

# Finding satisfying work

The experiences of recent migrants  
with low level English

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## ABOUT AMES AUSTRALIA

**Vision:** Full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society.

AMES Australia is the largest provider of services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. Services include English language, settlement, training and employment programs. In 2014 AMES worked with approximately 35,000 clients.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AMES Australia recognises that employment is an important component of successful settlement. This study investigated the employment situation of 102 migrants who had arrived in Australia with low level English four years earlier.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The focus of this report is on the work satisfaction of migrants arriving in Australia with low level English, approximately four years after arrival. Major themes for the participants in this study included the impact of low level English, barriers to finding work aligned with their skills, and challenges securing reasonable employment conditions. Women experienced more difficulties finding satisfying work on these terms and were more likely than men to experience occupational downgrading in Australia.**

Migration is a significant factor in Australia's economic development. The Federal Government strongly promotes skilled migration and its benefits for productivity. The proportion of migrants coming to Australia from non-English speaking countries is increasing and a significant number of people arrive with relatively low levels of English. This research considered the employment outcomes of a group of migrants in this category.

Having worked with migrants for many years, AMES Australia recognises that employment is an important component of successful settlement. This study investigated the employment situation of 102 migrants with low level English who had arrived in Australia four years earlier. We were interested in the following questions:

- What kinds of work were migrants who arrived with low level English doing after four years in Australia?
- How satisfied were they with their work?
- What factors influenced their work satisfaction?

Initially recruited for a longitudinal study in 2008, the participants of the research were former English language students enrolled at AMES. They included people who had arrived through all three streams of the migration program: Skilled, Family and Humanitarian. Two thirds of participants were women, one third men.

Participants had diverse educational and employment backgrounds and came from 19 different countries.

By 2012, all but one of the participants who were in the labour force had worked in Australia. This was two-thirds of the total group (88 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women). The remaining one third were not in the labour force at the time of our final interview for this research.

Many people arrived with significant employment experience and skills. Sixty seven per cent of participants in the study had a tertiary qualification before coming to Australia. Despite this, the major areas of employment in Australia four years after arrival were factory work, care work and customer service.

As expected, low level English was a significant barrier to finding work. Forty per cent of participants had arrived with no or extremely limited English. Many participants reported that it had been harder than they expected to acquire the level of English they needed for the work they thought they would be doing in Australia. Participants with tertiary qualifications found this particularly challenging.

The aim of this study was to look beyond whether or not participants had found a job in Australia and consider their satisfaction with their employment four years post migration. We investigated three main aspects of work satisfaction: the match between work in Australia and work overseas, employment conditions and relationships with other people at work.

Levels of satisfaction varied, but there were some clear trends. Participants whose work in Australia drew on their skills and former work experience were more likely to be satisfied with their employment situation than those who were working in unrelated jobs. Participants with good work conditions were also more likely to be happier than those with poor conditions even when their employment was low status. Relationships with colleagues had an important influence on satisfaction.

Participants in the study who had arrived without tertiary qualifications were more likely to be satisfied with their work situation because their expectations were not highly specific. Satisfaction was reduced when work was intermittent, low paid or precarious in other ways. Low level English in some cases meant that participants in this group did not or could not seek clarification about their conditions of work. Further research to understand the experiences of this group of migrants and to improve access to information about their work rights in Australia is recommended.

Many tertiary qualified participants were working in jobs that did not draw on their qualifications or professional experience. The research suggests that this group were less satisfied due to the high barriers to accessing professional work in Australia. Programs supporting the integration of tertiary qualified migrants who arrive with low level English into the labour force in areas that better use their skills would therefore be valuable from the perspective of both the individuals involved and the Australian economy.

Women in this study experienced greater challenges in finding satisfying work than men. Four years after arriving in Australia, many women with tertiary qualifications and professional experience were working in jobs that did not use their skills. A combination of factors had resulted in them not returning to their original profession.

Participants in this research expressed a strong desire to participate economically and socially in Australia. Although it had been much harder to find work than they had expected, they still saw Australia as a place of opportunity. Employment was seen as a critical way to contribute to and become integrated into their new home country.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

**Migration is a significant factor in Australia's economic development. Successive governments have emphasised the value of the migration program in improving Australia's productivity and supporting its economic growth. Fundamental to this is the expectation that the knowledge and skills brought to Australia through migration are put to use in the labour force (Spinks 2010).**

Research by the Australian Government indicates the relative success of migrants in finding employment<sup>1</sup>. Within this broad picture, however, there is significant variation, with some migrants experiencing greater success in finding work than others. Men from English speaking backgrounds who come to Australia through the Skilled stream of the migration program have the best employment outcomes. The situation for people from non-English speaking countries, and women in particular, is less favourable (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a; Miranti, Nepal & McNamara 2010).

An increasing proportion of people are coming to Australia from non-English speaking countries (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015a). Although many people from these countries arrive with high level English, a significant number do not. In 2014, 66,000 people accessed English language classes provided by the Australian Government for recently arrived migrants with low level English (Department of Industry and Science 2014, p.46).

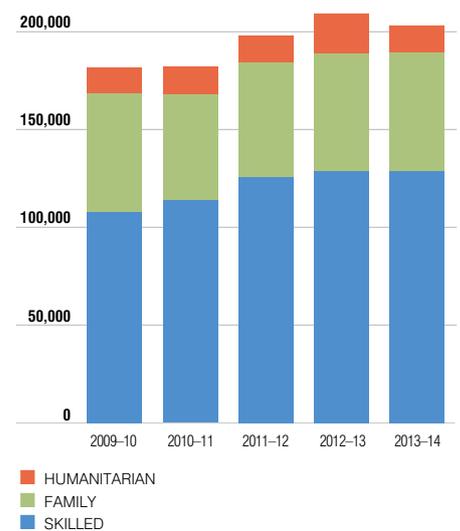
AMES Australia clients, the majority of whom come from non-English speaking backgrounds, are strongly motivated to work in Australia (AMES 2011). Many people arrive hoping to use qualifications and skills they already have or to work in positions that otherwise draw on their resources and capacity. For the great majority of people, finding suitable employment is a crucial element in the process of settlement. As well as ensuring access to resources including food, housing and healthcare, employment is an important part of becoming part of Australian society. It is an essential way of developing social connections and gaining social acceptance (Galligan, Boese & Phillips 2014; Valtonen 2004).

AMES has a strong interest in understanding the work trajectories of our clients. In addition to whether or not our clients find work, we are interested in the nature of this work and how it relates to clients' employment backgrounds. This knowledge can assist us in delivering services that facilitate successful settlement.

## AUSTRALIA'S MIGRATION PROGRAM

In 2013-14, just over 200,000 new permanent migrants arrived in Australia through one of three visa streams: Skilled, Family and Humanitarian. The Skilled stream forms the largest portion of permanent migration to Australia due to economic imperatives to increase Australia's skilled workforce (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2013).

**CHART 1: PERMANENT MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA 2009- 2014<sup>2</sup>**



Source: (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015c)

<sup>1</sup> In this report the term 'migrant' is used to refer to people coming to Australia for permanent settlement through any of the migration streams: Skilled, Family and Humanitarian.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding Australian or New Zealand citizens returning after living overseas or the small number of people on special eligibility visas.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Skilled visas are intended for people with qualifications and employment experience that are in demand in the Australian labour market. Professions currently on the Government's Skilled Occupation List include health professionals, engineers, IT specialists and trade workers<sup>3</sup>. The primary applicant in this stream must satisfy a series of requirements relating to their professional skills, age, health and character. They must demonstrate a high level of proficiency in English. Skilled visa holders very often bring members of their immediate family including partners and children (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015b). Skilled migration accounts for about two thirds of permanent migrants to Australia. Currently the top three source countries for Skilled migrants are India, the United Kingdom and China.

Family migration accounts for one third of permanent migration to Australia. This visa stream is for family members of Australian permanent residents or citizens. More than three quarters of people granted visas in this stream are partners or spouses. Currently the top three source countries for people in this visa category are China, India and the United Kingdom.

The Humanitarian stream provides visas for people who are refugees. This stream represents about 7% of the total permanent migration program. The main countries of origin in this stream at present are Afghanistan, Iraq and Myanmar.

About a quarter of permanent migrants from each of the major migration streams settle in Victoria.

**TABLE 1: MAIN COUNTRIES OF BIRTH FOR NEW PERMANENT MIGRANTS TO VICTORIA 2013-2014<sup>4</sup>**

Country of Birth	Number	Per cent
China	6,658	19%
India	6,163	18%
United Kingdom	1,619	5%
Philippines	1,416	4%
Sri Lanka	1,330	4%
All other Countries	17,042	50%
<b>Total new permanent settlers to Victoria</b>	<b>34,228</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014

## ADULT MIGRANT ENGLISH PROGRAM (AMEP)

The AMEP is an Australian Government program providing English tuition for permanent migrants in Australia. Accessible and voluntary English language classes have been available for people with low level English since 1948<sup>5</sup>. Eligibility for the program is determined by people's need for English language assistance. English is assessed using the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) on a scale of 0 – 5 where 0 is 'no proficiency' and 5 is 'native like proficiency'. The AMEP is currently available for migrants with English proficiency of less than 2 in one or more of the core language skills of speaking, listening, reading or writing.

Not all migrants from non-English speaking countries require the AMEP. The AMEP is not compulsory and migrants with high English language proficiency, including primary applicants in the Skilled stream, are not eligible.

The AMEP provides a minimum of 510 hours of preliminary English language tuition. The curriculum focuses on the language and cultural information required to access systems and services that migrants need to use early in their settlement in Australia. Employment and job seeking in Australia are key contexts for language learning.

AMES is the largest AMEP provider in Victoria and in 2013 provided English tuition to more than 16,000 people (AMES 2014b).

<sup>3</sup> See Department of Immigration and Border Protection Skilled Occupation List.

<sup>4</sup> Note: All percentages quoted in tables and charts throughout this report are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of component items may not always total exactly 100%.

<sup>5</sup> The provision of English classes is legislated in the *Immigration (Education) Act 1971* and *Immigration (Education) Regulations 1992*. More detailed information about the AMEP is available from the Department of Education and Training.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

This research documents the employment situations of a group of recent migrants with low level English from a range of occupational backgrounds. It explores the kinds of work people were doing, how satisfied they were with this work and what factors influenced their satisfaction.

On starting out in Australia, a number of factors combine to put new migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds on a different footing from local job applicants. Lack of knowledge about local recruitment practices and a lack of local work experience can significantly reduce people's chances of being shortlisted for positions. Several studies have shown that employers may make judgements about a candidate based on the name on their resume (Booth, Leigh & Varganova 2010; Oreopoulos 2009). Those who do reach the interview stage may have difficulties convincing employers of the value of their overseas qualifications and their ability to adapt to the local workplace culture (McKay 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013; Syed 2008). Further, new migrants typically lack the formal and informal networks that are known to be crucial for securing work and in particular for finding jobs with good conditions and pay (Granovetter 1973; Mahuteau & Junankar 2008). Australian born professionals have greater access to these networks and use them to hear about unadvertised jobs, gain information about the industry, and obtain reputable references.

One consequence of these barriers is reduced labour force participation. Recent migrants are less likely to be in the labour force than the Australian born population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a). Although this employment gap is most pronounced for Humanitarian entrants, it is also significant for people arriving from non-English speaking backgrounds as Family migrants and for secondary applicants in the Skilled stream (Hugo 2011; Smith, Kovac & Woods 2013).

Alongside issues of access to and participation in the labour market, migrants with low level English also face a greater risk of occupational downgrading. People take jobs below their qualification and skill level as a strategy to secure income while they develop local networks and improve their English. However, it can take longer than expected to overcome initial barriers to professional employment and people can still find themselves at some distance from their original occupation four or more years after arrival (Liebig 2007; Ryan & Sinning 2012). There is limited research on the longer-term occupational transitions of people who arrive in Australia with low level English.

More women than men are migrating to Australia every year (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015a). Yet there is a significant gender gap in employment outcomes with migrant women less likely to be in the workforce compared to migrant men. Migrant women are also less likely to be in the labour force than Australian born women (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a).

The majority of recently arrived migrants are in the 20-44 age group, which means many families are likely to have young children. Women predominantly manage childcare. The challenge of organising childcare can be particularly difficult for migrant women because access to informal family care networks, such as family, friends and neighbours can be sharply reduced as a result of migration (Cooke, Zhang & Wang 2013; Webb, Beale & Faine 2013). Families may prioritise employment for men early in settlement, particularly as men's income is likely to be higher than women's (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2015). These are some of the reasons migrant women are less likely to be in the labour force. Like many Australian born women, migrant women with children may favour jobs that offer flexibility. As it currently stands, many of these jobs are casual, low paid and low status (McGann 2012).

Gender and ethnicity operate together in relation to employment prospects. Irrespective of qualifications and work history overseas, women from culturally distant and non-English speaking countries may face a range of stereotypes about the kinds of work that they are most suited for in the labour market (Babacan 2014; Browne & Misra 2003; Webb 2015). Accessible work is more often in feminised occupations such as in care work and administration, fields which are undervalued in terms of pay, status and conditions (Acker 1989; Cortis & Meagher 2012).

This research draws on interviews with 102 migrants who participated in an AMES longitudinal study from 2008 to 2012. The participants had arrived in 2008 or earlier and were learning English in the AMEP. An initial study, based on a series of interviews with participants, set out to evaluate the impact of the AMEP on settlement and employment. Analysis from the early stages of this study revealed the difficulties migrants with low level English had in finding work generally and, specifically, work that was commensurate with their skills and capacities (AMES 2011).

The study was extended in 2012, allowing us to conduct a final interview with all participants to find out more about their employment experiences in Australia. The key questions were:

- What kinds of work were migrants who arrived with low level English doing after four years in Australia?<sup>6</sup>
- How satisfied were they with their work?
- What factors influenced their work satisfaction?

Four short case studies are presented within the body of this report. These are based on separate in-depth interviews with study participants and highlight some of the challenges new migrants face looking for work in Australia.

<sup>6</sup> In 2012 ninety-four per cent of participants had been in Australia between three and five years.

## CASE STUDY 1

### MIGRATION AND CAREER ADAPTABILITY

Ling Li<sup>7</sup> came to Australia from China in 2008. She had studied Business Management and worked in IT for 16 years, initially as a skilled technician in a telecommunications factory, subsequently in sales and marketing. Alongside her work in IT, Ling opened a private school of the arts, teaching singing to adults and children. She migrated to Australia through the Skilled stream with her teenage daughter.

On arrival, Ling studied English in the AMEP. She started looking for work in IT whilst studying but was not successful in any of her job applications. She formed the view fairly soon that she was unlikely to find work in IT and decided to start a small business. With advice and support from her landlord, she opened a fish and chip shop.

Early on in our interview Ling spoke positively about her work situation in Australia:

*It's very hard, especially at the beginning, because I'm not familiar with the food industry. And also communication with other people is hard for me at the beginning. But now I feel very good! Because now it's getting better and lots of local people, they recognise my shop. They become regular customers. I think doing business in Australia is easy, because you just focus on what you're doing. You just manage it well. That's all. I can run a very good shop.*

When asked about her former qualifications and work experience, Ling did express some regret and suggested that she thought it was unlikely that she would work in her former field again:

*It's not quite right for me. It's not a match with my skills and experience because I studied business management in the telecommunications industry. This is the first time I manage business in the food industry. I think if you want to be mixed in this society you have to forget what you studied or what you experienced in your country and try to understand the new culture and rules and do something this new community accepts.*

Ling identified her low level English and a lack of familiarity with the Australian labour market as the main barriers to finding work in her field. She advised new migrants to be better informed:

*I think if we can open more information to migrants and let them know what the Australian market needs they'll find it easier to get a job.*

Ling has decided that her professional contribution in Australia will be through small business and intends to develop a new business in the future. She is very appreciative of the support she received in the process of settling in Australia:

*I would thank the Australian Government as they provided me with lots of opportunities to study language, understand the culture, know people and helped me to build confidence living and working in Australia.*

Whatever type of work people had taken up, a key factor in their satisfaction was being able to use their skills and capacity in some way in Australia.

<sup>7</sup> Names of people in case studies have been changed.

## 2 RESEARCH DESIGN

**The AMES Australia longitudinal study consisted of four interviews conducted between 2008 and 2012 with an initial 245 participants. Data and analysis from the first three interviews is available (AMES 2011). The focus of this report is on the final telephone interviews completed in 2012 with 102 of the original study group participants.**

The longitudinal design of this research was highly advantageous. Having interviewed participants over four years, we already knew a lot about their backgrounds and did not need to rely on their recall of events soon after migration. This allowed us to focus the final interview on their current situation. The schedule for this last interview covered:

- education and work experience prior to migration
- type of employment and employment conditions in Australia
- the match between current and former work
- relationships with others at work
- satisfaction with employment situation
- aspirations for work in the future
- advice for other migrants coming to Australia.

Interviews were coded using Nvivo10 software. The themes presented in this report are based on an analysis of this data.

In addition to these telephone interviews we conducted four in-person interviews with study participants. The case studies in this report are based on this material.

### INTERVIEWING IN FIRST LANGUAGE

From the beginning of the longitudinal study, we employed bilingual research assistants in order to communicate with participants about the complex topic of work. For many participants this allowed them to take part in this interview based research. In 2012 we employed nine research assistants to conduct final interviews in the languages most commonly spoken by participants. These were Arabic, Cantonese, Chin, Dari, Hazaragi, Karen, Mandarin, Tamil and Vietnamese<sup>8</sup>.

The research assistants shared more than just language with the participants; in many cases they had similar migration experiences. They understood the potentially sensitive nature of the research and issues relating to employment for new migrants. As highly skilled communicators in their first language as well as English, the research assistants were able to collect rich data about the employment experiences of the participants they interviewed.

Interviews were conducted by telephone at a time convenient to the participant. The research assistant asked questions in first language and recorded responses in English. Responses were documented using online data collection software.

The benefits and some of the challenges of working with bilingual research assistants in this research are discussed in detail in a separate paper available on the AMES website<sup>9</sup>.

### REFERENCE AND ADVISORY GROUPS

A Reference Group made up of AMES staff from migrant backgrounds, including the research assistants, was convened to provide advice on cultural issues relevant to the research. Members of the Reference Group were from the same range of cultural backgrounds as the participants. They had all migrated to Australia recently and were familiar with issues relating to employment within their respective cultural communities. The commentary and insights provided by Reference Group members had an important influence on the research in relation to the proposed areas of inquiry, methodology and interpretation of the data collected.

Alongside the Reference Group, the study was overseen by an Advisory Group comprised of people working in research relating to migration. In 2012 members of this group included staff from the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Refugee Council of Australia, the University of Melbourne, VicHealth and AMES. The role of the Advisory Group was to provide expert advice on the research theme, design and data analysis.

<sup>8</sup> A small number of people from other language backgrounds with higher levels of spoken English participated in this study and were interviewed in English.

<sup>9</sup> AMES 2014a, The First Language Advantage: Working with Bilingual Research Assistants.

## 2 RESEARCH DESIGN

### ETHICS

Research for the longitudinal study was approved under the AMES Research and Ethics Policy in 2008<sup>10</sup>.

Participants gave written consent to be involved at the commencement of the longitudinal study in 2008. This consent was reconfirmed verbally at the beginning of each interview. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage. All data collected was treated as confidential. Participants were informed of the progress of the research at regular intervals.

A referral protocol was established to guide research assistants when participants conveyed concern about their employment situation or settlement in general. Research assistants were required to offer referral to appropriate AMES services for professional support in such cases.

The research assistants did not know any of the participants outside their work on this research.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study reports on the experiences of a relatively small number of migrants enrolled in the AMEP in 2008. We are not suggesting that this group is representative of all migrants with low level English who arrived at this time.

The research was conducted with former AMES clients by research assistants employed by AMES. It is possible that participants' responses may have been influenced by their experiences of or views about AMES. In order to reduce the potential for bias in responses, research assistants were trained to emphasise the confidential nature of the interview, encourage participants to speak openly and communicate AMES sincere interest in their experiences of work in Australia.

Participants responded to questions in their first language. These responses were translated by the research assistants and documented in English. Given this process, the spoken words from participants cited in this report are more accurately described as paraphrase rather than quotation.

The research assistants shared more than just language with the participants; in many cases they had similar migration experiences.

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<sup>10</sup> The AMES Research and Ethics policy was developed in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

## CASE STUDY 2:

### MIGRATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Growing up in Iraq, Habib Mossawi always had a great love of English language and a curiosity about the world outside his country of birth. His aspiration as a young person was to work as a teacher or an interpreter. He completed a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and his first job was with the Ministry of Education in Iraq. He went on to work with the Multi-National Force active in Iraq at that time.

Habib arrived in 2008 with his wife and two children. He attended the AMEP and started looking for work at the same time. Initially, his hope was to find work as an interpreter or in a role otherwise related to the work he had been doing in Iraq. After some time, he undertook a number of short courses in the expectation that these would enable him to find other jobs unrelated to his previous experience. He completed certificates in customer service, transport and logistics, first aid and forklift driving. He applied for an increasingly wide range of jobs but, to his distress, was not successful with any:

*I'll tell you, a simple job: car park inspector. What kind of qualification do you need? What kind of experience do I need?*

Habib described a large folder in which he kept all his job applications. Most were never acknowledged. His impression was that the absence of Australian work experience was a major barrier.

Wanting to do something positive towards his professional future, Habib enrolled in and completed a Master of Education. During this time, he took on a voluntary role as a leader in his community, organising cultural events and job search workshops and providing support to other professionals looking for work.

When Habib eventually did find work, three years after arriving in Australia, it was not through any formal job search strategies. Chatting with his neighbour one day, he learned that the neighbour worked for a community service organisation with Arabic speaking clients.

He asked if he could contact the organisation and the neighbour passed on the details. Habib sent his resume, was offered an interview straight away and started work two weeks later. After a short period of casual work, the organisation offered him a full time, permanent role. At the time of our interview, he expressed how happy he was to have a secure and enjoyable job:

*I love it! Every morning when I wake up, I am happy in order to come to work.*

He commented on the importance of social networks for finding work:

*I got the job because of the contact. Not because of my qualification. Not because of my experience. Because of my contact.*

Although Habib is very happy to have this job, his long-term goal is still to work as an interpreter, possibly in the international aid sector. When asked how settled he felt in Australia after four years, he referred to his career aspiration and his wish to secure stable housing for his family:

*In terms of settlement, to be honest with you, I'm not settled yet. Because I'm thinking what settlement means is that I got my own house, my own property, in order to settle, to live.*

Like many other participants in the study, Habib advocated strongly for work experience opportunities for new migrants. He shared his advice for migrants looking for employment in Australia:

*I want just to say something to people who are really looking for work - not to stop. To keep going and to make contact, communicate with other people. It is really important. As I said, I got my job through my contact. Through my relationship, not according to my qualification or work experience. They need to keep going. Don't panic. Don't stop. Don't be frustrated.*

I want just to say something to people who are really looking for work - not to stop. To keep going and to make contact, communicate with other people. It is really important.

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The study group is broadly representative of AMEP enrolments in 2008. There was a high degree of diversity with participants having come from 19 different countries on a range of visas and with widely varying employment backgrounds. Over two thirds (69%) of the participants were women.

The majority of participants in the study arrived through the Family stream, followed by those who arrived through the Humanitarian stream. Skilled and Family stream migrants in this study were mostly from China, Vietnam and India. Humanitarian entrants mainly came from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Iraq.

**TABLE 2: VISA TYPE AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH**

		Per cent (n=102)
Visa Stream	Family	42%
	Humanitarian	35%
	Skilled or Business	23%
Country of birth	China	27%
	Myanmar	18%
	Vietnam	11%
	Afghanistan	8%
	India	8%
	Sri Lanka	6%
	Iraq	5%
	Iran	4%
	Pakistan	3%
Other	11%	

Over one third of participants had no or extremely limited English proficiency on enrolment in the AMEP. About 10% of participants from Humanitarian backgrounds had not completed formal schooling and in some cases were not literate in their first language.

**TABLE 3: SPOKEN ENGLISH ON ENTRY TO AMEP**

	Per cent (n=102)
No or extremely limited English - ISLPR 0	40%
Basic transactional English - ISLPR 1	42%
Basic social English - ISLPR 2	18%

Most participants in this study were between 20 and 50 years old and were intending to work in Australia. Less than 10% of participants were older than 50. Participants from Humanitarian backgrounds were younger than people in other streams.

Eighty-five per cent of participants were in their first months of settlement at the time of the first interviews in 2008 and had therefore been in Australia for approximately four years by 2012.

The majority of participants in this study (62%) had a tertiary qualification. Most people (71%) had some work experience prior to coming to Australia. This reflects migration trends in Australia towards more highly qualified and skilled migrants with current data indicating that migrant adults are twice as likely as Australian born adults to have a tertiary qualification (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013b).

**TABLE 4: HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOLING**

	Per cent (n=102)
Tertiary	62%
Secondary	23%
Primary	4%
No formal schooling	12%

Thirty eight per cent of participants had not completed any tertiary study. This was more common for participants on Humanitarian visas, reflecting their younger age and circumstances prior to arrival. However, there were also a number of people who arrived on Humanitarian visas with tertiary qualifications and significant professional experience.

The participants who were graduates but did not have a work history were all women. They had moved to Australia soon after graduation and before having an opportunity to start work.

The main areas of work for women prior to migration were teaching, administration and healthcare. Titles of jobs held by women overseas included: 'Secondary school teacher', 'Payroll accounts officer' and 'Nurse'. The main occupations for men prior to migration were trades, science, engineering and IT. Examples include 'Auto Mechanic', 'Building services engineer' and 'IT Manager'.

<sup>11</sup> This is based on assessment using International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR) on enrolment. Data was recorded in the AMEP Reporting and Management System database.

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

**TABLE 5: OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND ON ARRIVAL**

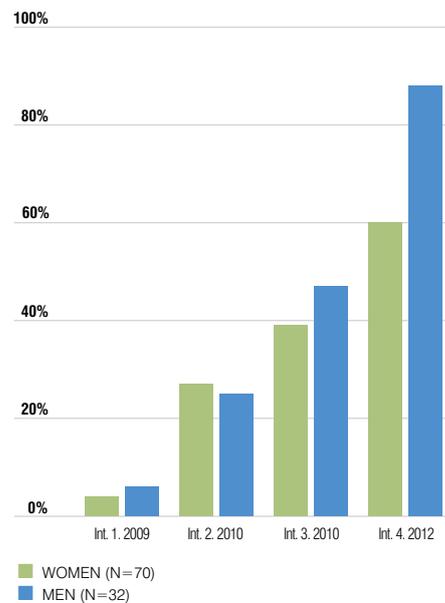
	Per cent (n=102)
Science, engineering, IT professional	10%
Tradesperson, machinist	10%
Administration or clerical worker	9%
Teacher	8%
Factory worker or labourer	8%
Salesperson	6%
Healthcare worker	6%
Finance, law, arts, social professional	5%
Customer service or retail worker	5%
Hospitality worker	4%
Business - owner operator	3%
Not worked - graduate	10%
Not worked - non graduate	18%

## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

At the beginning of the longitudinal study, 95 per cent of participants indicated that they intended to work in Australia in the future (AMES 2011). A small number of people were already employed but most were learning English full time. In this section we report on the labour force participation of the study group over time. We describe the types of jobs the participants were doing at the final interview four years after they enrolled in the AMEP.

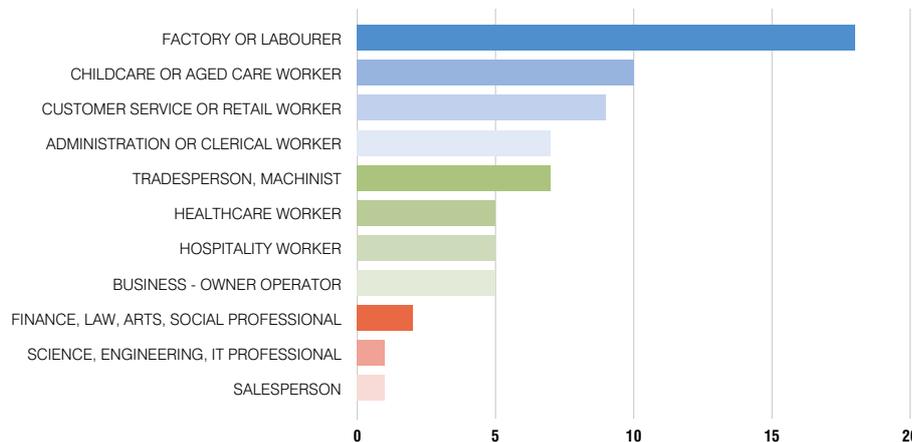
Over the course of the longitudinal study the number of participants who had held a job steadily increased. By 2012 every participant who had looked for work, with one exception, had experienced employment in Australia. Two thirds of participants had started working, with 88 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women having had at least one job in Australia. The majority of those who had not looked for work yet were women who were caring for their children or other family members. Other reasons for being out of the labour force included further study and health issues.

**CHART 2: PARTICIPANTS STARTING WORK IN AUSTRALIA (N=102)**



The major areas of employment in Australia were factory work, care work and customer service. More than one in five participants who had started working were in factory or labouring work; the main occupations were meat processing and cleaning. The second most common area of employment was care work, with the majority in childcare assistance. The third most common area was customer service or retail, most often at one of the big supermarkets in Australia.

**CHART 3: EMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA (THOSE WHO HAD WORKED N=70)**



# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

Other areas of employment included trades (e.g. electricians) and healthcare (e.g. dental assistants). Business owner operators all owned and managed small retail shops across Melbourne. Four people were in professional positions (IT programmers, interpreter). Full descriptions of participant occupations before and after migration to Australia are provided in the appendix.

The focus of this report is on the work satisfaction of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, four or more years after arrival. Major themes for the participants in this study included the impact of low level English, barriers to finding work aligned with their skills and challenges securing reasonable employment conditions. Women experienced more difficulties finding satisfying work on these terms and were more likely than men to experience occupational downgrading in Australia.

## IMPACT OF STARTING OUT WITH LOW LEVEL ENGLISH

Low level English is clearly a significant barrier to finding employment in Australia. While all participants in this study had arrived with low level English, there were significant variations in proficiency. Some people had experienced considerable exposure to English and achieved a basic social level of communication before migration while others had virtually no English on arrival.

Most participants in this research said they had underestimated how challenging it would be to acquire the level of English they needed to find suitable work. Tertiary qualified participants and participants with many years' professional experience had come to Australia expecting to be able to find work in their field. They were not prepared for a long career gap while they re-established themselves in a new labour market:

*At the start I wanted to have a job in sales but I can't do this because my English is not strong enough. It was hard to settle here. Learning English, learning new systems - everything is new so it is very hard to learn everything. I cannot find a job same as my previous job. I have no choice. I have to live, to make a living. (Sales manager from China, male, business owner)*

Almost a quarter (22%) of participants with a tertiary qualification had no or virtually no English on arrival. Migrants with low level English often need to balance the need to work with efforts to learn English. For some of the participants work had to take priority and this limited their opportunity to learn English after arrival:

*I have finished 510 hours and I have improved my English a little, but I still only have basic English. I want to learn more but because of money I must work. (Hairdresser/waitress from Myanmar, female, working in meat processing)*

Language skills are not just about language literally but about cultural familiarity. Recruitment and employment practices in different countries can vary widely. Approaches to prospective employers, resume presentation and interview styles can vary across cultural contexts and it can take time for new migrants to understand the nuances of job-hunting in an Australian context:

*I found it hard getting the job I have been expecting because of the lack of language skills and knowledge of work cultures in Australia, which made me feel very confused. (Accounting graduate from Vietnam, female, has not worked in Australia)*

Lack of confidence was a factor raised by many people. This was related to the experience of job hunting in an unfamiliar cultural environment but was strongly exacerbated by limited English skills:

*First of all I think language is very important. If you don't have appropriate language skills you will struggle to find a job. I had very basic English when I arrived - I had no confidence. (Travel agent from Russia, female, working as bookkeeper)*

The 510 hours of AMEP cannot provide more than an introduction for those who arrive without English and for many people there were limited opportunities to learn more than a survival level of English. Most participants had improved their English over time. Nevertheless, four years into their settlement, English language level was still having a significant impact on most participants' employment options.

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

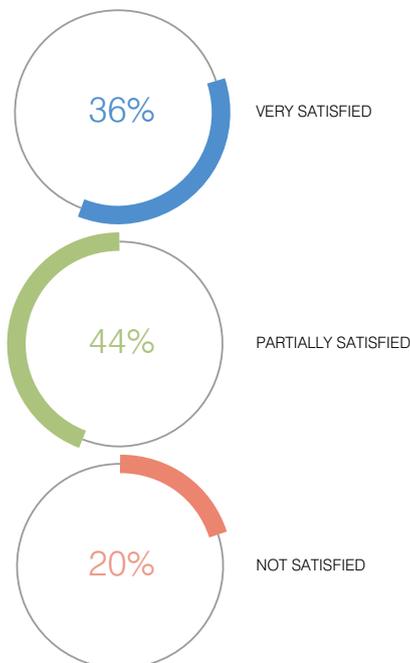
## SATISFACTION WITH WORK

About one third of the participants who had worked in Australia could be described as being satisfied with their work situation. A few people in this group were extremely happy, doing exactly what they hoped to be doing and feeling positive about their future employment. Others were aspiring to a better work situation but generally felt that they were on the right track professionally.

Half of the people who had worked in Australia were somewhat satisfied. This group included people who were using some of their skills but were working in a more junior role or in a different occupational context. It also included people who were not using their skills but had good work conditions.

One in five participants were not at all satisfied with their work situation. Their expectations of working in Australia had not been fulfilled. People in this group included those whose work did not have any relationship to their skills and experiences. These participants often communicated concern about their prospects for the future.

**CHART 4: SATISFACTION WITH EMPLOYMENT SITUATION (WORKING PARTICIPANTS (N=70))**



Levels of employment satisfaction were derived through thematic analysis of participant responses to the following questions:

- How satisfied are you with the conditions of your job?
- What is the main reason you are satisfied (or not satisfied) with the conditions of your job?
- How do you feel about the match between your skills and your job?
- How would you describe your experiences of working with other people at this job?

Below we report on the three areas of investigation in relation to participants' jobs:

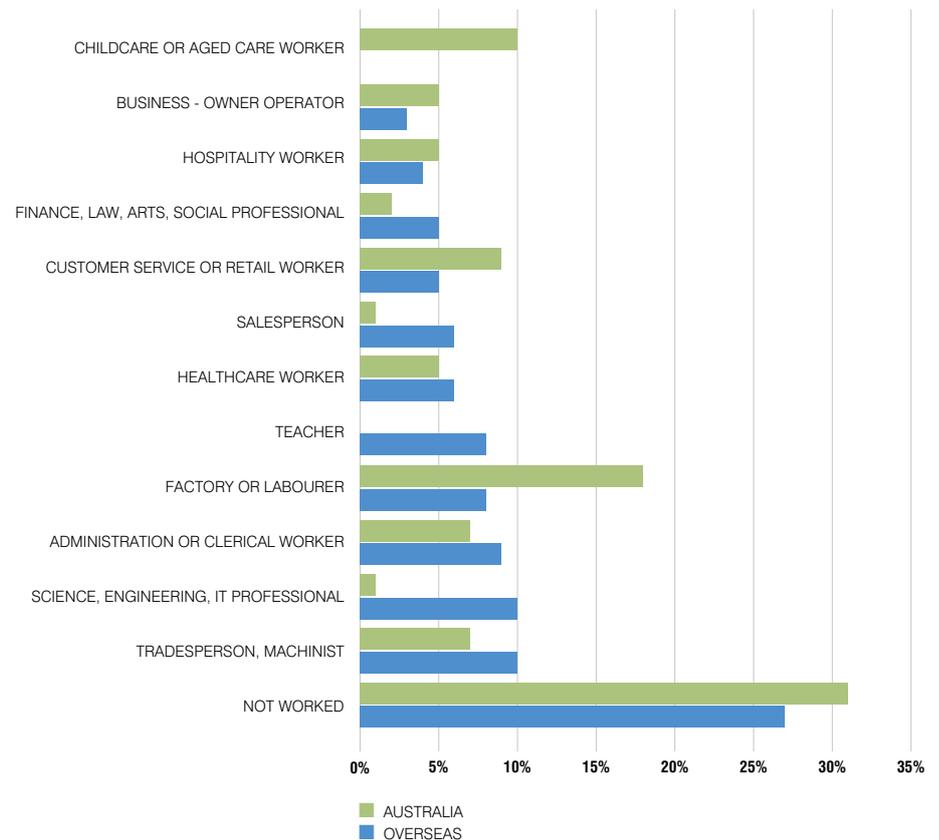
- 1) the match between work in Australia and work overseas
- 2) employment conditions and
- 3) relationships with others in the workplace.

## THE MATCH BETWEEN WORK IN AUSTRALIA AND WORK OVERSEAS

After four years in Australia, few of the participants with tertiary qualifications or professional experience were in employment that was a good match to their previous positions overseas. Many were in a less senior role than previously or working in a job unrelated to their work overseas.

For example, some IT specialists were working in retail or factory jobs, participants with trade qualifications were often working in factory and labouring jobs rather than in their trade and all the teachers were working in industries other than education. (See appendix for more details).

**CHART 5: PARTICIPANT EMPLOYMENT BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA (N=102)**



# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

The small number of participants who were working in jobs related to their former work were much more likely to be satisfied than others. A participant with a degree in computer science was working in a full time, permanent role as a programmer at a major Australian bank when we interviewed her. She was extremely happy with her work situation and spoke about how important it was to her that she was using her qualifications:

*Most of the things I'm doing are very similar to what I learnt when I was in university. I'm gaining a lot of experience. It's giving me a good opportunity to see another career, how to grow, how to motivate myself. I definitely if it is possible want to continue with my work and stay in the same career. (Communications Officer & IT graduate from Ethiopia, female, working as programmer)*

Whatever type of work people had taken up, a key factor in their satisfaction was being able to use their skills and capacity in some way in their job in Australia. A participant who was very satisfied with his position as a machine operator in caravan manufacturing said:

*The job matched my skills. I used to work with machines in manufacturing. I enjoyed doing the work and developing my skills. I had a chance to make use of my experience to improve my work every day. My skills and experiences could meet the requirements of the work and help me improve myself. (Mechanic from Vietnam, male, working as machine operator)*

Similarly, a participant working in meat processing reported feeling very satisfied:

*It's a good match. I worked as a farmer before but now work with machines. It's all fine. I am happy with this match. I cannot speak English; I do not have other skills, so this job is very happy for me. (Farmer from Myanmar, male, working in meat processing)*

Participants in jobs that did not draw on their skills and experiences were more often dissatisfied. A participant with significant experience in IT was working in a textile factory. He said he was grateful to be able to support his family but felt disappointed not to be working in his professional field:

*The work I am doing is totally different compared to my skills. I used to work in information technology - installing programs. I am currently working using physical strength. I rarely have time to develop and make use of my creativity. I work on ready-made patterns. I feel sorry not to have a chance to make use of my skills in the work I am doing. (IT specialist from Vietnam, male, working as fabric cutter in factory)*

Most people migrating to Australia, especially from non-English speaking countries, are aware that finding work might be difficult. The issues are well documented and include difficulties relating to recognition of overseas qualifications, employer emphasis on local experience and the absence of networks for finding work (Mahuteau & Junankar 2008; Reitz, Curtis & Elrick 2014; Williams 2008). Throughout the interviews participants said that finding work in their field had been more challenging than expected. A Finance Manager from China who had worked in real estate, managed a power plant and been the financial controller of a hotel business overseas said:

*I had hoped I could work in the accounting and finance area as I used to in my country. It is very hard for me to find the first job as every job requires experience and references. (Finance manager from China, male, printing press worker)*

An experienced Mechanical Engineer who had worked alongside Australian and American engineers in Iraq spoke about his attempts to find an engineering role in Australia:

*When I applied for a job, they said, 'Do you have experience in Australia?' If I said, 'I have just been here for one year', then it became difficult for me. They would ask, 'Do you know about safety procedures here? Do you know about work here?' It is difficult, you know, just to acclimatize straight away and adapt with them in the work. I appreciate that, actually. (Mechanical Engineer from Iraq, male, doing PhD)*

At the time this participant arrived, the automotive industry in Victoria was experiencing a significant downturn. Labour market conditions can have a significant impact on migrants' ability to secure work.

The impact of not securing work that uses qualifications and skills in the long term can be significant. It includes substantially lower income relative to investment in education and a strong risk of skill loss and loss of social status. All of these factors influence wellbeing and settlement experiences for migrant families (Dean & Wilson 2009; Reid 2012).

One strategy for new migrants to overcome these barriers is to take up an entry level job in the hope that, over time, they will find a position more closely related to their previous employment:

*I wish to work in the logistics area in the future. I wish to gain experiences from this short-term job, improve my English skills and then find a suitable job for the future. (Transport & logistics manager from China, female, working as pathology collector)*

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

The desire to enter the workforce as soon as possible may explain some of the drop in occupational status experienced by participants in this study. Taking any job in the short term may address the immediate need for income and provide valuable experience in the Australian labour market. In the long term, however, this may be at the expense of quality of employment (Green, Kler & Leeves 2007; Kostenko, Harris & Zhao 2009). As time away from a previous field lengthens, a pathway back to an original field of qualification can become less feasible. Interviewing participants four years after migration, it was clear that some people were beginning to feel they were unlikely to return to their original field:

*I feel that in order to find a job in Australia sometimes you have to change your career. However, after you changed your career, it's very hard to change it back. It's just like me. I expected to find a job in IT industry when I came to Australia, but because of my poor English, I turned to work in a food industry. It took me about three years working there. Now it's very hard for me to find a job back in the IT arena. (IT manager from China, male, working as food production supervisor)*

While those from a professional background expected a drop in occupational status in the initial period of adjustment and language learning, this situation appeared to have persisted for many people. After four years, many people had not returned to their previous field. Reflecting on her experiences of looking for work in Australia, an experienced Travel Agent said:

*I would say, be prepared that finding work may not happen soon. It's quite a shock. Even if you have got great experience in your own country, you may not be of interest to employers. You may need to do a few courses and prove that you have skills. (Travel agent from Russia, female, working as bookkeeper)*

Other participants had made the decision not to retrain, as it was too difficult in terms of time, energy and money. They had become resigned to the possibility that they might not use their former skills in Australia at this stage in their settlement:

*At first I wanted to continue with my accounting, but now I change my mind because it takes too long to start over again in Australia. (Finance manager from China, male, printing press worker)*

One of the consequences of new migrants taking up jobs that are unrelated to their specific skills is that they may never return to their original field. This reduces the productive potential of this workforce in Australia.

While participants could identify positive aspects of their employment conditions, the pressure to find work meant that some people had taken on jobs with less than ideal conditions.

## EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

Work conditions are an important factor in work satisfaction. Forty four per cent of the participants who had started work in Australia were in a permanent job. Three quarters were working full time. Over 70% of participants were earning between \$15 and \$30 per hour. Reflecting the types of occupations in which participants were employed, only one person earned more than \$30 per hour and almost one in five earned less than \$15 per hour. One third of participants were working in jobs where they used their first language most of the time.

**TABLE 6 EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS IN AUSTRALIA (WORKING PARTICIPANTS N=70)**

Employment conditions		Total
Status	Permanent	44%
	Casual	26%
	Self-employed	13%
	Contract	9%
	Not stated	9%
Hours of work	Full time	74%
	Part time	26%
Pay rate (per hour)	Less than \$15	17%
	Between \$15 and \$20	37%
	Between \$20 - \$30	34%
	More than \$30	1%
	Not stated	10%
Working in first language more than 50% of the time	Yes	34%
	No	66%

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

Within this overall picture there was a high degree of diversity in people's working arrangements. For many participants good conditions went a long way towards making otherwise unsuitable work more attractive. A former transport and logistics manager who was working in concreting would have preferred to work in his professional field but appreciated several aspects of his work conditions:

*I am very satisfied with the conditions of my job for now as I have family commitments. The working hours are very convenient for me to take care of my young child and to get ready for two more who are coming very soon. (Sales and logistics manager from Vietnam, male, working as concreting labourer)*

The emphasis on occupational health and safety regulations in Australia was mentioned positively especially by participants working in the manufacturing sector:

*It was very safe. I worked with my hands; there was no heavy lifting, no hazards at the workplace. The workplace was cleaned every day and checked regularly. OHS was well applied. (Mechanic from Vietnam, male, working as machine operator)*

Participants regularly compared their work conditions with their prior work overseas. Many were appreciative of higher standards of industrial protections in Australia:

*Comparing with all my friends in China, I think I'm quite lucky working in Australia. I know that lots of workplaces in China have no superannuation payments, no over time working payment, whereas I got all the benefit from working here. So I feel very happy now. (No formal work overseas, from China, male, working as apprentice electrician)*

While participants could identify positive aspects of their employment conditions, the pressure to find work meant some people had taken on jobs with less than ideal conditions. This could relate to job security, hours, wages and other entitlements:

*I'm working with an ABN number. I don't work every day – they call me when they are busy. My wages are \$15 per hour. I pay for everything myself. But I'm happy. I like going to work. (Hairdresser/business owner from Sri Lanka, female, working as cake decorator)*

Some participants had ended up in highly precarious conditions where patching together a liveable income became a constant battle:

*Sometimes I work every day, sometimes there is nothing; it depends on the roster. I need more hours. I need a consistent job to be able to pay my rent and my living costs. (Production supervisor and bookseller from Iran, male, working in supermarket)*

Among the participants in this study there were some extreme cases of underpayment and income volatility such as a participant working in administration:

*I earn less than \$15. \$10 per hour plus bonus sometimes when we've had good selling, but still overall it's less than \$15. (Bookkeeper and office administrator from China, female, working as administrative officer)*

Intermittent or very low wages were a source of dissatisfaction. A participant who was working on a farm in regional Australia who was being paid less than \$15 per hour, cash in hand, said:

*I am not satisfied because I cannot receive good pay. I want to get a job in a factory. (Shopkeeper from Afghanistan, male, working as farm labourer)*

Some of the participants in this research were working in jobs that were by nature precarious and did not bring a secure source of income. Work can be considered precarious when there are no protections against dismissal, when there is insufficient work, when payment is variable without reason or when hours are irregular and insufficient for minimum survival income (Burgess & Campbell 1998). These working arrangements, characterised by low and unpredictable income, are known to be highly detrimental to health and wellbeing (Wilkinson & Marmot 2003; Zhang & Richardson 2009). People did not always feel that they had choice in the type of work available to them. For some people, working in an environment to which they were not suited exacerbated the negative impact on wellbeing. An older participant who took a job to which she was not suited out of necessity was asked to leave after two weeks:

*It's the first job I was earning. I couldn't finish it. They wanted me to do 14 rooms in one day. I got stressed. Because of the stress, I couldn't finish it. (Arts - social science graduate and volunteer teacher, female, working as room attendant)*

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

In the context of feeling under pressure to find work but having limited English, some participants looked for jobs within their first language networks. The main way people found work where they did not need to speak English was through 'chain employment'. This occurs in workplaces where very little English is required for the execution of required tasks and existing employees are encouraged to bring in (vouch for) friends and family as potential employees. This form of recruitment appears to have occurred for some of the participants from Myanmar working in meat processing:

*My friend had contacts at the company because they already worked there and that's how I got the interview and the job. The work is in English - but other workers help translate if required. It's manual work - English is not really required except to talk to the boss, and other Chin speakers can help (Hairdresser/ waitress from Myanmar, female, working in meat processing)*

The nature of this kind work means there are limited opportunities to learn English in these workplaces:

*Most of the workers in the abattoir are Chin speaking so I don't have the opportunity to use English, but I don't really have time to talk. I communicate with other people during the break but just by gestures. When I'm working there is no time to talk. We must keep up with the machines. (Farmer from Myanmar, male, working in meat processing)*

While there may be advantages in finding work through first language connections, there may be drawbacks as evidenced by this same participant:

*When I was getting sick, I could not speak to my manager so it was a little bit difficult for me. Other people, they could talk nicely, they got leave. I could not speak, we had the same sickness but I wasn't speaking well so I couldn't get the leave. (Farmer from Myanmar, male, working in meat processing)*

Access to information about workplace rights is not always readily accessible to migrant workers, particularly those who do not speak English or are not familiar with Australian employment law. When asked about entitlements like superannuation and holiday pay many participants in the research were hazy about the details:

*I don't really know. It is not a thing to ask about superannuation here. We don't know about it. Just having a job is important. (Farmer/builder from Myanmar, male, working in meat processing)*

Work conditions have an impact on all workers but are particularly important for recent migrants, for whom limited English, a lack of familiarity with entitlements in Australia and an eagerness to have a job can mean they are more vulnerable to exploitation than other workers. Further research is required to develop better strategies to improve access to information about employment rights in Australia for those with low level English.

We respect each other, learn from each other, and cooperate happily. Everything goes smoothly. In my workplace people come from different countries, for example, Burma, India. They are very nice people.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS AT WORK

Few people would dispute the importance of social and collegiate relationships in the workplace and the impact these can have on one's employment experience. This can be more complicated for recent migrants who are adjusting to a new cultural context and different ways of working. For participants in this research there was a strong link between their relationships with others at work and their satisfaction with their employment situation.

The number of participants who spoke positively about their relationships at work was noteworthy. Almost a third of all participants described their workplace as harmonious or cooperative and spoke about experiencing a sense of friendship or respect at work:

*I feel comfortable working with people in Australia. It is fair, there is no discrimination, and you are appreciated because of your skills, no gaps between employers and employees. Whatever good suggestions you make regarding improvements in work can be considered and approved. It is very supportive, we can learn from each other. (Receptionist from Vietnam, female, working as sandwich maker)*

Participants specifically cited cultural diversity at their workplace as a source of satisfaction:

*We respect each other, learn from each other, and cooperate happily. Everything goes smoothly. In my workplace people come from different countries, for example, Burma, India. They are very nice people. We always bring our traditional food and share with each other. So we can learn the culture of different countries. (Auto Electrician from China, male, working as Auto Electrician)*

# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

A participant working at a university said:

*I enjoy working with people from different countries, speaking different languages. I respect their job. That's why they are respecting me. I am understanding them and they are understanding me. (Call centre worker & business marketing graduate from India, female, working as student administrator)*

The importance of relationships at work underscores the way in which employment is not just a source of income but an avenue for social integration. Friendships and connections with other people are a key way in which new migrants can connect with and contribute to Australian society (Dandy & Pe-Pua 2013; Valtonen 2004).

Where relationships with people at work were not optimal, this inevitably influenced participants' feelings about their employment. Some of those who reported low satisfaction had experienced difficult interactions with others at work. For participants in our study, these included subtle issues of inclusion or exclusion as well as more overt situations of conflict:

*They all are friendly and helpful to me at work. But they have their personal chat; share their problems among them, not with us. (IT specialist & accountant from Sri Lanka, male, working as assistant accountant)*

Some issues of conflict were with employers:

*I really don't like my boss. I try to avoid him because he's very harsh. He threatens that I will lose my job. I don't know what's the problem with him - he's aggressive. My friend had the same problem; he also experienced pressure from the boss. (No formal work overseas, from Liberia, male, working in meat processing)*

A small number of people reported that they had experienced discrimination.

A young woman who was working as a packer in a cheese factory had just been made redundant when we interviewed her. She said:

*The workplace was safe – the work was not dangerous and there were no hazards that might cause injuries. However I felt not very safe when having to communicate at work. There seemed to be discrimination towards the low level of English workers – they were not listened to and could not enjoy equal rights. (Dressmaker from Vietnam, female, working as packer in a food company)*

The participants who reported negative experiences with others at their work were among the least satisfied people in the study.

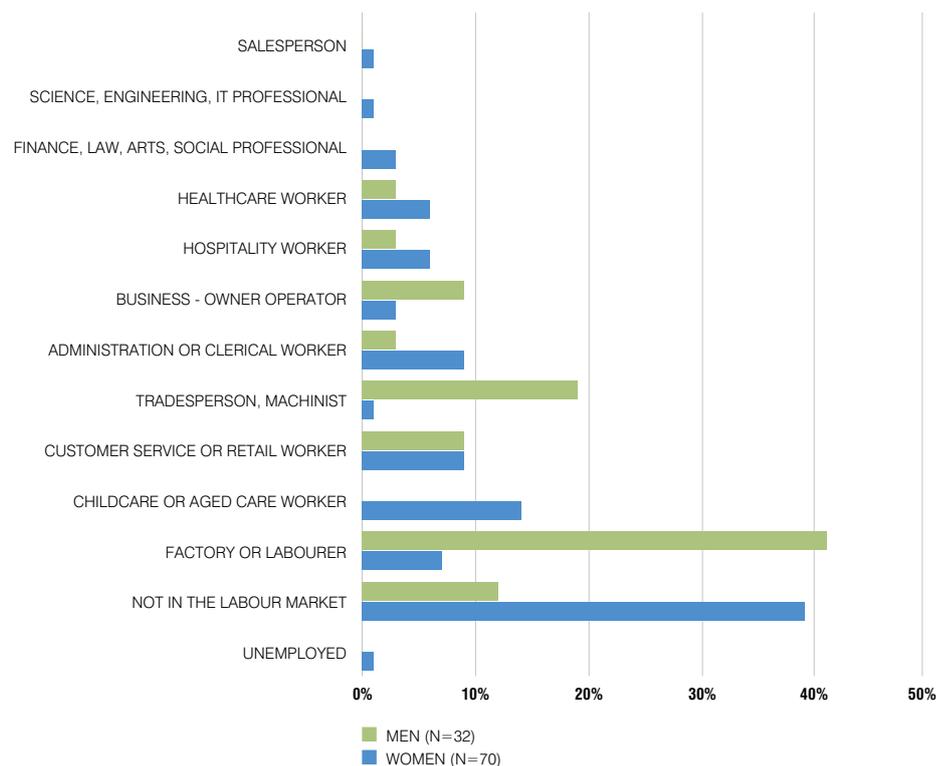
The nature of workplace relationships was a significant factor influencing how participants felt about their employment. In the context of familiarising themselves with new social expectations and workplace cultures, participants communicated a strong motivation for making the adjustments necessary for finding and keeping a job in Australia.

## WOMEN, MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Work outcomes in Australia were different for men and women in this study. Women were much less likely to be in the labour force compared to men. Those who were working were almost twice as likely as men to be earning less than \$15 per hour despite working in permanent and full time positions as often as men.

Women in the study were mostly working in caring, administration or customer service occupations. Fifteen per cent of women were working in aged care or childcare; none of these had worked in the care industry prior to migration.

**CHART 6: OCCUPATION IN AUSTRALIA BY GENDER (N=102)**



# 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

Most women in this study had said on arrival in Australia that they would like to work. By 2012, however, 39% had not yet started looking for work. Many women in this study had primary responsibility for domestic work and the care of children. However they did not have the family and community support they may have had before migration, resulting in less flexibility to take up paid employment:

*I'm very busy – I have no time for work! I have one child at school, one at kinder and my baby at home. But I'd like to work in the future. (Research assistant from Sri Lanka, female, has not worked in Australia)*

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that women in general are disadvantaged in the Australian labour market. At present there is a nearly 19% wage gap between men and women in Australia (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2015). This is related to women being concentrated in occupations that are associated with femininity and undervalued in the labour market (Acker 1989; England, Budig & Folbre 2002; Huppatz & Goodwin 2013). It is also related to recruitment and promotion practices favouring men (Bertrand & Mullainathan 2004; Booth & Leigh 2010). Women are more likely to undertake the majority of domestic duties within households and this can further limit career opportunities in ways that are less likely to affect men (Hochschild & Machung 2003; Maushart 2011).

Migrant women with low level English face similar disadvantages to migrant men on entering the labour market. In addition they face similar disadvantages to Australian born women (Fortin 2005; Sloan 2012). This puts migrant women at a double disadvantage in terms of competing for work in Australia. Gendered social expectations about migrant women and their employment prospects influences work outcomes, especially for tertiary educated and skilled women (Boucher 2007; International Organization for Migration 2013).

Women in the study generally spoke with acceptance about the impact of their caring responsibilities on their employment options. It was evident, however, that some women were ambivalent about this. They commented on the absence of affordable or informal childcare to enable them to study or work whilst their children were young:

*When my baby is a bit older he maybe can go to childcare. I would like to study nursing – I hope I can work in nursing. I'm still not sure if I can find a job but I really, really want to do this study. I think about it a long time. In my country you have neighbours to help look after your children. (Hospitality worker from Thailand, female, working as waitress)*

The majority of women in the study who were not in the labour force said this was likely to change in the future:

*Once my kids are in school, I hope I will be doing part time work and part time study. I need to be a nurse and I need to study a lot. (General worker in family business from Ethiopia, female, has not worked in Australia)*

For women in the study who were in the labour force, the challenge was finding work in their former field. Four years after arrival, many women had changed their initial career goal. A participant who had hoped to pursue a career in teaching abandoned this idea due to the difficulties of learning English and gaining the relevant accreditation:

*I like mathematics very much. When I was in my country I wanted to be a teacher but when I came to Australia I found it very hard in English. I would have to go to university and it would take time so I have left that idea. (Maths science graduate from India, female, working as childcare assistant)*

A number of women with tertiary degrees from overseas had decided to work in childcare:

*Before I came to Australia, I didn't think I would work in the childcare area. It wasn't stable at the beginning, but the situation gradually got better and finally, I have found a job I like. (Foreign trade marketer from China, female, working as childcare assistant)*

Childcare was perceived as an accessible entry point to the labour force. In addition, participants appreciated the potential to combine earning an income with caring for their own children:

*I am very satisfied with this job at the moment. I am happy to do this. It really suits me - I can care for my daughters while they are still young. I want to be there for my daughters. So at the moment it works well (Maths science teacher from Sri Lanka, female, working as Family Day Care provider)*

### 3 EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION FOUR YEARS AFTER MIGRATION

This participant went on to point out that there were also drawbacks of starting a new career in childcare. These included a loss of connection to her former career and working in a role that was in fact less satisfying to her:

*I didn't know that I would be in Family Day Care in my future. I am happy and this work suits me a lot. But the job is not matching my previous experience at all. It is a little bit similar as it is involved with children, but really it is not as satisfying as teaching science at a secondary level. Ideally if it were possible I would go back to teaching secondary school. (Maths science teacher from Sri Lanka, female, working as Family Day Care provider)*

Four years after migration, some women felt they were beginning to lose connection to their previous skills and qualifications. Re-entry into their former profession came to be seen as too difficult. Although some women framed their new career in Australia as positive choice, their decision may have been influenced by an inability to re-enter their professional field. These career changes also usually meant lower wages than work in their professional field would have generated.

The women in this study spoke about the importance of work in relation to settlement and about wanting to be economically independent:

*This has been my goal: the feeling of being useful and independent, not to rely on social benefits - the opportunity to put what I have learned into practice (Accountant trainee from Vietnam, female, working as aged care assistant)*

Women who had come to Australia on two-year temporary spouse visas faced specific challenges because not all employers fully understood their right to work in Australia:

*All Australian workplaces want me to be a permanent resident, that's why I couldn't get a job. (Hairdresser/business owner from Sri Lanka, female, working as cake decorator)*

Finally, women with children sometimes accepted poor work conditions in order to be able to work at all:

*Because of my sick baby, I am happy with the casual hours. The hours are convenient for me. I am happy to work close to home. But with the pay I am not happy. And there is no job security. (Lawyer from Sri Lanka, female, working as supermarket customer service officer)*

Increasingly, migrant women coming to Australia are tertiary qualified and skilled. Nevertheless, under-employment and occupational downgrading are significant issues for this group (Colic-Peisker 2011; Iredale 2005). Further research into the labour force participation of migrant women who arrive with low level English is needed to ensure that their skills are used effectively in Australia.

The women in this study spoke about the importance of work in relation to settlement and about wanting to be economically independent.

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## CASE STUDY 3:

### MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITY TO PRECARIOUS WORK

Mei Chen came to Australia from China in 2006 on a spouse visa. Her husband, also from China, had completed tertiary studies in Australia. He had become a permanent resident and, at the time Mei migrated, was working in hospitality.

Mei has a degree in finance and accounting and worked for a Chinese airport for 10 years, initially as an accountant, subsequently as an internal auditor.

Initially Mei thought that starting a new life in Australia might be an opportunity to change her career. She is interested in design and was thinking of doing some study in this area. Once here, though, Mei felt under pressure to earn a wage to supplement her husband's income:

*[At first] I wanted to study, but after that, I realise I need more money, so I just take the reality option. Just find some job first. If I have time, if I have money, then I will go to have a part time study or something like that.*

She found a casual role as a Chinese teacher through her husband's landlord, working weekends. She enjoyed this job very much. Soon after, she applied for a job advertised in a local Chinese newspaper. This position was in retail, working in a shop with a predominantly Chinese-speaking customer base. Mei was offered the job on the condition that she give up her teaching role so that she could work on the weekends.

Mei's initial wage at the shop was \$8 an hour. When she queried this with her employer, her wage was eventually raised to \$95 for eight hours of work. Although Mei was aware that this was still below the minimum wage she decided not to challenge it further, saying, "If I want to stay, I should just stay, why argue with them?" In time she was promoted to a more senior role, supervising 10 staff, on the understanding that her wage would be increased. This did not eventuate. When she had worked at the shop for almost two years, Mei unintentionally exposed irregularities in relation to the employer's superannuation payments for staff. When her employer became aware of this, he verbally abused and threatened Mei. Mei made the decision to leave the job.

This was an uncertain time for Mei. Her husband was still working in hospitality and they both recognised the need for a second wage. Mei heard through a social contact that there was a job available delivering patient meals in a private hospital. Although this work was unrelated to her skills and qualifications, Mei said to herself, "I don't care. Any job, I just want to have a job."

Mei signed a contract for a permanent part time role at two days a week. As soon as she started work, however, she was asked to work five days, the additional three days as a casual. Mei worked in this role full time for two years. While the work was physically taxing, Mei felt her English improved significantly through this job. She enjoyed her relationships with her colleagues, most of whom were also migrants from non-English speaking countries.

Expecting her first child at this point, Mei applied for maternity leave. Although she had worked five days a week continuously, her maternity leave was paid on a 0.4 basis. Mei said:

*I don't argue. I don't know how things work. I think because this hospital is a very good hospital, I think they do things right.*

Following the birth of her child, Mei reconsidered her employment situation. On the recommendation of a friend, she decided to do a course for migrant professionals seeking to re-enter their professional field. The course included a six week unpaid work placement. Mei was offered a placement as a banking officer at an office supply company. She was willing to work without wages because she saw the placement as 'a foot in the door' of a large group company.

At the time of interview for this research, Mei had been offered ongoing work at this company on the condition that she work as a contractor. Although she would have preferred to have the security and conditions of an employee, Mei agreed to this. While the role was more junior than her job in China, she was happy to be working in her field again.

Six years after migrating, Mei said she wished she had known about the course for professionals earlier. Reflecting on the jobs she had done which did not make use of her qualifications and skills, she described the sense of pressure she felt after coming to Australia to earn an income from any source "Looking back, I just... Where I grab opportunity, I just grab it. I can't think more. Those jobs were not the purpose we came here."

# 4 CONCLUSION

**This research investigated the employment satisfaction of 102 recent migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. There was a great diversity within the group. Irrespective of their migration pathway, people were highly motivated to find work and expressed a strong desire to contribute to Australia. Satisfaction with work largely had to do with feeling that their work experience and skills were of value.**

Participants knew when migrating to Australia that they would have to improve their English. Nevertheless, they envisaged finding work that drew on their professional skills and provided appropriate pay and conditions. Four years after arrival, this had not eventuated for many people in this research. The impact of migration on their employment options in Australia had been greater than they anticipated.

The participants who arrived without tertiary qualifications were often the more satisfied group within the research. They had found jobs that enabled them to support their family and were happy to be contributing economically to their new country. A closer look at the work conditions of this group does raise questions about the security and stability of some of these jobs. Having come to Australia with a desire to start working as soon as possible, these participants had often ended up in jobs that were somewhat precarious. For people with very low level English, these less than favourable conditions were exacerbated by communication difficulties and a lack of information about work rights.

Migrants with low level English who arrive eager to work as soon as possible and who are open to any type of job can be vulnerable to exploitative work situations.

This group could benefit from opportunities for English language learning alongside their employment. Improved English language could assist them both in relation to accessing information about work rights, understanding their employment options in Australia and possibly equipping themselves for improved future work situations. To reduce the potential for exploitation, access to information in relevant languages is necessary for this group. Consideration could be given to working directly with employers who employ a high number of people with low level English to address these issues.

Tertiary qualified migrants are a significant potential source of skilled workers in Australia. In this study many people with professional backgrounds were working in jobs that did not make use of their qualifications and skills. Participants who had arrived with professional backgrounds but had not been successful in finding work in their field had often taken on entry-level work as a short-term strategy. They too wanted to begin earning an income and gain their first foothold in the Australian labour market as soon as possible. Four years after settlement, few tertiary qualified people in this study had transitioned into work more closely related to their experience and skills. For most, this had a significant influence on their employment satisfaction.

Although the AMEP has a strong focus on employment, it is limited to those with low levels of English. Some of the participants in this study who completed the AMEP and had significantly improved their English since arrival may have benefited from additional targeted support to find professional work. Early evidence from our own research suggests that employment bridging programs, offering familiarisation with recruitment practices, professional associations and workplace cultures in Australia, can be highly effective for newly arrived professionals seeking to re-enter their field (AMES 2013). There are few programs of this nature in Australia.

Further research on these programs could consider the economic benefits of providing intensive support to tertiary qualified migrants who arrive with low level English.

Women in this study experienced specific challenges in finding appropriate work. While they arrived motivated to work in Australia, the professional labour market was often inaccessible for tertiary qualified women. The absence of family and social networks to support newly arrived families with the care of children meant that many women in the study either did not enter the labour force or took on jobs that did not draw on their skills and experience. Four years after arriving, they reported feeling that their previous work experience and skills were beginning to be irrelevant. Interventions for new professionally qualified migrants in relation to employment must take into account the specific challenges faced by women.

Australia's migration program is oriented towards bringing in skilled labour to strengthen the national economy. Notwithstanding the challenges in finding appropriate work, the participants in this study saw Australia as a place of opportunity, a place where their energy could be put to use. Making the best use of new migrants' skills and capacity is vital to Australia's productivity and economic development.

## CASE STUDY 4:

### MIGRATION AND CHALLENGES FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN

Ta Eh completed a Bachelor of Arts in teaching in Myanmar. She taught at a primary school for several years before going on to work at a secondary boarding school. She loved teaching and working with young people.

When security in her region became very compromised, Ta Eh was among many people forced to leave their homes to seek safety. She was separated from her family and went into hiding in a small village. Eventually, she made her way to a refugee camp and from there went to New Delhi, where she was found to be a refugee.

Ta Eh lived in India for several years, waiting to be resettled. She worked packing clothes at a garment export factory while her visa application was being assessed. In 2008 she was accepted in Australia through the Woman at Risk component of the Humanitarian migration stream.

Ta Eh had hoped that in Australia she might be able to teach again. Learning English, however, was a major challenge. She finished the AMEP but thought her English was not good enough to work in education. Further, due to the sudden way in which she had left her home, Ta Eh did not have any documents verifying her qualifications and work experience.

It was very important to Ta Eh not to be a burden on the Australian Government. As the interpreter present at this interview commented:

*She wants to look for a job because she doesn't want the government to look after her, she just wants to find a job and look after herself.*

Ta Eh completed Certificate III in Retail and as part of this course did two weeks unpaid work at a chain variety store. Feedback from her employer was very positive. On her last day he said he would offer her ongoing work. Ta Eh completed a number of forms and her employer said he would be in touch within a week. The employer did not call back.

Ta Eh had a friend who worked at a factory manufacturing bedding products. The friend made a recommendation to her employer and, after a brief conversation, Ta Eh was employed full time. Following an initial period on the factory floor, Ta Eh was promoted to a more senior role, supervising the dispatch of products to five star hotels. Ta Eh was happy with her hours and wage but felt that her employment was very insecure. She worked full time for two years but her status remained casual; she did not feel she could approach her employer about being made permanent.

In late 2012 production at the factory unexpectedly fell due to problems with new machinery. Without notice, Ta Eh and several colleagues were asked to 'take a rest'. At the time of interview, several weeks later, she had still not been contacted by her employer and did not think she would be working at the factory again.

In previous interviews Ta Eh had expressed that the factory job was 'too low' and that she would like to 'learn more and move on.' In our final interview, having just lost her job, she spoke of really wanting to teach again but suggested this was unlikely to be possible. She said that she would most likely look for another factory job. Living with other people who had come to Australia through the Humanitarian program but remaining single, Ta Eh strongly expressed her wish to earn her own income and live independently of financial support from others.

People were highly motivated to find work and expressed a strong desire to contribute to Australia.

# APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT JOB DESCRIPTIONS BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION

## WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

Field pre migration	Occupation pre migration	Occupation Australia
Teacher	Secondary school teacher	Self-employed healthcare provider
	Maths science teacher	Family Day Care provider
	Primary school teacher	Factory worker
	Primary school teacher	Business owner (grocery shop)
	Secondary school teacher	Customer service staff
	Primary teacher	Sales staff (tax-free gift shop)
	University lecturer	Apprentice electrical engineer
Administration or clerical	Bookkeeper and office administrator	Administrative officer
	Accounts and office administration worker	Office assistant
	Accountant trainee	Aged care assistant
	Payroll accounts officer	Family Day Care provider
	Business and HR administration officer	Fruit and vegetable packer
	Communications officer & IT graduate	Computer programmer
	Sales and administration (real estate)	Not in labour force
	Research assistant	Not in labour force
	Assistant manager & office administration	Not in labour force
Healthcare	Nurse	Aged care assistant
	Nurse; dental assistant	Dental assistant
	Nurse	Dental assistant
	Dental assistant	Dental assistant
	General and anaesthetic nurse	Interpreter (government sector)
	Nurse	Not in labour force
Salesperson	Hair and beauty salesperson	Trainee administrative assistant
	Travel agent	Bookkeeper
	Foreign trade marketer	Childcare assistant
	Real estate sales consultant	Real estate agent
Tradesperson, Machinist	Production operator (car factory)	Child care assistant
	Dressmaker	Packer in food company
	Hairdresser and business owner	Cake decorator
	Metal toolmaker; massage therapist	Not in labour force
Science, engineering, IT professional	Transport & logistics manager	Pathology collector
	IT specialist	Business owner (fish & chip shop)
	IT sales manager; software programmer	Unemployed
	Engineer, manager	Not in labour force
Finance, law, arts, social professional	Website editor	Payroll assistant
	Social worker	Social worker
	Lawyer	Supermarket customer service officer

# APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT JOB DESCRIPTIONS BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION

Field pre migration	Occupation pre migration	Occupation Australia
Customer service or retail	Call centre worker; business marketing graduate	Student administrator
	Garment merchandiser	Childcare assistant
	Hotel & tourism receptionist	Customer service & food handling
Hospitality	Telecommunications & hotel industry customer service	Customer service staff
	Hairdresser; waitress	Meat processing worker
	Hospitality worker	Waitress
Factory or Labourer	Assistant chef	Not in labour force
	Farmer	Not in labour force
Business - owner operator	General worker in family business	Not in labour force
	Business owner & banking worker	Business owner (coffee shop)
Graduates without overseas work history	Business owner	Not in labour force
	Maths science graduate	Child care assistant
	Arts social science graduate	Room attendant
	Maths science graduate	Supermarket worker
	Trade or diploma qualified	Salesperson
	Accounting graduate	Not in labour force
	Business - marketing graduate	Not in labour force
	Arts - social science graduate and volunteer teacher	Not in labour force
	Maths - science graduate	Not in labour force
	Business - marketing graduate	Not in labour force
No formal work or study	Tertiary qualified graduate	Not in labour force
	-	Childcare assistant
	11 women	Not in labour force

# APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT JOB DESCRIPTIONS BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION

## MEN'S EMPLOYMENT BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

Field pre migration	Occupation pre migration	Occupation Australia
Teacher	Teacher	Warehouse worker
Tradesperson, machinist	Electrician	Machine operator
	Sales and service manager (air-conditioning)	Business owner (real estate agency)
	Production supervisor and bookseller	Customer service staff
	Mechanic	Machine operator
	Auto-electrician	Auto-electrician
	Sheet metal worker; restaurant manager	Not in labour force
Salesperson	Sales manager	Concrete worker
	Sales manager	Business owner
Factory or labourer	Farmer	Meat processing worker
	Farm labourer	Factory worker (food products)
	Farmer; builder	Meat processing worker
	Farmer	Factory worker (automotive)
	Construction worker	Not in labour force
	Packing worker	Not in labour force
Hospitality worker	Waiter	Waiter
Science, engineering, IT professional	IT specialist; accountant	Account assistant
	IT specialist	Fabric cutter in factory
	Building services engineer	Factory assembler (heaters & coolers)
	IT manager	Food production supervisor
	Electronics engineer; sales manager	Builder & house renovator
	Electrical; maintenance engineer	Not worked in Australia
Finance, law, arts, social professional	Finance Manager	Printing press worker
	Interpreter; accountant	Community support worker
Customer service or retail	Shopkeeper	Farm labourer
Business - owner operator	Business owner & marketing manager (telecommunications)	Business owner (sandwich bar)
No formal work or study	-	Meat processing worker
	-	Plant nursery worker
	-	Cleaner
	-	Supervisor (supermarket)
	-	Shop assistant (retail business)
	-	Apprentice electrician

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