Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)

Overcoming the disadvantages to refugee employment

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Refugee Employment Landscape in Australia

- Refugees are a non-homogenous group arriving in Australia via different methods:
  - Onshore programs
  - Other Migration Streams (such as Family and Partner subclasses)
  - Offshore Humanitarian Programs

- Refugees possess differing experiences and skills. Some refugees may arrive in Australia highly skilled and with a high level of educational attainment (Peter, 2001; Beatriz, & Ruth, 2009; Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012, Census data 2016).

- Currently, the 2016 ABS Census data suggest, the majority of Skilled migrants aged 15 years and over were in the labour force (83%). This compared with almost two thirds (64%) of Family migrants and about half (48%) of Humanitarian migrants.
Refugees, a highly disadvantaged group

Others arrive with little education or English language skills - a result of a lack of educational opportunity in their home countries or disrupted education as part of the refugee experience.

Table 1: Indicators of background disadvantage. Education, work experience and language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Disadvantage</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never attended school (Aged 18 or older)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never undertaken paid work (Aged 18 or older)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not understand spoken English at all before arrival</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate in own language (cannot read or write own language at all)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BLNA Report on Wave 1 Data

If you had to, would you know how to look for a job?

- Very well: 34
- Fairly well: 60
- A little: 20
- Not at all: 14

How well do you understand spoken English?

- Very well: 32
- Fairly well: 26
- A little: 9
- Not at all: 12

Humanitarian Entrants Employment Outcomes, BLNA, 2016
All reviewed studies revealed that refugees and people seeking asylum experience multiple barriers to employment. These barriers have their basis in:

- Institutions
- Government policies
- Racism and discrimination
- Language proficiency
- Labour segmentation and
- A rigid system of skills recognition
- Legal limbos for people seeking asylum

(Sources: (Hugo, 2011; Fozdar & Torezani 2008; Casimiro, Hancock & Northcote, 2007).)

Table 2: Indicators of physical and mental health concerns amongst the BNLA cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Physical and Mental Health</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor or very poor health over previous 4 weeks</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate or high psychological distress (Kessler 6)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current health worse or much worse than the 6 months pre-arrival</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescribed medication for physical health since arrival</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescribed medication for emotional health since arrival</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Response: What does the Gov employment support looks like in Australia?

Journey of a humanitarian entrant through Government programmes

- Australian Cultural Orientation Programme (ACOP): First step in settlement journey, familiarises about journey to Australia, quarantine laws and what to expect post-arrivals.
- Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS): Provides early practical support to humanitarian entrants on arrival and throughout their initial settlement period, generally for the first six to 12 months. Refers to end supports participation in AMEP, SEE, JSI if an active job seeker.
- Complex Case Support (CCS): Specialised, intensive case management services to eligible humanitarian entrants with exceptional needs which extend beyond the scope of other settlement services. Refers to PASTT, Settlement Grants, and a range of specialised services.
- Settlement Grants: Services which assist humanitarian entrants to become self-sufficient and participate in the community to their full capacity.
- Disability Employment Services (DES): Assistance for people with a disability to prepare for work and find a job.

Programme of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT): Specialised support for humanitarian entrants experiencing psychological or physical difficulties associated with surviving torture and trauma.

Source: DSS 2016
The effectiveness of Jobactive to support refugee employment

The Jobactive program
Key barriers
Lack of specialised Jobactive providers
Choosing between learning English and looking for work
Streaming and the Job Seeker Classification Instrument
Compliance measures and implications
Limited support with resumes and interview skills
Job Plans and understanding of rights and responsibilities
Under-use of interpreters and lack of translated materials
Inappropriate Work for the Dole placements
Overuse of, and lack of support for use of, technology
Being treated with disrespect
Opportunities to attain relevant Australian work experience
Recognition of prior qualifications and experience
De-skilling or upskilling?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation #</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Develop a national multicultural employment strategy</td>
<td>The Australian Government should develop a national multicultural employment strategy that incorporates a whole-of-government approach. This strategy should ensure the appropriate linking and collaboration between settlement, education and training, and employment services. It should identify areas for targeted investment in employment transition programs for refugee and migrant jobseekers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Review and improve Jobactive services</td>
<td>The Australian Government should commission an independent review of the effectiveness of the Jobactive program in meeting the needs of refugee and migrant jobseekers, and develop a plan to address key areas for improvement identified in this review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Invest in targeted employment programs</td>
<td>The Australian Government should review their funding of employment transition programs with a view to increasing investment in targeted employment programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Share knowledge about what works</td>
<td>The Australian Government should invest in research and platforms for sharing knowledge about effective employment programs that result in better outcomes for refugee and migrant jobseekers.</td>
</tr>
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Rethinking of AMEP for employment readiness

• English language programs for refugees include the Adult Migrants English Program (AMEP), Special Preparatory Program, Basic English Program and advance certificate I and II (Peters, 2008) and are available to all refugees.

• ‘However, a 2013 study showed that one-quarter of humanitarian immigrants did not take up these language training opportunities (Fozdar & Hartley 2013). Whereas, some of the reasons were prioritising employment, having logistical and transport issues, and for refugee’s mothers did not having access to appropriate child care (Fozdar & Torezani 2008; Fozdar, & Hartley, 2013).

• These studies also highlighted the inadequacy of the AMEP for professionals and for those people illiterate in their mother tongue languages.
Falling through the gap: Survival jobs and down-skilling

- Attributed to lack of qualification recognition
  - Pressures by Jobactive
  - Requalification difficulty

- Many professional and qualified people finding themselves trapped in ‘survival’ jobs which do not utilise their skills, expertise, and aptitudes (Barraket, 2007; Hugo, 2011, ABS Census data 2016).

- Evidence suggests that 95% of refugees with tertiary educational qualifications from countries outside Australia end up taking jobs in manual labour. There remains much “to be done to assist humanitarian settlers to enter the Australian labour market and to facilitate their upward mobility

- Despite holding tertiary degrees (28%), and Diploma level qualification (20%), two out of five recently arrived humanitarian migrants work as labourers, as the need for labourers in the economy is falling.

- On the best available evidence suggests 17 per cent of humanitarian migrants are in paid work after being in Australia for 18 months. (ABS, 2016)
What works: Targeted and customized support services in education and training

- Increasing the educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups and identify effective practices for improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners at a vocational education and training level.
- Adopting practices from public, private and community educational providers with good outcomes for disadvantaged learners.
- Learnings: **Targeted support and institution wide commitment** (as opposed to ad hoc practices) with defined initiatives to provide learning support and matching **experienced staff** with high-need learners.
- Building of **strong relationships** between language and training providers and employers and other services to maximize immersive learning.
- Offer specialized support matching the type of disadvantage and the available employment and labor market opportunities.
- Increased collaboration between education and training institutions and job markets

(Source: [Centre for International Research in Education Systems](https://www.vu.edu.au), Victoria University, 2018.)
What works: Exposure to the labor market for local experience

“I believe opportunity is important. Self-help, hard work, that of course goes without saying. You have to try hard. But you have to also be given that half chance.” - Employee, Eritrean, Community organisation (VIC)

• A major challenge for refugees and other newly arrived migrants is understanding the local labour market. A lack of local work experience, awareness about the job search methods, local referees and lack of social networks all present barriers to employment (Lenette & Ingamells, 2013; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003).

• Providing Labor market opportunities via internships, placements, mentoring programs and post employment programs or government wage subsidies to employers

• Post employment follow-up programs

• Examples of What is working: Australian CareerSeekers (through employers who value and are committed to workforce diversity for meaningful, and sustainable employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to getting a job</th>
<th>Wave 1 (n=534)</th>
<th>Wave 3 (n=498)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have Australian work experience</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My English isn’t good enough yet</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have the necessary skills or qualifications</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t get a job in the same occupation I had overseas</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No suitable jobs</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport difficulties</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t get an interview</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours were unsuitable</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health reasons (physical or emotional)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look after family</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BNLA, n= 53)
What works:

- Building awareness within communities about career pathways in Australia; and
- Coordination and collaboration among refugee entrants and their communities, employment services, education and training providers and employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Wave 1 (n=511)</th>
<th>Wave 3 (n=436)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through family or friends</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Centrelink</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted an employment agency</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted employers directly</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through people from my religious/ethnic community</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through newspaper advertisements or internet</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through settlement case worker</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through other community groups</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through school/where I study</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The reported proportions include respondents who were asked but chose to provide a non-specific response such as ‘prefer not to say’ or ‘don’t know’. Restricted to respondents 18-64 years of age.

Source: BLNA Wave
What works: Entrepreneurship and small business development

In light of **entrenched disadvantages** and **lack of opportunities**, and **chronic down skilling**, entrepreneurship grants self agency and resolves lack of employment opportunities at an individual level.

Key Question:

- How to foster entrepreneurship

1. **Small business training and support**
   - Providing appropriate information, training and support on starting and sustaining a small business was seen as key to supporting entrepreneurship among refugees.
   - Providing targeted support that is accessible.

2. **Enterprise facilitation**
   - Compensating for lack of networks, such as drawing people, navigating local labor market and complex regulations and systems that govern small and medium enterprises.
   - Syncing their entrepreneurial spirit and an idea with the skills, expertise and networks needed to make that business successful.