mutual obligations this month) and short-term outputs (e.g. a job seeker got contract work as a cleaner, even though they are a qualified engineer).

The Commonwealth Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and White Box Enterprises are currently co-designing a Payment by Outcomes pilot, as a new way for governments and the private sector to partner to address complex social problems.¹⁴⁵ It is recommended that State and local governments stay abreast of developments and learn from successful aspects of the pilot to explore innovative ways to support WISEs that employ migrants and refugees.

It is recommended that:

5. Governments, at the Commonwealth, State and local levels, consider policy settings that provide greater financial support to work integration social enterprises that employ and support migrants and refugees into skilled occupations, including options for improving their integration into the funding available within the Commonwealth Government's New Employment Services Model.

MENTORING PROGRAMS

With additional support, existing mentoring programs could be expanded to provide targeted assistance to more migrants and refugees.

There is also scope to establish a place-based mentoring program in a location such as Fairfield, where there is high demand. There may be aspects of the Kaleidoscope¹⁴⁶/TRIEC (Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council)¹⁴⁷ mentoring model, which has a proven track record in Perth and Canada (respectively), that could be adopted for migrants and refugees in Fairfield. In particular, the model is a cross-sector collaboration between corporate, local government, State government and community sectors. Government departments that may be interested in supporting such an initiative include Multicultural NSW and, at the Commonwealth level, the Department of Home Affairs and Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

For this reason, it is recommended that:

6. Fairfield City Council consider establishing a collaboration with relevant Commonwealth and State government departments to develop or adopt a mentoring program tailored for skilled migrants and refugees living in and around Fairfield, who are looking for work in skilled occupations.

RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY

There are 7,000 professional recruiters and labour hire companies with expert knowledge of matching candidates to job vacancies,¹⁴⁸ that could greatly benefit skilled migrants and refugees if their services were more accessible. However, very few understand the particular barriers that make it challenging for migrant and refugee job applicants to be considered based on their CVs (systematic devaluation of overseas work experience by recruiters).

One exception is Glow Up Careers¹⁴⁹, a professional coaching and recruitment company. They have recently partnered with HOST International,¹⁵⁰ a not-for-profit

organisation, to expand their recruitment services to assist employers with an interest in hiring refugees.¹⁵¹ Working together, they are building connections between employers making efforts to hire for diversity with a talent pool of job-ready candidates from a refugee background. In late 2021, they began a government-supported program to support recent refugees from Afghanistan to start their working lives in Australia.¹⁵²

There would be value in exploring practical options for service providers to work together with recruitment companies to more effectively support skilled migrants and refugees – one sector providing expertise about the unique challenges experienced by migrant and refugees and the other providing expertise about ways to navigate the labour market and connect to employers.

It is therefore recommended that:

7. The Commonwealth government explore options for facilitating additional partnerships between service providers and the recruitment industry to provide customised support for skilled migrants and refugees to find work in their field of expertise.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE MIGRANT AND REFUGEE SUPPORT SECTOR

Many service providers supporting migrants and refugees have limited funding and resources to provide additional support relating to the search for work. To help them provide more holistic support to their clients, government could consider supporting them to develop their capacity to assist clients to build their personal networks and skills to find work through informal pathways, and refer skilled clients to programs that offer tailored support.

Government support could include improving communication channels between government and the migrant services sector, to raise awareness with service providers about government information and resources that are currently available and provide updates when new resources are developed.

It is recommended that:

8. The Commonwealth government provide financial and other support to enable service providers supporting migrant and refugees to build workforce capacity and knowledge about the labour market, recruitment and other programs that offer tailored support to skilled migrants and refugees.

CONCLUSION

Having a job is an essential part of building a new life in a new country. It is understandable for migrants and refugees who are highly qualified and educated to expect that their skills and work experience will be welcomed by both employers and government when they arrive. Unfortunately, structural barriers within the Australian labour market make it difficult for migrants and refugees from skilled occupations to successfully integrate into the workforce.

Policies and interventions that enable migrants and refugees to continue working in their field of expertise – fully utilising their skills and experience – are a worthwhile investment. Research estimates that the economy would be \$250 million larger in 10 years if the skills of migrants were better utilised, due to increases in productivity flowing through to economic outputs and consumption.¹⁵³

Successful models of support already exist but operate on a small scale. At their heart are design features that help to expand people's social networks, deepen their technical understanding of their field of expertise and how recruitment works in that field, and provide multi-faceted support with their lives and careers.

Service providers can improve the support they provide to clients by improving their capacity to refer them to these existing programs and initiatives, building their own workforce knowledge about the labour market and recruitment, and learning from the key design features of successful models.

There is also a significant opportunity for governments, at the local, State and Commonwealth level, to support existing initiatives to scale-up and amplify their impact. The full participation and social inclusion of skilled migrants and refugees benefits not only individuals and their families, but also the businesses they work for, the colleagues and friends they make in their working lives, and the Australian economy and society.

APPENDIX A: FECAP EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS SURVEY QUESTIONS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Age</p> <p>2. Sex</p> <p>3. Country of birth</p> <p>4. Language at home</p> <p>5. Level of English</p> <p>6. Year of arrival</p> <p>7. Suburb of residence (Cabramatta, Fairfield, Liverpool)</p> <p>8. Social welfare payment Y/N</p> <p>9. What type?</p> <p>10. Working Y/N</p> <p>11. If Y, is your work FT, PT, casual, on call, never worked</p> <p>12. Did you work in your country?</p> <p>13. If Y, what was your job?</p> <p>14. Did you complete any qualification in your home country?</p> <p>15. If yes, what is your qualification or skills?</p> <p>16. What other skills do you have?</p> <p>17. Has your qualification and experience been recognised in Australia?</p> <p>18. Did you complete any professional or upskilling course since arriving in Australia?</p> <p>19. If yes, what was it? (type "what was your job?")</p> <p>20. How do you rate your computing skills (excellent, good, not good, no computer skills)?</p> <p>21. In which industry are you seeking or have secured employment? (construction, hospitality, mechanical, farming, hairdressing and beauty, engineering, childcare, aged care, machine operator, office admin, accounting,</p> | <p>customer service, other)</p> <p>22. Are you interested in any of the following (apprenticeship, internship, traineeship, starting small business, other)?</p> <p>23. What is your short/long term goal?</p> <p>24. Do you have Australian driving licence?</p> <p>25. Do you have own transport?</p> <p>26. How long are you able to travel for a job? (15, 30, 45 minutes, 1 hour, > 1 hour)</p> <p>27. Which agency is your current service provider? (CORE, SSI, STARTTS, TAFE, Assyrian Resource Centre, GLAPD, Hume Housing, Navitas, MTC Australia, Work Skill, Centrelink, WISE Employment, other)</p> <p>28. Will you relocate to Regional NSW if there is a job opportunity?</p> <p>29. What are the key barriers preventing you from looking for jobs and whether you need further assistance and support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to secure professional job and use overseas qualification / experience • Family, childcare and caring commitment • Limited English • Health and injuries • Age • No local work experience • Never worked & no skills or experience • No own transport / no driving licence • No work rights in Australia or limited rights • No good with computers to look for jobs or apply online. |
|--|--|

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS WITH SELECT SURVEY RESPONDENTS: TEMPLATE QUESTIONS

Note: The full set of questions is set out below under theme-based headings, using nurse as the sample home country occupation. The questions were tailored according to the survey responses of each particular interviewee. So, for example, if the person had been an engineer, then the question was tailored to ask about their experiences as an engineer.

QUALIFICATIONS RECOGNITION

I think you were a nurse in [home country]? Did you try to get those qualifications recognised in Australia? Tell me about that.

In the survey, you said you can't get your qualifications recognised. Can you tell me more about that?

HELP FINDING WORK IN HOME COUNTRY OCCUPATION

Are you with a jobactive provider? Tell me how they have helped you find a job as a nurse, or any other job. What did they advise?

If not with jobactive: Have you asked for help from anyone else? What have they done to help?

Who has helped you look for work? What did they advise?

Tell me what you know about where nurses can find work, and how to look for work as a nurse in Australia? (e.g. public, private hospitals, but also doctors clinics, nursing homes for older people, facilities for people with disability, cosmetic "beauty" clinics)

METHODS FOR FINDING WORK GENERALLY

Tell me how you look for other jobs? Tell me how you apply for jobs? Has anyone helped you with your CV and shown you how to write an application?

Explain how you would use a computer or your phone to find a job vacancy?

HELP EXPANDING NETWORK RELATED TO HOME COUNTRY OCCUPATION

What has your service provider, or anyone else, done to help you meet people in nursing?

Do you know anyone who works in nursing in Australia?

EXPERIENCES WITH COMPLETING COURSES OR QUALIFICATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

In the survey, you said you'd obtained a [qualification]. Can you tell me some more about that? What was your reason to do this? Has it helped you get a job? At the end of the course, how did the teacher help you meet people in [related occupation], or advise you how to find work?

Alternatively:

In the survey you told us you didn't do any courses when you came to Australia. Did any service providers suggest that you do a course or training?

PERSONAL FACTORS IMPACTING ON ABILITY TO SECURE WORK

In the survey you told us you are on a [welfare payment]. Do you mind telling me a bit more about your situation and how that impacts on your ability to work?

You said limited English is a barrier. Tell me a bit more about that. Do you feel nervous speaking English? How is your writing? What activities have you done to help with your English?

In the survey you told us you did not have good computing skills. Is there a computer in your home? Can anyone else in your family help you use it? If someone offered free classes to learn how to use a computer, would you be interested in attending?

In the survey you selected “family, childcare & caring commitments” when we asked you the key barriers preventing you from looking for a job. Were you thinking about your study commitments, or do you also have other family members you need to look after? Can you tell me a bit about that?

You said in the survey that “health & injuries” was a barrier to you looking for work. I think you are also on a Carer’s payment. Do you mind telling me a bit more about your situation and how that impacts on your ability to work?

RESPONDENTS WHO WERE CURRENTLY STUDYING

Are you currently looking for part-time or casual work so you can both work and study?

Let’s talk about what you hope for after you’ve finished your degree.

Tell me what you know about the specific organisations where you could look for a job or the types of roles you could apply for after you’ve finished your [name] degree?

EXPERIENCES WITH WORKING

You’re working at the moment. Can you tell me about that?

What is your job? How did you find the job? What is it like working in Australia? How is it different from [home country]? What has been a good experience? What has been difficult or unusual? Before you started, did anyone explain to you what to expect and how that might be different to [home country]?

LOGISTICS OF WORK

Let’s talk about the logistics of work. If you had to travel more than 30 minutes for a job, how would that impact your life? Would you be willing to travel more than 30 minutes for a job you liked? Would you be comfortable taking public transport for work? Tell me how confident and familiar you feel when travelling on public transport.

In the survey you told us you don’t like driving. Tell me how you currently feel about travelling around Sydney by public transport? In your home country, how long did you travel to get to work?

ATTITUDE TO RELOCATING TO REGIONAL AREA

You said you’d relocate to a regional area for work. What kind of support could help you to do that?

INTEREST IN STARTING A SMALL BUSINESS

In the survey you said you might be interested in starting a small business. Tell me what you know about how to start a small business in Australia and what are your ideas? Have you heard of any programs in Australia that can help you?

APPENDIX C: CONSULTATION WITH FECAP MEMBERS: QUESTIONS CIRCULATED

Q1: Do you know about any of these government tools and resources to help job seekers?

- Jobs Hub
- Labour Market Information Portal
- Find Employers Hiring Now
- Job Jumpstart
- Jobs Board
- SkillsRoad
- Jobactive videos about interview practice
- Jobactive playlists about looking for work
- National Skills Commission research on workforce shortages

Answer:

- None of them
- Some of them
- All of them

Q2: Have you ever used or helped your clients use any of these resources?

Answer:

- Yes
- No

Q3: Why/why not? If yes, which resources have you used and were they helpful? [open text field]

Q4: Do you know about any of these organisations that focus on trying to connect employers with migrants and refugees or support people who want to start their own business?

- Refugee and Migrant Talent
- Connections Australia
- Career Seekers
- DivTal
- Community Corporate
- Jesuit Social Services Corporate Diversity Partnerships
- Ignite (SSI)
- Thrive
- Catalysr
- Migrant Women for Business
- Welcome Merchant
- Humans Like Us

Answer:

- None of them
- Some of them
- All of them

Q5: Have you ever referred your clients to any of these organisations?

Answer:

- Yes
- No

Q6: Why/why not? If yes, which organisations? [open text field]

Q7: Do you know about any of these freelancing platforms?

- Hipages
- Airtasker
- Homecare Heroes
- Fiverr
- Freelancer
- Guru
- Upwork
- People per hour

Answer:

- None of them
- Some of them
- All of them

Q8: Have you ever discussed with your clients how they could find work using freelancing platforms?

Answer:

- Yes
- No

Q9: Why/why not? [open text field]

Q10: Have you ever discussed with your clients how they could earn money through e-commerce?

Answer:

- Yes
- No

Q11: Why/why not? [open text field]

Q12: What additional support could government provide to help your organisation build its capacity to support clients in their search for work? [open text field]

Q13: Please tell us about the type of employment-related activities your organisation does.

Answer (please select one):

- We run an employment program trying to find work for refugees and/or migrants, which includes a business development role.
- We run work readiness programs for refugees and/or migrants.
- We run programs for refugees and/or migrants to help with pre-employment skills (for example, computer literacy, driving).
- We provide services for refugees and/or migrants that are not related directly to employment.
- We are a jobactive provider.
- Other (please provide details) [open text field]

ENDNOTES

Executive Summary

1 Centre for Policy Development, *Settling Better: Reforming refugee employment and settlement services* (Feb 2017), citing the Department of Social Services' Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): A Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants dataset for Wave 1 and 2

2 The Department of Social Services' Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): A Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants collected survey responses from humanitarian migrants who arrived in Australia (or were granted a permanent residency visa) between May and October 2013, in 5 waves. Wave 5 responses were collected by face-by-face interviews conducted in October 2017-March 2018 (<https://aifs.gov.au/bnla/about-study>), so the respondents had been in Australia for over 4 years.

3 Department of Social Services, *Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): A Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants. Wave 5 Addendum* (July 2020), Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1, p. 9-10; downloaded on 14 June 2021 from <https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/national-centre-for-longitudinal-data/building-a-new-life-in-australia-the-longitudinal-study-of-humanitarian-migrants>

4 Ibid.

Chapter 3

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Chapter 6

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Conclusion

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