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# Refugee Employment Experience:

# Struggles, Strategies & Solutions

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This report was produced by the **Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education (ERC)**. The ERC is a non-governmental research and advocacy organization that was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1996. The ERC conducts rights-based programs including people-centred research, community education, community empowerment and advocacy by focusing on three areas: the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum; and the rights of the peoples of the Pacific, especially those struggling for climate justice. The ERC's aim is to raise awareness that leads to social action and policy change in favour of the poor and excluded in Australia and internationally.

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(Syrian community leaders)

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# Foreword

**The Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education** welcomes this report into the employment experience of refugees and the struggles they face in looking for work and finding employment in Australia. The aim of the report is to highlight the refugee perspective on working and looking for work by listening to what refugees themselves say about their job seeking efforts and their experiences in the Australian labour market. The report is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with refugees about their employment experience, as well as community leaders, key informants and service providers to gain a wider perspective on refugee employment.

The recommendations proposed by this study are based entirely on the insights of the research participants that emerge by engaging closely with their lived experiences. The recommendations could be used by relevant stakeholders, including the Australian Government and non-government service providers, to bring necessary changes in the employment services and education programs for the purpose of achieving better employment outcomes for refugees and other vulnerable migrants. While implementing some of these recommendations require new or increased government funding, the largely ineffective current refugee employment and education support services could be redirected, refocused or replaced.

My deep appreciation and sincere gratitude is extended to the many participants in the study, including Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan and Iranian refugees, community leaders, key informants and service providers, who shared their lived experiences and offered genuinely their perspectives and opinions. I greatly appreciate the time, honesty and passionate responses

of the participants, as their contributions informed the study and made it possible to complete this important and timely report on refugee employment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the authors of the report, who worked very hard to produce an in-depth and nuanced analysis of the employment experience of refugees, including concrete recommendations for further investigation and policy changes for better employment outcomes for refugees and other vulnerable migrants. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the genuine contribution, expertise, commitment and determination of the research team during the past twelve months.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Judith Betts, Dr. Shashi Sharma, Jim Olson and Br. Geoff Kelly who offered their genuine support during the data collection and interview process. My appreciation is also extended to the Reference Group for this study who worked collaboratively with the research team to monitor progress and outcomes of the research and ensure the quality of the final report.

Last but not least, I would like to sincerely thank the Edmund Rice Centre's Human Research Ethics Advisory Committee (Prof. Amanda Kearney, Dr. Mick Bezzina, Dr. Darryl Cronin and Dr. Jack Frawley) for their time, support and contribution, particularly in reviewing the primary research proposal, providing feedback and guidance to the research team, and finally approving the study.

*Sincerely,*

**Phil Glendenning AM**

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# Executive Summary

This report investigates the struggles and challenges refugees face in finding work in Australia. The aim of the report is to highlight the refugee perspective on working and looking for work by listening to what refugees themselves say about their job seeking efforts and their experiences in the labour market.

Refugees do much worse than others in the Australian labour market, even compared to other migrants. They often struggle to find work at all, or are employed in low status, low income jobs that do not match their skills and qualifications. Because refugees often place high importance on resuming their previous careers in Australia, their failure to find satisfying work adds to the trauma of displacement. However, despite the challenges refugees experience in working and looking for work, they are very resilient, adaptable and determined to continue their search for meaningful employment.

## The research

Previous research on refugee employment challenges has rarely meaningfully included the voices of refugees themselves. This is not only morally problematic but can lead to misunderstanding of important dynamics and neglect of the diversity of refugee experiences. This research project is therefore based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 40 refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran about their experiences of looking for work in Australia. The interviews were loosely structured in a narrative manner designed to allow refugees to tell their own stories, on their own terms. The interviewees were recruited to reflect the experiences of diverse demographic groups. We also conducted interviews with 15 community leaders and eight service providers and key informants to gain a wider perspective on the issues. Many of these interviewees were also from a refugee background.

## Key Findings

The key findings presented in this report are entirely based on what our research participants, particularly refugees and community leaders, shared from their own experience.

## Importance of work and impacts of unemployment

Meaningful employment is considered very important by most of the refugees we interviewed. They want to work in order not to rely on welfare, to give meaning to their lives, secure a future for their families, and contribute to Australian society. For them, success in employment means more than simply finding any kind of work: they also look for personal fulfillment and satisfaction, respect and community involvement.

Most refugees had positive expectations about their working life in Australia and expected to be able to continue their previous careers and make use of their existing qualifications and experience. Nearly all, however, reported disappointment and frustration when they faced the challenge of finding a job.

The failure to secure employment has negative consequences for refugees, affecting their emotional wellbeing, mental health, living conditions, sense of self-worth and confidence. Unemployment also threatens their ability to resettle successfully and make a place for themselves in the Australian community. Similarly, refugee unemployment has implications for the wider Australian society, including the lost human capital of their existing skills and qualifications, ongoing reliance on the welfare system and potential burden on health services.



## How refugees look for work

The refugees we interviewed employed a variety of strategies to navigate the labour market. These include pursuing formal pathways into employment by applying for advertised jobs, looking for work informally by asking around in their community and locality, seeking to improve their employability through volunteering and vocational education, and trying to start their own businesses.

Formal job-seeking through resumes and application letters tends to be extremely ineffective for refugee jobseekers, even though they are encouraged (or compelled, if on income support) to pursue this strategy. They are relatively more successful in securing employment through informal job seeking, but this does not always result in the type of work they really desire.

Further vocational education was useful for some people, but for many the time and money invested was not repaid by actually finding work. Volunteering and self-employment were attractive to many refugees, but they generally require more support and advice to access these strategies than is currently available. Volunteering programs need to be well organised, accessible, appropriate to the volunteer's career ambitions, and non-exploitative. Lack of access to capital and business advice, and the perceived high risk, discourage refugees from pursuing self-employment options.

## Barriers and obstacles

The main barriers that prevent refugees from finding work have been well documented by previous studies, but they appear in a different light when looked at from the refugee perspective.

Many refugees, for example, identified a 'Catch 22' problem in relation to English language learning. They consider the best way for them

to learn English is in the workplace, rather than in formal classes, but they cannot get a job because they can't speak English. The many hours of free English tuition are therefore, for many people, ineffective.

Overseas qualifications and experience are consistently devalued by potential employers, even when refugees have gone to great lengths to achieve formal recognition of their professional qualifications. This indirect discrimination raises questions about the value of encouraging refugees to pursue qualification recognition.

Differences in the way the labour market works in refugees' home countries is another challenge faced by refugee jobseekers. They may, for example, expect more government support and intervention, be perplexed by the insistence on formal qualifications for relatively unskilled jobs, and be unfamiliar with formal job application processes.

Barriers to employment may also be psychological, not only due to the trauma of the refugee experience, but also as a result of a steady loss of confidence and self esteem after numerous rejections in the labour market. Women and older workers are particularly vulnerable to losing confidence in themselves, while professionally qualified refugees often experience a profound sense of loss when they are not able to pursue their previous careers.

## Seeking help and forms of support

Refugees seek help for finding employment from three main sources: organisations operating within the Jobactive model of Centrelink-mandated support; settlement sector and non-government organisations offering refugee-specific support programs; and informal community networks.

Assistance provided within the Jobactive model is clearly the least effective form

of support and does not help refugees to find employment. The reasons for the ineffectiveness of the Jobactive model include excessive staff-client ratios, a one-size-fits-all model of support that makes little allowance for specialised assistance, and a system designed around compliance rather than assistance. Major changes to this program have been flagged by the current government and this represents an opportunity to address the shortcomings of the Jobactive system for refugees and other disadvantaged jobseekers.

Compared to the Jobactive model, the specialised programs aimed specifically at refugee jobseekers that are offered by some settlement and non-government organisations are relatively more successful, but they are still inadequate in many respects. They too often also provide assistance that is generic rather than tailored to individual circumstances and the great diversity of models in this sector make it difficult for refugees to navigate these employment support opportunities.

Support from informal community networks such as friends, family and community organisations was very helpful in some cases, but informal networks may be limited in their ability to provide accurate and up-to-date advice, particularly for professional and skilled jobseekers who have specialised needs.

## Recommendations

The recommendations we make in the report for changes to current systems for supporting refugee jobseekers are based on what research participants told us from their own experiences of seeking employment. Although some of these ideas would be relatively resource intensive and imply a need for new or expanded government funding, the ineffectiveness of many of the existing government funded programs in employment services, language learning and vocational training suggest that resources could be saved by refocusing or replacing current programs.

If new approaches are successful in moving more refugees into employment there would also be a reduction in welfare expenditure. The recommendations fall into four areas:

### Provide more tailored support

Both refugees and community leaders emphasise the need for more tailored support that addresses the particular circumstances of individual jobseekers. Options for providing this kind of tailored support could include:

- Introducing case management for refugee jobseekers and refocusing on-arrival settlement support to cater to job-ready refugees
- Investing in and expanding mentoring programs
- Investing in and expanding specialised services
- Replacing or supplementing Jobactive with a greater diversity of more specialised services

### Shift the focus of services from offering training to creating opportunities to work

Training style interventions are perceived by refugees and community leaders as relatively ineffective in helping people find work compared to practical work placements and other work-like activities. More opportunities for refugees to engage in practical work experience could be achieved through:

- Initiating partnerships with employers to create refugee-identified positions (and supporting refugees and employers to make these successful.)
- Creating employer subsidies for refugee-identified positions
- Incorporating practical placement-like activities into training programs.



## **Engage with refugees and refugee communities as partners**

Support services and policymakers need to engage with individual refugees, community leaders and refugee-led community organisations as active partners in enhancing employment outcomes. They can do so by:

- Empowering and resourcing communities to formalise self-help support systems
- Creating meaningful refugee representation in service provision agencies and inter-agencies.
- Treating individual refugee jobseekers as partners, not clients.
- Acknowledge and address discrimination against refugees and other migrant job seekers

Refugees face ingrained, largely unconscious discriminatory practices within the Australian labour market. Legislative safeguards against such discriminatory practices already exist and are largely ineffective. Therefore, initiatives that raise awareness of such practices amongst employers and human resources personnel are needed, as well as initiatives that promote more diverse and inclusive hiring practices.

# 1. Introduction

This report addresses a central problem in refugee settlement in Australia: refugees struggle to find work in their new country of residence. Even compared to other migrants, who also experience difficulty finding employment, refugees fare especially badly. They struggle to find work at all, and when they do find work it is often low status, low income, relatively unpleasant work which, in many cases, does not match their skills and qualifications. While employment outcomes improve over time, refugees continue to report much higher unemployment rates, lower labour force participation rates and lower incomes than migrant or native-born Australians for many years after settlement.<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment, or low paid, unskilled employment, has consequences for refugees' living conditions, economic and emotional wellbeing, sense of self worth and confidence. It also has consequences for the wider community. It impedes refugees efforts to make a place for themselves in Australian society and leaves refugees reliant on welfare for far longer than they themselves wish to be. There is also a loss to the Australian economy when refugees are unable to make use of the professional skills and experience many bring with them.

This is the context and rationale for our research. The objective was to listen to what refugees themselves had to say about their attempts to find work in Australia and their experiences in the labour market. Some of those we interviewed had eventually found employment they were satisfied with and they told us about their strategies for navigating the labour market in Australia. Others had faced numerous obstacles to finding employment and many were still trying to find work that met their financial and emotional needs. The refugees we interviewed talked about their frustrations and disappointments and their

ambitions for the future. Almost all had had contact with government and non-government employment service providers and community organisations during their job search and they shared their views on the value of this assistance and how it could be made more useful.

This chapter discusses previous research on the topic of refugee employment, outlines the contribution made by this study, and describes the methodology used for the research. It also provides data on the demographic characteristics of our interview sample.

## 1.1 Listening to refugees – context and research methodology

### Previous research and the contribution of this report

There is a wealth of research in both academic and applied settings concerning the problem of refugee employment, which has long been recognised as an important, and problematic, dimension of successful resettlement. While a detailed review of previous research is beyond the scope of this report, some more general remarks about it will help define the contribution this particular study sets out to make.

The most commonly cited recent analyses of the problem of refugee employment tend to define the difficulties refugees face in finding employment through a series of deficits: refugees tend to not have good English language skills, they lack Australian qualifications and their overseas qualifications may not be recognised, they have no local work experience, they have limited contacts in the Australian workforce and a poor understanding of Australian workplace culture and job seeking processes (resumes, cover letters, interviews and so on.)<sup>2</sup>

In most reports on refugee employment, this

analysis of refugee deficit is complemented by an acknowledgement of the systemic issues in the Australian labour market that lock out refugees through no fault of their own. The qualifications and work experience refugees accumulated before coming to Australia are often hard to get formally recognised and even when recognised are not highly valued by potential employers. Assistance with employment-seeking is poorly tailored to refugee needs, and a kind of subtle discrimination is arguably at work against them, as when employers deem their overseas experience worthless in the Australian context. As well as being commonly discussed in the literature, these structural factors are often well-understood by service providers who tailor their programs to address one or more of them.

One thing that is often absent from these otherwise sophisticated discussions of the issues refugees face when looking for work, however, are the voices of refugees themselves. Refugee jobseekers and their problems are understood quite generically, as though they all face more or less the same problems, without respect to their individual circumstances. Moreover, these problems are divorced from the way they are experienced and lived. Research thus produces a list of 'causes' and 'issues' removed from the context in which they are actually experienced.<sup>3</sup>

This strikes us as problematic in a number of respects. Most obviously, this approach tends to erase the very marked differences in how people experience their search for employment. Little attention has thus far been paid to the ways broad demographic distinctions in age, gender and previous work experience shape refugees' search for employment, let alone to more nuanced distinctions between individual refugees. Furthermore, the tendency to view issues faced by refugees generically and in abstraction from their lived experience tends, as we'll argue below, to lead to misunderstandings of crucial dynamics, such as the relationship between language-learning and employment.

Finally, there is something morally troubling about the practice of making policy and delivering services to people whose experience one has not taken the time to engage with in detail. Refugees have a moral right to have their experiences and views heard and taken seriously by those who make decisions that affect them. Furthermore, those who make these decisions will do so more effectively by virtue of having listened to refugees themselves.

For all these reasons, the purpose of this study is to centre and amplify the voices of refugees themselves, in the hope that their experiences and perspectives will be taken into account by those who make policy and design services. Refugees themselves are, after all, the ultimate authority on what it is like to seek and engage in employment as a refugee, and we have much to learn from them about these matters.

### **How we did the research**

At the centre of this project are in-depth qualitative interviews with 40 refugees about their experiences of working and looking for work. The interviews were about an hour long and the interview questionnaire was structured in a narrative manner, asking first about educational qualifications and experiences of work in their home countries, and then about looking for work in Australia, including any assistance they might have sought with this. This narrative structure and the loose, conversational style in which we conducted the interviews were designed to allow refugees to tell their own stories, on their own terms. As research was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews all took place online, via Zoom. The services of interpreters were made available to participants and just over a quarter of the refugee interviews were conducted principally through an interpreter. In such cases, the words we cite below are those of the interpreter and may, of course, not match exactly what was said.

It was important to us to capture a wide range

of different experiences and backgrounds, and this shaped how participants were recruited. We were conscious of the need to include a diversity of experiences and therefore recruited participants who differed in gender, age, ethnic and educational background and time of arrival in Australia. Participants were recruited by word of mouth, leveraging the networks produced by the Edmund Rice Centre's long history of working with refugees, and the help of a reference group convened to guide this project, made up of community members, service providers and other key organisations. To most effectively leverage existing networks, we decided to sample from four national groups that arrived in significant numbers at some point over the last decade from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Iran. All four of these communities were represented in the reference group. We tracked the demographic character of participants as recruitment proceeded to ensure demographic diversity, targeting our recruitment efforts to groups that seemed to be under-sampled. As we shall see below, these efforts to ensure diversity across major demographic categories were largely successful.

Again, because of our concern with refugees' own experiences, interviews were analysed and are presented below in a manner that, as much as possible, stays fairly true to refugees' own perspectives. Our approach to working with the interview transcripts was accordingly influenced by methodologies such as grounded theory, with the emphasis on allowing themes and issues to emerge from the data in an open-ended way, rather than imposing a pre-determined research agenda. We also wanted, as much as possible, to capture the richness and complexity of individual stories rather than exclusively breaking the data down into thematic categories which again tend to obscure the individual circumstances shaping refugees' experiences of working and looking for work.

We spoke also to 15 community leaders

and eight service providers and other key informants, who were often of a refugee background themselves, to help us gain a wider perspective on the employment situation faced by refugees. The categories 'community leader,' 'service provider' and 'key informant' are necessarily somewhat imprecise and blurry ones. Many community leaders (defined principally as people who themselves belong to and have a broad knowledge of the given refugee community) had often also worked in settlement service provision and drew on this experience as service providers in their responses. 'Key informants' also had intimate knowledge of settlement issues but were not readily classifiable as either representatives of the communities involved in the study or service providers. For instance, one was employed in local government in an area with a high concentration of refugees and was from a refugee community, but not one included in the study.

These interviews were also qualitative, open-ended and about one hour in length. To these participants we directed a more general set of questions about the circumstances shaping refugee job seeking, the kinds of assistance available to them and their difficulties with finding and keeping work. These were designed to be complementary to the interviews with refugees themselves, raising the same sorts of issues but in more general terms.

## **1.2 Demographic characteristics and representativeness of refugee participants**

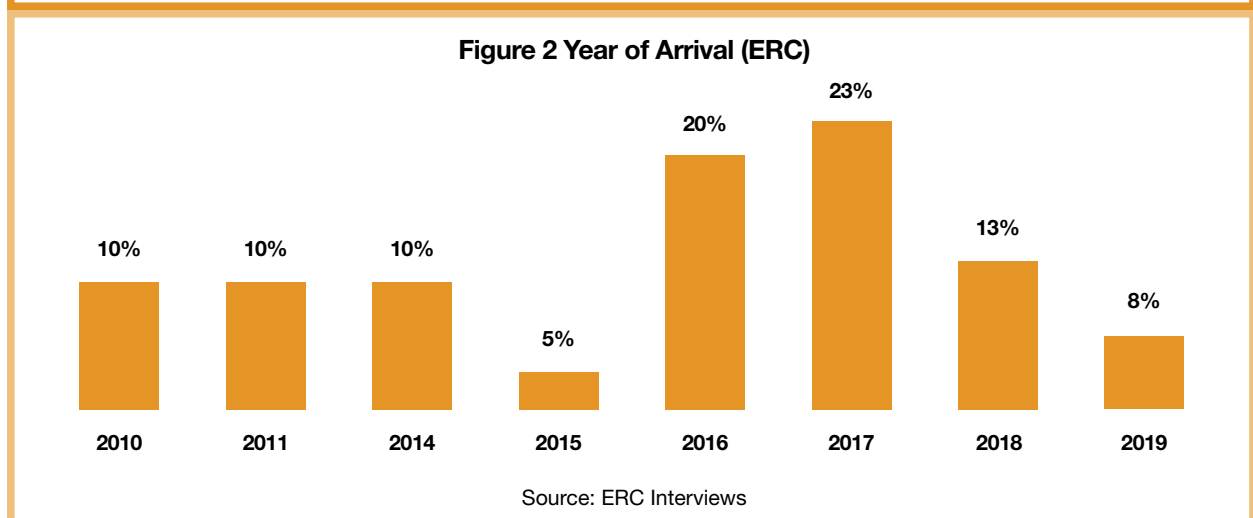
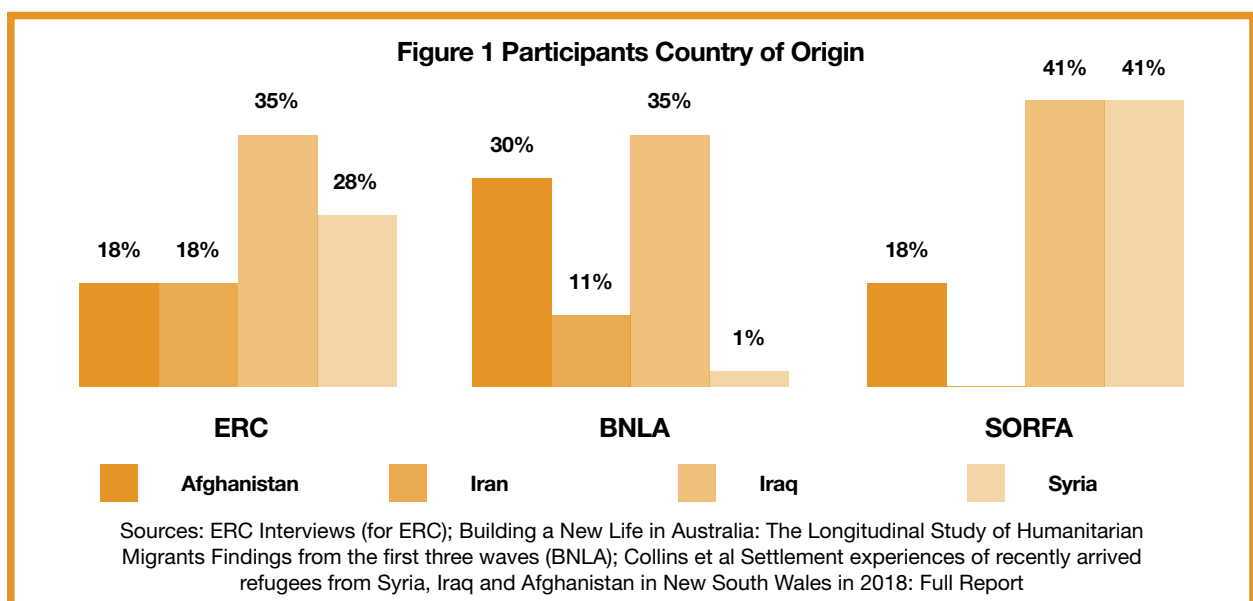
As mentioned above, demographic diversity was an important objective in selecting participants. We were largely successful in recruiting participants who were both diverse and broadly representative of the refugee community. To illustrate the representativeness of our small sample, we here compare it to two larger sets of data –

the Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) dataset (which is a longitudinal study of about 2,400 refugees who arrived in Australia in 2013) and the more recently arrived NSW cohort of the Settlement Outcomes of Refugee Families in Australia (SORFA) study based at UTS (195 participants).<sup>4</sup>

The main justification for using these two data sets as comparators is that they are drawn from essentially the same migration intakes as our participants, and largely consist of people arriving from the same part of the world. As Figures 1 and 2 show, our participants, like those of BNLA and SOFRA, arrived in Australia at various times over the last decade and came from Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria in about equal measure, with a slight over-representation of those from Iraq

and Syria which reflects the additional intake commitments of the Australian government in 2015 in response to disruptions in those countries.

The Syrian conflict influx also accounts for the slight clustering of refugees who arrived in 2016 and 2017, evident in Figure 2. The sample is otherwise fairly evenly distributed across the decade as to year of arrival, the earliest participants having arrived in 2010 and the most recent in 2019. Mirroring migration patterns more broadly, Afghan and Iranian refugees tended to be those arriving earlier in the decade, with most of the more recent arrivals hailing from Iraq and Syria. In comparison, BNLA participants arrived in 2013 and most of the SORFA participants arrived in 2017.

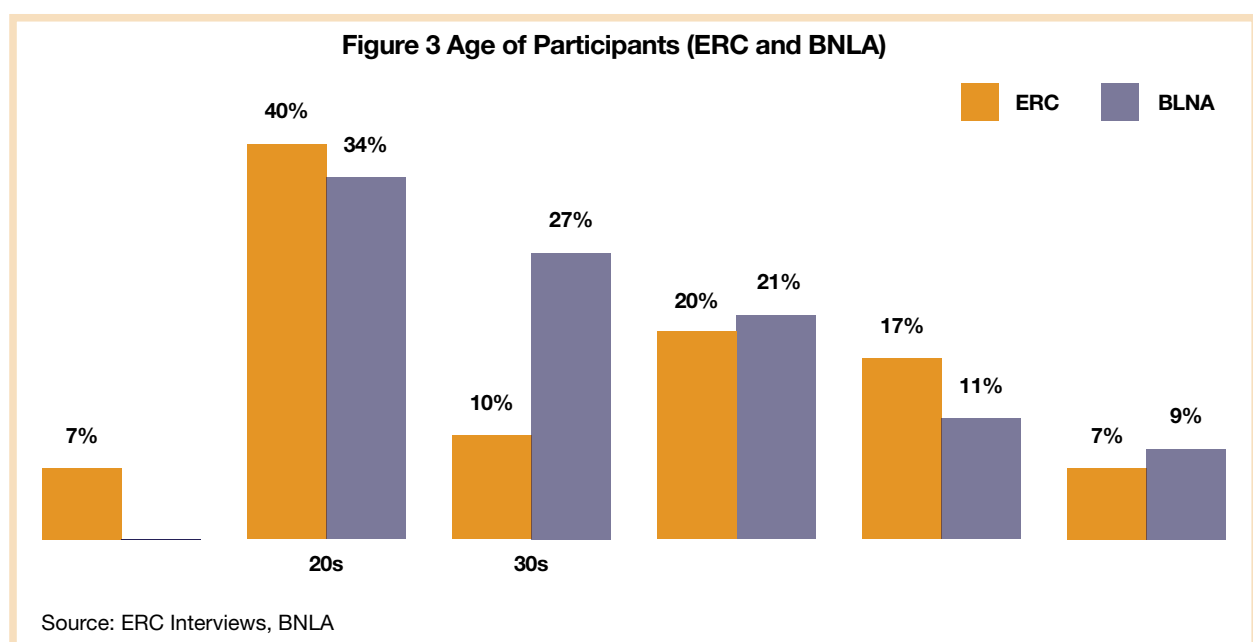


As can be seen in Figure 3, the age of participants on arrival in Australia was largely in line with the BNLA sample and ranged from people who were in their late teens to those arriving close to retirement age. The apparent under-representation of persons in their 30s is largely due to the fact that, unusually, almost half those in their 20s were actually 29.

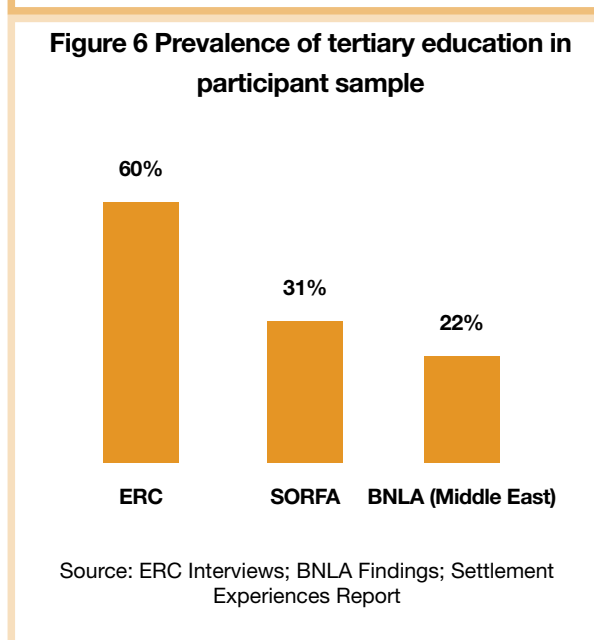
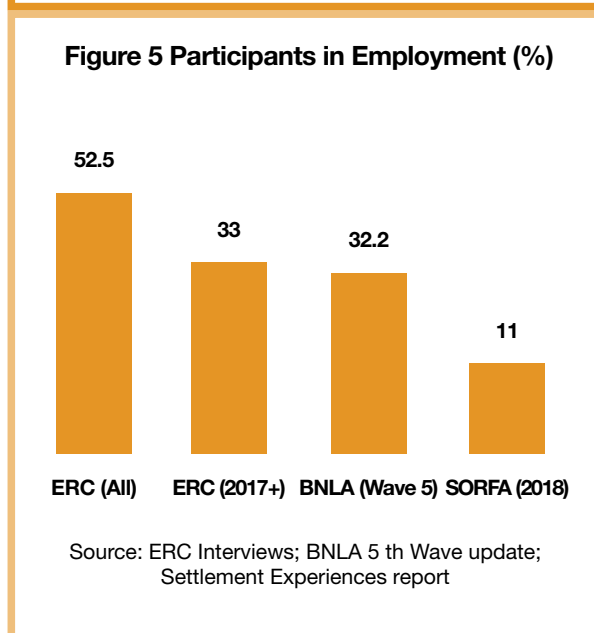
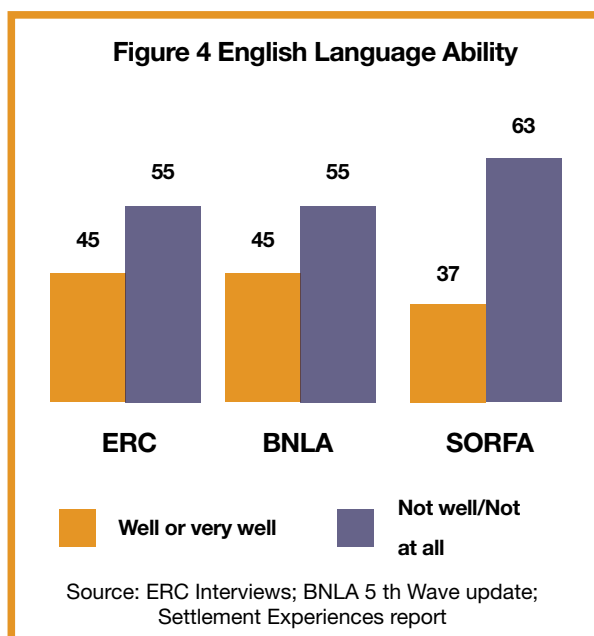
As in the two larger studies, the gender split of our participants was about even, with a slight (55%) preponderance of men, exactly as for the BNLA sample (whereas the SORFA sample instead had a 55% majority of women.) As Figure 4 indicates, the English language ability of participants was also roughly comparable to other studies, with something just shy of half of participants speaking English well at the time of their interview. These numbers are not directly comparable to other studies, however, as BNLA and SORFA used self-reported measures, whereas ERC classifications were done by the research team and most of the participants in our study had been in the country longer than those in either of the other two studies. Somewhat unusually, a slight majority (52.5%) of participants were in employment of some

sort at the time of the interview. It must be emphasised, however, that we took a very broad view of what constituted 'employment' for the purposes of this figure. Many of these jobs were part-time, casual or temporary jobs that were perceived by the refugees themselves as impermanent or precarious. For instance, an Iraqi couple working as Uber delivery drivers, a journalist working in a Woolworths that was about to be closed down, and a Syrian accountant on a three month work placement at IKEA, were all counted as 'employed.'

As Figure 5 shows, the resulting employment rate is quite high compared to other studies. However, both BNLA and SORFA participants were recently arrived when recruited to those longitudinal studies so that, even at the final 'wave' of the BNLA study (SORFA had only released its first wave at the time of writing) participants had been in Australia five years – a shorter time than many of our participants. Employment outcomes for refugees do tend to improve with time. If we look at only data about those who arrived relatively recently (in 2017 or later) the employment rate of participants is a more modest, and in line with other studies, at 33%.







One way our sample does stand out from the other studies and is, in fact, clearly somewhat unrepresentative is in terms of the educational qualifications of the participants. A majority (60%) of our refugee participants came to Australia holding a university degree. This is a far greater proportion than for either the SORFA or the BNLA sample (which helpfully breaks down educational qualifications by region, allowing us to compare more directly to the relevant area of origin.) We did in fact note this distortion in the sample as we were recruiting participants but it proved far harder to correct for than the other demographic characteristics we noted, the community networks we mainly relied on to recruit participants tend to be somewhat segregated along class lines (and education is often a proxy for class, of course.)

Overall, however, the picture is one of diversity. Some of the participants arrived relatively recently; others were able to share settlement journeys a decade in the making. Some had managed to find work that met their needs and expectations, others were still struggling to fulfil this ambition. Some were highly qualified professionals; others came to Australia with limited or interrupted educational histories. Some were fluent speakers of English before they set foot on Australian shores; others still had trouble communicating in English when we spoke to them and were interviewed through an interpreter. Some were young and new to the workforce when they arrived in Australia; others had enjoyed long and sometimes quite distinguished careers. They had different expectations and different resources to draw on when they first came here; they have different stories and experiences about what looking for and finding work was like. In what follows we have tried to capture the diversity and complexity of these experiences, while also acknowledging the common themes that emerge from these various narratives of settlement.

## 1.3 Outline of the report

In keeping with the objective of learning from the voices of the refugees themselves, this report makes extensive use of the words of refugees and their direct accounts from the interviews to present a picture of the situation they experience when they strive to enter the workforce and the strategies they use to navigate this environment.

The following chapter (Chapter 2) provides an overview of the stories the refugees told us about their experiences in the labour market in Australia: the frustrations, disappointments and obstacles they faced and their ambitions for the future. It also discusses the negative consequences, for refugees and for Australia, when refugees are unable to find satisfying work.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide a more focused analysis of the main issues raised in the interviews.

Chapter 3 looks at some of the strategies used by refugees to navigate the labour market. It compares the effectiveness of formal and informal pathways into employment, the value of vocational education options, the role of volunteering, and the practicality of self employment.

Chapter 4 identifies the main barriers to refugee participation in employment, including practical issues such as the challenge of learning English and the difficulty of recognising previous qualifications and experience, and more subjective challenges such as the unfamiliarity of the Australian job market and the psychological barriers of loss of confidence, stress and anxiety.

Chapter 5 describes how refugees experience the various forms of support currently available to them, focusing on the Jobactive model, alternative employment support programs, and informal community support networks.

Finally, Chapter 6 of the report suggests new approaches to helping refugees in their search for satisfactory employment, based on what the refugees themselves said would be helpful and their assessments of the services currently available.

## 2. Expectations and Reality

In our interviews with refugees they told us about their previous work lives and careers, their expectations and ambitions for their new life in Australia, and their experiences of searching for work when they arrived, both the challenges and disappointments and their successes and achievements. This chapter provides an overview of their stories and aims to bring the statistics on refugee employment to life through their own words. It also describes the potential negative consequences when refugees fail to find satisfactory employment, not only for the refugees themselves but also for the wider Australian society. In subsequent chapters, we analyse these stories in more detail to identify common experiences and the issues they raise.

### 2.1 The importance of work

***This is the thing: I wanna work. I want to work as well, and I can work too. R40***

When we asked refugees about the importance of work in their lives, we found, not unexpectedly, that refugees are very keen to find work, not only to improve their financial position, but more importantly, for their sense of identity and emotional well being. Many people expressed deeply held values about the importance of work in their life

One Iraqi chemist, for example, who had worked for 27 years in the laboratory of a pharmaceutical company, gave several reasons for wanting a job. He saw work as a value in itself, as well as a means of financial security and independence.

***It's very important for me to find the work, and life without work is not life. It's useless. So it's important to find a job. ... Of course there are the expenses of the family so you need to balance between your family life and work. Yes, when you work you will improve your living standards and you support you family and you'll find the house for your family. So it's important. In Iraq we have our own house. So when we left Iraq, we lost everything. We left our house, we lose everything. ... I was determined to find a job. I didn't want to be dependent on the governmental support for the jobs or Jobseeker support. R15***

A Syrian mother who had worked as an IT systems administrator at a major bank for 16 years, but had not yet been able to find work in Australia, expressed similar ideas. Work is important for success in her new life and for participation in the community, as well as for personal satisfaction and mental wellbeing.

***Of course, it's important for me. When you start a new life, when you have children, you have to ... it's your future, your life. ... Then it will be very boring without work in life ... It's very hard to stay on the Centrelink payment. It's very limited. You can't think about the future, about anything. ... Staying at home, it would bring for you depression, bring it at you. Yeah. To go in the community and to join the other people, you have to work. R37***

Many of our interviewees expressed almost identical ideas about their reasons for finding work which reflect strong value-based motivations.

***I cannot stay without job. I can't stay like that. R31***

***I can't find myself just sitting at home without doing anything. R19***

***So it's better to do something than just sitting at home. R23***

***So it's totally different than staying home. Because this is become a routine, a boring routine. R6***

Other interviewees focused on the emotional benefits of employment, the contribution it makes to feelings of self confidence, self worth and belonging to the community, and the psychological rewards of having a daily work routine.

***Employment actually is very important. Important that gives you the confidence, it gives you the value, it gives you independence and therefore it is one important element in terms of you belong somewhere and that you have your own value. You have the confidence in you. And therefore employment is very important, you know, to create that feeling so you feel worthwhile, you feel you know, someone that you can contribute to this community and it connects you to other people. R26***

***It's not about money. It's ... about independency too, but it's more about you have something to do so you have quiet mind and your program. So you know what you're gonna do tomorrow morning, where you going to wake up, you know, what's the plan, so you not gonna go and get a cold beer and start to drink again. R34***

Being able to help others was also a motivation for some people. An Iranian Bahai, for example, identified working as an aspect of his religious belief.

***As a Bahai even, I am been working but we see it as a service to humankind. It is to help other people. R28***

This Afghan woman also cited a desire to help others as a reason to find work.

***I want to earn so that I can help the people in need. R23***

A number of people felt that finding work was important for making the most of the opportunities Australia provides. A key informant who had also been a refugee explained this very clearly. We were denied opportunities in our home countries and in the countries that we grew up, transit countries and all of that. Whereas in Australia, at least from our lens, the opportunities are limitless. So therefore we feel that we should go and work and earn money and do good and make a good life for

***We were denied opportunities in our home countries and in the countries that we grew up, transit countries and all of that. Whereas in Australia, at least from our lens, the opportunities are limitless. So therefore we feel that we should go and work and earn money and do good and make a good life for ourselves, because we have that opportunity, otherwise it would be wasted. KI1***

Several refugees expressed the same idea.

***At the same time, they said "we have to start working to give back to the country where they paid us". R4***

***I want to serve the government that welcomed us. This is an important aspect of life. R16***

Refugees also want the financial independence employment provides. Most arrive in Australia having lost everything they had in their home country and are keen to achieve economic security. This was clearly expressed by a Syrian mother.

***I came here with just my clothes, nothing. I don't have anything here. So that needs for me work hard to build the future for my daughter. R10***

The chance to reduce reliance on welfare was emphasised by numerous interviewees.

***It is hard not having work. It is difficult for my family. We want to work and support ourselves. We don't want to be just depending on government payments. This is not our tradition, to depend on payments. We want to work and support ourselves. R13***

***Even that Centrelink payments, it's the government don't let anyone to live without any ... it's very helpful. But when we think about the future, we have to think about work. R37***

Community leaders and service providers shared the perception that refugees are strongly motivated to find employment.

***In my experience, English language is something they desire to have, but employment is the thing that they invest all of themselves emotionally, socially, intellectually, to get that employment. ... They are like every other Australian. Like everyone else, they only find themselves when they start working, when they become providers. CL11***

***They all want to do work no matter what. And they are happy to do any work, basically, as long as they do work. CL5***

## 2.2 Preamival expectations about employment

***I was very hopeful. Everybody who knew me, they were telling me that Australia is the best place for the line of my job. There are many opportunities for me. R24***

Refugees had widely different expectations about how they would find work in Australia and what their work life would be like. Some had no idea what to expect. Most, however, were quite optimistic about the opportunities that would be available to them, the support that would be provided, how easily they would be able to continue their previous career, and how quickly they would find employment.

Often the circumstances in which the refugees left their home country meant they had no chance to make plans. This Iranian refugee, for example, who arrived by boat, explained that he had had no expectations about his life in Australia.

***We hadn't any idea. How about a job and - of course the smugglers not going to give you right information. They make you just go. I hadn't any idea what's going to happen to me. R34***

Others were simply focused on finding a safe haven and a future for their children.

***Like, any kind of job would be okay for me because as long as they treat me as a human being in an equal, like, just, everything's okay by me. R36***

***I want to be honest, when I came here, I was like, my dream is for my kids, not for me. Because of that, as I told you, I wasn't thinking about going back to medicine. I just ... my focus was to find them in a better place and peaceful life. R25***

A couple of interviewees had been fairly realistic about the challenges they would face.

*I knew I had to study English here... and if you don't have English... then it would be difficult to find jobs, and... I mean ... I will not be able to communicate. I knew for any type of work I needed to have English language. R8*

*We were all pretty realistic, because we've resettled to other places, and I've also worked with refugees when I was in America. I know that it's not like, oh, in three months, I'm going to finish all the paperwork and then I'm going to start my life. I knew it wouldn't be that smooth. R18*

The majority, however, had high expectations. For some these expectations were based on their perception of Australia as an economically advanced Western country, as one of our key informants explained.

*You know, a lot of people expected that, because this is Australia, you know, first world country, rich country, blah, blah, blah ... they are told before they come here that, you know, there are jobs everywhere that they can do. K12*

This statement by a young Afghan refugee makes a similar point.

*When we were back in Karachi we were thinking, well, if we go to Australia, everything will be fine. And the government is here, and everybody is very helpful. And you know, look, and when we were watching movies, Australian movies, Indian movies, you know, they're shot mainly in Western countries and where you see beautiful buildings, beautiful, you know, beaches, and then, you know, forest and then I thought maybe this is the life you know, this is what we want. And let's go there. R7*

Mostly, however, people simply assumed that, because they had qualifications and work experience, they would be able to continue their previous careers in their new country, as these comments by numerous interviewees demonstrate.

*I wanted to work in a similar job to my job in Iraq. R13*

*When I came to Australia I wanted to work in my area, like a civil engineer. R3*

*When I came to Australia, my goal is to find a job in drafting, as a draft-person. R32*

*Actually, I plan to work here as a journalist, because I was a journalist in Iraq before, and we have here office in Sydney. So I plan to transfer my job here. This is my plan. R5*

Some, indeed, had very high aspirations for their future and passions they wanted to pursue.

*I would like to pursue my medical career here. That's why I have to do all these exams and to do a Bachelor of Medical Sciences or MBBS or something of that sort. R22*

*If I cannot get a job, so, of course, I will go with my own business. And then I want to expand it. I want to have my own restaurant. Because I love cooking. Right. And I want to have, like, at least one in each state, you know? So I know it takes time and it needs budget. It's kind of impossible, but, but my goal. R23*

*Well, my passion is to teach guitar. This is my passion. But it doesn't make a good living. R9*



For others, building a sound future for their children was their primary objective.

*You know, I'm just I think about my family, you know. Bring them to Australia, yeah, that's the first thing, you know. Okay. Yeah. R29*

*I want to work and buy my own house here. Focus on my kid's life. Hopefully they go to good way because I didn't have a good childhood. I don't want that to happen to any kids. I want to do my best for my kids. To bring them up in the right way. R38*

## 2.3 What refugees bring to the labour market – skills and limitations

***I have 35 years experience in the job. ... After 2005 I moved to United Arab Emirates. I worked there for five years or six years, till 2015. I came back to Lebanon. ... I was the director and deputy manager of planning and programming for ... a very big organisation in Syria. I made the budget and I make the plan for the organisation maintenance and production. I have my university Bachelors and ... I had two courses in Japan. R17***

These high expectations and career ambitions of newly arrived refugees were often based on the skills and qualifications many of our interviewees brought with them, and the years of professional experience they had achieved before being forced to leave their homes. The refugee cohort we spoke to included dentists, chemical engineers, medical specialists, accountants and electrical

engineers. Others had degrees in English, business administration, international law, teaching, and political science. Many had studied abroad, including in the US, France and Japan, or at English language universities at home. They had worked in senior roles in construction, project management, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, information technology, banking and journalism. A surprising number had worked with international aid organisations in their home country including for the Asian Development Bank, Save the Children, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the UN High Commission for Refugees and various NGOs. Some already spoke English well and several had been English teachers before arriving in Australia. Others were fluent in two or more languages before starting to learn English when they arrived.

Refugees with these kinds of qualifications and experience naturally assumed that the contribution they could make to the Australian workforce would be welcomed by the government and by employers.

However, refugees have diverse backgrounds. While many of those we interviewed had university level qualifications, others had limited education and work experience, and some had experienced trauma that affected their readiness to engage in the workforce. Our group included people who did not have any formal qualifications and had worked in unskilled jobs. Others had been too young at the time they left their homeland to have had much work experience or were still studying. Nevertheless, these people were equally determined to find work, or to continue their education.

It should be obvious, but may be worth emphasising – refugees do not choose to leave their previous careers to try their luck in the Australian labour market. Refugees come to Australia because it is no longer safe for them to remain in their homes.

The people we interviewed came here to escape the trauma and disruption of war and persecution. Many endured considerable hardship in their journey to get here, or even after they arrived. Some of the stories they told us were distressing.

***It was after 12 hours we were in the water with poor life jackets. Many of our friends died. So we were in the water for 12 hours and some of the people just held onto the dead bodies to survive. R14***

***In 2013 we had a very bad experience in Syria, so in the war, and my husband was killed because of the war, and my children were young and when I have to travel with them, to many cities in Syria and also to travel to Lebanon. R25***

***Immediately before I left it was hell there and a big mess in the country. You could not move more than 10 kilometres and every time you are target for shells or for militia to be kidnapped or to be killed. It was hell ... hell. I was detained six years in immigration detention centres. Six years. Since 2016, I'm outside. And actually I'm on Temporary Protection Visa. My visa already expired. I applied for another visa. Unfortunately, immigration just keep me in limbo and they just playing like a game with refugees. Especially with those who come by boat. I come by boat. That's why they torturing somehow. R21***

These experiences can have significant emotional and psychological effects. They leave emotional scars and sometimes cause serious psychological problems that can interfere with efforts to find work and settle.

***They were just after me, basically. I just couldn't feel safe and secure. We had no human rights over there. — I'm suffering with PTSD. I still have my reference from my psychologist. I saw a psychologist over a year. R36***

***Sometimes some refugees are like living corpse, they are living for the sake of - they are living, but they don't have a structured life, because they can't prepare the structured life. Because they are not mentally... physically they are here, but mentally they are not here. SP1***

## 2.4 The reality of job seeking

***Well, my experience is frustrating and disappointing experience really here in Australia. And it's not only my experience. R20***

The high aspirations and optimism most refugees felt when they came to Australia were, for most people, dashed when they faced the reality of looking for work. Numerous interviewees talked about frustration, confusion and disappointment as their primary feelings at this time. Around half the people we interviewed were still unemployed when we spoke to them, despite years of determined job seeking, and many of those who had found work were not in the type of job they really wanted.

This story from an Afghan refugee who had lived in Pakistan before traveling to Australia is fairly typical. He had quite high expectations before he arrived, but found life much more challenging than he had anticipated.

**Mostly my expectation was about good life. When we were in Pakistan, we heard about good life, safety, life is safe. There was no job problem, life was very easy ... [laugh] ... When we arrived here then we knew it was not easy. It is very different in Australia, different jobs, different culture and language. ... When I came here I was very confused, new country, new language, new culture. I didn't understand what to do. I was very confused. I didn't have anyone to help. R14**

There were similar stories of disappointment in many interviews.

**Whenever I go to find a job I don't ... I face with problems. This I find the frustration, disappointing when looking for jobs in this field. R12**

**Some of them, I feel it's like a scam or something. I feel like disappointed. R33**

Even those who were ultimately successful in finding work, such as these two community leaders who had themselves arrived as refugees, described feelings of frustration and emotional distress in the first years after arrival.

**The first two years in Australia for me was the most depressing time. All my dreams and expectations crashed to the ground. CL13**

**We went through that two years of depression, I mean not diagnostic depression, in terms of feeling disappointed that things are not going the way we expected. CL3**

Although refugees are provided with practical assistance in adapting to their new environment, most felt this did not help them know where to start when considering employment or further education. Many reported feeling alone and unsupported with limited community networks to fall back on

and unable to access relevant and reliable information to help them find a way through the confusion.

**For the first six months living in Australia was the hardest part of my settlement in Australia because there was no one there. I had no friend and I had no family member and no one that can support me. And that was one of the reasons that I wasted my six months because there was no one who can guide me of what to do, where to start. R39**

**So I think, you know, so I think the challenging part was I couldn't, I did not have access to the right help. Or I think maybe I did not have access to the people who could share their experience or who could give, provide some insights on what's right for me at that time. R7**

For some people their job search was a catalogue of false starts and failures. Some had found work but soon left because of low pay, poor conditions and unfulfilled promises. Newly-arrived refugees also sometimes reported exploitation by unscrupulous employers. These negative experiences, including underpayment and 'dodgy' employers, add to feelings of frustration, discouragement and hopelessness.

**I worked at a construction company to do tiles ... but they paid little money to us. So I left that job after 9 months. They promised me to teach tile layering and then I can have a very good life. But they never taught us... just made us work for little money. After I see that they not teaching me anything, I just got tired from them ... and I left that job. R14 and you know they pay the least. R29**

*It was hard for me. To be honest I went home and I started crying ... I work all these hours and he gave me only \$120. That was the first experience and it was a very bad experience. I didn't want to go through it again. R38*

*My experience is that they know we are new people. They know we don't know nothing about the law. So I am working 10 hours, 11 hours working. We don't have a car, so they just put us in the van. Morning seven o'clock is start to 7pm so like that 10 hours, 11 hours we working and you know they pay the least. R29*

Some people, particularly those who arrived with significant previous employment experience or professional qualifications and skills felt, in addition to frustration and disappointment, a great sense of loss and wasted time.

*My main goal is to get a, you know, a proper job. Not working in the shops, because it's if I work in a shop, so it means that I waste my 24 years of studies, like the hard work and everything, and I feel, I'm already forgetting everything. So it means that I'm just waiting my whole life. And now I'm doing a job that it's not related to my education at all. So I can't use any of my studies. R23*

*They will have this in their conscious that they have lost something valuable. They worked hard for it. They studied hard. And then sometimes they have to do something very irrelevant. CL5*

Despite the disappointments, frustrations and failures, however, most of the refugees we spoke to continued to be optimistic about the future and appreciative of the opportunity to live in Australia. A number wanted to emphasise that they balance their struggles in the labour market against the other benefits of living in Australia and express gratitude for

the chance to start a new life in a country that provides security, freedom and human rights.

*With saying all this, I just want let you know, we just talked but still I'm very, very appreciative towards the Australian government that they treating me, that I came as a refugee, the same as other citizens of here. And they gave me all my rights, and everything they apply to them apply to me as well. So it is a very big point and positive point for me. So I'm really appreciative for that. R40*

*So in that aspect of our life, I am very, very happy to come to Australia, because I wanted the freedom, I wanted the safety, and I want just a bit of place that I can feel right and relaxed. R28*

## 2.5 The consequences of not working

***And to be honest, it's affected me so badly. I am so distressed mentally that I so desperate. I don't even want the money, but as long as somebody can give me a job, not paid even, because I don't feel good in myself because I'm not working. R40***

Failure to secure satisfactory employment has financial impacts on the living conditions of refugee families, as several community leaders attested. For the refugees we interviewed, however, the more important consequences were emotional impacts, including loss of self confidence, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. Community leaders identified a number of broader potential consequences including family stress and a diminished sense of social inclusion. Several interviewees also noted that there is an economic loss to the country when refugees are unable to use their skills and experience.

Unemployment, or low paid, unskilled employment, affects refugees' economic well being. One community leader in Sydney described the inadequate living conditions of some refugee families resulting from financial hardship.

*You know, we went into their rooms and it's poverty, like, like not even as refugees they live like that ... unfortunately they're living in, you know, some people's garages, they've got a cooktop, they've a long table with a laptop has been given by the school to their kids to use. And there's wires hanging down, you know, in the garage. And it was just, like, just devastating, devastating. And they've got mattresses sitting on top of each other, and so at night-time, they can lay them, they can sleep on them. Because they can't afford it. They cannot afford to pay rent. CL15*

As one of our key informants explained, many refugee families are supporting relatives at home, which adds to their financial problems.

*Then there's financial stress, so if you're not employed then obviously, if you were fortunate enough and had permanent residency, you might be able to access Centrelink. So there might be some financial support there but that's not enough. That's not enough even for someone who doesn't have any family members to support overseas. So imagine the adequacy of that funding for someone who has himself to support and also his family members to support. KI1*

Unemployment, or underemployment, also has negative effects on individuals' sense of self worth and confidence, and their psychological well being. Several refugees told us about the emotional stress, anxiety and depression they themselves, or others in their community, had experienced as a result of not being able to find a job.

*It is worse, because even sometime I feel I'm completely different. I have to do something, hurt myself, or do ... to be honest with you. I'm not making you upset. But this is my own story. I have to tell you. R21*

*So imagine you don't have a job, you don't have the language and you are drop by yourself. It is you're going to be lonely, you're hope is going to be gone, you have no hope anymore. But all those sorts of things. It's like the facts for getting to the wrong way. And you - it's like a you have no other choices. R29*

Loss of self esteem and mental health problems were also identified by community leaders as consequences of ongoing unemployment.

*It really impacts, like, their mental health. They feel like frustrated, they feel stuck, they feel like, useless, and they think, okay, I came here to have a better life. But look, I ended up being like Uber driver or, like, cleaner, or like this sort of job that they think they don't deserve that situation. CL10*

*Because there is no routine so there is no why? What's the reason they have to wake up? What's the interest? What's their purpose of life in general? ... you need to have a great meaning for your life to back up, so you can wake up in the mornings CL2*

The emotional effects of unemployment and financial hardship place stress on the entire family, including children. Several community leaders commented on the potential intergenerational impacts of the stress of unemployment and financial hardship on families.



*And it's also affect the little kids I think, you know, the babies – the ones who are about to go to school but they didn't go to school yet. They have to put up with all that misery, the misery of having the two parents sometimes at home, the fights, the confusion of what's happening here, unsupportive environment. CL11*

*For young people, it causes other problems as well. Because if they don't see a role model in their family, then they don't understand why you know ... why they have to work? Or they don't look up to somebody, because they don't have somebody they can relate to, who is actually productive. SP2*

Another concern expressed by some community leaders was that being locked out of the mainstream job market could lead refugees to feel excluded and disconnected from Australian society.

*It is very important for them that they feel belonging to Australia. If they don't have this feelings, feelings of despair, they have feelings of discrimination and all those stuff, then what will happen to them, their self esteem, confidence and everything ... So it is very important for them that they have to feel that they are belong here, that they are not discriminated, they are not marginalised. So I think it is very important for them. CL14*

*Now you are actually disengaged already. So you're not subscribing to the same values anymore. You're not subscribing to the same nations anymore. Because you are not keeping track of them. So jobs become irrelevant. Language becomes irrelevant. Values become irrelevant. You know, so you become falling back on the familiar notions that you have. CL9*

*They start feeling low self esteem, worthless, incapable of being part of that community. They feel strange, they feel like strangers, they feel like we don't belong here, Australia. ... That's also affecting the social cohesion of Australia, affecting the cultural integration of these people together. CL11*

Many people made the point that refugees have qualifications and experience that would be of value to the Australian economy. In particular, several service providers noted the large number of refugee medical professionals who could fill an obvious gap.

*These are people who are highly qualified, that could be actively contributing to our society. And we saw that during COVID, there was this shortage with nurses and doctors, and we had so many on our caseload that were shouting out saying, I would jump in and help if I was able to. SP3*

*For example, there's a shortage of medical professionals in Australia, but government are bringing in migrants who are medical professionals on migrant visas, okay. But they have no any program for the refugees who are medical professionals ... Less money can be put as investment on them, for example, training medical professionals in Australia, which can cost millions to train one. SP6*

Community leaders noted that years of study and professional experience are wasted when qualified refugees are unable to find a pathway to employment, even while Australia has a shortage of skilled workers.



*For example, Australia, in every year, they are facing shortage of skilled people. And they are putting, you know, interest to the outside world that, look we are facing with shortage of engineer with this and that. While at least a number of those people comes through the refugee code, but unfortunately, for not being able to providing a pathway for them, all their skills are, you know, lost ... So unfortunately, that experience is killed, qualification all wasted. CL12*

## 2.6 Employment and successful settlement

For service providers, their main concern about refugee unemployment related to its potential impact on refugees' ability to settle well in their new country and their integration into the Australian community. Nearly all the service providers we spoke to emphasised the contribution employment makes to successful settlement.

*We know that when someone gets into a job, they have to speak with other people in English, they have to get up in the morning with a purpose in life, go to work, learn English, learn the norm in the culture of this new country they call home, interact with human beings, and also would not have a lot of time to think about their worries, their health issues, and things like that. They become physically active, mentally active, socially active and all that. Also, if they are on Centrelink benefits, down the line they come off Centrelink benefit, they pay taxes, to grow the economy. There are so many things that happen as a result of that. SP5*

***The sooner people start work, and the sooner they settle, and that it helps in lots of ways, you know, not just financially but in terms of their mental well-being and, and social cohesion with the community and sense of belonging to Australia. SP4***

*Employment is a strong indicator of settlement and integration. People come with expectations, they want to contribute, they want to support their families, both here and back, you know, in their countries. ... there are a lot of both health and economic benefits to employment, you know. People feel that they're productive, they feel that they're part of the community, and they're able to provide for their family. Yeah, and it makes them feel good. SP2*

# Chapter summary

Refugees clearly want to work. They want to earn an independent living instead of relying on welfare, give meaning to their lives, build a future for their families, and contribute to Australian society through working. Job seeking success for refugees therefore means much more than simply finding any kind of work. Like most people, refugees are looking for personal fulfillment and satisfaction, respect, and community involvement. The failure of large numbers of refugees to find work that meets their expectations adds to the emotional and psychological trauma of the refugee experience and threatens their ability to settle and become part of the Australian community.

Refugee unemployment also has wider ramifications. There is an economic loss when refugees are unable to make use of their qualifications, practical skills and years of experience; their ongoing dependence on unemployment benefits is a waste of the considerable human capital they bring with them as willing and skilled workers; and the mental health impacts are a potential burden on health services. There are, therefore, practical as well as humanitarian reasons for addressing the issue of refugee employment more effectively.



# 3. Working it Out: How Refugees Look for Work in Australia

Refugees employ a wide variety of job seeking strategies when trying to find work in Australia, with quite mixed results. They apply formally for jobs advertised through job-search websites like Seek.com; they look for work more informally by asking around in their community and locality; they seek to improve their employability through volunteering and vocational education; some even try to start their own businesses.

This chapter examines some of the more common strategies refugees pursue when looking for work and explores their benefits and limitations, concluding with some remarks about the personal qualities that facilitate eventual success. Refugees also seek formal and informal assistance with employment from others, and this kind of helpseeking is covered in a subsequent chapter.

## 3.1 Formal and informal pathways into employment

***I was applying a lot of jobs and I didn't get any call. No one called me back. Or they called me two three times but they reject my forms. R2***

Consider the story of the following two refugees: one came to Australia in 2019 and the other in 2018. Both were from Syria, held bachelor degrees in accounting and had ten years' experience working in that area. They came to the country with a reasonable grasp of English and both were extremely anxious to find work, so they embarked on their job searches right away. They went about looking for work in very different

ways, however, and their respective experiences tell us something important. The first refugee, a confident, gregarious man in his late 20s, had spent time before the war in Syria working in Dubai for large multinational companies. As he desired to work in a similar environment in Australia, he pursued a job strategy of formally applying for jobs advertised on the internet. He focused on jobs involving accounting or customer service, his main areas of previous experience. He displayed a remarkable degree of persistence in this endeavour, applying for over a thousand jobs over the course of a year but to no avail.

***Actually, I did, like, apply more than like a thousand jobs ... whenever I checked ... Seek application ... upload my resume ... And I've been applying every day. I used to do like, between 15 to 20 job ... there was asking for the for the internal experience ... I get the first interview with them, some of the company. And they told me [name], it's like you are qualified about the job. But the main problem, you don't have experience, or you don't have the certificate ... This what was the main point for them. It's like they need something inside, internal from Australia. R33***

As he suggests in the above quote, he discovered eventually that this approach was all but hopeless in the face of employers' insistence on local qualifications and experience. It is also possible, of course, given the volume of applications he was sending, that this man did not know to tailor his resume and cover letter to individual applications as is customary in Australia, further reducing his chances. At this point, he changed strategies – enrolling in TAFE in a Certificate IV in Accounting and seeking to build his networks

through LinkedIn, which in turn led him to an organisation that assists refugees to find employment. With their aid he had just secured a three-month placement with IKEA in a customer service role at the time of the interview, his first job after almost two years in Australia.

Contrast this with the experience of his fellow Syrian, who had arrived in Australia a year earlier. She had similar qualifications and experience, was a little older (in her late 30s) and a single mother with a young daughter. Equally anxious to start working, very soon after arrival she started looking for a job. However, she employed a more informal strategy of seeking work. Having worked as a hairdresser in her mother's salon when younger, she simply walked into a local salon and asked if they had any work.

***Maybe I spend in Australia about two months, or something like this. Then ... I told you I have an idea in hairdressing because my mom doing that. So I find that work very close to my home, about five minutes walk, in the hairdressing shop, and I started working ... I spent about one year working with them. ... my apartment is very close to there ... So this shop, I always see it on my way all the time. So I decided to ask them ... if they accept. It's okay. If they don't, nothing will happen. I will try. Give it a try. So I go to them. I asked him. He said to me, do not know how to do blow dry, some stuff. I told him, yes. He told me "Come one day." Give me a day that is not very busy. And he told one of the girls. I did her hair like, blow dry and other stuff, like washing on the basins, something like this. So he said it's good. You can start next week. R11***

The contrast between these two experiences is dramatic. From nearly the same starting place in terms of qualifications, experience and language ability we get two very different outcomes: two years' struggle and a thousand applications resulting in a three month placement versus a single walk-in resulting in a stable job.

Not too much should be read into this one story, of course. The hairdressing example involved an unusual amount of luck and did not really result in satisfactory employment – the woman in question wanted to continue her career in accounting rather than work as a hairdresser. Nevertheless, it was an income, and a foothold in the labour market from which she was able to explore other options.

Only certain kinds of jobs are available to refugees who pursue informal job seeking strategies, usually less skilled and less well-paid roles (though some tradespeople and technically skilled workers also reported success with informal pathways.) One can go door-to-door to hairdressing salons, cafes and carwashes, but not to engineering and accounting firms, or universities and hospitals. The jobs people found by this method were therefore often not the type of work they were really aiming for.

This is not to say that employment in professional workplaces is not also often sought and obtained through informal channels. However, refugees face much greater challenges connecting to the kinds of professional networks and social contexts where these opportunities are to be found.

However, there is a broader point here that is echoed across the various interviews we conducted: formal job seeking strategies tend to be extremely ineffective for refugee jobseekers, whereas they tend to encounter much more success by pursuing informal job seeking strategies. Only one out of the forty refugees we interviewed reported finding work by sending a formal application in response to an advertised position while most of the rest had experienced only frustration and failure pursuing such strategies.

***I plan to apply for five new jobs every day before I sleep every day five jobs. And you know, it takes time you have to ... yeah. So, I was applying every day five jobs before I sleep. Every day, every day, every day, and different jobs ... and I didn't get any call. No one called me back. Or they called me two three times but they reject my forms.***



***They said you don't have experience in Australia. R2***

***I just register online with SEA and with HAYES and with these recruiters. I register resume and ... I check to find anything. If I see that am suitable for anything I apply immediately. But after two days I receive apologies from the company ... you are not shortlisted. Next time.... R17***

***Before I arrived here, I even started applying online from UAE and also from Afghanistan. ... but I didn't hear back from them ... I'm working on my CV as well ... I have been to so many of them and they work on my CV and they give me feedback. But even after that I didn't get any job R23***

On the other hand, a surprising number of refugees reported having some luck with informal strategies such as walking in to businesses to apply directly.

***I have to go to by myself to the shop. Do you need a worker, please keep my number if you need any time call me. Yeah. So I used to do that. And then one day, they call me. R23***

***I was keep going to different factories in person and asking for a job. And then when I was looking somebody told me "Yes, we want one person go to our office and register yourself." R27***

***I must start working carwash you know, wash the cars. I saw van advertising painting that came to the carwash so I asked 'Oh please I need to work as a painter. I have experience.' And yeah, like that, I find the job. --- They pay less but I'm happy because I want to start working. R29***

Another informal strategy which refugees reported to be quite successful was asking

around for work opportunities within their social network, a topic we discuss in more detail in chapter 6. The majority of refugees who reported having successfully found work in Australia cited one of these two informal strategies as a key to their success.

### **In summary**

**Refugees reported very little success pursuing the formal job seeking strategies mandated to retain income support payments, such as applying for publicly advertised positions through job search websites. Informal job seeking strategies such as walking in to local businesses or looking for work through social networks tended to be more effective, if more limited in what could be achieved through them. In fact, most refugees who were in employment had found work through informal channels.**

**This relatively stark contrast between the success rates of formal and informal job seeking calls into question the way refugees are often steered towards more formal methods of looking for work. Refugees are compelled by Jobactive providers to apply for a certain number of advertised positions each week in order to retain their welfare entitlements, regardless of their likelihood of finding work this way. However, other assistance providers also devote considerable resources to helping build formal job seeking skills (such as resume and cover letter writing, interview skills) in a way that is perhaps not the most effective use of scarce resources given the multiple barriers refugees face in trying to apply formally for advertised positions.**

**In view of the power but also limitations of refugees' informal networks, assistance providers would be well advised to direct more energy to helping widen jobseekers' informal networks – especially to include people outside their ethnic communities and possessed with experience relevant to their qualifications and employment ambitions.**

### 3.2 Education as a pathway into employment

***I tried to work in the field of health assisting after I did the training or the short course training. But I failed to find a job ... I [also] studied at TAFE ... but what's the benefit of study if it's not guaranteed that you will find the job after that? R16***

Despite their differences, the job seeking narratives of the two Syrian accountants described above converge in one important respect – both attempted to bolster their chances of success in the Australian job market by obtaining a local qualification in their chosen field of work.

The young male accountant was looking for ‘something ... like to push me, to support me from here’ – to mitigate his lack of ‘something inside, internal to Australia.’ In the end, he settled on a Certificate IV in accounting from TAFE. The older female accountant, on the other hand, turned to education in the hope it would create a pathway to the kind of job she wanted – she was an accountant, after all, not a hairdresser. She explored her options through word of mouth.

*But at that time most of people said to me, it's hard to find work in accounting. I recommend you to stay like in a profession like this one like hairdressing or something ... but [a friend] told me her friend she had an accounting background and she went came here she studied like a ... accounting Certificate IV and then she find a job ... and she is very happy. R10*

Like her fellow Syrian accountant, she also ended up enrolling in a Certificate IV in accounting.

Unsurprisingly, given that both of them had university degrees and a decade of experience actually working as an accountant, the TAFE course contained little that they did not already know. However, both reported that it was none the less a useful experience. For the female accountant, it was mostly a matter of finding ways to localise what she already knew.

***I know that maybe most of the information [in the course] I know, except the information that related to the taxation. Because completely different system. ... And at the same time, you know, I'm studying everything in English, so I know [i.e. learn] the terms and the expressions in English. So it makes it easier for me when I find work, so I get benefit from this course ... the accounting principle is the same all over the world. But sometimes the systems like especially the taxation system, different from country to country. R10***

The male accountant echoed these sentiments and also saw the qualification as perhaps enabling him one day to work for himself as a tax agent.



*Interviewer: And so are you planning on finishing [the TAFE course?] Because you have a job now ... ?*

*Yeah, I will finish that. Of course I will finish that. Even if I get internal experience but still I am willing to get that ... They are explaining much about the way how we're gonna pay the tax and these things. And at the same time it will be like, even you can call it like, a sideline for the job. Because ... some of them, they have their own business R33*

These are fairly typical examples of how refugees with existing qualifications engage with and experience vocational education. While most find the material they encounter in such courses is already familiar, they see these courses as ways to make themselves more employable in their field, pick up English vocabulary pertinent to their area of work and also learn what is different about such work in the Australian context.

*Yes, people who work in my field, plus the counsellor, they advised me and they told me that I have to do this course in order for me to be able to work in my field. They emphasise on this point ... That's why I started doing Certificate IV straightaway. Plus, I had some information about to follow, to comply with the buildings standards in Australia. So I had this information, a lot of information. So I learned many, many new things here in Australia ... I finished my studies 35 years ago, it was in 1989, the study here is very different. So I learned many new things in Australia. R31*

*So I tried to do the administration course here in Australia but they told me you don't need to because you're you got Australian equivalent for foreign qualifications. But I insisted on doing the course so that, I know how people work, how they can look for work in Australia ... That's why I prefer to do the administration course here in Sydney R32*

*Some consultant in the TAFE that I study at, she directed me to study banking, that I know in the banking industry and financial. I take a certificate IV in banking and I studied and I applied for many jobs in banking from the first of this year, but you know, it's the Coronavirus and no one ... I didn't accepted in any one R37*

Particularly for refugees who arrived in Australia at a young age, education was at times also seen, as it also is by many native-born Australians, as a way of opening new doors and getting ahead in one's chosen field.

*I think, right now, I've reached the conclusion that I will do my master's degree, because I'm interested in doing research ... the jobs I qualify for right now, I feel like I have more to get than that job. And I feel like I cannot get a better position if I don't have a master's degree. R1*

*My first priority, after arriving to any settlement, or anywhere I go, no matter what, Australia, America wherever I go, so my priority would be to continue my studies. So that's where my motivation comes from and also the support from family. R39*

However, there are also many difficulties with accessing education as a pathway into employment. Many refugees pointed out that the investment of time and money seemed prohibitive to them, especially those who were older when they came and approached job seeking with more urgency.

*I'm not about to waste time in studying. I'm not young. Yeah, I need to get a job ... with the post office or with courier or something* R9

*Yeah, I call them and I asked how to get to do my degree here and they said you have to study three years in the university ... It's hard after this age to start studying for three years.* R37

*I wanted to [study], but all the courses are a couple years. So, I don't know. I couldn't see myself to go studying couple more years and start all over again. I just wanted to settle, to find a job, work, get money, and start buying my own house? Yeah.* R38

Other reasons cited for reluctance to pursue further education included mental health issues and lack of language proficiency. Some refugees also described the very confusing educational landscape they encountered, remarking on the plethora of educational options and the lack of substantive assistance with figuring out which were the right options to pursue:

*No, no, no. Because mentally I was not ready [to study] to be honest with you. And now still, like, the impact of detention.* R21

*I liked nursing but nursing requires the study, advanced study, and it's difficult for me because of the language. It needs a high level of language to study ...* R16

*Very confusing. Every employee was saying different stuffs ... in uni. Like the admin was telling me different things, teacher was telling me different things ... There was workshop there like for foreign people who they came from overseas ... They can give you like the steps. What's the steps to do. I went to that one as well. Still was confusing.* R2

Alongside these barriers to pursuing further education and local qualifications, many interviewees also spoke about the uncertain returns that education as a strategy for employment presented in their view. It must be said in support of this view that, for none of the refugees we interviewed did obtaining local qualifications lead, in any straightforward or direct way, to employment. Indeed, several interviewees from refugee backgrounds drew attention to what they saw as the false promise of vocational training in this respect.

*Some clients studied some courses. These courses ... they did not have a job after they finished ... Because some times they spend one year or six month without nothing because at the end there is no job available related to the client.* R3

*I have witnessed people studying day and night, and getting qualifications, and they studied but they couldn't still with the qualifications, with their degrees, they couldn't find any jobs. That was what disheartened me and made me think I didn't need to study because it wouldn't lead anywhere.* R35

*You know, the two years I invest studying and put in so much money and live in dire circumstances, if I'm not a doctor, or an engineer or pharmacist. It's not worth I....*

*Interviewer: Yeah. And then of course, you might not get the job right? You might get your degree and you might still not ...*

*Yeah, most of ... not gonna say most, but lots of them don't. They go through all the pain and they don't they end up working as ... a young man I know, he's delivering bread now. And he's a nurse CL11*

Interestingly, many service providers and other informants with a broader experience of refugee jobseekers also tended to articulate strong ambivalence about the value of vocational training.

*You know, I think that there is a tendency by some NGOs to delay their engagement unnecessarily by encouraging them to do training in Australia, that is unnecessary. SP4*

*Yeah. And I think that the other thing I feel very strongly about is that I think that there is too much emphasis on encouraging people to waste time doing local skills based training at TAFE and things like that, which is unnecessary, and doesn't help them in their professional journey, if they've already got a university degree and ... professional experience in the country of origin. And all that is doing is delaying their capacity to settle and delaying their ability to improve their language skills and settle effectively. SP5*

*In Australia, education has value. If you are educated, you have more opportunities than someone who is less educated or less trained. However, that does not actually address the problem, which is the labour market issue that stops, refugees, humanitarian entrants, migrants ... and a lot of other disadvantaged groups from actually finding a job. You know, that education doesn't ... you can be as educated as you want. You know.*

*Interviewer: It's your example of the gentleman with his PhD.*

*Yeah, exactly. And they can't find a job. So I think education and training does play a role. But it doesn't solve the real issue. KI2*

### **In summary**

*Education has its value for refugees, especially for refugees with professional or skilled backgrounds looking for insights into how their field operates in the Australian context. However, many refugees see education as an unattractive pathway due to the investment of time and money required for most educational qualifications, and in part due to the uncertain prospects of actually finding work through obtaining such qualifications. In view of all this, we ought to more carefully re-assess the current emphasis on directing refugees towards educational opportunities. For some, education is a relevant and worthwhile pathway, but for many refugees it may well be a waste of time that needlessly and somewhat pointlessly delays their entry into the labour market.*

### **3.3 Volunteering as a pathway to employment**

*Yes, I contact a lot of organisation leaders to volunteer to help because I am in good health. I can help people during the lockdown. I can even deliver food to them. But nobody answer me or accept my offer. R17*

Volunteering was often mentioned by community leaders as a possible way to help overcome some of the difficulties refugees face in securing employment. In this way, informants echoed a trend in the policy literature, where volunteerism is often suggested as one possible way to tackle

a number of issues refugees face in the labour market.<sup>5</sup> Volunteering, in this view, can help build English skills, confidence and social networks, and provide some local work experience, the lack of which refugees themselves often identify as a key disadvantage in their search for work.

***It starts with the volunteering ... in some instances it might have led to employment within that organisation whereas in others you learn - get a lot of experience and very good experience that you can certainly cite that when you are applying for a job. KI1***

***One of the things I used to tell the clients is to start volunteer work somewhere. And actually ... that's how I started my job career ... I start to volunteer with a migrant resource centre a couple of months, and I got the job. So I used to encourage people a lot to start volunteering somewhere, and that will put something in their resume and also build their confidence and then that might lead to actual work. CL4***

***I believe we need to be supporting people to ... especially the ones who really need that support, to be giving them volunteering roles straightaway into their professions. To be able to be ... volunteering programs, specifically for refugees, and to be putting them upon arrival, within the first six months, not longer than that. CL9***

Though some of our informants saw refugees as at times reluctant to take up such opportunities, the refugees we spoke to were usually fairly open-minded about doing some volunteering as part of their job search. Many had in fact done voluntary work and talked positively about their experiences with volunteering as a source of skills, information and networks key to their career aspirations.

***As a volunteer, people wanted to help me. Because they knew that that's the path to employment. So they were sharing, okay, you do this, now you apply for this job. It may be a casual position, but then it's you get your foot in the door. So it was a lot of real advice ... that was the advice that that was the most helpful for me. R1***

***Yes, I work currently with Sydwest as a volunteer. When they reopen I will be with their volunteer team... It is important for me to find new prospects, to know more people, to have more knowledge and to know how to deal with others – to work in this field. R11***

***I was very excited about the volunteers that I'm doing now because it gives me the opportunity to talk with people, to practice my English, to hear English. Because sometimes about month I don't hear any English in my surroundings. R37***

However, many other refugees had experienced difficulties and disappointments with volunteering as a pathway into employment.

Some found it just as hard to secure volunteering opportunities as actual employment. Others found it hard to get volunteering work that was well-suited to their career ambitions. Still others did undertake volunteering but found the supposed benefits of doing this work elusive, and ended up feeling merely exploited.

***Also I plan to try to get to get a voluntary work in IT also to get experience. But I could not continue into it. So that the voluntary work for experience is part of my plan. But also it should be sensible and reasonable. It should not be for very, very long, long time, getting nothing. It's very difficult. R9***

*Well, when I volunteered for four years ... one of my purposes was mainly to get employed ... one of my friends said it is better you go to TAFE and have a certificate. I went to TAFE and got Certificates III and IV in community services. But I know actually they don't employ volunteers because there are a lot of volunteers who do everything for free. When there is a volunteer available to work, why should they want to employ them and pay them? So, I disappointed, and I didn't continue R24*

Community leaders and refugees both pointed out that there were in fact considerable practical difficulties in finding volunteer positions in many areas, some of which had to do with confidentiality and indemnity issues involved in hosting volunteers in particular kinds of workplaces. Others had more to do with the fact that hosting and engaging with volunteers was an additional burden to a busy workplace, and many workplaces did not have systems in place to manage this, or spare capacity to develop effective volunteering programs.

*To say volunteer, for example, with a court area, that's not going to be possible because the amount of information they can be exposed to and the confidentiality, so usually, they don't encourage that. With policing, the same thing ... some of the agencies, probably they don't have enough resources, or staff, so they can spend that spare time to teach this person. Or they don't know how to manage them. Like for us, if we bring in volunteer, we know already we're gonna allocate some work, we have some time for them. And we plan it for the period they're going to be with us. Some agency, they don't have that at all. CL4*

*Here in Australia ... the hospital, anyone who enter the staff there even for observance, he needs to have indemnity insurance. And the insurance company will not accept to give you insurance, if you don't have registration. So Catch-22. R20*

### **In summary**

*Taken together, these comments make clear that, while volunteering can be a useful strategy for refugee jobseekers, it is not a 'magic wand' and comes with its own set of problems. Volunteering opportunities need to be readily accessible, appropriate to a person's career ambitions and non-exploitative in nature. Moreover, for volunteering to be really effective, businesses and other organisations need to have well-organised volunteer programs that are furthermore structured so as to deal with any confidentiality and indemnity issues the presence of volunteers may raise – which are common reason given for why certain organisations cannot accept volunteers. Volunteering is a promising pathway but refugees will potentially need as much assistance securing and making use of such opportunities as they do paid employment.*

## **3.4 Self-employment**

***Yes I thought of starting my own business or private business, but it needs capital. It needs an amount of money which I don't have. R15***

One of our interviewees had come to Australia in 2014 from Iran with what seemed to be a reasonable enough ambition – he wanted to drive a truck for a living, as he and his family had done in his home country for many years. Six years later, this goal seemed as elusive as when he first arrived. We spent a long time together



talking about the reasons that had been so difficult in Australia, including the usual issues around language and lack of local experience. However, as we spoke, the real heart of the problem emerged – what this man really needed was not local experience but rather, simply a truck.

***I worked in abattoir. It was a hard, heavy work starting from four o'clock to three o'clock in the afternoon ... but I was doing it because I was hoping to collect money and have some saving to buy a truck. ...***

***Interviewer: So it sounds like that's what your family did back in Iran. they own their own trucks. Is that correct?***

***My mother's side all of them. Yes ... actually I've been going different places that they told me if I had my own truck they would ... give me the job ... But they said, for example, because I don't have experience with them, they cannot give me their own truck. I need my own truck the job to be available for me R27***

For want of the \$25,000 he estimated needing to buy an entry-level truck, this man, who had plenty of experience both driving trucks and running his own business as a for-hire truck driver, was stuck in a cycle of precarious employment and unemployment. He felt confident he would know how to find work and manage the financial side of the business but no regular bank would lend him the small sum he needed to get started due to the insecure nature of his work and his poor English. Instead, the only finance he could secure was from loan sharks who would illegally take out a loan in their own name and then lend the money on to him on highly unfavourable terms.

This Iranian truck driver is typical of a particular kind of refugee for whom the simplest and most obvious path to

employment is actually self-employment. Refugees are well documented to engage in entrepreneurial activity at rates far surpassing other migrant groups, despite the many obstacles they face to starting their own businesses.<sup>6</sup> Not all the refugees we spoke to about the possibility of starting their own business were enthusiastic about the idea, but surprisingly many were open to the possibility, particularly those who had run their own small businesses in their countries of origin. All those to whom we spoke, however, mentioned the need for greater levels of support than seemed readily available to them, whether that be in the form of capital, as with the truck-driver, or with the legal, marketing and logistics complications of a business enterprise.

***Interviewer: You've run your own business back in Syria and Egypt. And have you ever thought about doing that here?***

***Yes, but it's a bit risky you know, in Australia, the budget and your assets you need to be ... you need to have strong background, strong financial structure to start this business. ... Here Australia, I had an idea to like make a food truck. Yes, but it was not easy because the food truck itself it will cost me like, not less than \$30,000 ... you know, decoration and equipment ... Yeah, it's not easy. And I don't know where to work what location, what permission I need. I don't know. R9***

***So I went back to tiling... I created my websites for repairing showers/ bathrooms and balconies. I tried to maintain the website, but it cost money to do marketing to get jobs. So it was not profitable. I didn't have enough money for marketing, so I couldn't continue. R13***

*When I was at university, so I used to do my own business ... I was cooking. And I was selling it to ... whoever was in the campus ... if I cannot get a job, so, of course, I will go with my own business. And then I want to expand it. I want to have my own restaurant. Because I love cooking. Right. And I want to have, like, at least one in each state, you know? So I know it takes time and it needs budget. It's kind of impossible, but, but my goal. R23*

### **In summary**

*Starting their own business is an attractive pathway into employment for many refugees, especially those who have done something similar in another country. However, many are held back from such ambitions for want of modest amounts of start-up capital or a lack of confidence in business planning. The small programs that exist to facilitate refugee entrepreneurship would, if expanded, find a receptive audience with such jobseekers.*

## **3.5 Pathways to success**

Most refugees struggle to find stable and satisfying employment when they first arrive in Australia. Many do eventually succeed but there is no one recipe to success that works for everyone, and the path to employment is often a long and winding road.

One vivid example of what success can look like is an Iraqi man we interviewed as a community leader who related his own employment journey to us. He arrived from Iraq in 2006 in his early 20s with a bachelor degree in English and no clear career direction. For the first few years he struggled, quickly abandoning Centrelink and working variously as a night-shift cleaner while studying a vocational certificate and drifting through a number of casual jobs, including stints as a

barista and dish-washer. A friend put him on to a settlement agency where his customer service and computer experience, as well as experience with refugees, were seen as assets. He volunteered for a while with this agency and meanwhile received help with his interview skills, eventually landing a job with them as a settlement housing officer. He worked his way up from there and by 2015 was promoted to manager. Now he works for one of Melbourne's leading settlement providers and remarks

*'Since last year I've been working as manager for community inclusion. I oversee several projects involving services funded by governments, with team leaders calling me all day!' CL7*

This was a successful story in the long run, and, like many other stories of success, it includes aspects of most of the strategies discussed in this report: formal and informal job seeking, education, volunteering and various forms of assistance seeking. However, and again like many others, this community leader describes a path towards desired employment that is long and meandering, filled with obstacles, detours and dead ends, requiring persistence, resilience and a fair bit of luck.

*So I started an advanced diploma at TAFE in electronic communication and in the second year I started to apply for jobs, but nothing happened. When I finished, one of the companies that I had applied to work with rang me and asked me to send them an updated cv. At that time, it was the introduction of 4G ... there was a huge demand for technicians. ... There was a huge demand and I just got lucky at the right time. I got into the industry and went from there. CL13*



*I started working as a traffic controller, which was really, really hard for me, because back home, I had, you know, good remuneration, good possession, contact with the high level of the government. But here, I was working with someone that's ... very rude. And the environment was really not good. But I was very committed, and also resilience towards it. ... then two friends, one of the people say ... you are good in Farsi, and Dari, why you don't go to work with [settlement organisation] ... they offered me the job as a bilingual guide. Then when I started working, taking the people from the airport, taking them to their short term accommodation, helping them with registrations ... That's how I started. Then I start Diploma in community services and case management. So ... they offered me role of case manager, then this is how it started. So my new career formed from there, then I continued to do my bachelor, again in human services. Then I did my master and couple of diplomas. CL 12*

When we asked them about what they felt, in hindsight, were helpful attitudes and personal qualities to cultivate for navigating these long, meandering journeys towards employment, refugees mentioned the need for persistence, flexibility, passion and strongly defined goals.

Many emphasised the value of remaining persistent and proactive in their search for work. Some started looking for jobs online and making contacts even before they arrived in Australia. Most took the initiative themselves to find work by approaching employers directly or using online job search sites, often applying for many more jobs than would be required by Centrelink 'mutual responsibility' requirements. And despite the frustrations and failures and disappointments, most of the refugees we spoke to are still optimistic that they will eventually succeed. Numerous interviewees made this point.

*I haven't lost my faith that ultimately I will get a job. I am not desperate. I am still determined to continue to learn and to ultimately find a job. R11*

*Just I want to clarify that I'm serious. I'm very serious about looking for a job. R37*

*I will work on myself to develop and improve my language, improve myself, my skills. R35*

*Still my plan is to work as whatever is possible, what sort of job. I don't really mind any sort of job because my plan to work and save to get to my ideal. R27*

For some, flexibility was key and a realistic and pragmatic preparedness to consider new pathways, even a complete change in career, was essential to successfully navigating the Australian labour market.

*Honestly, I want to work in accounting, because this is my job. But on the other hand, I don't have no idea about ... job opportunities here in Australia. So sometimes, if you don't find the what to do, like opportunity in the field that you like, you have to find something else. R10*

*Sometimes you know, our life is like a river changing direction, and many people could manage to find another career that led to massive success, could be much better than if they stayed in their original career. CL3*

*But one of the advisors that really helped me to draw my future ... she told me that ... "forget about what you had. Think about what you have now ... I know you have good experience, good qualification, but you're in Australia and new culture, new country, new system, new environment ... try to find a job. Doesn't matter what that job is. Once you find a job, then look at for better opportunities. This is how you progress." CL10*

Others emphasised having strong passions and clearly defined goals to sustain them in their long journey to desired employment.

*I would say, and I say this to a lot of people, until you don't ask, until you don't express your feelings and your wish and your dreams, nobody will knock your door, even your husband or your family, to say that, oh, you want this one? Come do this! You've got to ask for it, you got to push for it as well, right? So for me, I had that ... I had the guts to ask and push for it as well. And I did fail many, many, many time, still I'm failing. But I tried. And I tried. And most of them, I guess worked, in their own space and influences. CL8*

*So do what you want to do. Do what you love to do. And then you're gonna, you're gonna love it, you're gonna find a job. If you love it, you're gonna find. If you love it, you're gonna study. ... Any refugee people, just encourage them to do that. Just encourage them to do anything that they can do. Study, work, volunteer, introduce themselves to someone else, introduce themselves to organisations. Don't stop. Don't stop. R19*

# Chapter summary

Refugees employ a variety of strategies to seek employment with quite varying amounts of success. They pursue formal pathways into employment, sending resumes and cover letters to apply for jobs advertised on job-search websites. They also use informal channels, such as asking around and walking in to workplaces to apply directly. Though they are generally advised, assisted or compelled to pursue formal pathways, they are generally more successful through these informal methods.

Most engage in further education as a pathway into employment, partly on the advice of service providers, even though many are sceptical that this is a strategy that repays the time, money and effort it requires.

Volunteering and self-employment are other pathways into employment that are attractive to many refugees but they generally tend to require more support to access such opportunities than is often available to them.

When asked about the personal qualities they see as valuable to successfully navigating the labour market, refugees stress the need for persistence, flexibility and clearly defined goals. These attitudes are crucial to sustaining them on a journey toward satisfying employment that is longer and more precarious than many had hoped it would be.





# 4. What Goes Wrong: Barriers and Obstacles to Employment

In this chapter, we detail the barriers that refugees face in looking for work. The barriers our interviewees highlighted are substantially those identified by earlier research, though we argue below that most of them appear in quite a different light when seen from the perspective of refugees themselves. The most commonly talked about barriers were of an objective and practical character – issues such as inadequate English skills or a lack of local work experience – though refugees also highlighted more subjective and psychological issues, such as unfamiliarity with local norms around seeking employment and the lack or loss of confidence in job seeking.

In what follows we move from the more commonly highlighted objective issues to those of a less prominent, more subjective character. We begin with a discussion of the ‘Catch-22’ that refugees often describe in relation to employment and language-learning, wherein each seems to require the other. The second-most common barrier identified by refugees was the lack of local experience and qualifications, and the seeming valuelessness of overseas experience and qualifications in the Australian labour market. Turning to more subjective issues, refugees and community leaders often spoke about a mismatch between their expectations about job seeking and aspects of the Australian labour market, such as the place of certification in job seeking and the role of the state in relation to the jobseeker. Finally we turn to psychological issues such as the loss or lack of confidence which at times subverts refugee jobseekers’ efforts to find employment.

## 4.1 English learning and employment: a ‘Catch-22’ problem

***The 100 hours [of language instruction] I didn’t finish. I spent about two three weeks, maybe two or three weeks on and then I moved to work. But when you talk to people, English becomes better. R10***

One young woman we interviewed came to Australia from Iraq early in 2019. She was in her late 20s at the time and had attended the 500 hours of English classes which were provided for free at the time, and then enrolled in further English courses. Nearly two years later, we were interviewing her through an interpreter and she was frustrated and unemployed. She is an enthusiastic baker and wanted to pursue a vocational qualification as a pastry chef but her English was not good enough for TAFE to enrol her in the relevant course and she was unable to get a job for the same reason. She was highly frustrated with this sense of being ‘stuck’ inside a classroom that was not helping her. From her point of view, it made more sense to pursue employment first and pick up language that way.

***I believe that if I start work, it will be better opportunity to learn language through communication with other people then from studying in a course at TAFE. So they don’t allow us to work because we don’t have language, and we want to improve language through work. So like that’s Catch-22. R12***

Another Iraqi refugee struggling with this issue is a teacher who came to Australia in 2016 and who, after years of classes, was still needing an interpreter to speak to us. Her story illustrates another aspect of the problem. She came to Australia with two young children and was asked if she felt child- caring responsibilities were interfering with her ability to learn English. She replied, however, that neither the classes, nor fitting them around her caring responsibilities, were the real issue. Rather, as the interpreter explained for her:

***Because the vast majority of people she meets are people who speak Arabic, they don't speak English. And she's worried that she might forget the English language ...this means that ... focusing on speaking is very important. R6***

Nearly all studies on refugee employment highlight the fact that refugees with poor English struggle to find employment. What is less well recognised is that the lack of employment itself for many contributes to difficulties learning English. As the stories of these two women illustrate, language classes are for many refugees a highly ineffective way to learn English.

Like the aspiring Iraqi pastry-chef, many people struggle to gain a functional command of English through language classes and even other kinds of formal instruction. Many refugees spoke about it being easier to learn English more organically through immersion in English-speaking environments. For most adult migrants, this kind of regular social interaction with native speakers is chiefly available through workplaces.

***I feel like I am improving in my language with customers, I am improving my skills...you know how you need good skills to communicate with people even as well as colleagues. R8***

***So while at work, the whole day I speak, I listen to English. And I felt that I have improved during this time. When I first came, my English skill was just zero. I just few words, but now I feel I'm learning more at work. R35***

***I think it's better to teach the people how to communicate with others. It's not about Grammar. ... because we need to, to talk with other people. Yeah, that's what I mean. ... And something not do it now and to forget it when we go out the class ... R37***

This causes particular problems for those who, like the Iraqi teacher described above, live in areas where they are more likely to encounter speakers of their native language than native English speakers. Refugees tend to seek out others from similar backgrounds for mutual support. This has social and psychological benefits, but it also means that many end up living in areas where English is not encountered often enough to facilitate language learning. Many refugees highlighted that, even if they felt they were benefiting from classes, the lack of opportunity to practice what they learned there held back their language acquisition.

***Yes, this is this is the main problem. We live here for example, in Liverpool, most of people are talking Arabic. R5***

***Here with the family and with our family friends, and they all speak Arabic together or Assyrian. And my children, they started speaking, their language develop. Of course, I can't speak with the English with them. R35***

***I: Ah. ... it sounds like you found you didn't have much opportunity to practice your English outside of the class?***

***H: Yes, yes. Yes. Especially when your family and all your friends or all your friends around you talking Arabic. So it's ... there is no chance to practice yours. R37***

This is a problem across the refugee community but affects women in particular, who tend to lag behind male refugees in language acquisition metrics.<sup>7</sup> The refugees cited above are nearly all women. Women, by dint of caring commitments for children, and often for older relatives as well, are more likely to spend a greater portion of their time within non-English speaking environments. Even when they do work, it is often part-time or casual employment that lends itself less well to immersive language acquisition.

Many service providers and community leaders made similar observations and were, as a consequence, quite critical of the formal instruction-driven approach to language learning that currently prevails in the settlement sector. They pointed out that this focus on formal language instruction was failing many refugees who were simply not learning English in this way.<sup>8</sup>

***I had many complaints about the English language ... the teaching ... they put them in one room who speak the same language, most of the times they communicate in Arabic, and they have no chance of learning English properly. Yeah, they get sick of it ... and they have to be forced to attend this lessons. CL5***

***A lot of people ... they have not learned language at school, and they don't understand why they need to go to school, at the age of 50, or at the age of 60 when they arrive in Australia. They don't understand it, you know. They feel that it's too late to go to school, a lot of people feel it's too late to go to school. Now, it's not time, you know? CL9***

***We give priority to the language, English language, then to employment. So language comes first, while in theory, that's right. In practice, it's not ... all of the people I know, who came as a refugee, that start working, when they start being able to say "hello, how are you?" ... then they start, they learned most of the English from the employment setting. CL11***

Not everyone benefits from being rushed into employment, however. Professionally trained refugees, in particular, face a somewhat different set of issues around language and employment.

The Iraqi teacher described above is married to a man who was a journalist in Iraq. He had been working at a Woolworths supermarket for some years by the time of his interview for this project. Like many professionally trained refugees, his problem was not so much that he couldn't speak English at all. Indeed, he spoke with the ready eloquence of a skilled journalist in spite of the limitations of his vocabulary. However, he lacked the kind of language skills that were essential to pursuing employment more aligned with his professional experience, whether in journalism or another field that would utilise his communications background. As he himself put it.

***It's easy to get any language but what my goal is the really language. If I entered with you any for example a policy discussion or so I can transfer my idea I can make you to believe what I believe ... this is my goal. At my level I can't. R5***

For this journalist, the author of several books who could boast a decade's experience in editorial positions, a highly accomplished command of language was what he needed – and his job, far from facilitating this, actively hindered his opportunities to further his English language skills.



*They told me when I start work my language improve faster. Yeah, this is what I thought and what they told me, but I found that it's not ... because ... when I was in Navitas I was talked with my teacher for a long time and discussion many things and we take many new meaning ... When I work now ... I haven't talked anymore with the people just shelving something ... So coming down my language is coming down R5*

His attempts to improve his English by enrolling in more advanced language classes is now, ironically, hampered by his work schedule, as he has experienced difficulty rearranging his shifts so as to be able to attend classes.

The obvious lesson to be drawn from this is that language learning assistance, as with so many other things, needs to be better tailored to suit individual circumstances. As one service-provider eloquently suggests.

*Personally, I think, it should take a two pronged approach, you know. The English language should be for those who are skilled. They should be streamed, and it should focus on them learning language relevant to the industry that they want to go back into. And for those who unskilled, you know three weeks after they arrive here, three weeks to about three months into the settlement journey, place them, you know, into employment, and they will pick up the language eventually. SP2*

Obviously, this idea of streaming purely by former profession is a somewhat crude suggestion that could easily inhibit refugee aspirations for career change or development in Australia. However, the idea of having several different approaches to language and employment that case managers could sensitively 'stream' their clients into after gaining a more detailed understanding of their needs, disposition and career ambitions is a worthwhile approach to consider.

### **In summary**

*The relationship between language-learning and employment needs to be rethought. Language-learning is often seen as a pre-requisite for employment. However, classroom-based language learning is for many refugees, for the reasons raised above, fairly ineffective. While classroom learning is suitable to some refugees, others would prefer to learn language organically, in workplace settings, and many struggle to learn it in classroom settings, getting stuck in a Catch-22 where they cannot find work because of their language skills and cannot improve their language skills because they are not able to find work. This problem affects different kinds of refugees differently; women are particularly markedly affected by these issues because of expectations that they will spend more of their time in community settings where English is not commonly encountered. Professionally qualified refugees, on the other hand, often need a specialised kind of language to further their employment goals, which they are unlikely to acquire in most workplace settings.*

## **4.2 Recognition of overseas experience and qualifications**

***Nobody cares about your overseas qualifications, education and experience. R24***

Next to issues around language skills, the lack of local Australian experience and qualifications were the most often mentioned practical barriers to employment faced by refugees. Again, this matches a finding common in many other studies of refugee employment. However, it is important to note

that, from the point of view of many refugees, the actual issue here is not only that they lack local experience and qualifications but that employers fail to recognise and value the experience and qualifications they do have.

Many, after all, are highly skilled workers with a wealth of experience in their fields which they, reasonably enough, feel ought to count for something in the Australian job market. Their experience, unfortunately, is often that it counts for very little indeed.

***I was expecting when I arrive my experience will be recognised, and I will work in the nursing field in Australia. I tried to find a job, but I couldn't succeed in being approved for a job as an assistant pharmacy. It makes me frustrated. I tried everything to get a job, but I couldn't. R16***

***My cousin in Melbourne is a very good electrician. Before coming to Australia, he maintained all Abu Dhabi airport in the United Arab Emirates. And here they didn't allow him even to install a switch. Because he does not have this paper [i.e. Australian trade certification]. R17***

***When you are applying for a job in here, local experience is very important to find a job. ... The government doesn't pay attention to your educational and professional background and they ask you to start from scratch ... nobody cares to use of the expertise and education of new arrivals. R24***

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 under valued in fact represents a kind of discrimination.

***Discrimination is the fire under the ash in Australia. Discrimination is a big problem, and it is undisclosed and hidden, but you feel it and it is real.... When you submit a job application, you feel the discrimination against your age, ethnicity, background, language and gender. But of course, they will not say it to your face...R20***

***But overall, during that process, I found that where you come from, it actually plays a role as well. Even your name, you can be identified by your name. I have many friends who have actually changed their names, at least they could not be picked up just by their names. R26***

It is unlikely that many employers explicitly and consciously discriminate against refugee job applicants simply on the basis that they are refugees. However, there is a sense in which the refugees who feel like this do have a point.

Even in the absence of explicit discrimination or conscious hostility on the part of potential employers, migrant job seekers are often treated differently. Refugee job seekers experience the same types of discrimination faced by many other job applicants whose appearance, religious affiliation, country of origin or cultural background are seen by employers as in some way problematic. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that refugees, just like these other groups, are correct when they see themselves being treated differently in the labour market.

The refusal to take seriously refugee jobseekers' overseas qualifications and experience is one major way this kind of discriminatory treatment manifests. One can imagine that certain kinds of employers might have legitimate concerns about the extent to which overseas experience might translate directly to Australia – for instance, due to the different standards, regulations, expectations, requirements and culture surrounding particular forms of work. Most refugees would

themselves readily agree that they need to adjust what they know to the Australian context and, as we saw in previous chapters, they go to some trouble to acquire this 'local' knowledge (recall, for instance, the university trained accountants who did vocational study at TAFE to learn about Australian tax law).

However, the almost complete and universal devaluing of the qualifications, skills and experience that migrants bring with them, demands for local experience and certification, and the expectation of fluent English in jobs that may not in fact require it, are forms of indirect or systemic discrimination. They are not based on a reasonable evaluation of refugees' actual skills and abilities but rather on a widespread feeling that anything foreign – be it a qualification or a resume item listing relevant experience – is less valuable than the local equivalent. Further, if such qualifications and experiences are less valuable, then so are the employees who hold them. Refugees are right, then, to say that this is discrimination against them on the basis of who they are and where they've come from, even if it is not based on negative attitudes to their particular ethnicity.

Even skilled permanent migrants, who have in fact been awarded a visa on the basis of existing qualifications in areas in high demand in the labour market, are sometimes unable to find a job that matches their qualifications. A recent CEDA study found that almost a quarter of permanent skilled migrants in Australia are working in a job beneath the skill level for which they were given a visa, including 13 per cent of employer-sponsored migrants.<sup>9</sup> As with refugees, these migrants cited lack of local experience and English language difficulties as the main obstacles to finding suitable work.

The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. Arguably, an employer who excludes suitable job applicants on the basis that they lack

local experience or qualifications would be in breach of article 9 (1A) of the Act, which deals with the indirect discrimination that results from requiring a person to comply with a condition or requirement which has the effect of disadvantaging certain groups more than others. The existence of such legal protections has, however, not been sufficient to prevent this kind of largely unconscious bias against migrant job applicants. This kind of discrimination needs to be taken into account in the delivery of support for refugee job seekers. If we acknowledge the presence of this kind of discrimination, some of the strategies refugees are encouraged by service providers to pursue begin to look more questionable. For instance, we might wonder if refugees with professional qualifications are well served by the focus on formal recognition of qualifications, which is often a prominent feature of policy discussion and service delivery.

Recognition of professional qualifications is, in Australia, often governed by professional associations, who impose on their overseas professional peers very costly, time consuming and difficult processes for having their qualifications recognised in Australia. Many of the professionally qualified refugees we spoke to had therefore, often on the advice of settlement service providers, dedicated what sometimes amounted to years of their life to clearing the hurdles to having their qualifications recognised.

We spoke to many refugees who had engaged in heroic efforts to get their qualifications recognised, or spent many years acquiring local qualifications they hoped would pave their way back into their former professions. A Syrian dentist we interviewed had arrived in 2016 and was still trying to save enough money to finish his dental accreditation; a Syrian eye surgeon had arrived in 2017 and, even with help from a settlement organisation to subsidise the process, was still working her way through her medical accreditation exams; an Iraqi surveyor and building supervisor arrived in 2017 and,

having had his qualifications recognised, was advised to complete further study in order to be competitive for Australian positions. All these people had decades of experience in their respective fields and had thus far spent their time in Australia unemployed and frustrated.

Years were also passing as they pursued these goals and these professionals were getting on in life. The youngest of the refugees described above – the eye surgeon – was in her mid-40s. Speaking to them, it was difficult not to wonder whether, even if they eventually did obtain formal recognition, they would not still find employers reluctant to put faith in their qualifications and give them a chance ahead of other, younger candidates with local experience, better English and no large gaps in their resumes. Some of the refugees we spoke to had, in fact, precisely this experience. An Iraqi chemical engineer, for example, had obtained his qualifications, but was now working as an Uber Eats delivery driver. The dentist mentioned above, on the other hand, was more confident about his prospects. He pointed out that, failing all else, he could open a private practice.

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.

***Normally when you go and start working for a company, all right, they generally don't ask whether you have the Engineers Australia recognition or not, they don't ask about it. No, in reality, they don't. But you just do it just because you want to lose some money, maybe. In reality it doesn't work. R36***

***it's hard because engineering was my passion to do ... But I'm a very realistic person. Learning from other professionals that came to Australia. I have noticed, for example, the doctors came with the mentality that I was the doctor, I was an engineer, I was a professor, I want to have ... the same role, the same position. So keep them all behind. They're staying at home, they're tired, they haven't achieved anything. CL12***

### **In summary**

***In having their skills, qualifications and overseas experience so consistently and dramatically devalued by potential employers, refugees face a form of systemic discrimination in the labour market. The existence of this discrimination should be frankly acknowledged by service providers and careful thought needs to be given to the value of certain kinds of employment pathways in light of it – particularly the arduous pursuit of formal qualification recognition. At the very least, refugees should be forearmed with accurate information about the probable value of such recognition for them personally, which will vary greatly from profession to profession, and even from person to person. More broadly, the problem of discrimination in the labour market needs to be more explicitly acknowledged and tackled in both policy development and service provision.***

## **4.3 An unfamiliar labour market environment**

One thing that greatly complicates refugees attempts to find employment are the differences between the ways the labour market worked in their home countries and the way it operates in Australia. These differences lead to a host of difficulties, frustration and confusion, and often to a great deal of wasted time for refugee jobseekers. The less proactive

involvement of the state in labour markets, the higher emphasis on credentialisation, and the greater need for jobseekers to 'market' themselves to an employer by way of such mechanisms as cover letters and interviews stood out as major differences that cause confusion and delay in finding work in Australia.

Many refugees reflected on being accustomed to a quite different labour market in which governments play a more proactive role in assisting unemployed people to find employment. In fact, this seems at times to lead refugees to take a more passive stance towards the organisations tasked with assisting them than is really in their best interests, in the mistaken understanding that these agencies will 'find them a job,' as opposed to merely helping them look for one.

***They think someone is going to grab them and say yes, you were a doctor in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere. Come here there is a program to change your knowledge to suit whatever the health requirements are here, or the medical practice here. But it is not. You have to go and find your way. You have to pay the fees. It is up to you ...*** CL3

*It is not like here. When I graduated from the university the government hired me in a place. It is a bit complicated, but the things are going like that in my country.* R37

*They call and ask what you want, what kind of job but they don't later find me any suitable job ... even I called them and asked if they can find me a position as a volunteer and even that they didn't provide. Didn't secure any position as a volunteer for me.* R12

***I heard those places, they're supposed to look for a job for us. They are paid to find a job for us. My question is: they're not finding me a job. They telling me to go find a job myself. They're not helping to find a job. If I'm supposed to go and look for a job myself, why I'm going to them?*** R28

Others were bemused and frustrated by the tendency of Australian employers to demand specific credentials, even for quite basic jobs. Many refugees, especially the more highly qualified ones, believed that their professional or educational qualifications would self-evidently allow them to perform less skilled work and often felt confused or offended when they were told they would need a TAFE certificate or similar to be considered for relatively unskilled positions.

***I thought, I have a social science degree and a lot of community development background. I can get a job without a community services certificate.*** R1

*Because the regulations and requirements are ridiculous in here. Let's say they [employers] want a worker in office work and community services. Even if you are a doctor, they will not accept you. They say we want someone who understands community services. Maybe they will accept someone who has a TAFE certificate in the community services, but they will refuse a medical doctor. They are ridiculous in depth.* R20

Both refugees and community leaders also noted that notions such as resumes and cover letters, and the whole apparatus of selling yourself to a potential employer, were unfamiliar and presented another real obstacle in navigating the job market.



*But the main difference between Syria and Australia is here you have to sell yourself. You have to talk more about yourself. But back in Syria, we didn't do that. We just presented our qualifications and certificates and got the job. We didn't do that as talking, making professional resume or doing lot of these things. R25*

*I came to Australia when I was 31, yeah? So I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to start. So I remember ... I took my resume ... and you laugh at my resume when I just came here ... I never give that job to that resume ... I took that, I went to the city, to one of the biggest building you can imagine, that's a multinational company ... I went to the HR department, I said, "This is my resume. Give me a job." ...You know, so that means I didn't know where to start from. CL2*

*So, the resume notion, the cover letter notion, they are all almost non-existent in Iraq, almost non-existent. We know that there is there is something called CV in Iraq. But not many people know it... CL9*

## **In summary**

Many of these observations are actually fairly sensible critiques of the Australian labour market and the forms of support provided to jobseekers. Refugees are not entirely wrong when they say that our labour market often has more jobseekers than there are jobs in any given field, that its preoccupation with credentials often seems perverse even to older native-born Australians, who grew up in more flexible labour market, that the government's decision to contract job seeking assistance out to private providers has tended to produce 'assistance' that is both expensive and ineffective, and that this places responsibility for finding employment almost entirely on the shoulders of the jobseekers themselves. However, being right about all these things does nothing to help refugees navigate our admittedly peculiar labour market and employment support systems. Instead, their difficulties in so doing present yet another obstacle to finding work in Australia.





#### 4.4 Psychological barriers – failure, loss of confidence and stigma

***To be honest, I don't have a high hope anymore and I am no longer ambitious compared to the time when I arrived in Australia. I think I am now just looking for a normal job to work in an office environment [i.e. office work]. R24***

The years of rejection and lack of success take their toll. One hears it in the voice of, for instance, a woman who had worked as a teller in an Iraqi bank and had genuinely enjoyed being in customer service, interacting with and helping people. She came to Australia in 2017, and at the time:

***I had had that thought and idea to find the job in the same field, in a bank. But then I discovered that it wasn't easy to do that. It wasn't easy. I need to study, I needed qualifications from here, from Australia. Needed language and citizenship. So I changed my mind after that because of those challenges. R35***

But she didn't change her mind right away. At first, she undertook a TAFE certificate in business administration in the hope of resuming her work as a bank teller. This was no mean feat given her poor English (four years after her arrival, she was still speaking to us through an interpreter.) The interviewer asks: did she complete her certificate? Yes, she did. And did she then try to find a job as a teller? No, she didn't. The interviewer is confused by this reply and, thinking perhaps there's a translation problem, asks a follow-up: given how arduous getting the certificate was, why not at least try and make use of it? The woman sighs as she replies:

***You know what I tried after that ... I applied to Big W, Woolworths, Coles. Just in customer service, in sales, just to tidy up, to put things back to the places, just simple things. And still all the applications were unsuccessful. In any of them. So, imagine if I applied for bank ... R35***

Like many refugees, she was a persistent woman who did not give up on finding work, and had in fact recently secured a work experience placement through a settlement service provider when we spoke to her – her first job in nearly four years. But, as for many, the years of rejection and failure had taken a toll on her confidence and self esteem. The first victim of this loss of confidence was the job she actually wanted. So impossible did it seem to get a job as a teller by the time she finished her course that she did not even try applying. The other victim was her demeanour, her confidence in the workplace. By the time she is undergoing training for her work experience placement, it is obvious to those around her:

***I think they noticed that I was shy a bit. And they so I think that's why they put me with a team, like some of them are Iraqis. R35***

The bank teller's experience is unfortunately a very common one. The accumulated sense of failure and disappointment due to years of unemployment itself tends to become a barrier to seeking employment – a vicious cycle that traps people in long term unemployment.

This is a dynamic which unfortunately tends to be exacerbated by Centrelink requirements. Unless they are undertaking study or a limited number of other suitable activities, a jobseeker registered with a Jobactive provider is required, under the mutual obligations regime, to be actively seeking work in order to maintain their

eligibility for government assistance. 'Actively seeking work' is usually defined as applying for 20 jobs a month. Refugees are usually granted a temporary exemption from this requirement on arrival to give them time to settle into life in Australia.

We did not, as a matter of course, ask refugees how many jobs they had applied for since coming to Australia. However, just hypothetically speaking, a refugee who arrived in 2017 might begin 'actively seeking work' in 2018, roughly a year after their arrival. At 20 jobs a month, by the start of 2019, they have perhaps applied (and been turned down) for 240 jobs. By the start of 2020, they have applied for and been turned down for nearly 500. It is not hard to see how this process might wear on the confidence of even the most determined jobseeker.

Refugees rarely give up on the idea of working altogether, but many describe the gradual loss of confidence that they will ever work in their original careers. Some also describe the general sense of intimidation, fear and 'shyness' that begins to accumulate around the idea of employment.

***Because after being disappointed and frustrated from not finding a job, I stopped looking for such job opportunities [in his original career] ... This is because I tried for two or three years and then I stopped ... when we arrived, I was hopeful and optimistic that I would find a job and start working but this optimism starts to diminish or dwindle after a few years of arriving. R15***

***Let me be frank with you. I feel that jobs make people feel scared. I was really scared. I have like a horror. Yes believe me, I am now 62 years old. I feel that I hesitate if someone was there to give me a job. I would hesitate to go ... R3***

***My brothers ... I thought it was like a bit, they are scared about some things, they are not like pushing themselves to get kind of job, they are shy, they are scared. I have no idea ... it's like they are willing to get something but they are shy to show their self. R33***

Community leaders also often described these dynamics and shed light on the ways they compound and are compounded by the trauma of displacement and resettlement, leading people to abandon their careers and the hope of good, fulfilling work.

***I've seen some young people also comes here, they really enthusiastic they want to pursue their future here. ... But then they slam again when they come to apply for work and they got all this rejection and rejection impacted on them. Because these are refugees, they come through a lot of trauma to arrive here. So any ... like a rejection is another kind of trauma on them. Because what's wrong with me? My self esteem goes to zero. I'm not capable to do this. CL4***

***Because there's so many hurdles, like many people just give up. I know, many engineers and doctors who give up. ... And if anything comes up, then they take it. And they just forget their profession. CL5***

***When you come to a new culture and get rejected a few times it gets difficult. Especially when some people just say "Forget about it mate, you can't get a job here, you don't have local education, you don't have local experience. You came from a war torn country and expect to get a good job – forget about it". And if you put negative thoughts with a few rejections, it can be a disaster, and the guy will just forget about it. CL13***

Informants also drew attention to the ways some groups are uniquely vulnerable to this kind of loss of confidence, highlighting especially that

women, older refugees and professionals face particular issues in this area.

Women were often described as lacking, or more quickly losing, confidence in their own potential to work, in part due to gender norms in their home countries that discourage a confident and assertive stance towards employment.

***For women who came from Afghanistan in the past 10 or 20 years, there is a huge gap in terms of their literacy level. If they can speak, read and write English, they don't have the experience to be able to work in here... Or if they have all of them, they don't have that self-esteem. CL8***

***I think I can talk about women from my area. Women are less confident. So maybe because of the situation back home, or male domination in their country of origin ... They are less confident. And that is why I think that it is more important to work with them to build their confidence. CL10***

Older refugees (and here we are often talking of people over 40, rather than those on the cusp of retirement) also tended to be seen as being more prone to give up on themselves as workers, particularly in response to perceived age discrimination or their failure to rebuild their former lives and careers.

***Many times, I say if I came here earlier, maybe when I was younger, it will be a very big difference ... You have ... more opportunities ... when you are younger. So everyone when you are old, they prefer to hire younger people. And when you are younger, you have the mind that you can work anything, there is no barriers or no mental image for what you did in the past... Now as my son, he is start working in KFC ... So there is no problem for him. But for me in this age, maybe there is barriers, there is ... do you know what I mean? R37***

Professionals often face the added psychological difficulty that the jobs most readily available to them in Australia are low skilled and low status occupations that are often seen as humiliating, shameful and stigmatising in the eyes of their community.

*I think this is an issue in our Middle Eastern culture. If you worked for a long time in an occupation that you know it very well and you have special prestige of your occupation, you can't work in less than. It could be a little less, but not too much less from your former professional career. Let's say if you are a doctor, it is a shame in your community to work as a construction worker or in a restaurant. This is shameful. You will be stigmatised. R20*

*The first two years in Australia for me was the most depressing time. All my dreams and expectations crashed to the ground. I wanted to go back home even though it was dangerous but at least I had my respect and my professional dignity. Everyone at home was asking me what I was doing here, and I couldn't tell them that I was working in a factory. It was very embarrassing. CL13*

*I have this experience when someone who is qualified and wants to work in their area but they couldn't find the job and then they feel shame and stigma. I have some experience working with them and when they found a job, they say ah this is a bit lower job, I have never done that before. I believe that some of them think that their community will think about them why they are doing this lower job... CL14*

This does not mean, of course, that professionally qualified refugees in fact turn down jobs they consider shameful. The vast majority of those we spoke to emphasised their willingness to do any kind of work and many of those who were working had in fact taken jobs for which they were vastly overqualified. Rather, we should see that these are not desirable employment

outcomes from their points of view but instead ones that contribute further to a loss of confidence and sense of worthlessness as concerns employment.

### **In summary**

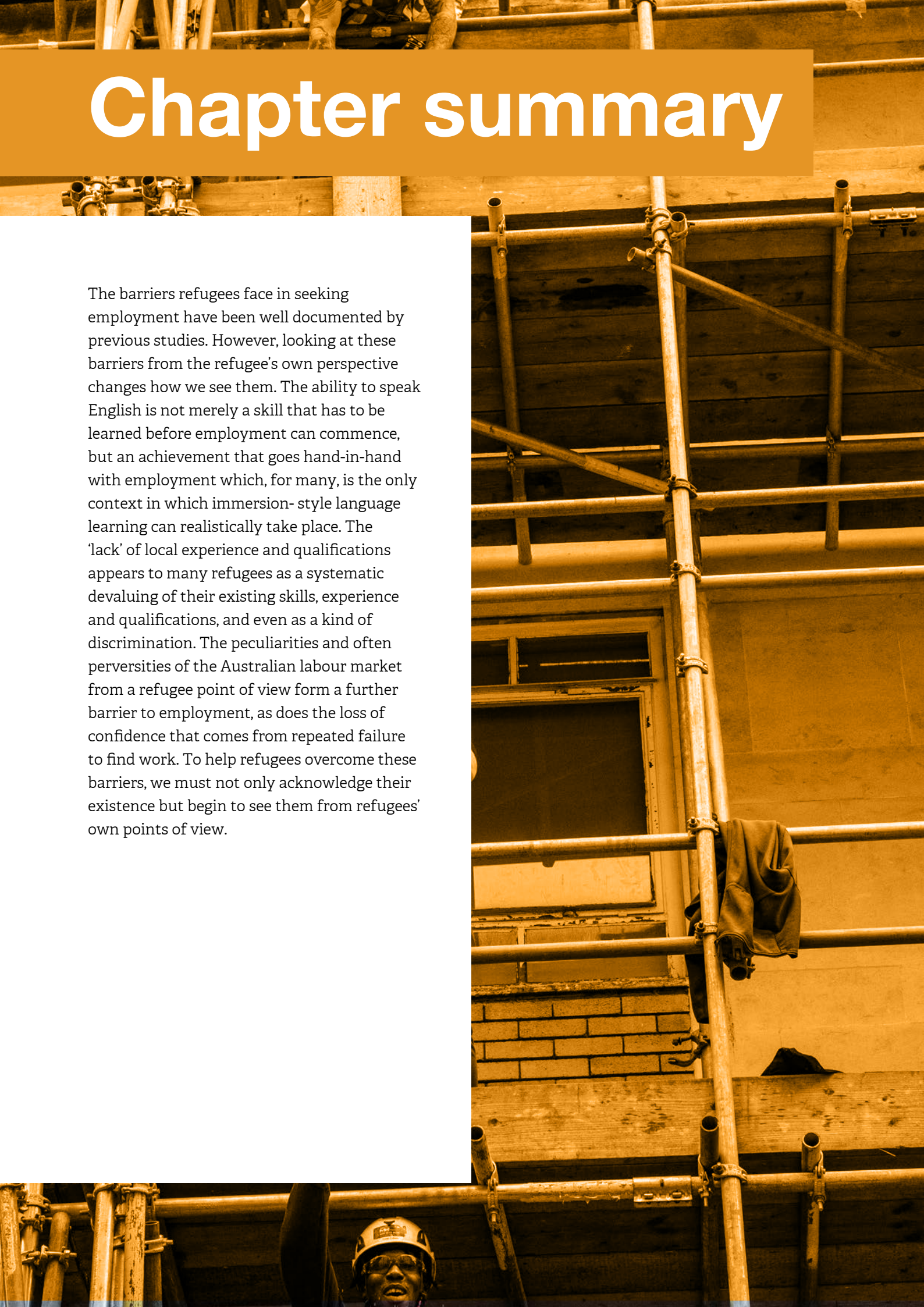
*As this section demonstrates, barriers to employment can be psychological as well as material. Years of unemployment can understandably lead to a loss of confidence in oneself and giving up on resuming one's former career, finding truly satisfying work or indeed in finding employment at all. Women and older refugees seem particularly vulnerable to this kind of loss of confidence in themselves as productive workers. Professionally qualified refugees, on the other hand, often experience this loss of confidence as a consequence of having to abandon their chosen profession or work in fields which they consider shameful.*

*Skilful service provision to refugees experiencing long term unemployment therefore involves as much restoring their confidence in themselves as it does helping them in more material ways. Unfortunately, the current regime of mutual obligation tends instead to reinforce the tendency for refugees to lose confidence in themselves by forcing them to subject themselves to literally hundreds of rejections every year.*



# Chapter summary

The barriers refugees face in seeking employment have been well documented by previous studies. However, looking at these barriers from the refugee's own perspective changes how we see them. The ability to speak English is not merely a skill that has to be learned before employment can commence, but an achievement that goes hand-in-hand with employment which, for many, is the only context in which immersion- style language learning can realistically take place. The 'lack' of local experience and qualifications appears to many refugees as a systematic devaluing of their existing skills, experience and qualifications, and even as a kind of discrimination. The peculiarities and often perversities of the Australian labour market from a refugee point of view form a further barrier to employment, as does the loss of confidence that comes from repeated failure to find work. To help refugees overcome these barriers, we must not only acknowledge their existence but begin to see them from refugees' own points of view.



# 5. Seeking Help: Forms of Support Available to Refugees and their Experiences with Accessing Assistance

The forms of support available to refugee jobseekers vary quite widely but may be divided into three main categories.

First, most refugees tend to have some engagement with the employment support provided through the Jobactive system, as this is a compulsory condition of receiving Centrelink welfare payments. Jobactive providers offer a generalist service that tends to deal with refugee jobseekers much as it does with other unemployed Australians, and has tended to have a relatively poor record assisting them into employment.

Many refugees also seek help from settlement service agencies and other non-government organisations which offer more specialised forms of employment support targeted specifically to refugees and their unique needs. There is a great diversity of models in this sector and the extent to which refugees are aware of these opportunities varies considerably; some have extensive experience with multiple such forms of support, others are not even aware it exists.

Finally, there is assistance provided by informal social networks of friends, family and other acquaintances, which often centre within the refugee community itself, which is a frequent source of advice, support and even employment opportunities. Not all the informal

relationships refugees sought assistance through were necessarily with others from their own ethnic background but many refugees clearly relied at least initially on their ethnic community for this kind of assistance, not least because of poor on-arrival English skills.

## 5.1 The Jobactive model

***Honestly they haven't done anything for me. Only they made my anxiety worse and put a pressure and stress on me without giving me a good result. ... My problem is this job seeker company. They know about my physical problems. They know that I have all these issues. And they know that, because of that, I am not capable to work. But they still are forcing me to find a job. R28***

One of our interviewees was in his late 50s when he came to Australia from Iran. A chemical engineer by training, he left behind a prestigious and accomplished career which included running a major industrial company responsible for much of Iran's



domestic fertiliser production. He spoke of his accomplishments as a scientist, engineer, manager and entrepreneur with evident pride.

***I was very proud of what we're doing. Instead of having an import from the other places, we could produce it in our own country, and they can use it. So I was very proud of my job. R40***

Keen to start contributing to his new country, he started looking for work soon after arriving and was sent in due course to a Jobactive provider, who promptly sent him to a restaurant to wash dishes.

***I attended a few employment centre, that's where from Centrelink anyway ... The only job you can get from them was washing the dishes. Don't get me wrong. I'm not opposed to wash the dishes. If I work in a restaurant, I can manage the dishwashing capacity very easily, and it's not the issue. But even though when they offer me twice in this time, they offered me two jobs. It was only for one week, lasted only for one week. I was very hard working, I did my best to keep me in this job, and I want to keep going. But unfortunately, those jobs were not given to me at the end. R40***

To add insult to injury, this highly accomplished man felt the staff at the agency he attended treated him with contempt and made no serious effort to assist him.

***Each time that I went because of my age, because of the attitude toward me, it was like a joke. The attitude toward me is, like I said something funny or ... they were not very serious about what I was telling them so the approach was always like, not taking me seriously. R40***

These experiences took place in the early 2010s. In the intervening years the Jobactive model has been fiercely criticised as both ineffective and humiliating for refugees.<sup>10</sup> In

fairness to Jobactive providers, more recently arrived refugees seem to report a somewhat improved state of affairs. For example, a Syrian ophthalmologist (eye surgeon) who came to Australia in 2017 encountered a more respectful attitude in her more recent dealings with Jobactive.

***There is a programme called work for the dole to help us to experience some work and in Australia ... there was some work I did, I wasn't happy with ... and I asked them to, to change this for me and they change it. They were understanding.***

***Interviewer: Okay, that's nice. And so what didn't you like about the [work]?***

***Um, you know, when you were working for long years in another domain, you will feel yourself as a kindergarten student. Yeah, I wasn't happy. And like, I wasn't accept this idea. I was happy to do real work not to do something like just make me feel that my self-estimate is very limited. I don't know. Yeah, I wasn't happy with that. But other than that, they understand us, and they try to do R25***

The way the Jobactive provider responded here is commendable, and seems to represent a real change in approach. This refugee was also happy with the way the provider had facilitated her study to qualify as a doctor again in Australia. However, on the whole, the assistance she was provided with did not really connect well to her own career ambitions.

She had come to Australia on her own and with teenage children, and starting again in medicine was a distant goal. In the meantime, she hoped to work as an administrator in a medical centre or something of that kind. In pursuit of this goal, she tried to use her Jobactive placements to acquire local experience as an administrator but was rebuffed.

*But working with dole my problem is just with this program because ... the manager, when was working with the dole, she insists me to go to the church, as I told you. And when I was there, I thought that I will be an admin there or something like that, but after a while, they said to me, no, you have to be in the kitchen. So I said to them, I can work as admin, and I know there is like spot for me. But they refuse. R25*

For all that the personal attitudes of Jobactive providers seem to have improved somewhat in the five years separating these two stories, the fundamental problems remained the same: both these refugees were sent to work in jobs that they were not well suited to, that did not seriously engage with their own sense of what they might be able to do in Australia and that did not ultimately lead to employment.

Neither of these people was being in any way unreasonable in their attitude; the chemical engineer did not expect to skyrocket into senior management and the eye surgeon was not demanding a medical practice be made available to her. These people simply wanted ongoing work of some kind that was matched in some way to their skills, interests and capabilities. The Jobactive model failed them in these regards – neither had ever secured employment through the system.

Of the three forms of employment support refugees encountered, the Jobactive system was by far the most negatively evaluated by both refugees and other informants. The experiences people had were, at worst, humiliating, stressful and inappropriate and at best rendered useless by the provider's complete inability or unwillingness to actively assist refugees with complex needs. A lack of recognition or indifference to clients' limitations or preferences stand out in these stories. So, in fact, does the general inability of Jobactive providers to actually help clients get work of any kind, and their consequent tendency to waste both clients' and employers' time.

*One day also I remember that Job Active set me to a cleaning job. I told them already , I don't think a cleaning job is a very hard job.. it's a good job, a good service. But I am not eligible to do this job ... They said if I don't set you to this job I shall lose my place at Job Active. I went to Bankstown for the session as a cleaner ... and they spoke about using this heavy machine. ... When she described what they have to do cleaning schools with this machine I raise my hand and told her. I cannot do the job; I don't have the ability and I have a problem with my back and my qualification is as a civil engineer. She asked my why I am coming here. Who sent you to us" I told them the Job active sent me to them. R3*

*The things is, they find a job for example, meat packing or those sorts of things. And I'd already told them I don't have any problem. I can do everything. But please, I prefer to have truck driving jobs and those sorts of things. They're making appointments each month that I have to go visit them. And it's still nothing has happened. R27*

*So whatever is happening, nobody does anything you just you. It's you who are looking for a job is you are searching; is you who are calling. So to be honest, they have they have done nothing. They just they provided you with the computer; otherwise they are not actively looking for the job for you. They do nothing they just there to allow you to use that computer. ... This is not the result you're looking for. It's not answering the problem. It's not reasonable to ask one person behind the desk in those agencies to actively look for 10 or 20 people to find them a job, it won't happen and is not reasonable to ask that one person to do that job ... They are put in there is just for decoration. R29*

Community leaders and service providers tended to echo these kinds of sentiments, being especially critical of the one-size-fits-all model and the lack of matching between clients and jobs.

*For example, once clients go to Centrelink and refer them to Jobactive and Jobactive ... they're not matching, you know, their experience, their qualification. So I have seen a lot of clients that ... one of my client was you a university professor, but Jobactive was pushing him to come and do fruit picking. It is sort of, you know, disrespect for them. CL12*

*The problem with the job agencies related to Centrelink, they don't know what they're doing. ... they don't do proper assessment about their skills, about their issues. If they know English? They can speak? Or they have experience, work experience in that area or no? So they just, you know, do the job because they have to. CL 14*

*But for cohorts such as people from refugee backgrounds, Jobactive, because, I guess, the volumes of cases, the case loads, they don't have that individual support. And there isn't an understanding of their particular barriers. It's just, we need you to do job search, you know, it's a mandatory program, there's mutual obligations attached, there's timeframes with the department. So that person centred approach is probably lacking a lot more. SP3*

## In summary

*As the above quotes suggest, the ineffectiveness of the Jobkeeper model is rooted in far deeper causes than whatever indifference or incompetence one may care to ascribe to particular Jobactive agencies. Burdened with excessive client-staff ratios, with implementing a system designed around compliance rather than assistance, and with a one-size-fits-all model of support that makes little allowance for specialised needs, even Jobactive providers with the best of intentions are at best only going to waste refugee jobseekers' time and, as we argued in the previous chapter, undermine their confidence in themselves. As the Jobactive system is at the time of writing undergoing a substantive overhaul, now is a good time for the federal government to address these long-standing issues and replace Jobactive with a form of employment assistance better suited to meeting the needs of refugee jobseekers.*

## 5.2 Other organisational models for employment assistance

***Frankly saying, they clever in just talking, but in doing they are not as good as talking. They only talk, they only promise ... they call and ask what you want, what kind of job but they don't later find me any suitable job R12***

The inadequacies of the Jobactive model and its predecessors has long been recognised, and has led within the settlement sector to the development of a diversity of other models for helping refugees get jobs. Organisations offer casework, case management and mentoring support to refugee jobseekers, they partner

with private businesses to facilitate temporary workplace placements and internships, offer training to refugees to improve job seeking skills such as resume writing and interviewing technique, guide refugees through processes of qualification accreditation and assist with costs, they steer refugee jobseekers to relevant vocational education opportunities and even sometimes offer assistance with learning to drive or starting a small business. Many programs offer a combination of some of these services.

Unfortunately, refugees' experiences with these other models for providing organisational assistance to refugee jobseekers was not, on the whole, all that encouraging. Many, in the first instance, had no awareness at all that such assistance was available to them and had not engaged with any agencies other than the Centrelink- mandated providers and perhaps vocational training through TAFE. Moreover, those that had engaged with such services often were quite vague as to what organisation had provided the services, having been referred through several different agencies. The large array of services on offer was clearly somewhat confusing and difficult for many refugees to navigate, and community leaders were often critical of the confusion and inefficiency introduced into the help-seeking process by the myriad of organisations operating in the sector.

***Extremely fragmented. Is wastage of money. The money is poured into this system, unfortunately ... the system is not universally centralised and the bits and pieces of it don't talk to each other. So the refugees go from one organisation to the other without these organisations and community communicating with each other and really assessing or individualising their needs. CL1***

Because so much confusion reigns within the refugee community about the specific services they are accessing, we are not in a position to comment on the value of any particular program or organisation. We therefore restrict ourselves to more general remarks about the style of assistance being provided in the settlement sector and the way refugees experience this.

In contrast to Jobactive, when refugees are able to successfully navigate the confusing plethora of services on offer, other models for employment assistance can sometimes be remarkably effective in helping refugees find not just work but the kind of work they desire.

Consider, for example, the story of a young Iraqi accountant who arrived in Australia in 2018 and, soon after her arrival, had the good fortune to find out about a refugee mentoring program being offered by a small Sydney NGO. Her mentor helped her identify an organisation which works specifically with professionally qualified refugees and partners with corporate employers to secure them three month placements in their field. The mentor helped her apply for this program and she was successful in securing both a place in the program and eventually a paid placement at a major Sydney accounting firm. Generously supported with her transition to Australian work practices by both her employer and the ongoing involvement of the two NGOs, she successfully navigated the very considerable challenges of this placement. At its conclusion, this three month contract was extended for another three months, and then turned into a permanent position. She had been given a chance, provided the necessary support, and has thrived in a job she is evidently very proud of and satisfied with.

*They were so, so nice. And they were always giving me nice feedback. So this feedback, they support me, and they gave me a chance to complete and to work hard. I was working hard in first three months, but I didn't find myself like I'm doing good things in this three month. I was still like, I was thinking myself: "it's level zero, still, still, still." But after six months, I was doing so hard job. Crazy job. Yeah. R2*

Success stories like this are, unfortunately, rather exceptional. Only a handful of the refugees we spoke to had very positive experiences with service providers. Often, as with the young accountant above, the ingredients of success included some combination of ongoing individualised attention, usually in the form of mentoring or intensive case management, specialised assistance, in this case from an organisation that works with refugees from professional backgrounds, a job placement arranged directly with the employer, and ongoing on- the-job support in the first months of employment.

Almost all the refugees who had good experiences were, moreover, unusually confident and proactive people who approached their job search with unusual zeal. They tended to be those who were more proactive, persistent and capable of self advocacy in their dealings with settlement support organisations, as the below quotes illustrate.

*My experience is very long way with [settlement organisation.] I have been in contact with lot of people. And every one has different treatment and approach ... Just the way they meet with people... many times you have to keep contacting to get help ... you have to be in contact with them every time. You have to ring them all the time if you want help. Actually, I missed some jobs, when I didn't call them. You need to go to them and knock their door and tell them I am here ... I used to go to them twice a week, and tell them look I am here I need the job ... please let me ... let me know what I have to do R22*

*They continued to work with us. As long as we are not citizens yet, they continue to work with us. And we also continue to work with them. Like we ... even they found recently, one and a half months ago, they found a job for my husband, who is an engineer. And before that we even worked with them as volunteers, if there's something those opportunities. So we always even after Corona (of course, they closed their offices) I kept calling them, asking them for opportunities. So they helped us. They did everything they could to help us even with programs, activities, we work with them and they worked with us. R35*

More typical is the experience of another young woman from Iraq whose previous professional background was actually with various non-government organisations that support refugees. She came to Australia in 2019 with a degree from an American university and fluent English. Having lived in an English-speaking country and worked in the sector, she knew all the 'right things' to do. She volunteered with major settlement organisations and advocacy groups, and quickly identified and accessed the various programs designed to assist refugees with employment. However, this only led to a series



of encounters in which the person tasked with helping her could offer only very generic and unsuitable advice.

*So me and my sister ... went to TAFE and talked to a very, very nice lady. And I remember just feeling like that conversation was very limited, and the person I was speaking to didn't have enough knowledge to help me. ... She gave me some career advice about, you know, getting a job in a coffee shop ... while I wait. And just hearing that, kind of discouraged me ... I thought, well, here's a person who doesn't know everything that I've done or my experience, and it's probably something that she says to everyone. Yeah. So it actually doesn't bother me that she said coffee shop, but it was the only thing she said. R1*

As this young woman would herself readily admit, her situation was somewhat unusual by virtue of both her excellent English, her somewhat unusual educational background and career, and her consequent familiarity with settlement organisations. However, precisely for these reasons, it should also have been very easy for her to seek effective and tailored assistance from non-government organisations, as she was after all trying to get into the field these people themselves worked in. Her experience, unfortunately, had been that such tailored assistance was simply not available and that the people who work with refugees are often simply not well equipped to provide it. Part of the problem here is evidently that caseworkers aren't adequately knowledgeable. They are trained to provide assistance to 'refugees' defined quite generically and seem to struggle to address the more specific needs of those in circumstances requiring specialised knowledge – as, for instance, the needs of this young woman who required assistance restarting her career in a specialised professional field.

The frustration that evidently simmers beneath this young Iraqi woman's largely good natured

account of her engagements with a broad range of service providers is echoed in the accounts of many refugees seeking help from non-government organisations.

*They used to call us and show us a list of available jobs. And I read about them. They didn't apply or suit my study or my experience. So it was useless.*

*Interviewer: Did you ever have a case manager ... who would have assisted you?*

*Yes, there was case manager but they didn't help us in regard to job finding. R15*

*We had one session ... where they went over my CV. It didn't look like they could assist me very much ... They were like, oh, maybe put this here or that here. Because I've already had a CV for a long time, and I've been updating it. And they told me, are you familiar with INDEED? Are you familiar with SEEK? ... Yes, I was already I had already familiarised R18*

*And I just start with them until it's like, I give off from them actually, to be honest. I don't know if from their side or I just feel disappointed about them ... it's like, I cannot get something about what I'm thinking about ... they cannot get me a job the way what I'm thinking about. They thought about like the basic job as a cleaner or these things R33*

As the above quotes suggest, a few themes emerge from these descriptions of engaging with support services. One, the assistance provided is mainly of a generic and often unsuitable character: providing assistance with resume writing, for example, which may be very helpful for some but is entirely unsuitable for others, or circulating a list of available jobs to refugee clients without regard for their personal qualifications. In most of these organisations there is little evidence that assistance is being tailored to the individual client through ongoing interaction with a case manager.



In fact, those refugees who were most likely to report being satisfied with these kinds of services tended to have generic, easily identifiable needs that were amenable to 'off-the-rack' solutions. For example, they required assistance with well understood processes of qualification recognition, or with identifying an appropriate training pathway, or with such matters as getting a driving license. Tellingly, these are precisely the sorts of issues that are amenable to one-off, generic interventions requiring little specialised understanding of the client's issues, rather than ongoing, tailored support.

There was evidently a widespread perception amongst the refugees with whom we spoke that these organisations are often 'all talk' and offer little in the way of practical support. They are also frequently perceived as bureaucratic, unresponsive and indifferent to client needs, a factor often exacerbated by not having a consistent contact person within them, but also by the somewhat superior or indifferent attitude service providers are sometimes seen to be taking with clients.

*Because they are busy, or they have too many cases, so they don't care. They just advise you go to Navitas, go to TAFE, you can do this, you can do that, but they don't care, they don't find the job for you. R19*

*And why should people put people in this humiliating situation, to tell them that you are not capable of coming to this country, finding a job. You know, it really worries me ... not only like government I'm also talking about service providers, NGOs. They are not real community worker, you know. When you want to be a community worker, you should definitely have some principles, how to support community. And then everyone ended up just blaming refugees, that I don't think it's right ... They receive lots of budgets, lots of funding, just to tick boxes, and not to provide real support. And it makes me angry. CL10*

*When the refugees go to a different service provider, we see them unfortunately, as a client, and we see ourselves as a service provider. So we create, you know, like, a different position for ourselves and for them. ... So we are more, you know, machine driven, we are more KPI driven, that, okay, I have to get employment for five people today, what five people doesn't matter for us. Doesn't matter, we just need to get people on the system ... even if we see, for example, the reporting system within the service provider, it's just about the number. We help thousand people. We help 20 people. But how helpful, was really that support? Was client happy? It's a different question. CL12*

### **In summary**

*Specialised settlement programs designed specifically for refugees have much more success in helping refugees than Jobactive programs. However, they clearly still too often offer forms of assistance that are generic rather than tailored to the specific client, and that depend on clients to take initiative and be very persistent in seeking out help. It is obviously unreasonable for settlement organisations to expect newly arrived refugee clients to be capable of such high levels of self advocacy. The majority of refugees require a more proactive and tailored approach from service providers. The failure to provide such support reduces the efficacy of the assistance being provided and breeds resentment and disengagement amongst refugee clients.*

### 5.3 Seeking employment support from informal networks

***I could not get any job through resume. I get jobs only through my networks. ... Yeah, I prefer to go to another job. Maybe less money, but I'm comfortable. Yes. So that's why I'm frustrated because my network is small. My network is small I can't ... I don't know much people. R9***

Let us return briefly to those two young women we discussed at the start of the previous section. How did the young Iraqi accountant come to hear about the NGO whose assistance first set her on the path to employment? She heard about them from a friend.

***I was talking to one of my friends. It's my mom's friend. She told me there's this organisation ... she told me I will send you their number. Then I called they told me you can come ... and just bring, like, your qualifications. Yeah. And if we can, we can help you. R2***

Recall also the other young woman from Iraq, with a background in refugee advocacy and settlement. To whom did she turn for advice when the advice she was getting from settlement organisations proved unhelpful? She also turned to a friend.

***I: So In all of that case management kind of stuff, at no point did anybody ... really properly sit down with you and have a conversation about ...?***

***S: Not in an official place where I would get support. It was done through a friend. Like people that I met and befriended, like, [name] she sat with me, and told me what, what might happen If I do volunteering here for a while or advocacy here, and what types of opportunities would work best for me? She's Iraqi, Iraqi, we have like, similar backgrounds and point of views. So she was able to relate that. R1***

These two women are by no means unusual in turning to informal community networks for support in job seeking, a fact that has unfortunately gone largely unrecognised in the policy discussions. Informal community networks are, in fact, the masked hero of refugee employment support. Working out of view and in an unofficial capacity, they are often able to accomplish what conventional support structures do not.

Many refugees spoke in passing about the ways they sought counsel and assistance from those around them, and often to better effect than by seeking formal assistance.

***Mostly I found all jobs through my friends. R14***

***Some friends suggested to me to work in Uber and it was easy. I applied and within a week they answered. They responded and accepted me. It's not a permanent job. I just do it so I am not sitting at home without a job. R15***

*Okay, yeah, I have to admit, first of all, all jobs I get based on relationship to be honest. My friends just recommended me in different jobs. When I get library job, it was very fancy place, fancy job. It was very good job. ... I had a friend still she is here. She was a lawyer ... She just introduced me in that firm ... Then I start tiling with my friends. Again, I start painting with friends. Like, here also, I work as a technician ... one of my Australian friends just introduced me here and he recommended me and he was like my referee. R21*

*So I call my friends saying, hey, this is happening, do you know anyone in Australia who I can meet with and have a conversation about what I want to study at university? So this lady, at the time she was ... working with SBS ... I went and I met her, and she gave me some advice. And I met her recently. And I was like, I think those advice, I still remember vividly the advice that you gave me. And I think I've made the wise decision. R39*

Help with getting work, recommendations about where to seek help, what kinds of jobs to apply for, advice about what kinds of study to undertake, even where to live – all of these are sought and obtained in informal community settings. Obviously, these settings are able to provide wholistic, person centred, culturally appropriate forms of support that simply aren't readily available in formal settings, and this is their great advantage. In fact, local community organisations often find themselves doing much of this kind of social brokering for recent arrivals.

*So yes, was kind of different, because you don't go, and particularly to the church, to find a job. But you go to the church to find people and meet people. And then after that, you start going to those whom you know in the community. ... What always I did do and what I still do is connect people together. So, I use my social connections to learn about what vacancies, or what kind of skilled people, what kind of businesses, or what kind of jobs are with the people I know. CL 11*

*Maybe around 70 - 75% of Afghans they are in construction ... so we have a lot of employers' numbers and contact details in our list and whenever someone will come and they want some job we have those employers' details and we contact them ... And we have a lot of shops ... where Afghans run their businesses so we contact them if they need labour or something. And sometimes the employers themselves call us and ask if we have someone, so we keep the list of people who are seeking job, and we have the list tradies as well. Tradies, different tradies, like plumbers, painters and renderers, bricklayers and tilers, and if someone from the community want some renovation or something they call us. CL14*

These community networks are powerful and effective in assisting jobseekers, but they can also be something of a double-edged sword. Many refugees, particularly those from skilled backgrounds, find social networks very limited in their ability to assist with obtaining the kinds of work they desire, and even actively discouraging of efforts to obtain work in their former fields.

*But at that time most of people said to me, it's hard to find work in accounting. I recommend you to stay like in a profession like this one like hairdressing or something.* R10

*When I came to Australia, my goal is to find a job in drafting, as a draft person. But, many of my friends, many people I know, they did that course in drafting but they couldn't find a job. So I was scared to do the course.* R32

*Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I talk to people at TAFE and I talk to anyone who I see accidentally or something I asked about. But no one in this field in my area. Yeah. So I can't find anyone to help me in this.* R37

*When I first arrived, the first thing I heard was "go and do security". But I said I don't have permanency, which is required. "so go and do taxi driving." But I need to have one year of driving in Sydney to be able to do that. Okay, so nothing left. That was the community advice.* CL13

Many of the community leaders we spoke to also had experience working in settlement services, and so tended also to highlight the problems with the kinds of support that are available through informal community networks.

These networks can and do spread information that is incorrect, or out of date, that is needlessly limiting or discouraging or even outright dangerous in its potential consequences. They also tend to shepherd refugees into the less desirable sections of the labour market, where most of their fellow community members have ended up.

*They get most of their information from the failed experiences of their countrymen, our country mates who have arrived before them. And basically they ... become isolated from mainstream because they don't know how the system works.* CL1

*Because these people, as I say, they don't know how to navigate through, and then the biggest myth or mistakes, they always listened to the one who've been here before them, or relatives and all that. And that might be wrong information being given to them.* CL4

*The majority find jobs through other community members. Thing is, it's not always fair what the job they get. So they get jobs as cleaners and they pay cleaners \$16 per hour, they get underpaid, they get factory work while they sometimes are doctors, engineer's, they are holding high degrees from universities and some would work in security, some would work in, you know, car washes, petrol stations, and so whatever is available. So, in other words, they get the undesirable work that is leftover by the society.* CL11

*I was telling people I don't want to stay working in a factory. I will go to TAFE. And they were telling me that I needed to go to high school. I thought that was crazy at my age ... So I went to get an opinion from outside of my network. I went to MRC [Migrant Resource Centre] and they suggested I try TAFE. ... And she said I definitely didn't need to go to high school. And that advice saved me a lot – perhaps depression.* CL13

## **In summary**

*Like other methods of seeking support, informal community networks leave a great deal to be desired. However, it would be unwise to ignore or dismiss their power and significance for refugee jobseekers, for both good and ill. Service providers would do well to reflect on how they might better engage and collaborate with these community networks which are, after all, already important, if unacknowledged, 'partners' in the work of helping refugees into employment.*

*Service providers, with their expert knowledge of Australian support systems and the available opportunities and pathways, could help mitigate the information gaps and shortfalls which characterise informal networks. They could also work to widen such networks beyond ethnic communities by working to connect refugee jobseekers to other relevant avenues of informal support in the wider community. On the other hand, informal networks can and do usefully complement service providers' own necessarily somewhat impersonal and specialised approach to providing assistance, by offering the kind of personalised, ongoing, understanding and person centred assistance service providers sometimes struggle to provide.*





# Chapter summary

Refugees seek help from three main forms of support systems: organisations operating within the Jobactive model of Centrelink-mandated support; settlement and non-government organisations offering more refugee specific support programs; and informal community networks. Each of these forms of support leaves a lot to be desired from refugee jobseekers' point of view.

Assistance provided within the Jobactive model is clearly the most inadequate form of support refugees encounter. While Jobactive providers seem to have responded to criticisms of the manner in which refugees are treated within the system, 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. The current rehaul of the Jobactive model must therefore address the failure of this system of employment support to facilitate the entry of refugees and other highly disadvantaged groups into the workforce.

Specialised programs aimed specifically at refugee jobseekers are more successful than those operating with the Jobactive framework. However, these, too, often leave much to be desired from the perspective of refugee jobseekers. The plethora of organisations and services on offer are difficult for refugees to navigate and tend to succeed best with refugee jobseekers who are unusually stubborn and proactive in their engagement with these organisations and with the job market more broadly.

Other refugees experience these services and the organisations that provide them as unresponsive, bureaucratic, unhelpfully generic and unsympathetic to their particular circumstances.

Finally, many refugees seek support from their informal community networks – friends, family and whatever community organisations they might happen to belong to. These are often a surprisingly effective way for refugees to access information, support and, frequently, even employment. However, these networks also have many limitations, particularly for professional refugees who are likely to find them less well equipped to deal with their more specialised needs and even outright discouraging to their hopes and ambitions. For settlement service providers these informal networks present an opportunity in that there are obvious ways that the kinds of assistance service providers are able to provide complements, and is well complemented by, the kind of support community networks provide. To best effect such collaboration, however, it will be necessary to think of refugees not simply as passive clients in need of assistance but as proactive, capable partners in settlement.





# 6. Recommendations: A Different Approach to Support for Refugee Jobseekers

As well as asking refugees to describe their experiences of employment seeking, we asked them if there was anything they would like to change or add to the forms of support available to them. The recommendations we make below are based on what they told us, complemented by the insights that emerge by engaging closely with their lived experiences.

While some of the ideas set out here imply a need for new or increased government funding, the previous chapters of this report show that much of the current spending on refugee employment and education support through, for example, Jobactive, AMEP and vocational training programs, is largely ineffective and could be redirected. To the extent that new or reimagined programs are successful in helping refugee jobseekers find satisfactory stable employment, there would also be a reduction in welfare spending.

Our suggestions for making changes to existing support systems fall into three major categories. For each of these we first state the recommendation in quite broad terms, then suggest some ways it could be implemented.

Firstly, many refugees mentioned the need for more tailored support which engages with their particular circumstances, needs and ambitions. This could be provided through a personalised case management approach to employment assistance; by pairing refugees with mentors in relevant fields; by expanding services that specialise in assisting

particular kinds of refugee jobseekers; and by redirecting funding away from ineffective mainstream Jobactive providers to a greater diversity of more specialised support services.

Secondly, refugees expressed frustration with the perceived focus of support agencies on providing classroom-like training opportunities (in fields such as language learning, vocational training or job-ready skills.) Many called for a shift in focus from providing training to actively facilitating opportunities to work. This could be implemented through partnerships with employers to establish, recruit for and support refugees to succeed in refugee-identified positions. Another option would be to incentivise employers to take on refugee jobseekers by providing an initial subsidy for their salaries. In addition, existing training programs should, when appropriate, be reimagined to include work placements or the like, as has indeed already been trialled successfully in language learning contexts.

Finally, refugees (and particularly community leaders) called for support services and policy makers to engage with individual refugees and refugee-led community organisations as active partners rather than simply as clients in the employment seeking process. They might start to do so by empowering and resourcing communities to formalise the self-help support systems that already exist. They might also more actively seek to include community representatives in the process of

providing employment support, including in helping devise and deliver support programs. Finally, they could pay greater attention to interactions between service providers and refugee jobseekers, ensuring that these engage with the individual refugee as a partner in employment seeking, rather than being a mechanical process driven by funding requirements and KPIs.

## 6.1: Provide more tailored support

When we asked refugees what they thought might help them in their search for satisfactory employment by far the most common response was the need for someone to take enough time to appreciate their particular situation, explain to them what they needed to know and assist them in charting a pathway to a job suitable to their circumstances and needs.

*You have to understand them ... to ask them, What is your skills? What is your level of English language? What do you want to do? What do you like? What kind of job do you want? What you would like to do it? Okay, based on the skills they have? This is how we can assess, for these people to assess them ... what do they want, what do they like, how intelligent are they, what is the best way they have to go? To go through it. What is the pathway? R3*

*Look at my situation itself and find something really suitable for me. Or give me like, options that I can choose from. It's not like, "just go for that or go for that." ... because my situation I'm just looking for a limited job. So I want something like, in my area, and school days, and school hours also and yeah. So maybe they can like, look at my situation, and my age, my experience. R25*

*I have to let you know, I want some place ... some organisation, for the people who are the same age group, that they are in very sensitive situation. And I want somebody who can only work for them. And they can listen to us, and hear us out, and gave us the right advice. Because in this group, we needed some people just concentrating on our needs. And give us the right advice and right guidance, to be honest. Since I came here, nobody was really giving me guidance. Correct one, correct advice. R40*

These are in essence calls for more tailored and person centred forms of assistance than currently prevail in the employment support sector, or even in many organisations that provide specialised refugee oriented services. This is a suggestion that could be responded to in many different ways, some of which are already being trialled on a small scale. Below we detail several possibilities for how the need for more tailored, personalised assistance might be met.

## Introduce case management for refugee jobseekers (and refocus on-arrival case management to cater to job-ready refugees)

One obvious way to provide more tailored support is for more services to provide case management-style support to clients looking for employment, which refugees report is currently lacking even in many programs aimed at refugees.

*I don't think there was a place where someone actually did some planning, or looked at things based on my profile and my skills. You know, let's think about what's next for you. I wish there was. R1*

*That they should appoint some specific case managers to certain specific people, because I, when I went there, every time when I was going there different people or I was dealing with different people, a direct trust that you build with one person ... if one case manager just had person completely and give that person an opportunity to express what he or she wants to do, and really help in that area. R22*

Case management is a resource intensive approach to providing assistance, of course. All but the most generously funded organisations will struggle to provide this kind of hands-on, ongoing support to a meaningful proportion of refugee jobseekers. One way that large organisations providing settlement support might implement employment-related case management without incurring large additional costs, however, is by rethinking how they provide existing on-arrival support. Doing so would also involve the Department of Home Affairs, as it would require the revision of guidelines which currently govern settlement support provision.

On-arrival case management to support settlement is already funded but is organised in a way that does not readily lend itself to assisting with employment. Currently, recently arrived refugees are streamed by settlement service providers according to need and ability, as mandated by Department of Home Affairs guidelines. Refugees with good English and better social networks are helped less, refugees with poor English and fewer social connections are provided more assistance. Furthermore, employment is generally not prioritised in the period when intensive case-management is available. As a consequence, refugees with, say, professional skills and decent English, tend to be seen as 'low need' and don't receive much assistance with employment or are even told to delay their job search while the case manager is with them.

*As far as I understood, there was a plan of when you refer people of a certain age, but I mean, I was interested in getting my degree recognised immediately. So not eight months later. R1*

*Yes, case manager ... She was with us about maybe nine months, one year. And then she said: "You are all right. And everything is good with you. And you can depend on yourself." ... because we don't call her a lot, we can do all the things by ourselves. And everything was good.*

*Interviewer: But she didn't really kind of help you very much with employment or whatever. It was more other stuff?*

*No, no, with employment no. Not at all. R37*

*Usually the case managers ... serve for six months after refugees arrive so usually they help in finding housing and in starting their English lessons. But they do not stay with the family until they are looking for jobs. Usually their work with the family is for six months on only so usually they don't get involved with finding good jobs for the family. R16*

Several community leaders with experience in settlement provision thought this approach might be reimagined, with more 'job-ready' refugees being streamed into programs that would lead to them receiving more appropriate assistance with employment earlier in the settlement process.



*A whole bunch of assessment that could be done as to what the best pathway would be for them when they arrive, rather than everyone being treated as one homogenous group, when there is incredible diversity around their level of English, level of skills, professional experience or no professional experience. SP4*

*Volunteering programs, specifically for refugees, and to be putting them upon arrival, within the first six months, not longer than that. If you stretch it really 12 months, but don't stretch it too long, because people get cold. You know, people get that dangerous relaxation, when they get to a stagnation point. They lose hope in reviving their professions. ... CL9*

*This support system is just based on client's abilities. For example, if you can speak good English, okay, we help you a lot less. If you don't speak good English, we help you more, for example. But it is not based on based on client's qualification, it's not based on client's experience. So one of the system that I wanted, for example, we need to consider the refugees that they come with higher qualification as separate cohort. And we build the pathways for them to get into the system, employment, education system. And for those clients, for example, that they come with technical skills, for example, carpenter, for example, mechanic ... so we consider them for example, as skilled people, based on their experience and their knowledge. People that they don't have the skills, they don't have, for example, the language, so we can tailor the services like them. ... But now we just see them based on the language abilities, for example, how they can reach the services. We are not seeing them based on their experience, qualifications CL12*

One further advantage of such streaming is that it would allow case managers to develop specialised expertise in assisting a particular 'stream' of refugees – thus addressing an issue flagged by refugees who often described those attempting to help them as not knowledgeable enough about their particular set of issues. For instance, a case manager who spends any amount of time working with professionally trained refugees would quickly learn the ins and outs of such issues as how qualification recognition works in the various professions, what the relevant study options and programs are for this class of clients, and such other specialised knowledge which one couldn't realistically expect a generalist caseworker to have at their fingertips. In a best case scenario, such a case manager would be able to have a well informed, sensitive and realistic conversation about how plausible it was for a given refugee to expect to resume their professional career, and to help chart alternative pathways if they and the client come to an agreement that this is the best way forward.

### **Invest in and expand mentoring programs**

An alternative approach to providing more tailored assistance to refugees, and one that might be particularly valuable in contexts where case management is not a viable strategy, is the introduction of mentoring programs that pair refugee jobseekers with mentors who would support them in an ongoing way to chart a course towards employment. Many community leaders thought such mentoring programs would be desirable, especially if mentees were carefully matched with mentors who shared their professional background.

*Because one of the great lacks in general ... for refugee communities, can be lack of mentoring ... you know, we have the youth mentoring program for youth, for example. But we don't have a mentoring program for migrants. So it doesn't matter if I'm 35, or 40 ... I came to Australia when I was 31, yeah? So I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to start ... I didn't have anyone around myself to tell me, man, this is not the way ... this resume is not good enough ... you need to fix it. But someone in my sector ... especially if with Iranian heritage, helps me a lot. CL2*

*Plus, not enough support when they came to Australia, when they came, there has to be like some kind of mentoring for them to navigate them in different steps. ... for example, I have a desire to running a company establishing a company, there should be an organisation linking me with someone who already have this experience, to navigate with me ... And that make a huge differences in their life if you have that kind of support. CL6*

*There is a program I am working on at the moment which focuses on personalised career coaching rather than the standard process. I don't want to be racist or discriminatory to any group, but if this coaching is coming from someone who has been through this experience and the pain, they are able to relate. For example, if I'm sitting behind my desk and I can't relate to how a refugee is feeling – of course I can help with his resume – but I can't relate to his background, his culture, his experience and all these things. So the program I am working on at the moment is personalised. I look for coaches from people who have experience in the community and can relate to the person. CL13*

Such programs are in fact already being offered on a small scale by some community-based organisations. These smaller organisations are particularly well placed to deliver such tailored support because of their closer relationship to individual clients and ability to tap into existing networks for potential mentors. The refugees we interviewed who had experienced this support tended to have more favourable things to say about it than about many other kinds of programs. One thing that they found particularly valuable about mentoring relationships is that mentors were able to accompany them on their journey in an ongoing, responsive way and help in a variety of different contexts.

*And [mentor] was with me, like, all the time, advising me. Yeah, actually, I appreciate that. ... They told me like there's a company or its organisation, non-profit organisation. [this organisation] they helped me only in one thing, but ... like, [mentor] they were helping me. First thing ... they asked for CV ... So I didn't know how to do my resume, like I've done my details, but I don't know in Australia ... I asked [mentor] how to do my resume, ... and he told me like we're working for maybe 10 days in my resume. Then he's done my resume, which was perfect. And still, I'm using the same resume. And they help me help to translate my qualifications from Kurdish to Arabic. Then from Arabic to English. Yeah. Then I've sent it to Canberra. So, all these things, they teach me how to do it. R2*

Mentors in the organisation this refugee is describing are volunteers, many of them not actually from migrant backgrounds. Mentoring programs are therefore one way community goodwill can be mobilised by organisations with well developed volunteer networks to assist jobseekers without incurring large costs. Of course, much of the success of these initiatives depends on access to dedicated mentors with relevant experience.

## Invest in and expand specialised services

Providing personalised support to refugee jobseekers in the form of mentoring or case intensive management is obviously the most effective way to make sure support is tailored to the needs of the individual. One other way to better tailor support for refugee jobseekers is by way of more specialised programs that are better targeted to the needs of one particular sub-set of refugee jobseekers. Such services already exist on a small scale, the most common being programs like Career Seekers that are targeted at refugees with professional qualifications. They commonly pair with large businesses to create paid work placements for their refugee clients, which often subsequently lead to employment or at least to meaningful Australian work experience. In preparation for placement, such organisations put refugees through some training to prepare them for the Australian workplace and also work with employers to ensure refugees are going into workplaces that are aware of their special needs and able to support them during their placement.

We spoke to several refugees and community leaders who had experience with such programs and these were on the whole quite favourably regarded, especially in contrast to other services that provided more generic forms of assistance. Refugees often spoke of valuing the training but, more particularly, of actually getting an opportunity to work in a field relevant to their career aspirations. Such programs are only relevant to a small sub-set of professional refugee jobseekers but this is also their great strength – by focusing on a particular kind of refugee jobseeker they are able to provide more tailored and more effective assistance to that particular group. Unfortunately, currently only professionally trained jobseekers receive this formalised assistance. It is not difficult to imagine, however, programs targeted at other groups of refugee jobseekers that experience

particular challenges – women and older refugees being groups that seem particularly in need of additional attention.

*Career Seekers... I know and I am in touch with the and with their clients ok. Because I am in touch with most Syrians. They help them and maybe 50% of Syrians after internship they continue their job. R17*

## Replace or supplement Jobactive with a greater diversity of more specialised services

The effectiveness of more specialised forms of support highlights again the issue that generic forms of employment assistance, as provided through the Jobactive model, do not help and often actively undermine refugee jobseekers. Even after years of criticism and attempts at reform, Jobactive remains an ineffective, counterproductive and wasteful use of public money that could be put to better use in more tailored programs that specialise in working with high need jobseekers with particular needs. We therefore join the call of a number of recent reports, including the government's own *I Want to Work* report, for the current overhaul of the Jobactive system to take the opportunity to replace the Jobactive model altogether with a substantially different form of employment support that identifies high need jobseekers and refers them to more specialised services<sup>11</sup> In the case of refugees (who are, of course, only one such group) these services would ideally be provided by organisations with experience and a proven track record of success in working with refugees, rather than by a mainstream provider.

Even across more specialised refugee-targeted programs, it is by no means clear that it is always the largest and most widely targeted programs that are the most effective. What seems needed instead is a greater diversity of more narrowly targeted programs

able to address specific refugees' needs. Some such programs are already in existence and more robust funding provision is needed to test whether they can be scaled up effectively. Ideally, this more robust funding model would include greater continuity of funding for programs with good track records (a privilege currently only enjoyed by Jobactive providers, in spite of their relative ineffectiveness.)

A wider distribution of public funding across organisations working in this area would therefore be well advised, with appropriate monitoring and evaluation practices to identify especially effective approaches and programs. Naturally, these monitoring and evaluation practices would only be useful if they are conducted in such a way to involve individual refugee jobseekers and representatives of refugee communities in providing meaningful feedback. Using only abstract metrics to evaluate programs has proven an ineffective way to guarantee effective service provision.

## **6.2 Shift the focus of services from offering training to creating opportunities to work**

As we documented in previous chapters, training and educational opportunities are a prominent aspect of the services offered to refugee jobseekers. These educational initiatives occur in a range of contexts; refugees are offered educational opportunities in the fields of language learning, vocational training and also various job readiness initiatives that offer assistance with such issues as resume writing skills and interview techniques.

While refugees often perceive there to be some value in these various training programs, the general feeling amongst both refugees and community leaders is that training-style interventions are fairly ineffective in helping refugees actually

find work. Beyond the fact that classroom learning is unsuitable for some refugees, the main issue seems to be that refugees face multiple barriers, and training activities usually address only one of these at a time. Even if a refugee jobseeker improves, say, their resume writing, they still face issues of language competency, lack of local work experience, discrimination, and so on.

*If you look at the training programmes, well, they send you to the preferred training organisation. So that they can get fund from the government. And also, they ask you to do certain type of course, while you think that you are going to benefit from this course but at the end of the day, I think is the organisation and the people who are promoting that course are benefiting from it. Because it doesn't help you either R7*

*These organisations are providing information to us, but it is not enough. They should have connections with job owners or employers that can provide jobs or employment, to help us in relation to finding employment. Information is not enough. R11*

*And how can we help is actually getting them the job. It's not getting them work experience. Because they will have many thousands of other difficulties and obstacles to overcome ... putting on a CV, applying ... and then presenting themselves, and here we go: the English language, the mental health, the emotional situation and in some other cases you need to provide them with some sort of degree or driver's licence ... take them by hand, put them in a job, and they will carry on. Right? You direct them, it doesn't work. CL11*

It is in this context that many refugees and community leaders call for a shift in focus from providing educational opportunities to facilitating pathways for refugees to actually engage in work and work-like environments.

The value of such opportunities, apart from the obvious value of having work, is their capacity to address multiple barriers at once – having such opportunities to work is an opportunity to build language skills, local experience, networks, confidence and familiarity with Australian workplaces – as well as show one's value in a way that indirectly combats discrimination.

*Many of the Iraqi or Syrian refugees who are coming have experience but they are not given the opportunity or chance to try to show their experiences. At least give them a trial, a chance to accept a place to show their experiences. They [employers and agencies] are always claiming that age and the language are a problem, but give them a chance to work in their in the fields in which they've already worked before and in which they are proficient. If they are not suitable, they can cancel their work experience but at least give him the chance to start. R15*

*I think there should be a chance given to refugees with experience to work, even as volunteers, and then judge their proficiency, their experience. And if they are good, they can then pay for them for their work or make a contract with them. So at least give them the chance, the opportunity to start. R16*

*I just suggest they could give refugees and newly arrived migrants here more opportunities to work to prove that they are hard worker. They can do the work. Like, for example, as volunteers in retailers like big W, Woolworths, Coles, Aldi. I know that we, like us, we don't speak the language, but we understand things. We are skilful, and we can prove. If we are given a chance we will prove ourselves successful as hard workers. R35*

Again, these kinds of facilitated pathways into work environments can take many forms, many of which can readily be combined with formal training and some of which already exist in embryonic form. Below we detail several possibilities for what such facilitated pathways might look like, and how organisations and governments might go about creating them.

### **Initiate partnerships with employers to create refugee-identified positions**

One possibility that some service providers have already begun exploring is the creation of partnerships with individual businesses (or, at times, local councils) to create refugee-identified positions. We've already described in another context the Career Seekers model (Recommendation 1.3) of partnering with businesses to create three month refugee-identified work placements and working beforehand with both refugees and employers to make such placements a success. This particular organisation specialises in helping refugees from professional backgrounds but their model is, in principle, applicable beyond this particular focus and has been trialled in a broader context by other settlement organisations. One community leader we spoke to emphasised, for example, the need to target initiatives of this kind to women who have limited employment experience.

*Now we have to step on a platform where we can, if I may say, sell the stories of women and ask other organisations, other private sectors to employ, to give people even one month of work experience ... and then saying that, we have to equip those organisations, especially private sectors, with cross culture information and awareness, how to welcome women, how to welcome shy women, how to welcome somebody that never looked at somebody's eye to eye. CL8*



These deliberately created positions could take various forms. Ideally, they would be actual, ongoing positions in that particular workplace. In practice, it has so far been easier for service providers to secure three month paid work placements only. In principle, volunteer positions of this kind (unpaid internships and the like) would also have some value in terms of helping more refugees gain access to volunteering placements (lack of access to which, as we noted above, is a major issue with the otherwise well regarded strategy of using volunteering as a stepping stone to work.) In all these cases, service organisations would need to invest resources in building relationships with employers, and then supporting both refugees and employers to make such placements a success – ideally both through pre-employment educational activities and on-the-job support to iron out any difficulties. On-the-job support was described as crucial by refugees who participated in such programs, and can take the form of either support provided by the employer (by, for example, assigning a workplace mentor to refugee employees) or externally, by partner organisations, who might assign a caseworker to communicate with both the employer and employee in the crucial early months of employment to address any issues emerging on either side of the relationship. By way of illustrating how this kind of external support can work, one community leader described an evolving partnership with her local council to provide opportunities to refugees that is clearly underpinned by this kind of support work.

*Whenever ... any kind of opportunity come up, so I get in touch with council say ... do you think that we can collaborate on this together? ... And they've been always very supportive. And I think one of the reason is, again, they trust me, they trust the community that I'm working with ... they are capable, they've got skill. And I won't just refer people that I know, maybe it is hard for them to fulfil ... And they know that, okay, every time that I offer something, I will be along with refugees, just make sure that everything is going well CL10*

The creation of refugee-identified positions within the public sector and non-government service provision are another possible avenue for creating opportunities for refugee jobseekers. As part of its attempts to address refugee unemployment, the NSW Government has trialled the creation of one hundred such roles across state and local government workplaces, with some success.

One advantage of refugee-identified positions, whether in private or public enterprises, is that they help combat informal discrimination in the labour market by allowing employers to gain experience of the capacities of refugees, which will over time tend to modify negative attitudes. We believe this can be a more effective strategy for combating discrimination against refugee jobseekers than public education campaigns or legal interventions along the lines of the Anti-Discrimination Act, in that it addresses, in the short term, the major negative consequence for the disadvantaged group (joblessness) and also, in the long run, the tendency of employers to devalue refugees' experience and qualifications.

## Redirect funds to create employer subsidies for refugee positions

Another strategy mentioned by several community leaders, and one that could be combined with the above recommendation to make refugee-targeted positions more attractive to private business, is to provide subsidies for employers to create refugee-identified positions. The idea here would be to redirect money currently being wasted on ineffective Jobactive services into subsidy programs where the government would pay part of a refugee employee's salary for the first months of their employment.

*We need them to give them opportunity ... like you used to have in the past a system ... they work somewhere and these government agencies like Centrelink, instead of paying the agencies to show them how to write a resume, they can pay a percentage of their pay to these agencies to give them that opportunity to work. CL4*

*So we need a lot of advocacy in terms of ... bringing, you know, the employers on board. Governments have, for example, persuasive packages for those employers, you know, to recruit those clients and instead of paying that money through Centrelink, pay that through an employer. CL12*

As with refugee-identified positions, the creation of incentives to hire refugees could, again, be an effective way to combat discrimination and give hesitant employers a reason to take a chance on a refugee jobseeker. Certainly, any concerns that such employees require more hands-on support or training in the early stages of employment would be allayed by schemes that support the employer in this specific stage of employment.

## Incorporate practical placement-like activities into formal training programs

As well as reorienting the focus from providing training activities to creating employment opportunities, service providers would do well to consider how training-style activities could be reimaged to include placements and other experiences in work-like environments.

Programs like this, of course, already exist. The apprenticeship model of training delivery, integrating workplace experience and classroom learning, is a long standing way most tradespeople are trained in Australia, and there is no obvious reason other vocational-type training could not be reimaged as combining some amount of on- the-job experience with classroom learning. In the sphere of language learning, AMEP providers already offer a program called Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET) which incorporates a short work placement in a mainly classroom-based course. Given the somewhat poor outcomes refugees seem to experience with classroom-only models of both vocational and language instruction, it seems advisable to expand on such initiatives to create hybrid training-placement programs.

Again, this would require partnerships with appropriate businesses and a great deal of placement related support work from training organisations like TAFEs and AMEP providers. They would, of course, need to be adequately resourced to undertake what would be a considerable change in the way they offer support to refugees.

### **6.3: Engage with refugees and refugee communities as partners in employment support**

As we highlighted in chapter 5, the refugee community is very active in supporting refugee jobseekers and is arguably more successful in this task than many service providers. Yet refugee community networks and formal refugee organisations are, for the most part, not actively included in conversations and initiatives to address refugee employment. Instead, these are dominated by government and non-government organisations that often operate in relative detachment from the community on whose behalf they work. Refugee voices are usually absent, as we've noted, not only from the formal policy literature but also from the spaces in which programs are devised, funded, implemented and evaluated.

This is unfortunate on several levels. There is, in the first place, an elementary question of justice – people have a right to have a say in the making of policy and programs which materially affect their lives. More practically, as we've argued throughout this report, the detachment of service providers and policy makers from the lived experience of refugee jobseekers has often led to misunderstandings, ineffective interventions and counterproductive attitudes of distrust on both sides of the community-service provider divide.

Bridging this divide by including refugee community groups and leaders in service provision could well enhance employment outcomes. Formal services and informal networks are actually naturally complementary, in that they each provide forms of support the other is hard pressed to supply (ongoing, open-ended support by people with a shared experience in the case of community networks; expert knowledge of Australian systems and access to subsidised programs in the case of service providers.)

Moreover, active collaboration between the two would have obvious benefits. Services would be improved by incorporating feedback from refugees with personal experience of the issues they address, as well as through collaboration with refugee groups or networks, even by way of such simple activities as information sharing about emerging issues and opportunities. On the other hand, as we argued earlier, the assistance refugee community networks provide is frequently rife with out-of-date, incomplete and misleading information about how the Australian labour market operates, what services are available, and what the opportunities and limits are as far as finding a job in Australia is concerned. All these could, again, be addressed by more authentic communication (as opposed to one-way 'information sessions') and collaboration between the service sector and the community.

There are a number of dimensions to how refugees could be brought into the conversation around refugee employment (as well as other settlement issues) to enhance employment outcomes.

#### **Empower and resource communities to formalise and widen self-help support systems**

Refugee communities tend to fairly quickly organise into relatively formalised ethnic, linguistic and religious groups relatively soon after arrival in Australia, and these formal organisations of course tend to be embedded within much larger and looser informal networks organised around kinship, friendship and shared ethnic identity. Naturally, such groups vary very considerably across communities and even individual groups in terms of their capacity to engage with or interest in more formal service provision. Indeed, some of the community leaders we spoke to were themselves at the helms of such groups and had extensive personal experience in the settlement sector

that would translate fairly readily into the kind of collaborative work we outline above.

However, in many communities, and especially recently arrived communities, there will be a need to engage in significant capacity building with existing groups and leaders to empower them to engage with more formal employment support systems and provide their own kinds of support in more proactive and organised ways. There will be a need to both formalise existing support networks and equip key figures with the skills and resources needed to engage with the settlement and employment sector, eventually perhaps as government funded support providers. This, ultimately, will depend on allocating funding to this kind of community organisation and capacity building.

***One thing is money. It's essential. Everyone needs it. The government always give it, to some more than others. Unfortunately, small organisations don't get much. But the thing is, it's not only that. So we see where there are venues that are owned by the Council and could be accessible ... when they get access to those and get the freedom of organising and working on projects, they can help much, much more ... You don't have to always give people money. You don't have to always give people fish, you can give them fishing lines to fish. CL11***

This would admittedly represent a considerable innovation in settlement support provision, which has often been conceived in a top-down fashion with refugees imagined as largely passive 'clients.' However, if we think about social services more generally, this is not actually that unusual. We take it for granted, for instance, that services aimed at Indigenous people will be delivered in collaboration with Indigenous communities and often that they will be delivered by or in partnership with formal

Indigenous-led organisations (lands councils, health services, NGOs and the like) that are recipients of funding specifically ear-marked for such organisations.

Refugee and migrant communities could benefit from a similar approach. As with Indigenous communities, the experiential gap between a refugee with lived experience of displacement and trauma and the typical service provider is very considerable, and this tends to make services designed without consultation prone to ending up ineffective or counter-productive. There also exists a need to widen these community networks by connecting them to other informal and semi-formal support networks within the Australian community. As we saw earlier, the ethnically homogenous character such networks tend to assume limits what they are able to do for their community. Many members of these networks would value the opportunity to connect to wider Australian society and service-providers are well-placed to facilitate such connections for both formal organisations and individual refugees.

### **Create meaningful refugee representation in service provision agencies and inter-agencies**

Currently, very few of the agencies or inter-agency consortiums that organise support to refugee jobseekers have meaningful representation from the refugee communities with which they engage. Staff in these organisations are sometimes from refugee backgrounds themselves but often their own settlement experience took place a long time ago and they are, in any case, constrained by their service provision roles.

One relatively simple way for service providers to begin building connections and laying foundations for collaboration between the refugee community and service providers would be to create meaningful representative role for people from recently arrived groups. Such representation can

take various forms: community reference groups set up specifically to consult on major initiatives; refugee-identified positions on key governance bodies (including inter-agencies) involved with settlement or employment support; or even paid refugee-identified staff positions with an explicit community engagement and empowerment focus. 'Meaningful' here is the operative term, however. To be effective such representative positions must be empowered to participate in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of programs and projects rather than merely engaging in consultations that don't actually impact on the programs implemented or the strategies pursued.

### **Treat individual refugee jobseekers as partners, not clients**

What we have said above in reference to the refugee community is also true about individual refugee jobseekers. As we've learned from talking to our interviewees, they are a resilient, adaptable and skilled group of people who are often keen to take the initiative in their own search for meaningful employment when they are sufficiently empowered to do so by the right advice and assistance. Too often, however, we heard from concerned community leaders that the attitude refugee jobseekers encounter from service providers does not fully acknowledge their capacities and instead tends to place them in a dependent and inferior position vis-à-vis service providers.

*I think it's like, very much like a white supremacist approach, you know, like imposing people what we think it's right for you, rather than thinking that they are individual, they've got their own interests, needs, thoughts. And they've been like, successful back home, and they're not like children, you know. They are like parents they are ... you know, and it really makes me angry sometimes that why we treat people like children CL10*

*When the refugees go to a different service provider, we see them unfortunately, as a client, and we see ourselves as a service provider. So we create, you know, like, a different position for ourselves and for them. For example, when they go to Jobactive providers, so they're pushing them to do this, when they don't understand them ... in what situation they are, or how at least respectfully I deal with them. So we are more, you know, machine driven, we are more KPI driven. That, okay, I have to get employment for five people today, what five people doesn't matter for us. Doesn't matter, we just need to get people on the system CL12*

Some of this is, as the community leaders cited above suggest, a question of training staff to deal more skilfully, tactfully and respectfully with refugees by, for instance, mandating cultural competency training for employees providing employment support. But much of it is also, as the second community leader points out, driven by a mechanical approach to refugee jobseekers which perceives them merely in reference to quotas of service delivery instead of as individuals who are anxious to be, and capable of being, partners in finding a pathway into employment if we take the trouble and time to empower them, rather than simply steering them into programs that satisfy organisational KPIs.



## 6.4 Acknowledge and address discrimination against refugees and other immigrant job seekers

Policy makers need to define the problem of refugee employment within the context of ingrained discriminatory practices in the Australian labour market and factor this into the design of refugee support programs. Refugees are perfectly right to suggest that the systematic devaluation of their qualifications and experience amounts to a set of implicit discriminatory practices. They are not the only job seekers who experience this type of discrimination. As we have noted, even migrants chosen on the basis of their in-demand skill sets face similar requirements to have local education and experience. But this discrimination affects refugees more harshly when combined with the many other challenges they face.

Legislation against direct and indirect discrimination against people on the basis of national or ethnic origin already exists. It is clearly not sufficient to deal with the problem of systemic racial and ethnic discrimination in the work force. Programs that work with employers to address and overcome their reluctance to hire people who do not fit their concept of the ideal employee are also needed.

Some of the proposals presented previously in this chapter would contribute to this. For example, partnering with employers to create jobs or placements for refugees, or subsidising refugee employees' salaries for a period, could combat this form of discrimination by allowing employers to gain experience of the capacities of refugees and thus modify negative attitudes.

Other possible initiatives might include:

- Awareness raising and cross-cultural training for staff in human resources departments to improve their understanding of the backgrounds of skilled refugees and other migrants, and promote ideals of equal opportunity and inclusion.
- Encouraging professional associations to change their approach to migrant professionals, and to provide support and assistance through, for example, networking opportunities and mentoring programs.
- Working with industry groups, professional associations and unions to track and report on the diversity profile of workplaces, as part of raising awareness of the under- representation of key groups in certain settings.

# Conclusion

Refugees come to Australia wanting to work. Through work they hope to rebuild their lives in Australia, contribute to their new society and earn a level of income that will enable them to participate more fully in Australian society. In their search for work, they answer formal job advertisements, they look for work more informally in their neighbourhoods and communities, they pursue educational and volunteering opportunities and many even try to start their own businesses. They also seek assistance from Jobactive providers, settlement support organisations and within their own communities.

Unfortunately, the road towards satisfying employment is rocky for most refugees. Hampered by difficulties with learning English, a discriminatory labour market which devalues their skills, qualifications and experience, their own unfamiliarity with Australian conventions around job seeking and the loss of confidence that often results from long term unemployment, many spend years without work or in unsuitable work. Many unfortunately find that the support available to them is not adequate to helping them surmount these obstacles.

We can do more for refugees looking for work but we have to change our approach. Too much money is still being wasted through the Jobactive systems on the provision of mainstream one-size-fits-all support that simply does not work. Support provided to refugees has to be tailored to both their needs as humanitarian entrants and the more specific difficulties they individually encounter due to age, gender, professional background,

career ambitions and other factors.

The form of support also has to change. Too much support takes the form of training opportunities which have only a limited impact on the ability of refugee jobseekers to actually find employment. Programs which actually place refugee jobseekers in employment or employment-like situations (placements, internships and the like) are regarded much more positively by refugees themselves than more indirect forms of assistance.

Finally, the refugee community and its organisations must be engaged with more fully as an active partner in employment support. Service providers and policy makers often think of refugees as mostly passive clients and recipients of assistance. Our research shows instead that they are proactive partners in both settlement and job seeking. Both individually and collectively, refugees are already making tremendous efforts to help themselves and service-providers and policy makers would do well to take note of these efforts and engage more fully with those spearheading efforts to create employment within the community itself.



# Notes

**1** Hugo, G., for the Department of Social Services, The economic, social and civic contribution of first and second generation humanitarian migrants, 2011, [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01\\_2014/economic-social-civic-contributions-booklet2011.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/economic-social-civic-contributions-booklet2011.pdf)

Olliff, L. for Refugee Council of Australia, What Works: Employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants 2010 [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/What-Works\\_Employment-report\\_2010.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/What-Works_Employment-report_2010.pdf)

Centre for Policy Development, Settling Better Report: Reforming refugee employment and settlement services, 2017 <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-02/apo-nid73852.pdf>,

Deloitte Access Economics, Seizing the Opportunity: Making the most of the skills and experience of migrants and refugees, A research report for Multicultural Affairs Queensland, 2018 [https://www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/44983/seizing-the-opportunity.pdf](https://www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/44983/seizing-the-opportunity.pdf)

Shergold, P., Benson K., Piper M. for the Commonwealth of Australia, Investing In Refugees; Investing in Australia: The Findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia, 2019. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>

**2** Recent work driven by the deficit model includes Centre for Policy Development, Settling Better and Deloitte Access Economics, Seizing the Opportunity, 2018

**3** Refugee voices are absent, or present only in an incidental way (ie. used to ornament the report or represented quantitatively but not analysed in detail), in most of the major reports on this topic in the last decades (see work cited in footnote 1.) A notable exception (albeit dealing only with refugees' experiences with Jobactive) is Shukufa, T. for Refugee Council of Australia, Not Working: Experiences of refugees and migrants with Jobactive <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Jobactive.pdf>. This critique is much less pertinent to academic literature. One recent example of in-depth qualitative work with refugees is Collins, J., Reid, C., Groutsis, D., Watson, K., Kaabel, A., Hughes, S., Settlement experiences of recently arrived refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in Queensland, 2018. <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/QLD%202018%20Full%20Report%20%5BFormatted%5D.pdf>.

**4** National Centre for Longitudinal Data, Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/03\\_2018/d17\\_1138305\\_bnla\\_report\\_final\\_word\\_accessible\\_version.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/03_2018/d17_1138305_bnla_report_final_word_accessible_version.pdf); National Centre for Longitudinal Data, Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants Wave 5 Update (Addendum to the Wave 3 Report) [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/07\\_2020/bnla-longitudinal-study-humanitarian-migrants-wave-5.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/07_2020/bnla-longitudinal-study-humanitarian-migrants-wave-5.pdf); Collins, J., Reid, C., Groutsis, D., Watson, K., Kaabel, A., Hughes, S., Settlement experiences of recently arrived refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in New South Wales, 2018 <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2021-01/NSW%202018%20Full%20Report%20%5BFinal%5D.pdf>

**5** For example, Refugee Council, What Works, 35-36; Shergold et al, Investing in Refugees, 33,44; Deloitte, Seizing The Opportunity, 25

**6** For example, Professor Collins, J., Watson K and Krivokapic-Skoko B. From Boats to Businesses: The Remarkable Journey of Hazara Refugee Entrepreneurs in Adelaide. From Boats to Businesses Full Report - Web.pdf ([uts.edu.au](https://www.uts.edu.au)) More broadly, see Legrain, P. and Burridge, A. for Centre for Policy Development, Seven Steps to SUCCESS Report: Enabling Refugee Entrepreneurs to Flourish <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Seven-Steps-to-Success-report.pdf>

**7** Department of Social Services, Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants Findings from the first three waves, 2019, 29

**8** Our finding here confirms the criticisms of the AMEP system found in Shergold, P., Benson K., Piper M. for the Commonwealth of Australia, Investing In Refugees; Investing in Australia: The Findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia, 2019. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>

**9** Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), A good match: Optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration, CEDA 2021

**10** Tahiri, S. on behalf of Refugee Council and Fairfield Multicultural Interagency, Not Working

**11** Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, I Want to Work: Employment Services 2020 Report





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