



Commonwealth of Australia

Hidden Assets:

Partner-migration, skilled women and the Australian workforce

AMES Australia Vision

Full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the partner migrant women who gave up their time and willingly shared their stories about securing employment in Australia. We felt privileged and humbled by their optimism, ingenuity and resilience. We also thank the service providers and employers for their insights into the services they provide, their experience employing skilled migrants and for providing evidence on service gaps and guidance on practice and interventions to best meet the needs of this hidden workforce. We would like to sincerely thank Navitas and the settlement service in North West Victoria that cannot be identified by name because it would identify participants, for their assistance and support in recruiting partner migrant women and employers to participate in the study. Finally we thank the Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet - Office for Women for funding this important and timely research.

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Published by AMES Australia Research and Policy Unit & the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet - Office for Women

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Glossary of Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CSOL	Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
EFT	Equivalent Full Time
GP	General Practitioner
HR	Human Resources
HSS	Humanitarian Settlement Services
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IT	Information Technology
MESC	Main English Speaking Country
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PR	Permanent Residency
SLPET	Settlement Language Pathways to Employment Training
SOL	Skilled Occupation List
SPMP	Skilled Professional Migrants Program
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

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Background

The purpose of this research was to provide:

- an understanding of the experiences of partner migrant women entering Australia under the Skilled and Family streams who are seeking employment
- a series of recommendations for practical interventions to support partner migrant women entering Australia to gain employment.

Over the last decade the overall number and proportions of permanent settlers entering as Skilled, Family and Humanitarian migrants has remained fairly stable with a steady trend towards increasing skilled migration. Government policy has focussed on increasing Skill stream migration into Australia, to attract new migrants to fill skill shortages.

Between 2010 and 2013 close to twice as many males were granted Skilled visas (Department of Social Services 2015). In contrast, women are much more likely to arrive as the secondary (or dependent) applicant; in 2013 the percentage of females in the skilled stream was 46 per cent; 34 per cent of primary applicants and 58 per cent of secondary applicants (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014c). Secondary applicants include both partners and children. Since the most common visa pathways for women migrants are tied to being a member of a family or partnership, this also means that women are less likely than men to migrate as a single applicant. The focus of this study is on “partner migrants”, that is, women who arrived as either a secondary partner migrant in the Skilled stream or as the primary partner applicant in the Family stream. According to data provided to AMES by the Department of Social Services from the settlement database, between 2010 and 2015, more than 157,000 women over the age of 18 migrated to Australia through the family stream, the majority being partners or spouses. For the same period, more than 181,000 women migrated in the skilled stream. The majority (more than 70%) were married or partnered.

Data monitoring the employment of migrant women indicates that they generally have a much lower labour force participation rate, higher unemployment and lower earnings relative to their skills and qualifications (Hawthorne 2011; Miranti, Nepal & McNamara 2010). Australian census data from 2011 indicates that a similar number of migrant women in both the Skilled and Family stream are degree qualified.

Partner or spouse visa holders in the Family stream face a longer time frame to permanent residency and citizenship compared to Skilled or Humanitarian visa holders; in most cases there is an additional initial two year temporary visa prior to application for a permanent visa. Their long-term status as a resident of Australia is less certain and depends on the maintenance of their relationship to a spouse¹. Although Family stream applicants have full work rights in Australia, some employers may be reluctant to take on women because they falsely believe that they will only be available to work in Australia for a short period of time. For some, the temporary visa can reinforce and entrench the career gap created in the process of migration. It can also reinforce traditional gender roles within the family and the male breadwinner model

¹ In cases of family violence or abuse, there is a process for temporary partners to apply to stay in Australia following relationship breakdown.

of employment for new migrant families. This research is interested in considering the views of women arriving as partner migrants, the influence of their visa status and how it impacts upon their ability to secure employment and their settlement experience in Australia.

Programs that cater for skilled migration, without considering the highly gendered nature of migration are at risk of being less effective for the majority of women migrants (Boucher 2007, Syed 2007). From an economic perspective, partner migrant women are an underutilised source of human capital in Australia. Women migrants from the non-main English speaking countries are one of the largest groups of new entrants to Australia, yet they are far less likely to be participating in the labour market and experience higher level of over-qualification and underemployment than other migrants. They are hidden from view where their role has shifted from being, in many instances a paid well-educated professional to being re-domesticated as wives, spouses and partners.

The exclusion and marginalisation of women from paid employment that allows them to utilise their skills and experience is not only a waste of human resources, it also has an affect at the individual and family level, since it reduces access to economic resources and independence required for full participation in Australian society. Employment is also a key determinant of health and wellbeing and underemployment is a known risk factor for poorer mental and physical health (Reid 2012; Wilkinson, R & Marmot 2003). Loss of connection to paid employment can contribute to social isolation and poor mental health and reduce connection to the community. Further, accessing social networks are not only essential for successful settlement but also for finding work. Over time this can compound deskilling as career gaps widen.

This group of women are often ineligible for employment services within both settlement oriented or mainstream jobseeker assistance programs. They lie somewhere between not requiring intensive support and assistance that is available to other disadvantaged jobseekers, but they are also not genderless and 'frictionless' in their experience of entering the Australian labour market.

If Australia wants to continue to attract talented migrants, we cannot afford to ignore the poorer employment outcomes of migrant women arriving in the Skilled and Family stream. There is little doubt that changing this situation will require investment. Yet there is little research that has comprehensively evaluated the experiences of Australian migrant women against a range of possible solutions. This study aims to provide some insight into potential strategies for the future, based on a review of best practice and a consultative approach including interviewing Non English Speaking Background (NESB) migrant women, employers and existing service providers, to uncover practical ways to assist migrant women to find suitable employment.

About the research

This was a qualitative study exploring the experiences of partner migrant women from CALD backgrounds in relation to securing employment in Australia. The fieldwork for this project was conducted between October 2014 and March 2015.

The research for this report was undertaken on four fronts. Firstly, consultation with migrant women on partner visas to gain a firsthand view of their experiences seeking employment in Australia. A total of 63 women were consulted as part of this project. This included face-to-face interviews (skype and telephone interviews) with 32 partner migrant women from CALD backgrounds and four focus groups comprising 31

women (across 4 groups). The women lived in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and the ACT. Two focus groups were held in Melbourne, one in regional Victoria and one in Sydney. The women in this study came from a wide variety of countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America.

Secondly, interviews with service providers (9) who assist skilled migrants. Thirdly, interviews with employers (10) that had experience integrating skilled migrants into their workforce. Finally, a desktop review was conducted looking at services in Australia and internationally to determine best practice to assist skilled migrants to secure employment in their chosen country.

Partner Migrant Women

The interviews and focus groups detailed:

- Expectations of finding work in Australia
- Job searching activities
- Employment outcomes
- Barriers to finding work
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Unemployment and settlement
- Strategies to find employment
- Advice to other partner migrant women
- Solutions for government and service providers

The findings of this research have demonstrated that the experience of securing employment for many partner migrant women can be a solitary and frustrating one. This study revealed that the process is often one of trial and error as they search for reliable information relevant to their situation. The respondents repeatedly found that time and resources were wasted trying to discover the relevant support services (if they were available) and to identify where to find suitable jobs commensurate with their skills, experience and qualifications in an unfamiliar and foreign labour market and community. Without understanding the expectations of Australian workplaces in terms of recognition of skills and qualifications, proficiency in English, understanding soft cultural skills and workplace culture it was difficult to secure a job. Many experienced unemployment, underemployment in temporary, part time and casual jobs, and deskilling as a result of working in low skilled occupations.

The subjects in this study had similar job searching experiences. There were themes that emerged repeatedly in securing employment. In relation to expectations of finding work in Australia, some respondents thought it would be easy but realised after a period of time how difficult it would be to break into the Australian labour market without local experience. Others had been fully apprised by family and friends of the difficulties of accessing the job market upon arrival.

The findings explore the experience of respondents who were currently employed. A number were in professional work (19 per cent) but most were in non-professional jobs. It was evident from the demographic data that they had experienced a downward trajectory in their careers. Just under three quarters (72 per cent) were working in professional jobs prior to migration. Post-migration more than one third were unemployed. Economic and financial imperatives meant that a number of respondents had to

find a job and were prepared to work in unskilled and low paid jobs such as hospitality, retail, low level administration and labouring.

Respondents were asked about the range of strategies and services they had used to secure work. Most women did not access any assistance. They were reliant on family and friends to provide guidance, but ultimately most women were self-directed in how they approached prospective employers. Internet searching on Seek.com was popular for identifying jobs. Those who approached private recruitment agencies had limited success and were not contacted for an interview. Developing a resume and a cover letter addressing key selection criteria was a challenge and many found that they could not get through the initial selection process and be shortlisted for interview. Without support and direction from an expert agency, many struggled to understand the recruitment requirements and expectations of Australian workplaces. This lack of support and direction ultimately hindered and impeded their ability to secure work in their professional occupation and/or other types of paid work.

Local work experience was identified as one of the key reasons for not getting a job. Respondents believed if they could get experience in an Australian workplace either through a job placement or volunteer work it would put them in a stronger position to get through the selection process and secure paid work.

Gaining recognition for skills, upgrading qualifications and registration to practice were time-consuming and expensive. Even though a number of respondents from teaching and medical backgrounds were fully apprised of this requirement to work in Australia, they still found it emotionally and financially difficult.

Women living in rural, regional and remote areas were more disadvantaged than those in metropolitan regions. These women were less likely to have access to any support services. They were also in a difficult position because there were very few, if any, professional roles available to them. This meant that they had to reconsider their employment options. For some this necessitated undertaking vocational training in childcare, disability or aged care, to improve their chances of getting a job. In some rural and regional areas these were the only types of jobs available in tightly held labour markets. Women living rural areas also had the issue of transport. This included limited or no public transport. The imperative to get a driver's licence to provide flexibility getting to and from places was noted by a number of women living in these areas. In terms of job searching, having a driver's licence meant that these women were in a better position to travel further afield to larger regional centres to look for work.

The findings from this study demonstrate that unemployment has had a significant impact upon the settlement process of respondents. Those who had found work, even if it was casual and non-professional, had a more positive outlook on their settlement than those who were unemployed. The impact of unemployment on the mental health and wellbeing of participants was an issue with a number reporting diminished self-esteem, loss of confidence in their skills and abilities, and in some instances, depression.

In terms of solutions, the partner migrant women in this study said that they required a service to support their job searching, work experience (either as a work placement or volunteer), mentoring programs, access to university and TAFE courses, assistance to get their qualifications recognised and childcare.

The women interviewed all had at least, an intermediate level of English. Yet, the findings indicate that these women face significant barriers in entering the Australia labour market, particularly in areas that

use their overseas skills and qualifications. Further research is required to investigate the issues and outcomes for women on these visas types but with low levels of English. This would augment current knowledge and evidence to support the full range of women arriving on these visas.

Employers

Support and buy-in from employers is essential if skilled migrants are to be successful in securing work. Interviews were conducted with ten employers and included Human Resource Managers and Senior Managers involved in the selection and appointment of staff. Employers were located in a range of businesses in Sydney, Melbourne, Regional Victoria and Perth. All of the employers in this study had skilled migrants in their workforce.

These interviews provided some useful insights into how skilled migrants generally, rather than partner migrant women specifically are perceived by a small number of select workplaces. The employers provided invaluable understanding and solutions on how best to integrate skilled migrants into their workforce. This chapter highlights some of the key themes identified by employers:

- key attributes of job seekers and how skilled migrants are viewed
- selection and recruitment practices
- local work experience
- skill shortages
- integration and acculturation.

Employers spoke about recruitment practices and wanting to get the best person for the job. They identified some of the issues with migrants applying for work in their organisation and cited examples where they had received numerous applications from new migrants who had taken a “scattergun” approach, applying for any sort of job without tailoring the resume or letter of application to specifically meet the selection criteria of that job. In some instances the applicants were not even qualified to do the job. Most of the employers were conscious that new migrant women needed time to understand the requirements of applying for jobs in the Australian context and understanding Australian workplace culture.

The behavioural based interview presented a challenge for many partner migrant women. Some of the employers were aware of this and made allowances for applicants when English was their second language. Although a number of the organisations had diversity policies in place, many of the larger organisations still did not have migrants from CALD backgrounds in senior roles. Several employers felt that the composition of their organisation should reflect the same cultural diversity found in the general community.

The skilled women migrants in this study raised the issue of not having local work experience time and again. For most of the employers interviewed this was not a major issue if the job applicant could demonstrate how the experience they had in their home country could be transferred and utilised in an Australian context. Overall, the employers were positive about the skilled migrants in their workforce. They were of the belief that a diverse workforce engenders high levels of skill, commitment and innovation.

Service providers

A total of nine service providers were consulted. Two service providers were located in regional Victoria, two in Perth and two in Sydney. Two services were located in both Sydney and Melbourne. Service providers were asked a series of questions about their organisation, the services provided, the types of client groups that access services, funding sources, referrals processes, specific programs that assist skilled migrants with job searching and comments on barriers faced by this group accessing the Australian labour market. Interviewees were asked to consider what additional services may be needed to best support skilled migrants to secure a job aligned to their qualification, skills and experience.

The service providers in this study gave some useful insight into the types of programs available to assist skilled migrants. The two programs in Australia identified in this study specifically designed for skilled migrants, Skillmax in Sydney and the Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) in Melbourne are both successful in terms of employment outcomes, even though they offer different approaches. Skillmax is funded by the NSW State Government and has the capacity to assist up to 1,000 skilled migrants each year. In contrast, the SPMP because of limited funding and resources assists a considerably smaller number of migrants in a year. The TAFE sector provides programs for skilled migrants but these are costly and may preclude partner migrant women on partner visas from access. None of these programs are specifically for migrant women. More men than women attend these courses.

In the absence of other specialised services in rural and regional areas of Australia, settlement services and other migrant services have taken up the mantle either formally or informally to assist skilled migrants to gain access to the labour market. Mainstream job search agencies such as Job Services Australia (JSA) providers are not mandated to assist skilled migrants on a temporary visa, nor are they able to provide assistance to skilled migrants with permanent residency as eligibility to access their services is based on access to Centrelink (this may be available two years after arrival). Some of the women had approached JSAs in their region for assistance to find jobs, but could not be helped other than having access to computer facilities. Other services such as Migrant Resource Centres also provided direction to migrants on how to secure work in an Australian context. However, these are not specialised services that assist skilled migrants to access professional work. The services in Perth were funded to support refugees, including skilled refugees, but did not have a mandate to provide assistance to people coming to Australia on a Skilled visa.

Service providers in this study were patently aware of the issues facing women migrants arriving on Family visas and as secondary applicants on Skilled visas. Those in rural and regional areas were conscious that these women had accompanied their partner who generally had employment. For many there were limited employment opportunities available for them because of the lack of job vacancies. This meant that their role had shifted from being an employed professional in their home country to one where attending to the household and domestic responsibilities became their primary focus. Some service providers tried to orient women into Certificate Level Training programs like disability, childcare and aged care with the view that these women could be mobilised in key areas where job vacancies were more likely to occur. Service providers identified social isolation and the lack of transport as major issues for migrant women in rural and regional areas.

Desk top review

A desk top review was conducted on the types of services and interventions available in Australia and internationally to assist skilled migrants to find professional employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications. This review focussed on four states in Australia: Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. It also looked at overseas examples from Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Switzerland and Finland. Websites were the primarily used to gain an insight into the range of services available. In some instances personal contact was made (via email or skype) to gain more information that was not available on the website. As a disclaimer, this review provides a snapshot of a small number of services that assist skilled migrants. Large countries like the USA and Canada have many more agencies that have not been included.

The desktop review documents the key features of each service including target populations and eligibility to access the program, similarities and differences in program content, funding models and outcomes.

With the exception of programs offered by the TAFE sector, Australia has two dedicated programs solely for skilled professional migrants. Compare this with Canada that has numerous programs that have been established for many years and are fully supported and funded by the Canadian Federal Government. The USA has a number of good programs in place where there is extensive collaboration between services to meet the needs of skilled migrants. However, the funding model for USA based agencies is culturally specific in a country that depends on a large philanthropic base to provide social and community services. The European examples are funded by hypothecated taxes from lotteries (Netherlands and Glasgow). The Swiss and Finnish examples are very much locally based initiatives that have been developed and supported by the city governance organisations in which they are located. The United Kingdom is a long way behind other developed English speaking countries in terms of assisting skilled migrants.

There were many common features in programs across the globe including resume development, how to compile a letter of application and understanding workplace culture. There were also variations between one program and another in terms of: the inclusion or exclusion of gender specific programs, occupational specific courses, opportunities for networking, mentoring, work placements or internships, career counselling and assistance to gain recognition of skills.

Chapter six details what an ideal intervention based on the evidence from programs across the world may look like. Some of the key features include:

- Understanding recruitment processes & development of self-marketing tools
- Orientation to life in Australia
- Vocational level English
- Work experience and mentoring
- Employer engagement
- Access for all
- Recurrent funding

Recommendations

Recommendation 1- Develop and pilot an early intervention program

It is recommended that an early intervention program be developed and piloted. The intervention would specifically be designed to meet the needs of skilled migrants including partner migrant women to assist their transition to the Australian labour market.

Recommendation 2 - Funding options

It is recommended that funding options be explored to finance a nationwide intervention to assist partner migrant women to access paid employment.

Recommendation 3- Information & knowledge about services to support skilled migrants

It is recommended that information and knowledge about the types of services available to assist partner migrant women enter the Australian labour market be widely available and easily accessible.

Recommendation 4 - Employers

It is recommended that employers are involved in the development of an intervention to assist partner migrant women to integrate into the Australian workforce.

Recommendation 5 - Evaluation of early intervention Program trial

It is recommended that the early intervention program trial to support skilled migrants on an Australia wide basis be evaluated in terms of process, outcome and impact.

Introduction

The funding for this research project was provided to AMES Australia by the Office for Women, located within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. One of the key policy areas for the Office of Women is improving gender equality and support for women's economic empowerment. The latter strategy has a focus on improving women's economic security and workforce participation.

The purpose of this research was to provide the Office for Women with:

- an understanding of the experiences of partner migrant women entering Australia under the Skilled and Family streams who are seeking employment.
- a series of recommendations for practical interventions to support partner migrant women entering Australia to gain employment.

The research for this report commenced in June 2014 and was completed in May 2015. Qualitative data was collected from face-to-face interviews and focus groups with migrant women who arrived in Australia on Skilled and Family visas. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with service providers and employers who have contact with partner migrant women.

The study took a national focus. Partner migrant women were recruited across Australia to participate in interviews. Focus groups were held in Melbourne, Sydney and regional Victoria. Employers and service providers from regional Victoria, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth were consulted.

In addition to the qualitative component of the research, this study incorporated the most up-to-date data on skilled migrant women, their labour force participation and income levels. This report is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one provides a summary of the literature on the employment experience of partner migrant women drawing upon the findings of other studies both in Australia and internationally.

Chapter two provides an overview of the methodology. Chapter three describes the key themes identified in face-to-face interviews and the focus groups with partner migrant women. This includes a demographic overview of the women interviewed and focus group participants, the expectations of the partner migrant women finding employment prior to arrival in Australia, the types of job search activities they undertook and the barriers to finding work. It also describes possible solutions for skilled migrating women and service providers.

Chapters four and five summarise the findings from the face-to-face interviews with employers and service providers. These two chapters segue into chapter six and the results of a desktop analysis on services and interventions in Australia and internationally. The focus is on services designed to assist partner migrant women and skilled migrants generally secure paid work. This chapter concludes with a picture of what an early intervention program to assist partner migrant women to secure employment would look like, including the key features and proposed funding model.

The final chapter provides a series of recommendations and possible strategies on how to increase the number of partner migrant women in employment.

Migration overview

Over the last decade the overall number and proportions of permanent settlers entering as Skilled, Family and Humanitarian migrants has remained fairly stable with a steady trend towards increasing skilled migration. Managing migration flows to increase the pool of talented, qualified people in the workforce is a core strategy to boost economic growth and productivity. Accordingly, government policy has focussed on increasing Skill stream migration into Australia, to attract new migrants to fill skill shortages which are identified through the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) and the Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List (CSOL).

The composition of the SOL is derived from advice provided by the Minister for Education and Training, based on analysis from the Office of the Chief Economist in the Department of Industry and Science.

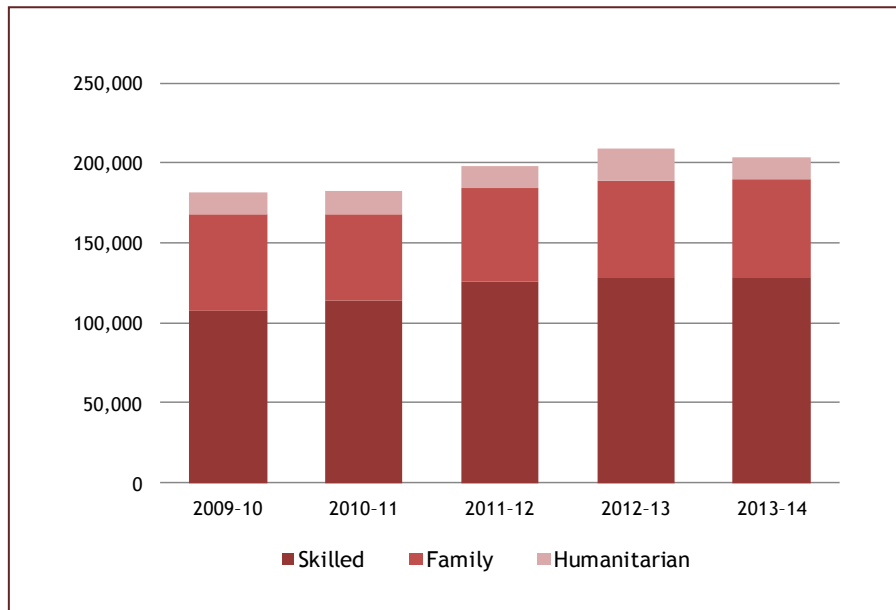
The SOL is updated on an annual basis, based on inter-departmental advice, while the CSOL is updated to reflect the changes in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) administered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The Department of Education and Training considers labour market, education and training, migration and general economic and demographic data and stakeholder submissions to develop the content of the SOL. The SOL applies to independent points based skilled migration (not nominated by State or Territory Governments) and Family Sponsored applications. It is also used by Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visa applicants in the Graduate Work stream.

The SOL is not a list of occupations experiencing current shortages. Rather, it identifies occupations where independent skilled migrants will assist in meeting the medium to long-term skill needs of the Australian economy where these needs cannot be met through employer and state sponsored migration programs, or through training and employing Australians.

Within the Skilled stream, approximately half are primary applicants who must demonstrate they have 'in demand' skills and the other half are their immediate family members: partners and children (Larsen 2013). In many cases partners of primary Skilled migrants are also highly qualified professionals (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014a, 2014b). From an economic perspective, this could be considered a key strength of the Skilled stream.

Family stream migrants provide the next major share of new permanent settlers. The majority of visas granted in this stream are for the partners of Australian citizens or residents. In addition a small proportion of migrants, currently less than eight per cent of all migrants, come to Australia through the Humanitarian Program.

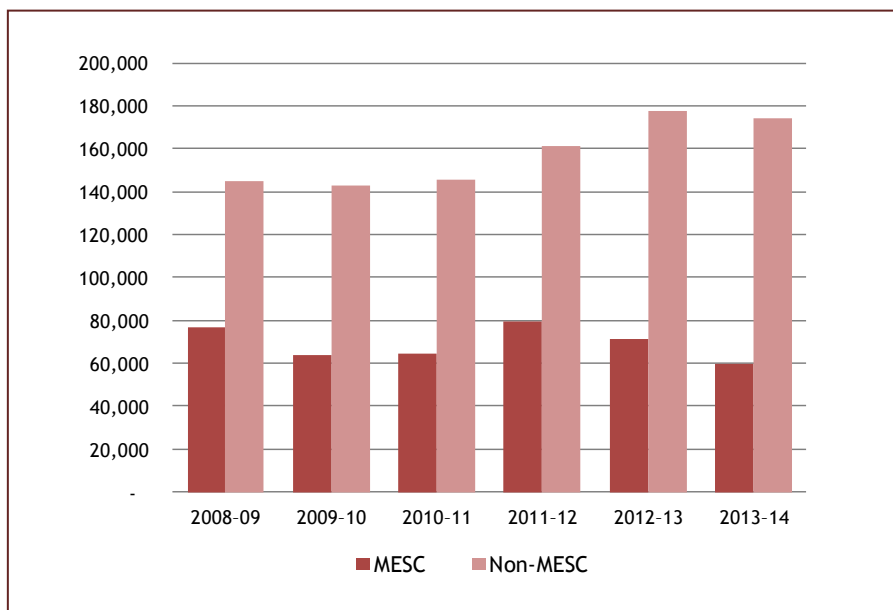
Chart 1: Permanent migration to Australia 2009- 2014*



Source: (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015b) *Excludes small number of special eligibility visa grants.

Fewer migrants are coming from Main English speaking countries (MESC), which include New Zealand, United Kingdom, America, Canada and South Africa² than in the past. Almost one quarter of migrants between 2008 and 2014 came from China or India and overall 70 per cent of new migrants in this period came from Non-MESC (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015b)*.

Chart 2: Main English speaking country (MESC) permanent migration 2009- 2014



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

² For list of Main English Speaking countries see glossary at ABS 2011a, Guide to Migrant Statistical Sources

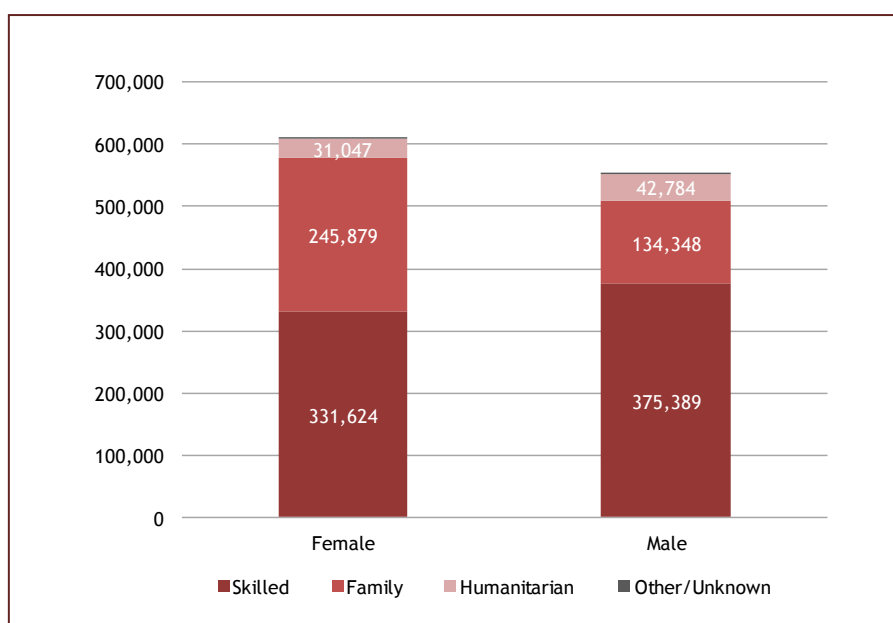
Many of those from Non-MESC will have arrived with competent English skills, as this is a prerequisite for the primary applicant on a Skilled visa.

As a result of the emphasis on skills, migrants to Australia, both men and women, are more likely to be tertiary qualified than the Australian born population (ABS 2013a) and highly qualified migrants arrive in all visa streams, including Family and Humanitarian (Hugo 2011; Khoo, McDonald & Edgar 2013).

Gender and migration

Often migration data are presented as though migrants were genderless and single individuals (Kofman 2000). The reality is that migrants come as men and women with or without families. In Australia, there are substantial differences in migratory patterns for men and women who arrive via the Skilled or Family stream migration. Overall, more women are migrating to Australia than men; more men migrate to Australia through both the Skilled and Humanitarian Programs, but a substantially greater number of women arrive as Family migrants. Over the past five years almost twice as many female migrants arrived for every male in the Family stream.

Chart 3: Migration stream and gender 2010- 2015



Source: (Department of Social Services 2015)³

Looking at the overall migration figures, between 2010 and 2015 close to twice as many males were granted skilled visas. In contrast, females are much more likely to arrive as the secondary (or dependent) applicant; in 2013 the percentage of females in the skilled stream was 46 per cent; 34 per cent of primary applicants and 58 per cent of secondary applicants (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014c). Since the most common visa pathways for women migrants are tied to being a member of a family or partnership, this also means that women are less likely than men to migrate as a single applicant.

³ These figures include children. Department of Social Services [settlement quick reports - age range](#) indicate that approximately 25% of the migration stream 2010 - 2015 is people under the age of 18.

In this study, women who arrived as either a secondary partner migrant in the Skilled stream or as the primary partner applicant in the Family stream will collectively be referred to as “partner migrants”. Partner migrants are the main focus of this study, simply because they form the majority of women arriving in Australia. This study is focussed on women in the Skilled and Family streams rather than those who arrive in the Humanitarian Program. To date there is far less research and attention to the experiences of this significant group of women migrants in Australia.

The larger number of males in the skilled migration stream may be rooted in the way in which the economic value of work is constructed along gender lines. Pateman (1989) traces the ways democratic society has evolved on the basis of a gendered divide between the public and private sphere of life. The public sphere of work and citizenship is associated with masculinity while the private sphere of family and care is feminised. In this context the male partner is more likely to be the primary applicant on a Skilled Visa application.

The SOL is based on research and analysis designed to identify and reflect genuine labour shortages. Many of the occupations require university level qualifications and include for example engineers, teachers, and health professionals such as registered nurses. However, among the vocational occupations listed, many are male dominated trades such as plumbing, electrics and shipbuilding. This means that there are more shortages in masculine type jobs rather than feminised occupations such as aged care and childcare. Moreover, taking a career break to care for children and other family members prior to migration can limit the type of career advancement that would support a Skilled migration application to Australia.

The disparity between the numbers of women who migrate as partners and spouses in the Family stream, compared with men, reflects the fact that women are more likely to be trailing spouses. Migration can mean, for some families, an increased priority on keeping the family together and improving the employment prospects of the male breadwinner, even at the expense of the female partner’s career (Boyle et al. 2001; Cooke, Zhang & Wang 2013; Meares 2010). Although women migrate with partners to Australia, it cannot be assumed that they do not have career aspirations. Many have high-level skills and qualifications accumulated over many years. Increasing numbers of women partner migrants are re-starting their careers in Australia (Khou, McDonald & Edgar 2013). Nonetheless, the different migration patterns of men and women to Australia contribute to, and are indicative of, ongoing gender inequality. As reported by Babacan (2014) there is a dearth of policy strategies targeting migrant women and their experiences of settlement and employment in Australia.

Migrants and employment in Australia

When assessing employment patterns of newly arrived migrants it is well documented that they are more likely to have lower participation and higher unemployment compared to the Australian population. The unemployment rate for recent permanent migrants (those who have been in Australia up to five years) is around twice the rate of those born in Australia (ABS 2014).

The migration process tends to reduce labour market access in the short term due to limited English skills, lack of local experience and references, problems having qualifications recognised and accepted, as well as the nascent development of social networks required to find good quality work. There may also be a period of cultural adjustment to recruitment practices in Australia. Most studies suggest that these barriers tend to reduce over time. (Richardson et al. 2004; Smith, Kovac & Woods 2013). For some, however, particularly those from non-western countries, these barriers can lead to a permanent derailment of their careers (Harrison 2013; Kostenko, Harris & Zhao 2009).

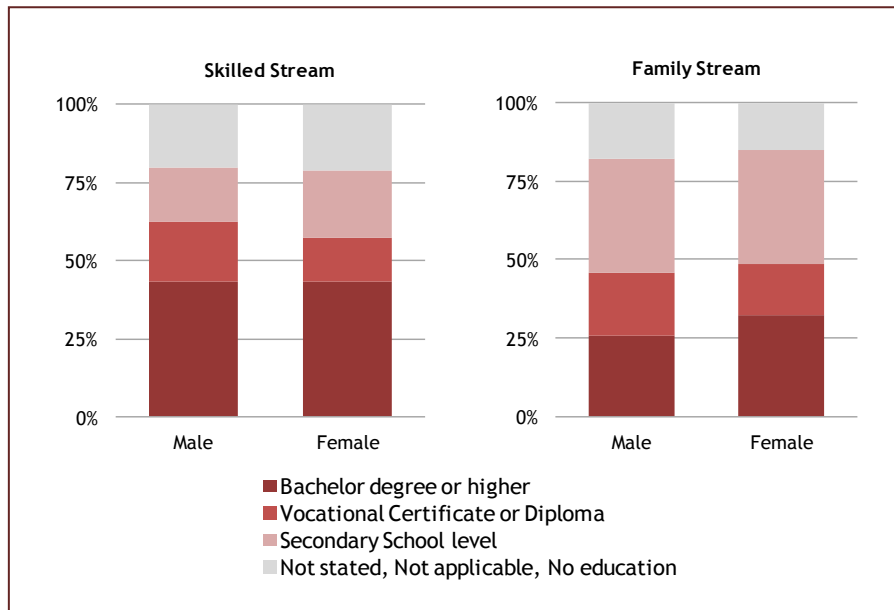
There are significant differences in employment outcomes for migrants in different visa streams. Those with the highest employment outcomes, almost approaching similar levels compared to Australian born tend to come from the Skilled stream, followed by Family and then Humanitarian (ABS 2014). This is closely related to differences in each stream in terms skills and qualifications, cultural match, English levels and how well people's skills match the Australian labour market. Primary Skilled stream migrants selected on the basis of these characteristics are at a strong advantage when searching for jobs and securing paid work.

Migrants from a non English speaking country, even if they have arrived in the Skilled stream with a good command of English, are disadvantaged in the Australian labour market. For example, data obtained from the Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants indicates that within the Skilled stream, migrants from non-Main English Speaking Countries have higher levels of unemployment and lower median annual incomes less than \$40,000 less per annum when compared with those from English speaking countries (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014b). Those who are seen as being culturally different are least likely to hold high paid or high status jobs (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007).

Women migrants and employment

Data monitoring the employment of migrant women indicates that they generally have a much lower labour force participation rate, higher unemployment and lower earnings relative to their skills and qualifications (Hawthorne 2011; Miranti, Nepal & McNamara 2010). Australian census data from 2011 indicates that a similar number of migrant women in both the Skilled and Family stream are degree qualified. However, more men in the Skilled stream are vocationally qualified, reflecting the number of male dominated vocational occupations on the Skilled Occupation List (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015a).

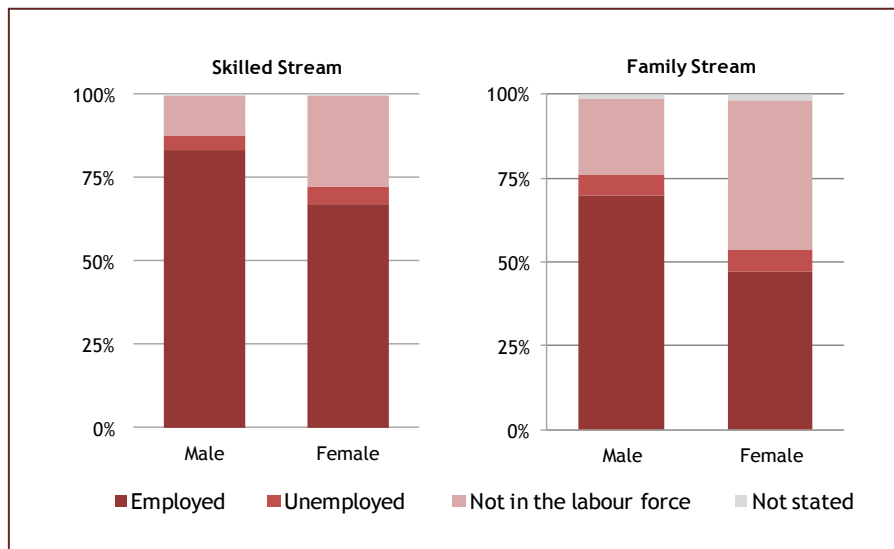
Chart 4: Education level Family and Skilled Stream Migrants at 2011 Census



Source: Generated from (ABS 2011e)

Despite the similar education profiles there is a significant gap between men and women migrants in terms of labour force participation and income in Australia. A much larger proportion of migrant women are out of the labour force compared to migrant men. To some extent the different employment outcomes in each stream can be attributed to the gender stratification of these migration pathways.

Chart 5: Labour force participation Family and Skilled Stream Migrants at 2011 Census*

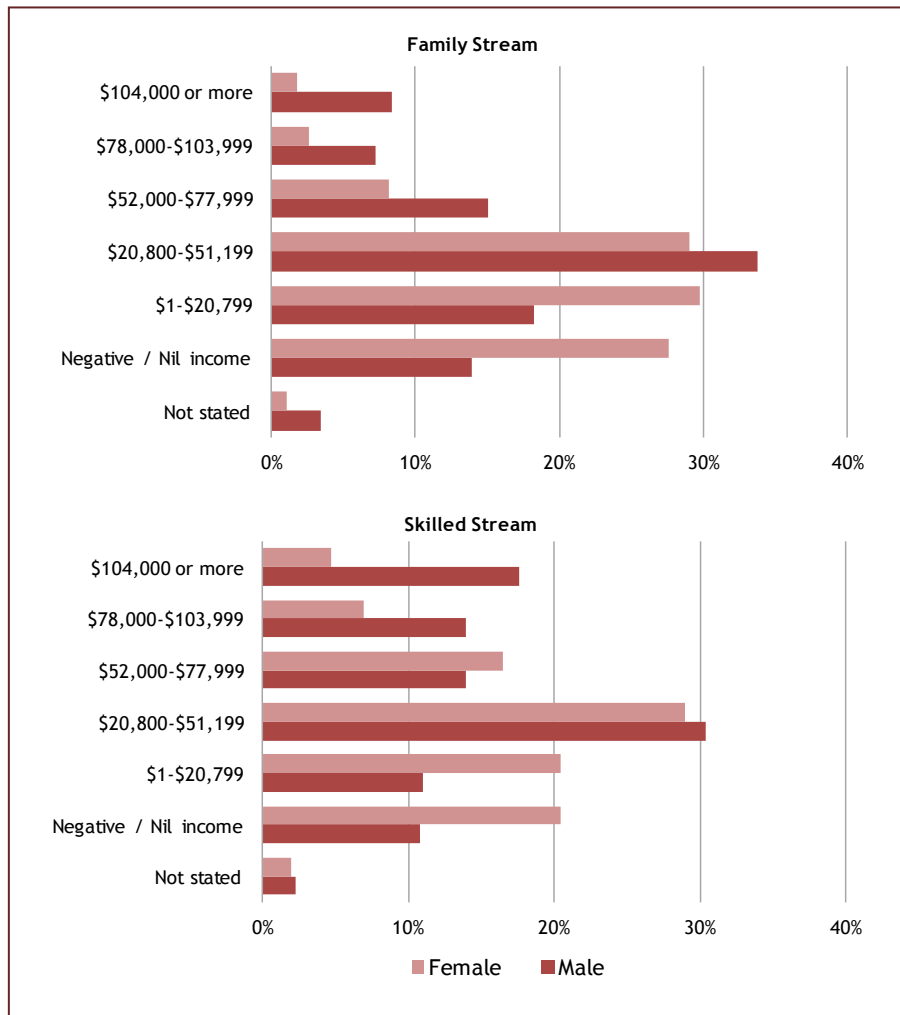


Source: Generated from (ABS 2011d) excluding those not applicable

In the Australian labour market context, men outperform women across most measures of employment, including participation rate, earnings and return on investment in education (Sloan 2012; Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2014). Women are still more likely to be the primary carers in the household and undertake the majority of domestic duties. Their role in the family can limit career opportunities in ways that are less likely to affect men (Hochschild & Machung 2003). A subtle unconscious bias has been identified in various recruitment settings (e.g. Bertrand & Mullainathan 2004; Booth & Leigh 2010),

whereby, all other things being equal, people generally tend to value men's skills over women's. This means that women, and in particular migrant women, through no fault of their own have reduced employment opportunities and income. In this light, it is hardly surprising that partner migration, which is significantly more feminised, tends to have poorer employment outcomes compared to skills and qualification. This group of women constitutes an untapped reserve of skilled talent to draw upon and are a hidden asset in the Australian labour force.

Chart 6: Income per week Family and Skilled Stream Migrants at 2011 Census



Source: Generated from (ABS 2011c)*excluding those not applicable

In both Family and Skill stream, the number of men earning more than \$78,000 per annum is at least double the number of women. Conversely the number of women earning less than \$20,000 is double the number of men. The gendered institution of family can restrict women migrants' access to the labour market far more than for men and this is partly related to the female visa categories and migratory paths. People who migrate in the Family stream as partners have a two-year temporary visa, which may adversely affect their employment outcomes. Lack of access to mainstream services such as Job Services Australia for secondary skilled applicants and Family stream partner migrants can create situations of economic dependency on the partner migrant. Without systematic social change or support from services these factors will continue to adversely impact economic and settlement outcomes for women partner migrants (International Organization for Migration 2013; Syed 2007).

Influence of family

Partner migrants come as part of a family and this has an impact on their job searching and employment prospects. It is much more difficult to optimise job searching for couples compared to single jobseekers. If the employment of the primary applicant in their family is prioritised as the basis for the visa grant (including already having a job in an increasing number of cases in the Skilled stream) this means secondary applicants may find themselves disadvantaged. This is particularly the case if the couple move to an area where there are limited jobs, such as rural or regional locations (Buchel & Battu 2002). Like all migrants to Australia, partner migrants tend to be younger than the overall Australian population. This means migrant women are likely to have young children and may delay entering the labour market until such time as they can fit paid work around their caring responsibilities. Those with caring responsibilities, particularly pre-school age children are more likely to want part-time work, which allows them to juggle paid and unpaid work. The pressure to provide childcare can be stressful in the context of high formal childcare costs in Australia and the lack of family care networks left behind in the country of origin. Like Australian born women, parents of pre-school age children need to weigh up the cost of childcare and working in low paid jobs that essentially just cover the cost of care with little or no earnings left for household items. Women shouldering the burden of domestic and caring responsibilities can lead to the re-domestication of some migrant women (Cooke, Zhang & Wang 2013; Webb, Beale & Faine 2013). Men are also much more likely to arrive as a single individual skilled migrant which fits within the discourse around the way skilled migration policy is developed. The lack of support provided to partner migrants, mostly women, influences their role as predominantly outside the labour force. This research will consider how women's role in the family influences their decision to enter the labour market and how this could be incorporated into planning for partner migrant women's entrance into the Australian workforce.

Influence of visa

Partner or spouse visa holders in the Family stream face a longer time frame to permanent residency and citizenship compared to Skilled or Humanitarian visa holders; in most cases there is an additional initial two year temporary visa prior to application for a permanent visa. Their long-term status as a resident of Australia is less certain and depends on the maintenance of their relationship to a spouse⁴. Although Family stream applicants have full work rights in Australia, some employers may be reluctant to take on women because they falsely believe that they will only be available to work in Australia for a short period of time. For some, the temporary visa can reinforce and entrench the career gap created in the process of migration. This may also reflect the government's purpose in family migration, the contribution of which is couched in terms of social support, in a way that other more male dominated streams are not (Khoo, McDonald & Edgar 2013; Lee & Kim 2011). This can reinforce traditional gender roles within the family and the male breadwinner model of employment for new migrant families. This research is interested in considering partner migrant women's perspectives on the influence of visa status and how it impacts upon their employment and settlement in Australia.

Dependency on partner

Those arriving in Australia on a temporary partner visa do not have access to any social welfare and limited access to health and Medicare services while on the initial temporary visa. This is also the case for

⁴ In cases of family violence or abuse, there is a process for temporary partners to apply to stay in Australia following relationship breakdown

those who are granted permanent residency as a Skilled migrant or partner. This means that those who are not working are reliant on their partner for financial support. Economic dependency may lead to an asymmetrical power relationship with their partner, which may adversely affect employment. Lack of financial resources and lack of independence, especially in the context of living in a less culturally familiar environment and without family and other resources, can make some migrant women more vulnerable to family violence (Yoshihama 2009).

Conclusion

Programs that cater for skilled migration, without considering the highly gendered nature of migration are at risk of being less effective for the majority of women migrants (Boucher 2007, Syed 2007). From an economic perspective, migrant women are an underutilised source of human capital in Australia. Women migrants from the non-main English speaking countries are one of the largest groups of new entrants to Australia, yet they are far less likely to be participating in the labour market and experience higher level of over-qualification and underemployment than other migrants. They are hidden from view where their role has shifted from being in many instances, a paid well-educated professional to being re-domesticated as wives, spouses and partners.

The exclusion and marginalisation of women from paid employment that allows them to utilise their skills and experience is not only a waste of human resources, it also has an affect at the individual and family level, since it reduces access to economic resources and independence required for full participation in Australian society. Employment is also a key determinant of health and wellbeing and underemployment is a known risk factor for poorer mental and physical health (Reid 2012; Wilkinson, R & Marmot 2003). Loss of connection to paid employment can contribute to social isolation and poor mental health and reduce connection to the community. Further, accessing social networks is not only essential for successful settlement but also for finding work. Over time this can compound deskilling as career gaps widen.

This group of women are often ineligible for employment services within both settlement oriented or mainstream jobseeker assistance programs. They do not require intensive support and assistance available to some groups of disadvantaged jobseekers. However, they need support and guidance to navigate the Australian labour market.

If Australia wants to continue to attract talented migrants, we cannot afford to ignore the poorer employment outcomes of migrant women arriving in the Skilled and Family stream. There is little doubt that changing this situation will require investment. Yet there is little research that has comprehensively evaluated the experiences of Australian migrant women against a range of possible solutions. This study aims to provide some insight into potential strategies for the future, based on a review of best practice and a consultative approach including interviewing NESB migrant women, employers and existing service providers, to uncover practical ways to assist migrant women to find suitable employment.

Overview of methods

This is a qualitative study exploring the experiences of partner migrant women from CALD backgrounds in relation to securing employment in Australia. Data indicates that women make up the majority of people arriving on partner visas (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015b). A significant number of these women have high levels of skills and qualifications, yet they are more likely to be either unemployed or underemployed and working for low wages when compared with their skilled male counterparts from CALD backgrounds.

Given the strong evidence available that partner migrant women are not being fully integrated into the labour market, qualitative data methods were chosen to explore the first-hand lived experiences faced by these women on finding work in Australia. In order to explore gaps and solutions in service delivery to this cohort of migrants, interviews were also conducted with service providers and employers. The study took a national focus with data being collected in Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, regional Victoria and other areas of regional Australia.

The fieldwork for this project was conducted between October 2014 and March 2015. A total of 63 women were consulted as part of this project. This included face-to-face interviews (skype and telephone interviews) with 32 partner migrant women from CALD backgrounds and four focus groups comprising 31 women (across 4 groups). Two focus groups were held in Melbourne, one in regional Victoria and one in Sydney. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with nine service providers and ten employers. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in English. All participants had proficient levels of English and were able to understand the questions being asked and respond appropriately.

Recruitment of interview participants

Recruitment of migrant women

The research targeted women who arrived on two types of visas as partner migrants. To be eligible for this study the participant had to:

- have arrived in Australia with their husbands/partners on a Skilled visa or on a Family visa. This included those on temporary visas (visa 309) who arrived in Australia to join Australian born partners and those who joined partners from the same cultural background who have already settled in Australia.
- have worked in Australia in the past, or currently working, or hope to get a job in the future
- come from a non- English speaking country
- have been in Australia for less than 5 years
- have a professional background

A number of methods were employed to recruit women for this study. Participants in Melbourne metropolitan area were recruited through AMES Australia (referred hereafter as AMES) networks and were either current students undertaking programs at AMES or former students. The women who participated in the focus groups were all undertaking SLPET (Settlement Language Pathways to Employment & Training) classes at AMES in Melbourne and Navitas in Sydney. Teachers in each organisation were asked to identify skilled women partner migrants who would be willing to participate in the study. Participants were given \$70 for their time.

It was more difficult to recruit women in regional Victoria. A number of avenues were explored. Contact was made with agencies in the major regional centres of Shepparton, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong as well as other regions in Victoria including North West Victoria, Gippsland, Mallee and South West Victoria to request assistance to identify suitable participants. A service provider in North West Victoria, who was contacted by the research team, was able to identify eight eligible partner migrant women from their community who were willing to be part of a focus group. This service provider was also able to recruit women to interview face-to-face.

Contact and dissemination of a flyer through the AMES Distance Learning program was the most successful recruitment strategy for finding women in rural or regional areas. Within a short period of time the interview quota was filled. Given the effectiveness of the Victorian experience, AMES liaised with Navitas in Sydney who provide Distance Learning to clients in all States of Australia except Victoria and Tasmania. Navitas teachers sent out the flyer and again within a relatively short period the quota to interview suitable women was filled.

The group of women from regional Victoria and the remainder of regional Australia were self-selected and they initiated contact with the research team to participate in the study. Contact details were collected including visa type, geographic location, country of origin, level of education and professional background to ensure the selection criteria were met. The research team selected women from those who expressed an interest in the project based on a broad range of ethnic backgrounds and locations across Australia.

Face-to-face interviews

A total of 32 women were interviewed for this study. Twelve were from the Melbourne metropolitan area, ten from regional Victoria and ten from the rest of Australia. In terms of rural and metropolitan split 19 participants were from metropolitan areas and 13 were from rural/regional areas.

Interviewee place of residence	Number
Metropolitan Melbourne	12
Regional Victoria	10
Queensland	4
Western Australia	3
South Australia	2
ACT	1
Total	32

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with skilled migrants were conducted in person for most of the Melbourne metropolitan interviewees. For those living in regional Victoria and regional Australia telephone or skype interviews were conducted. The preference was to undertake a skype interview as a proxy to interviewing the person face-to-face. This enabled the interviewer and interviewee to see and speak to each other. All interviews were audio recorded with the written consent of the participant.

Interviewees were asked a series of questions about their employment experience before arriving in Australia. The interviews explored the year of arrival, the type of visa they arrived in Australia, who they came to Australia with, their qualifications and previous employment, expectations about getting a job in Australia and the reason for settling in a particular location in Australia. For those who were working, further information was gathered about their current job, how they got the job, whether it was matched to their skills and qualifications, and the types of services they had used. Barriers they had faced while job searching were explored as part of the interview. For those who did not have a job in Australia the questions focussed on the types of work they were looking for, training undertaken, barriers faced and the impact of not having a job on their settlement. Participants were also asked to provide suggestions on what services would be useful to assist them with their job searching and advice to someone who is just arriving in Australia looking for work. Where participants hoped to be in the next 5 years was also canvassed. Interviews were between 25 and 40 minutes duration.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were convened. The two Melbourne focus groups were held at AMES Flagstaff site, a settlement service provider in North West Victoria hosted a regional focus group and Navitas hosted the Sydney focus group. The duration of the focus groups was between one and one and half hours. Focus group participants discussed seven key questions. These were:

- What were your expectations about getting a job before you came to Australia?
- What are your *current* career goals?
- What training/courses have you done to help you with your job searching?
- What has been your experience of searching for jobs in Australia?
- What services have you used to find a job?
- Imagine that you are part of a committee of people designing services to help migrant women like yourselves from non-English speaking backgrounds to find a job- what would the service look like?
- This research is about migrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds finding work. What would you like AMES to be saying to the Australian Government and to the Office of Women?

Focus groups involve an interactive process where participants learn from each other by sharing ideas and experiences (Wilkinson, S 1999). The women in the three metropolitan focus groups knew each other because they were in SLPET classes together. In contrast, the regional Victoria focus group participants were less familiar with each other. Some were in a play group together, while others had used settlement services in the region. People who know each other in a focus group tend to have a shared understanding are more likely to recall common lived experiences as well as share anecdotes albeit in an artificial environment that is facilitated by a researcher. As an example, the experience of the first Melbourne focus group for a number of members was both emotional and cathartic. The focus group provided a forum in which participants could speak about the emotional toll unemployment had taken on their confidence, financial independence, social isolation and settlement in Australia. All commented at the end of the

session that they were thankful for the opportunity to have their stories heard and that their experience was not unique or uncommon. The sharing of experiences in the focus groups meant that a much broader range of topics were covered than in the individual face-to-face interviews.

Recruitment of service providers

Service providers in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, regional Victoria and the rest of regional Australia were consulted. The service providers include agencies that directly assist skilled migrants, as well as provision of more general settlement services including Migrant Resource Centres. These services were identified through a desktop search on the internet and through referral by key agencies working with skilled migrants. A total of nine agencies were consulted as part of this study. Two agencies were in regional Victoria, three in Melbourne, two in Sydney and two in Perth.

Semi-structured interviews were used to ask service providers about their organisation, the types of services provided, referral processes and client groups. They were asked to specify any job searching programs that they offered particularly for skilled migrants, to identify service gaps and to provide an appraisal of the employment situation in their region. Final questions related to views on getting skilled migrants prepared for the Australian labour market and the types of services suitable to do this.

Recruitment of employers

The employer group included HR Managers and people working in senior roles involved in the recruitment and selection of personnel. Employers were recruited via a number of avenues. Four employers from Melbourne were recruited through the AMES mentoring program and contacts through the AMES Corporate Engagement Program. In regional Victoria a service provider identified suitable employers to approach. Three employers were gained through this contact. Other employers were gained through personal contacts and referral from agencies that assist skilled migrants. Although a number of key government agencies in Perth and Sydney were contacted, no interviews were secured through these approaches.

In total the research team approached more than 20 employers. Only ten agreed to an interview. Three employers were located in Melbourne, three in regional Victoria, one in Perth and two in Sydney. Employers came from a range of organisations including the mining and IT sectors, public utilities, public sector organisations and other for-profit and not-for profit organisations. Employers were the most problematic group to recruit. However these ten employers provide interesting insights into their experiences working with and employing skilled migrants.

Again semi-structured interviews were used to ask employers about their organisation, its culture and whether their organisation has a diversity policy in place. They were asked to identify the top three attributes they look for in a job seeker. A series of questions was asked around recruitment practices, employment projections into the future, their experience employing skilled migrants and any additional support in terms of services migrants may need to ensure they are job ready for Australian workplaces.

Pilot testing

Pilot testing was done with the semi-structured interview schedule used for the face-to-face interviews with partner migrant women. Three interviews were conducted as part of the pilot and the interview schedule was amended accordingly. Although the interview schedule provided a template to guide the interview by detailing the types of questions to ask, there was still the opportunity for the interviewer to deviate from the questions and explore topics in greater depth as they arose. Similarly, interviews with employers and service providers had a semi-structured interview schedule with the flexibility to investigate issues further.

Data Analysis

All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded with the consent of the participant(s). The focus groups and face-to-face interviews with 32 partner migrant women were transcribed as a verbatim transcript. These transcripts were thematically analysed using NVivo qualitative software. Quotes from respondents in the report have been edited for clarity.

Desktop review of services and interventions

A desktop review was conducted on interventions that assist skilled migrants to access employment in both Australia and internationally. The aim of this search was to identify models of practice to assist skilled migrants to integrate into the workforce and to determine what constitutes best practice.

The purpose of this review was to ascertain:

- The type of services available to assist skilled migrants
- Location of service
- Gender specific services available to help partner migrant women
- Types of funding models and main funding bodies
- Target population and eligibility to use services
- Models of service - including job preparation, work experience, mentoring, job placement
- Outputs and outcomes of the program.

This review was largely an internet based search that focussed on English speaking countries including New Zealand, UK, USA and Canada. A scan was also done on a number of European countries including Netherlands, Switzerland and Finland.

Ethical conduct of research

Ethics approval was sought according to the AMES Ethics Policy. This policy adheres to the NHMRC guidelines on the Ethical Conduct of Human Research.

All data collected during this study has been treated and stored as confidential. No one outside Research and Policy staff has access to project materials. All personal data has been de-identified. Occasionally the country of origin on quotations has been changed to prevent identification.

Participation in the focus groups and face-to-face interviews was voluntary. All participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to participating in a focus group or face-to-face interview and were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

A protocol was developed to assist migrant women who raised issues requiring additional settlement support.

Limitations of the research

This study does not make any claims to be representative of all new migrant women. The study sample was purposive rather than representative of partner migrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds who arrive in Australia. It provides a snapshot of views that reflect a specific time and place.

CHAPTER 3

Employment experiences of partner migrant women

The level of confidence goes down if we are sitting at home. There's a saying that stagnant water it always stinks. If we are not using our skills, then obviously we will forget everything. (IT specialist, India)

Introduction

Employment is a cornerstone of settlement for all migrants. The ability to secure a long-term income allows migrants to plan and establish themselves within the community. The transition into the Australian labour market for many skilled migrant women who arrive on a partner visa is often fraught. The findings from this research indicate that women face numerous barriers, including difficulties breaking into the workplace and are accepting jobs in less qualified low skilled positions.

This section will provide a detailed analysis of the responses received from the individual face-to-face interviews and the focus groups. Generally speaking, the women consulted had very similar experiences of job searching. During the interviews and focus groups similar themes emerged. The women were conscious of their proficiency in English in terms of their ability to communicate in the workplace. They all felt they needed to familiarise themselves with protocols and culture of Australian workplaces including how to apply for jobs and how to tailor a resume suited to Australian recruitment practices and interview skills in this context. Most of them spoke about the difficulties of “getting a break” in terms of securing their first job within the labour market.

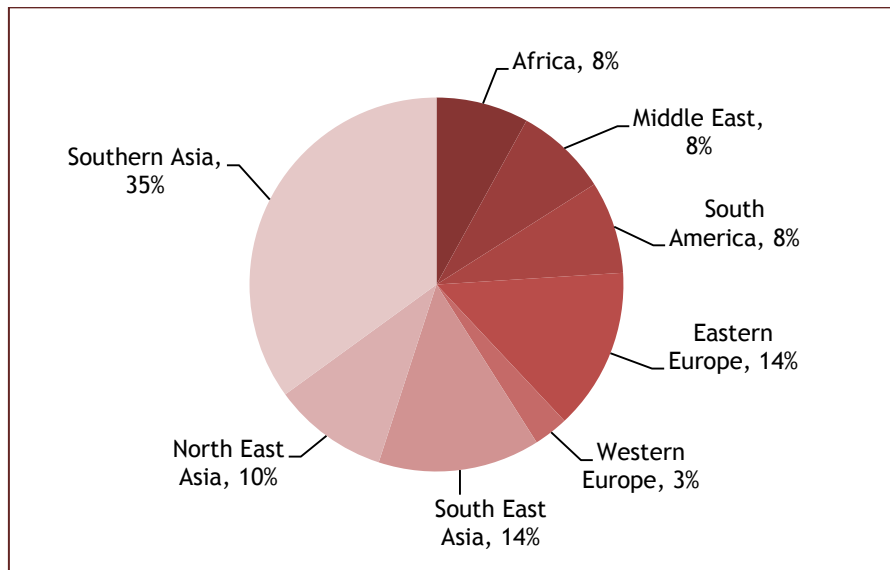
Demographic overview of women in this study

A total of 63 women participated in this study. They came from Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and the ACT. The table below provides a breakdown of the number of women who participated in face-to-face interviews and focus groups by State.

Location	No. of interviews		Total
	One-on-one	Focus group	
Metropolitan Melbourne	12	2 16 individuals	28
Regional Victoria	10	1 7 individuals	17
Canberra	1		1
New South Wales		1 8 individuals	8
Queensland	4		4
South Australia	2		2
Western Australia	3		3
Total	32	31	63

The women in this study came from a wide variety of countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America. The largest group with just over one third of respondents came from Southern Asia, the largest country of origin being India.

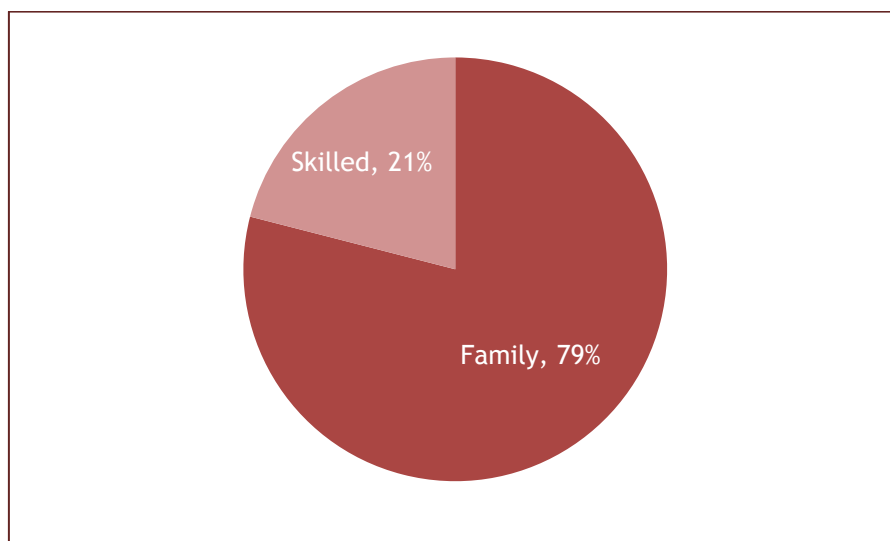
Chart 7: Country of Birth



Notes: This is based on the Standard Australian Classification of Countries, (ABS 2011b). Southern Asia includes India (15), Sri Lanka (4), Bangladesh (2), and Pakistan (1). NE Asia includes China (4) and South Korea (2). SE Asia includes Vietnam (3), Philippines (2), Thailand (2), and others (2). Western Europe includes Austria (1) and Denmark (1). Eastern Europe includes Russia (3), Ukraine (2), and others (4). South America includes Columbia (3) and others (2). Middle East includes Iran (4) and Iraq (1). Africa includes Egypt (1), Mauritius (1), Morocco (1), Nigeria (1) and Uganda (1).

Participants arrived in Australia on a range of visa types. As noted in the methodology this study was focussed on those arriving in Australia on a Family visa and those who came under a Skilled visa. Almost eighty per cent came on a Family visa.

Chart 8: Type of Visa



Two thirds of respondents in this study had been in Australia for less than 3 years, while 36 per cent had been in Australia for more than 4 years.

Chart 9: Length of time in Australia

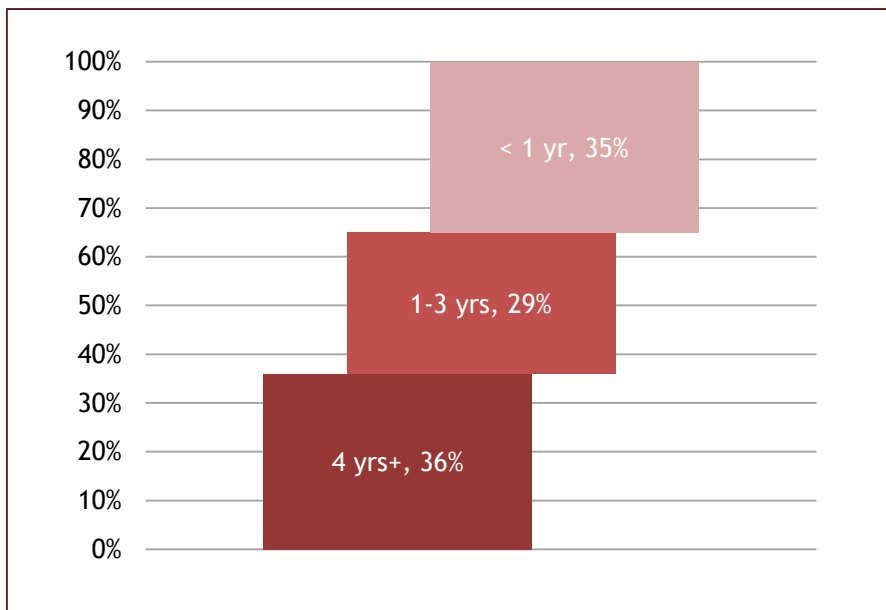
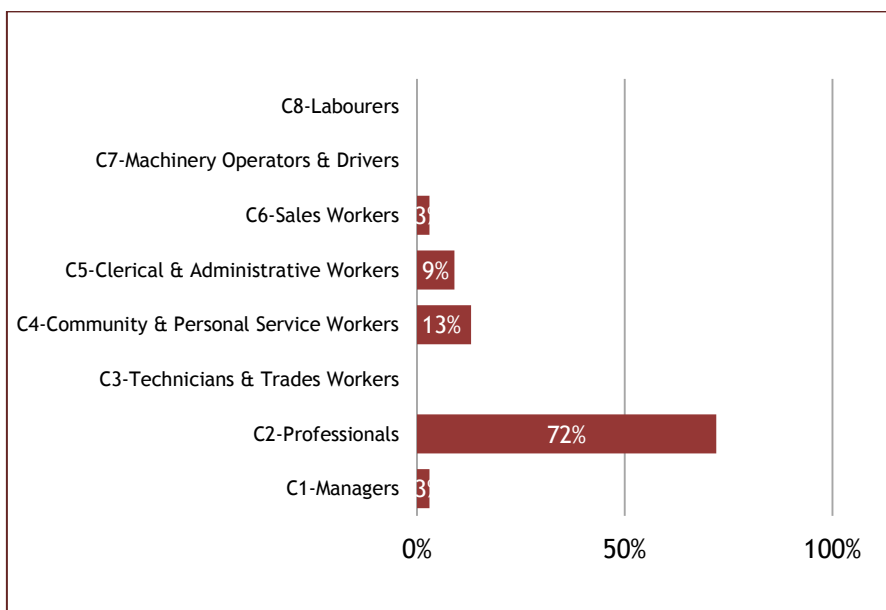


Chart 10: Occupation before arriving in Australia



Notes: This is based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ABS 2013b)

The graph above shows almost three quarters of the women in this study were employed in professional occupations including 3 per cent in managerial roles and 13 per cent as community and personal service workers prior to migration.

Views of partner migrant women about employment

Information in this section has been organised by themes that relate to the women's experience of securing employment. These themes are listed below:

- Expectations of finding work in Australia
- Job searching activities
- Employment outcomes
- Barriers to finding work
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Unemployment and settlement
- Strategies to find employment
- Advice to other migrant women
- Solutions for government and service providers

Expectations of finding work in Australia

Almost all of the women who were interviewed were actively looking for work. A number of respondents with very young children were hoping to look for work within the next 12 months.

The women interviewed in this study had mixed views on finding work in Australia. Some were optimistic at the time of arrival and thought that it would be relatively straight forward to get work commensurate with their experience, skills and qualifications while others had spoken to family and friends and had lowered their expectations. The examples below illustrate the range of expectations participants had in finding work in their newly adopted country.

As one interviewee said:

When I came to Australia I was thinking that it's really easy to get a job, but then I realised that it's not that easy. It's actually hard. (HR Specialist, Sri Lanka)

Another respondent had positive reviews from people in her home country, but the reality was far from what she had been told prior to her departure:

Before I moved here I got really good advice from my managers at work. They said it would be really easy with my background and job experience. But it was really, really hard. I didn't know the criteria, how they recruit, or when they get an application how they do the short listing. (Finance administrator, India)

Some respondents who had friends, family and partners already living in Australia had a more conservative view on their job prospects and understood that it would take some time to secure employment.

My brother's friend, who lived here, told me it's not predictable. I can't tell you how long it takes to find a job. Some people are lucky; they find work after two or three months. Some people are not working after seven months, one year. It's up to you. It's up to your chances. (Teacher, Iran)

No respondent mentioned any formal information about job searching acquired through government channels. In contrast, immigration agents tended to put a positive spin on securing work.

I came to Australia in 2013, with my husband. We started the process of our visa because our migrant agent from Melbourne told us that Australia was a new country, and an amazing place for engineers. He said that that because there are not too many people living in Australia there would be good opportunities for new families and for us as engineers. (Engineer, Columbia)

Most of the women found it difficult to secure employment in their professional field. Those who were able to secure professional employment did not find entry into the workplace straight forward. One participant applied for jobs across Australia. Her decision to come to North West Victoria was based on getting a job in the region.

I first came to Australia by working holiday visa. I went back home and when I came back I studied with AMES to prepare myself to work in Australia. And during that time I applied for jobs all round Australia. I didn't specify where it was - I just wanted a job. When I got the job here, I moved immediately. (IT consultant, Thailand)

Others felt that they would experience difficulties getting work because their qualifications would not be recognised and they would have to get an Australian qualification.

I wanted to find a job as accountant, but I think it's very difficult in Australia. I think I have to study again to get another qualification in Australia. (Accountant, Vietnam)

A respondent who was a highly experienced doctor in her home country came to Australia with her doctor husband. The family resources however went to upgrading his qualification, which meant that she had to lower her job expectations. She was surprised at how challenging it was to find employment at all in Australia:

When I came here I knew that my degree was not registered here and that I would have to take a special test to be a doctor. But I expected to get any job, like in retail shop or similar. But I couldn't find this, because they also need local experience. Any experience I have, I don't have here. (Medical doctor, Egypt)

For others who were employed at the time of the focus group or interviews, financial imperatives meant that they had to secure any sort of work in order to earn an income.

I think I will start working in a labour job, like working in a supermarket or working as a kitchen hand - something like that. (Kindergarten teacher, China)

By working in low skilled positions, some women had the expectations that they could rebuild their careers at a later time.

At the beginning, because I didn't know English, I knew that I was going to take any job, you know, as a housekeeper, as kitchen hand or waitress and just slowly, slowly going up and going back to my career again. (Advertising & marketing specialist, Peru)

Many of the work expectations of these women were shaped by their partner's careers. Generally speaking, their partner's work was given priority over the women's career path. This was particularly the case for women living in rural areas where employment options were limited. For the women living in North West Victoria, keeping the family together was more important than their own careers.

I want to stay with my partner. I don't want to leave him here and I don't want to go. And we have the kids, small kids. If we want to move, definitely we move together. Otherwise I will stay and do some work around here. (Research scientist 1, India)

Job searching activities

Almost all of the partner migrant women in this study had the intention of getting a job in Australia in their own field. The exception was the medically trained respondents who knew that there would be considerable time and costs associated with upgrading their qualifications. Most of the women in this study were proactive in job searching. They tried numerous avenues to secure work including sending out resumes, cold calling and applying for specific jobs advertised on seek.com or company websites.

Many of the respondents took, what was described by one of the employers in this study, a "scattergun" approach to applying for jobs. This meant sending out applications for all and any jobs without having a real plan as to what they might like to do. This was exemplified by the following respondent who realised that in order to increase the likelihood of success, she needed to be focussed on a specific area of work and address selection criteria when applying for jobs.

When I came, straight away I start searching for a job. For the first two months I was just applying online. Then I started sending random letters to HR departments. Three or five positions a day I was applying, applying, applying. I searched everywhere for everything from receptionist to administration assistants to student services in universities, teachers' aides in the schools, whatever. I got no response. It takes a lot of time to address key selection criteria and position descriptions, so it is better to spend your time applying for positions you know that you are going to take. (Finance administrator, India)

The women who were interviewed were extremely resourceful in terms of their job searching. Without support from services many adopted a trial and error method where they refined their job searching over time.

I did some applications by myself through the internet and I didn't use the recruitment agents. So, basically I did job searching by myself'. (Kindergarten teacher, China)

At the time interviews were conducted the labour markets in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth were competitive with all the employers consulted stating that they did not have any difficulty recruiting suitably qualified candidates. Many of the women reported their perception of strong competition for jobs and received either no response to their application or were not successful in being shortlisted for an interview. The experiences of rejection lead a number of participants to conclude that they should apply for low level positions in their industry or sector because they might have a better chance of securing a work.

I thought I would find a job in a bank, but after applying for jobs in financial institutions I found out that it is very difficult and very competitive. Every job advertised there must be 100 people applying so I lower my expectations for the moment. I just look for entry-level administration assistant jobs or something like that. (Banker, Vietnam).

Others shifted their focus to entry-level jobs in areas unrelated to their skills and qualifications. This respondent has spent two years trying to secure a job in her field of expertise IT. She finally got a job through a friend at a large retail store.

From 2008 continuously I was working. When I came here I couldn't find any job at all. It was very difficult for me to stay home. For two years, I was not ready to look for non-IT jobs. I don't know what the exact problem was because many of my friends got jobs in IT. But after two years, I'm not confident. That really affected my mind. I thought, okay I will look for any kind job. I'm not happy with the job I'm doing but at least I'm earning something. (Software Engineer, India).

The focus group participants in Sydney who were undertaking a SLPET (Settlement Language Pathways to Employment Training) course with Navitas (see Chapter five for further information on SLPET) had spent time getting their LinkedIn profile up to date as a strategy to secure employment.

I have made my profile in LinkedIn and now many people are making contact with me. It has been two weeks and I'm getting much more knowledge about my industry than I had before. Many people they are showing their interest and are sending friend requests. Because of this reason, I may get a job in the future. (Sales consultant, India)

Cold calling was another method employed by a number of respondents. This involved anything from applying directly to companies or physically going to businesses door knocking with their resumes. Some of the jobs were professional, but many were low skilled positions. There was a mix of success using this method with some respondents being able to secure work.

I used to print my resume and walk through the city and go to all the restaurants and places looking for a job. I did that for maybe a month or two until one day they called me. (Marketing Coordinator, Columbia)

For other respondents this method was not fruitful.

I started dropping in resumes at nursing homes, but then I worked out I couldn't do that. I've dropped resumes at the pharmacies, to see if I could get something there. And I've just applied for lots of unqualified jobs like working at the theatre and retail shops. (Nurse, Denmark)

Some respondents had mixed success with recruitment agencies. Some were able to secure either permanent or temporary employment, others felt that recruitment agencies were a major barrier to them securing work. For these respondents even though they lodged their resume with an agency and put an expression of interest in for specific jobs they did not hear back from the agency.

Ninety per cent of the time I got a call backs for an interview when I applied directly to a company. But the recruitment consultants, even when my skills were more than competent, they never responded about interviews. They just told me my resume was not shortlisted without giving any reasons. (Software Engineer, India)

Respondents living in rural and regional areas with access to limited services to assist them were even more likely to have to fend for themselves and be responsible for their own job searching. For many it involved trial and error, applying for jobs outside the area they lived and then having to deal with rejection and the lack of alternative options available to them. This respondent after fruitless job searching ended up working in a meat processing plant.

People don't help here at all; you do it on your own. My partner helps a bit, but he's busy - he's always in Queensland working. So I go on websites, I go to seek.com, I go to different IT jobs, whatever. I even tried a recruiter in town. I put a lot of energy into looking for a job, but in the end I took this job, so that's it. (IT specialist, Uganda)

For one respondent who had a background in banking in her home country applied unsuccessfully for jobs at local branches of the various banks in the town in which she lived. Once that avenue was exhausted, she focussed on getting a role in Melbourne and was prepared to travel to the city to get work. She was interviewed for an entry level position - part of an ethnic specific program at one of the big four banks. However, she was unsuccessful in securing this job. This respondent was at a loss as to what type of work she would do in Australia and thought about doing further training as a nurse even though this was not a preferred work choice.

Actually I've applied for nursing, but it's actually not my field. I'm scared of blood. (Banker, Nigeria)

Building experience, job-hopping

“Job-hopping” is a phenomenon that a number of women in this study undertook with the view to ultimately securing work in their chosen field. Job-hopping involves moving from one job to another to allow people to build their skills and knowledge and to gain local experience while improving their English skills. Many of the jobs are located in service, retail and hospitality industries and tend to be low paid and low status with unpredictable hours. The precariousness of many of these jobs makes them untenable in the long term and this means that incumbents are ready to move on to something better:

I was agreeing to do anything because of my level of English. In my first month here, I started working with other Brazilians doing a cleaning job. From there I changed to hospitality jobs, and I learned how to make coffee and how to carry three plates. That's the skills that I learned. All the while I was developing my English. But because this kind of work is completely unstable, I looked for something with more stability with normal hours, a permanent roster. Recently I found work in a chemist with a normal shift and the stability of one company. Now I can make plans with my life. (Accounts manager, Brazil)

First language contacts, family and friend contacts

Respondent's personal networks played a significant role in gaining access to the labour market and understanding employment rights in terms of minimum rates of pay and leave conditions. Some respondents had positive experiences from family and friends who were able to point them in the right direction or recommend them to colleagues and associates in their community.

My family have helped. My husband's stepdaughter is a lawyer, so she's helped with my applications. My husband's family has been putting words in with people when I put applications in. They say it's a lot about knowing people in a small town".
(Nurse, Denmark)

Others had less than favourable experiences with members of their own community who saw them as being ripe for exploitation. This was the experience with one respondent who was offered a job in a takeaway shop by a member of her community.

A lot of migrant women because they cannot speak English, they don't have information. They go to people that speak their own language. That's what happened to me. People who speak your own language, they might use you. The owner said 'we offer you training for three days and you won't get paid. After this, if you're good we will offer you a job at \$8 per hour in cash.' I asked 'is that the maximum rate?' He pointed at a lady working and said 'she can do cash and kitchen, if you are as good as her, you'll get \$12.' As soon as we walked out, my husband said 'No way! By the time you get on a bus to get there, you've wasted half an hour and it will cost you for your ticket. You'll just be doing free labour. It's not worth it, better go work for Aussie company'.
(Kindergarten teacher, China)

Although the temptation is to stay within your own cultural networks, one respondent was conscious that she needed to better understand the Australian community and opted to apply for jobs within the mainstream labour market.

In Australia, if you try to apply for a job, they want you to understand the culture. In the country I came from, there is only one nationality, Russian nationality. The problem is that it is easier to deal with a network of people with your nationality. But I wanted to enter the Australian community to meet people from other cultures."
(Digital Marketing Manager, Russia)

Another respondent was reluctant to work for a company with owners from her home country.

I worked at a Korean company in Brisbane, but the working conditions were totally the same as in Korea; it was really hard to get holiday leave and it was like minimum wage. But most Korean people here do this because we need local experience to get a job. But it is not good. (Interior Designer, Korea)

Volunteering

Many respondents saw volunteering as a proxy to local work experience. Volunteering enabled the partner migrant women to gain local work experience, improve their language skills, learn about Australian workplaces and learn new skills in the local context. Some of the women were able to secure volunteering roles through services they had accessed via referral, while others used their own initiative to get volunteer work. Generally speaking, volunteer work was highly regarded by most respondents, but for some there was an element of exploitation and the experience was less than optimal.

One respondent who was a teacher undertook volunteer work, which proved to be beneficial in her ultimately getting full-time teaching work.

I was looking for job in my area of expertise as a science teacher, but it was the end of the year and nothing much happens in schools. I didn't keep quiet, I spent hours in November doing a lot of research on the Department of Education website. I started writing resumes and preparing selection criteria. I even did some voluntary work in a primary school nearby in the hope of getting some casual relief teaching. (Teacher, India)

One respondent felt that volunteer work would increase her confidence and demonstrate enthusiasm to a prospective employer.

I think I need to focus on training opportunities and volunteer work. Maybe it's a good start if one shows enthusiasm and passion and demonstrates their skills. I will become more confident to apply for positions. (Teacher, Serbia)

For some respondents even getting volunteer work was competitive and difficult.

Before I arrived, I knew it would be a problem to find a job in marketing with my level of English. I thought that I would start with an untrained job for a few months as volunteer, to get Australian experience. What I found was that the competition for volunteering jobs was no less than for usual jobs. It's not easy getting a volunteering job. (Digital Marketing Manager, Russia)

Services used to assist with job searching

As noted in the service provider section in Chapter five skilled migrants are ineligible to access the government funded Job Services Australia (JSA). In addition, those on a temporary spouse visa are not able to access these services for two years. JSA does not have a remit to assist newly arrived partner migrants. A number of the participants in this study were not clear about the role of JSA or the eligibility requirements to access the service. The experiences of these respondents are not a reflection on the quality of the service provided. This points to a need for a service that is better equipped to meet the needs of partner migrant women.

In the absence of other services in regional areas, some of the respondents approached the local JSA. They reported being given access to computer facilities without any other any additional support.

I did try Jobs Services Australia to see if they could help me. They sent me to Centrelink but I couldn't register with them because I don't get any benefits on a spouse visa. So they couldn't help much, I could only go there and use computers and printers.
(IT specialist 1, India)

Those fortunate enough to be linked into services were in a better position than those who had no support. One respondent living in the ACT found a Settlement agency that helped her develop a resume and instructed her on how to apply for jobs.

There are organisations that help migrants or refugees to find a job and to write a good resume. I approached one of them and they taught me the importance of the selection criteria and how to apply for jobs. There is also an organisation for volunteering and I registered with them. (Accountant, Sri Lanka)

Respondents living in rural areas were the most disadvantaged in terms of access to services. One respondent living in remote South Australia had no services at all to assist her. Another respondent living in South West Victoria said there was a person at the Local Council who assisted skilled migrants. She had seen him once. She was waiting to get her nursing qualifications recognised to allow her to work in Australia.

Another interviewee living in far North Queensland had seen a mainstream service advertising assistance with resume development but was reluctant to approach them.

I didn't get any assistance at all. I read on the wall of the agency that they assist with resumes. I thought about going in but I felt a little bit shy. I was not sure if I could ask for their help. There are a lot of people like me. I not complaining about it but we need a little bit of support. (Advertising & Marketing specialist, Peru)

The respondents in the Melbourne and Sydney focus groups who were undertaking SLPET courses were in the best position to understand what is required of them to access the Australian labour market. They had learnt about writing a resume, how to job search, interview skills and as part of the course were given two weeks unpaid work experience.

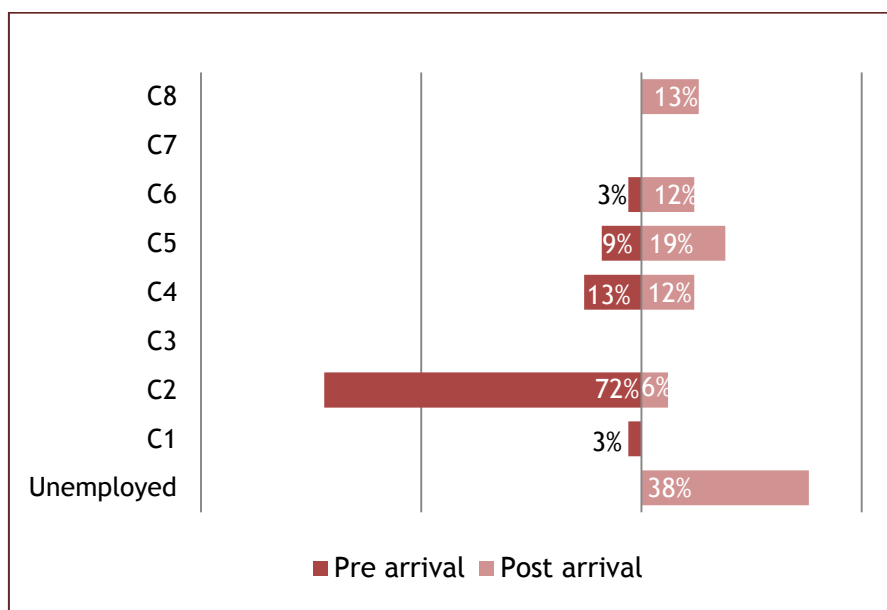
One of the counsellor explained to me that they've got a retail course at AMES, where I can go for work experience. It's much easier to find a job with work experience.
(Teacher, Iran)

Employment outcomes

Employment before and after arrival

The graph below illustrates that the respondents in this study experienced a significant shift in their occupational status after they arrived in Australia. Before arrival almost three quarters (72 per cent) were working as professionals. After arrival more than one third (38 per cent) were unemployed. Those who were employed were working in lower skilled positions as clerical and administrative workers and labourers.

Chart 11: Occupation before vs after arriving in Australia



Notes: This is based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ABS 2013b): C1 - Managers; C2 - Professionals; C3 - Technicians and Trades Workers; C4 - Community and Personal Service Workers; C5 - Clerical and Administrative Workers; C6 - Sales Workers; C7 - Machinery Operators and Drivers; C8 - Labourers.

(Among the 32 respondents who did one-on-one interviews, 72 per cent were professionals in the areas of Business, Human Resources and Marketing; Education; Health; IT and Science before arriving in Australia.)

Women who found low skilled jobs

Most of the women who participated in this study were yet to secure jobs in a professional area aligned to their skills and qualifications. An older respondent over the age of 50 who had teaching qualifications was finding it extremely difficult to access teaching because her proficiency in English precluded her from passing the IELTS test and therefore gaining registration. She had picked up a casual job delivering papers.

I got a casual part time job delivering newspapers around my house. After I pick up my son and we go around delivering papers. My son feels happy and me too. I get exercise and a little bit of money. (Teacher, Croatia)

Another respondent with a Master's Degree in Economics had applied for positions at Subway. Her hours of work varied from week to week, but she could work up to 20 hours a week over three to four days including the weekends and was responsible for closing late, after 11pm. She preferred to be working rather than not working even though this was not her ideal job.

It's casual work. The title of the job is sandwich artist. It means that your responsibilities include taking the order, making the sandwich, washing the dishes, mopping and cleaning. (Banking specialist, Iran)

One respondent who lives in Brisbane was a qualified engineer working in a laundry. The interview with this respondent was conducted at 6am so that she could get to work on time. She described how she got this job after living in Australia for three months.

My husband's friend used to work in this laundry; we spoke to him about any vacancies. I gave him my resume and after one or two weeks they called me about the job. (Engineer, India)

A respondent with a degree in Marketing and Communications found work with her family through her local community networks picking strawberries:

We met other Filipinos and they introduced us to a farm owner. We submitted all our resumes and then luckily we got the job. It was good money, but it was really hard work. In my whole life, I've never done that kind of work. We're not rich; we're an average family back in the Philippines. That kind of job is like whoa! We were out in the sun doing planting all day. My back hurt and I've still got blisters on my hands. It was a very humbling experience for me. (Information, media & telecommunications specialist, Philippines)

A respondent living in rural Victoria secured work at a meat-processing factory for four days a week. She had qualifications and a background in IT.

We weigh the meat on the weigher, make the boxes, pack the meat, lift the boxes and then lift the boxes into the big bins. It is hard labour, real hard labour. But I have to do it; I have no choice because you have to have money to survive. (IT Specialist, Uganda)

Women working in jobs matched to their skills and qualifications

Twelve women in this study were working in professional occupations. Some were not exactly aligned to their previous work experience, but they had managed to secure work where they could readily transfer their skills and knowledge.

The following respondent had a background in Human Resources but could not secure work in this industry. She found a job in IT, which represented a significant career change for this woman. She felt fortunate to have a job and relished the opportunity to learn new skills.

I'm happy in my IT job because I'm learning and I'm gaining some experience. This will help me to find work in the future because for people like us, it's very hard to find a job in human resources or administration because a lot of Australians are getting those positions. (Human Resources officer, Sri Lanka)

A research scientist and her family had come by a circuitous route to Australia; they had previously worked in the Middle East and Canada. They were living in rural Victoria and the husband had a permanent role in a public sector organisation. She applied for jobs in the same workplace and eventually after much persistence she secured a research position that was lower in status than her previous employment:

A job opportunity came and I went for an interview. I was not selected, which was a big disappointment. I wanted to find out why so I talked to the interviewer. They gave me feedback. There were one or two questions I was not expecting and I was not confident in answering. But because I came back and talked to them personally, I was offered a casual position. I delivered the results and then they saw I was doing very well. I then got the contract for three years as a research scientist. (Research scientist 2, India)

Other people also spoke about not getting any feedback from employers when they apply for jobs. Like this respondent, they felt that if they had the opportunity to speak directly with the employer about their skills and expertise that it would put them in a better position to secure a job. This couple have been fortunate because they have both been able to secure employment in a rural area.

Barriers to finding work

Lack of employer understanding about temporary visas and work rights

All of the women who were interviewed had a good understanding of their work rights as ascribed by their visa type. However, a number encountered employers and organisations that were unfamiliar with the work rights of migrants. A number of the women interviewed came to Australia on a temporary partner visa. This converts to a permanent visa after two years. Respondents on the temporary visa have work rights. However, many of the jobs that are advertised require people to have permanent residency before they can apply. This makes job searching very difficult for partner migrant women on this visa particularly if employers do not understand eligibility and work rights. One respondent had encountered this issue:

When I was applying for positions there was always the compulsory question, which visa have you got? That was the main barrier in my career progression because employers thought I was not allowed to work in Australia on a temporary visa. (IT specialist, India)

As a result she experienced confusion around her work rights and ended up applying for cash in hand work when she first arrived.

Others had applied online for jobs but could not find the relevant visa category with online applications. This could be seen as a major issue for companies who are missing out on eligible candidates from the labour market and creating unnecessary barriers for migrant women seeking employment. More work is needed to ensure that employers are better informed about the work rights of migrants on temporary spouse visas, who are on a legitimate path to permanent residency. The experience of a respondent who applied for a job at a large retail chain highlights some of the barriers:

I tried applying for lots of jobs like in supermarkets. They have a drop down list for type of visa, but there is no temporary visa. I think this plays an important role in getting interviews and a job because if I'm on a temporary visa, it's not guaranteed that it will be renewed. There are some jobs that seem to require permanent residency or citizenship, where there's no mention even of the temporary visa. " (Finance administrator, India)

This was a typical response highlighted in the metropolitan focus groups in discussion about the importance of having permanent residency (PR) when applying for jobs. This illustrates the need to provide employers with more information to ensure that they understand the work entitlements of new migrants.

My friend came from India and she has applied for nearly 150 jobs. For all of the jobs, the first question is "Are you PR?" "It's all PR, PR, PR?" (Hospital Administrator, India)

Australian workplace culture & recruitment practices

Australian workplaces present a challenge to skilled migrants in terms of understanding conditions of employment, hours and leave entitlements. Even more daunting than employment conditions was the whole process of applying for jobs. This involves firstly identifying where to apply for suitable jobs, navigating the application process in terms of having a suitable resume and then tailoring a letter of application for each job addressing key selection criteria. Respondents who had access to services like SLPET or other services were in a better position to apply for jobs because they had been apprised of recruitment expectations. Those women who did not have access to any programs to assist them on arrival to Australia found the whole experience of job searching daunting and did not know any of the protocols. Instead they adopted trial and error, which was largely unsuccessful.

When I came to Australia I tried to find work as a cashier in a bank because that's my background. I thought with more than five years experience it would be easy. I applied with a very simple resume because rules in my country are different. I didn't know resumes have to be specific and you have to follow many rules. No one answers me. Not even to say you're not the right person for the job. (Banking specialist, Belarus)

There was a widely held view by many of the women consulted in this study that Australian workplaces have a preference for Australian born people to work in their organisation because they are more likely to have local experience. One interviewee made a forthright comment about employers' preference for Australian workers.

Maybe they would prefer to give Australians job first, that's just my assumption. That's why maybe I never received any call or received any interviews (Finance administrator, India)

The behavioural style interview, often used in Australia, presented a significant challenge for many of the women in this study who came from cultures where it is not polite to highlight your strengths with talking about yourself:

We are not outspoken even though we are equally talented and well educated. Here people will do very small thing and they will tell very big stories. We will do the big things and we always tell the small stories. (Research scientist 1, India)

A participant spoke about the cultural difference between job interviews in her country compared with Australia.

Here it is hard. In my country you can be cool in interviews because it is the same language and same culture. You know what you have to say. Here I even worry about things like which way to sit in interviews. We are afraid about culture. It's one of the big reasons – language and culture. (Sales Manager, Iran)

Cultural issues were evident in relation to job searching activities. For some women it was difficult to highlight their strengths and be proactive with following up on applications and interviews if they had not been successful. In order to develop a good resume, address key selection criteria and prepare for interviews generally required assistance and direction from either a service provider or a highly skilled friend or relative. Those without such support, had more difficulty gaining traction in the labour market particularly if they had adopted similar standards and methods used in their home country. Even with assistance to develop a good resume there is no guarantee of success. As this respondent discovered:

I had my resume and cover letter reviewed by the teacher at AMES and she told me that it is very good. But even with the good resume and cover letter, I still can't get an interview. Sometimes I am very confused. (Banking specialist, Vietnam)

Other cultural differences observed by respondents include the informality between managers and their staff, which this respondent found perplexing.

It's so different. In Sri Lanka we have hierarchies. We were told that there were no hierarchies here, even with the boss. I can call them by their first name. And here interviews are also very informal. These are things we learned. (Teacher 1, Sri Lanka)

Skilled jobs and the requirement for local experience

One of the major barriers identified by respondents looking for professional work was the lack of local experience. It was a catch-22 situation for many of them. Without getting access to work they could not gain local experience and they could not get local experience without paid work. Some of them found the concept of transferrable skills difficult to grapple with in the Australian context and so opted to target lower level occupations with the hope that their skills and qualifications would usurp applications from Australian born people. Applying for lower level jobs was also seen as one possible way to get valuable experience. Personnel from Skillmax (see Chapter 5), tended to recommend skilled migrants target jobs at one level lower than they were employed in their home country. An engineer who had arrived in Western Australia had the following experience.

Even in a regional area, in a mining boom, we couldn't find engineering jobs. In Western Australia it is very important to have local experience. We had to work in restaurants, cleaning and doing things we had never done before. (Engineer, Colombia)

This respondent highlighted the lack of local experience paradox.

Since Australia gave us a Skilled visa I thought it meant that there would be vacancies here. But when we arrived here there were no jobs. Wherever my husband or I apply, they want local experience. Without working here how can I gain local experience? I'm a new migrant, how can I get local experience? I don't know. (Teacher, Iran)

Recognition of qualifications

Skilled women migrants often delay the recognition of their qualifications until their partner has completed the process (Iredale 2005). The cost of getting recognition for qualifications also means that priority is given to the male partner and the female has to wait until sufficient funds have been accumulated via her husband's employment before she can have her qualifications recognised. This may also include accessing services to assist them with job searching. As indicated in Chapter 5, programs specifically for skilled migrants often attract more male than female participants.

Those migrants with a medical or allied health background experienced particular challenges. All were aware before they arrived in Australia that they would have to gain the appropriate registration before they could practice and that this would involve further study. To gain this registration would take time and be costly. For example, a dentist living in a remote region of South Australia detailed how she was aware that she needed to get her qualifications recognised before she could practice but was unsure where to get help or support to help her achieve this goal particularly as she lives so far from a major city. Another participant, a physiotherapist, spoke about her experience of getting her qualifications recognised in Australia.

I knew that I would need to register with the Australian physiotherapist council. Within the first month I discovered that I couldn't get full registration and that I would need to requalify. I have completed exams and they now say it will take six months to process my registration. So it's already been a year and now I have to wait another six months. And I can't work as a physiotherapist until I get a registration number. (Physiotherapist, India)

Domestic responsibilities

A total of 25 (40 per cent) of the women in this study had children. Although a number were at home caring for their children at the time of the interview or focus group they were hoping to return to the workforce as soon as possible. The cost of childcare was raised by a number of respondents with many citing that if they were to secure work much of their income would go towards paying childcare.

I have two kids and job searching here is like a full time job. I need to pay for childcare. When I get a job I will need to pay more. For two kids almost all my salary will be spent. I am ready to do it because I need to get experience and in the future it will be worth it. But it is tough. (Digital Marketing ManagFer, Russia)

Very few women in this study mentioned that their partners had any objections to them finding work. There were some exceptions, with this respondent's husband wanting her to stay at home because of the high cost of childcare.

I have one son, I take him to childcare and I pay more than \$1000 per month. If I go to work as a casual, I would get \$1,500 - \$2000 per month. My husband says, 'you can stay at home and take care of your son. You don't need to go to work.'
(Small business owner, Vietnam)

Another respondent acknowledged the change in expectations from her family about her employment once she had a child.

In our culture when you get married you should start to build the family. I have a baby now, so it's harder because I can't get out now with the baby. (Economist, Iraq)

There was a strong sense that these women would deal with the issue of juggling work and family if and when they got a job. It should be acknowledged that childcare is a challenge for many women to returning to work. Those without support from friends or extended family have to rely on formal childcare systems. Levels of knowledge about accessing childcare, for example, waiting lists and so on may have been problematic for some.

Availability of jobs in rural areas

Those living in rural and regional areas faced additional challenges to the women living in metropolitan areas because there is a lack of suitable jobs. This respondent explains that in her very small town there is simply no work.

I can't find job in our town. I tried to do it. They needed a cleaner in kindergarten, I wrote to them. No. Then I applied as a cleaner in supermarket. But they want another person. And that's all. There's no work in our town. There are 1000 people in our town.
(Teacher, Russia)

In rural areas, entry-level jobs can often be filled by juniors because they are cheaper to employ. Even those women in this study had done Certificates in Childcare and Aged Care could not secure work because of tightly held labour markets where very few vacancies were available. If these women wanted to pursue professional careers it would mean working in a large regional centre or going to a metropolitan area.

Some businesses just prefer to hire students or 16-year-old local kids. Woman like us have to compete with this as well as with overseas students. It's not easy. (Sales manager, China)

Access to transport

Not having a driver's licence in rural areas was a problem for a number of women. The lack of public transport made it almost impossible to commute from one rural area to another in search of work. Living in rural or remote areas in Australia requires a driver's licence to provide the flexibility to get around. This meant that some women could not consider looking for work outside their immediate area. A respondent living in a small town in South West Victoria explains the difficulty of getting to a regional centre from her home:

If I want to get job in the [regional centre], I would have to go by public transport or by car. I don't have driver's licence and the bus only goes once a day. (Teacher, Russia)

Networking

Many women were patently aware of the importance of establishing networks to enhance the prospect of getting employment. Networking occurred at SLPET classes, through community contacts, volunteer work, work placement and through the respondents' own community:

I think networking is the best thing. When migrants come to Australia and they want to find a job it's very hard if they don't have any network here. (HR specialist, Sri Lanka)

Another respondent hoped to build her networks through volunteer work.

A person should get involved in voluntary work, in the community. It is a way to get in touch with people and to build networks. A lot of the job market is hidden; we need somebody who can support us and give us information. (Teacher, Serbia)

Proficiency in English

The women interviewed for this study had varying levels of English. Some had excellent spoken English while others who were undertaking AMEP were working on improving their English skills.

Many of them spoke about the difficulty of understanding Australian slang not just in the work context but also in their interactions in the community. Most of the respondents understood that the workplace provides the best opportunity to improve their English skills. A number of women spoke about their broad accent and the difficulty of being understood. Others from a range of backgrounds could understand Australian accents, but had difficulty understanding other people from different cultures and their English-speaking accent. A large number of them at the end of each interview wanted feedback from the interviewers about their spoken English. They wanted reassurance that the interviewer had understood them.

This respondent struggled with Australian slang.

It's not just the slang; they use a lot of idioms. Instead of 'I don't mind' they say, 'it's like water off a duck's back'. It is very uncomfortable when you don't understand these idioms. (IT specialist 2, India)

Another respondent, living in Western Australia, was conscious that she needed to understand Australian slang before she got a job so that she could fit in and appear competent to her work colleagues:

I don't know about the other coasts, but here they talk very fast and with the slangs. I don't want to be in my workplace and have to keep asking people to repeat or slow down. I don't want to be like the fool girl who doesn't know how to speak English. I just want to be respected as an engineer. (Engineer, Columbia)

Another respondent believed that the workplace would provide the best opportunity to improve her English.

My friend had a work placement for nine months. At the beginning of the placement, her English wasn't really good but by the end it had improved a lot. So I can tell that a lot of people will learn more English when they are in the workplace. (Audio Engineer, Korea)

One of the issues raised by respondents was confidence using their English. Although some thought they had good English when they arrived, this was often tested when using their English on a daily basis while going about their business.

For me, the big barrier is English. I have really had to put in a lot of effort to build my confidence to speak. That's the starting point for improving my English. (Teacher, Serbia)

English language skills that are less than perfect can have a major impact at job interviews:

I think the main area of weakness for me is listening. Sometimes in an interview when they ask questions, their pronunciation is difficult for me to catch. If I ask them again and again they see I'm not very good at English. (Manager, trading company, Myanmar)

A participant living in rural Victoria believes that because she has an accent people underestimate her abilities:

When you're from a different country, you don't speak English with the same accent. Sometimes people underestimate you; they think that you don't know anything. (IT specialist 3, India)

Mental health and wellbeing

One of the key findings of this research is the impact that not finding a job has had on the mental health and wellbeing of the women in this study. Poor mental health and social exclusion had a profound impact upon the settlement experience of some of the respondents.

Employment is associated with positive mental health, including higher self-esteem and sense of agency and purpose. It enables social inclusion and is an important way people can meaningfully integrate into the broader community (Auster 1996). Work also offers important financial benefits particularly for skilled migrants who are not entitled to any income support from the Australian Government for two years after

arrival. It provides a sense of belonging and a forum in which to gain status and recognition for efforts and achievements.

Financial dependence

Prior to leaving their home countries most of the women who participated in this study had busy working lives where they earned their own money and had financial autonomy. Upon arrival, many of the women were dependent upon their partners or savings for financial survival. This was the case for those who had migrated with their husbands and those who arrived to join their partners on a partner visa. The lack of financial autonomy reduced their self-esteem and their ability to make financial decisions. Many spoke about the shame of having to ask their partner for money to pay for even for the smallest of items like a fare for public transport:

I bought about two month's salary, equivalent to \$500, here. It lasted two weeks. It's very disappointing. My husband works harder and harder every day and I'm just waiting here at home doing nothing and spending his money. (Teacher 1, Sri Lanka)

Another respondent aptly describes how she feels not having her own money and the impact this has on her discretionary spending.

I feel like I'm not an adult because my husband gives me money. Before we came here I made my own money. I bought anything I wanted. Now I have to ask my husband for money. Even to buy Myki card. Of course, when I ask he gives, but it makes you feel dumb, just below the floor. (Banking specialist, Belarus)

When asked how important employment was to their settlement in Australia, this respondent highlighted the importance of her contributing to the finances of the family and her own independence.

It is important to earn an income because I like being self-dependent. And having two people working in the family is good. That's why I took that job, to contribute something to the family because he really supported me financially. (IT specialist, Uganda)

Impact of re-domestication

Many of the women who were not working found that their daily focus was largely centred on their domestic life. Without a job to go to, they cared for children and their partners. Many found this new role unsatisfactory because they had been used to earning their own income as professionals:

Believe me, in India I never did this housework! I was very busy in my work. I used to come home late at night because I had so many clients. In busy periods our clinic used to be totally full, so I was not having time to eat. And now all time I am eating, eating, eating, without work. (Sales consultant, India)

Another notes the staying at home and focussing on domestic activities has been soul destroying.

I used to wait and wait at home because I needed to work. There is not so much work at home to do. I'm just cooking, washing, cooking, washing, laundry. Earlier in Sri Lanka I had a good career but here it is nothing. (Teacher 1, Sri Lanka)

Loss of confidence and loss of hope

The impact of not having paid work and the despair felt by some of the respondents was palpable:

I was literally crying, whole days at home, because I had nothing to do. I was working before coming to Australia and to go from working full-time to being at home seven days is really hard. When a new migrant comes to any new country what she needs is a direction. (IT specialist 1, India)

Loss of confidence was a big issue for almost all the women who participated in this study. A participant shares her experience:

I applied so many jobs. When you keep on applying for so many so many jobs and you don't get any replies – It's so depressing. (Banking specialist, Vietnam)

One participant had a reality check when she arrived in Australia. By not securing employment soon after arrival all her hopes and dreams had been shattered about how life should be in Australia. She had to deal with the emotional upheaval of unemployment. She reflects on how she felt:

If Australia cannot assure jobs, then don't give people high hopes and bring them here to make them suffer. If they were in their own country, they would get a lot of support from family and friends, but here in a strange place, if there is no support and no job, people's life can be miserable. (Teacher, India)

Loneliness and social isolation was a problem for many of the respondents. Some respondents were fortunate that they had family and friends that could support them. Others were not as fortunate and essentially relied on their partner for support.

It's frustrating because I'm not really a housewife sort of person. I do get sick of just washing laundry all day. When you don't know many people to meet up with it gets a bit lonely. That's probably the worst bit of it. I would like a job for the social aspect - just to get out and get to know the community. (Nurse, Denmark)

Unemployment and settlement

In terms of social inclusion those living in some rural areas found people in these communities were not welcoming.

Melbourne is very multicultural, but here we have to deal with very regional, country-based people and sometimes the attitudes are not very welcoming I would say. (Research scientist 2, India)

A respondent who joined her husband from the same cultural background, after he had settled in Australia first, spoke about not having many friends or family for support.

We don't have many friends here; I can say no friends here. My husband first lived in Brisbane so he doesn't know many people here. (Banking specialist, Iran)

Financial and money issues were raised by a number of respondents. The high cost of living in Australia, the expense of upgrading skills, and the impact of financial uncertainty on people's wellbeing was canvassed by participants. A number of respondents had a much lower standard of living in Australia than they had ever experienced in their home country. This meant that they could not fully participate within the community.

We used to be at a financially specific level in our country. But here our financial level is lower. Now my husband is working, but not in his profession and I'm not working. So it makes me uncomfortable and means I don't do the things I used to do in my country.
(Medical doctor, Egypt)

Respondents spoke about the high costs of living in Australia and the imperative for two incomes to make ends meet:

Money is the biggest thing to settle - especially when trying to setup in a new country. Houses are really expensive, and I can't afford it. To get a job is a really, really fundamental thing. (Interior Designer, Korea)

A few women spoke about how the emotional toll unemployment had forced them to reconsider their decision to come to Australia and settle. Given the difficulties they had faced finding work they were seriously considering returning to their home country where they could resume their busy lives in paid employment. This respondent is now happy to stay that she has secured even a low level job in retail.

First I felt excited to move here. Then after a while I wanted to go back to India because my career wasn't going very well. It was hard because my husband wanted to stay. But when I finally got a job here in the retail industry, I stopped feeling like going back. I'll just stay, I'll work this casual. Only once you get a good job do you feel like you want to stay here. (Software Engineer, India)

Another respondent living in a rural area with little or no hope of securing employment in her chosen profession was also dreaming of home:

Seriously, I told my husband I may have to go back to Nigeria, I don't know. I'm still in the process of deciding. (Banking specialist, Nigeria)

Strategies for finding employment

The women in this study were proactively looking for work and using all the resources at their disposal. Even though some of them did not have access to any services to assist them, they still managed to devise a plan on how to job search. When this proved to be unsuccessful some of them used their ingenuity and initiative to generate their own jobs either in a paid capacity or as a volunteer. This finding is consistent with ABS data that indicates that new migrants are more entrepreneurial than Australian born people (ABS 2010). For example, one of the women consulted was a fitness instructor with her own business, another provided yoga classes as a volunteer in a regional centre, cake making for people in her community was an endeavour another respondent undertook before she secured a job. Others had aspirations of self-employment at a later time once they had established themselves financially. One hoped to become an interior designer, for another the purchase of a take away franchise was viewed as a good career option

and another wanted to become a family day care provider in a rural area where employment options were limited.

Although most of the women in this study were well qualified, many felt that if they could get an Australian qualification then it would help them get a job. However, the cost for those on a spouse visa or those without permanent residency made it prohibitive to even consider study in the first two years because it would mean that they would have to pay full fees. This meant that some of the women were in a holding pattern. Many felt that they would have to wait until two years had elapsed and they had permanent residency then they could apply for courses. Once they had Australian qualifications they could then get a job. In the meantime many had considered undertaking unskilled work until they could enter a university or TAFE course.

This respondent thought that if she gained a local qualification it would help her get a job in lieu of the fact that she did not have local work experience. However, being on partner visa meant that the cost was too expensive.

I want to study tax, in Canberra. But I can't do any study in Australia until I get my PR, unless I pay international student fees. (Accountant, Sri Lanka)

Others with specialised qualifications in law, medicine and allied health had to do extra study to have their qualifications upgraded and recognised and to gain the necessary registration. Others had already spent many years in time and resources getting qualified and were reluctant to do more study in Australia:

At my age I cannot afford to do five to eight years again. I have already spent the time studying and I have a lot of experience. (Homeopath, India)

A number of respondents were prepared to change their career trajectory and learn new skills in order to secure employment. For some this involved either a move sideways in terms of the types of professional work they were applying or a demotion in terms of applying for lower status positions. Some did Certificate II and III courses with the view to get into entry-level positions in aged care, childcare and disability support particularly in rural areas where there were limited employment options.

One woman had worked as a stockbroker in China and moved to rural Australia to join her Australian partner. Employment options open to her that aligned with her skills and expertise in the small town in which she lived were non-existent. She thought about doing a Certificate in Aged Care.

I started to do the aged care course because the town has a lot of older people who move here. So I am learning aged care. (Stockbroker, China)

Another respondent in a rural area had completed a Certificate in Disability Studies and was successful in gaining a job.

Advice to other partner migrant women

One of the questions asked in both the face-to-face interviews and canvassed in the focus groups was what advice would they give to other partner migrant women arriving in Australia and wanting to secure employment.

A number of women proffered advice along the lines of “never give up”. Others said that they had wasted time with trial and error and wished that they had sought help earlier to put them on the right path for applying jobs in the Australian context. Getting a local education was also seen as an avenue to break into the labour market. Others said that migrant women like themselves should be prepared to take any job in the labour market to gain local experience, even if this job is not aligned to their skills or expertise:

I would advise people to just be humble. Do whatever you have to do for work even if you don't like it. Most people don't feel like doing the factories, but you just have to be humble and start slow. Then you work your way up and get into a better job.
(IT specialist, Uganda)

Another respondent corroborates this experience:

It's very depressing and stressful but it is just a matter of really being diligent and never giving up. I do have a full time job now, but it's not really good and I'm underpaid. I accepted the job, because I had nothing else. It was a job, even if it was on a junior rate. At least it was a start, because apart from my farm work experience that's about all I have got. I think it's just a matter of taking any opportunity even if it's under your qualifications. (Information, media & telecommunications specialist, Philippines)

This respondent says that women need to be patient and to understand that settlement in a new country can take some time. She also recommended that women develop networks.

It will take time because settling in a new country is not very easy. You have all family back at home and then you leave everybody and then you come here and everything is new and different. Culture is different and lifestyle is different. Eventually if you don't give up you're going to get there. Go out, talk to people and network. That is the best solution. If you can't reach your goal, you can at least make friends. Be open. Just go out talk to the people and who knows? Sometime, somebody will help you.
(IT specialist, India)

Solutions for service providers and government

The women in focus groups and those who participated in the face-to-face interviews were asked what type of services they thought should be available to assist them. The types of services and support women identified were:

- Program to assist them to find a job in their occupation or profession
- Subsidised childcare
- Work experience via work placements or internships with businesses to gain work experience (short term) or traineeships to learn new skills (longer term) - either paid at trainee rates or unpaid
- Mentoring programs

- Access to TAFE and university courses in the first two years of arrival, particularly those on partner visa without having to incur full course fees
- Assistance to gain recognition of qualifications
- Assistance to pay the cost of getting skills and qualifications recognised and registration with relevant professional associations - e.g. allied health professionals and medical doctors.
- Access to volunteer work to gain local work experience

Others noted that they were more than willing to go to work and contribute to the community through paying taxes and consuming goods and services.

This respondent believes that it is much better for not only herself but the community generally if she is working:

I'm paying tax, I'm buying things, I'm paying for transport - I'm contributing in every field. I think if the Australian government really wants to reduce unemployment then as soon as we get the visa we also need contacts to get a job. That would be a good idea, but I don't know how they can do it. (Finance administrator, India)

Another respondent echoes this sentiment:

Once we have a job we are happy to pay back whatever government has spent on us. That would save us a lot of time. Sitting here it's a waste for us, and a waste for the government. Sitting and eating at home we are not paying any tax after all. (Insurance specialist, India)

This participant said the government should provide support to migrants in rural areas.

The government should be concerned about all women, not just those in the big city. If I'm in Sydney or Melbourne then it's easier for me. But because I'm far away in a small town, I feel helpless. I hope, for my sake, the government gets more concerned about migrant woman in small towns. Maybe they could have some organisation to help woman like me. (Sales manager, China)

One woman was pragmatic about her approach to assist migrant women get work. She believed that organisations should be mandated to have a proportion of their workforce born overseas.

I think the government should make a rule for each organisation in Australia. Five per cent of your workers have to be employed from international, from migrants. So it's fair. (Banking specialist, Belarus)

This respondent aptly describes how the government should support new migrants particularly when they promote Australia as a good place to come.

The government created and opened up opportunities for us to come here and we know we have to make a great effort in order to get the job. At the same time it would help us a lot if the government also took some action. We would love to have an organisation to help us because we are very new to the country and we don't have local working experience. (Banker, Vietnam)

Summary

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature that women who arrive in Australia on partner visas experience disrupted careers, deskilling and re-domestication (e.g. Webb 2015).

On the whole, women who participated in this research demonstrated resilience, ingenuity and adaptability despite the numerous barriers and obstacles that they face. With the exception of the metropolitan focus groups that were made up of SLPET participants, very few respondents had access to services to assist them with their job search. This meant that they had to learn from either family or friends or by trial and error on how to navigate and access the Australian labour market. Understanding Australian workplace culture and recruitment practices presented a challenge to almost all the participants. Devising a resume that meets local standards, producing a cover letter that addresses key selection criteria and the behavioural-based interview were challenging for most.

The women in this study did not expect handouts, they wanted to work and contribute in meaningful ways to the communities in which they lived. Some started with a fixed game plan that was adapted and changed as they learnt about the expectations of the Australian labour market. Most would ultimately like to be working in a professional job but were working in lower skilled jobs hoping to gain the necessary experience to achieve their goals. A number had experienced a change in career trajectory, which was met with enthusiasm because they could build on their existing skills and learn new ones. For others this was met with trepidation particularly if it meant that their career in the long term was entirely different to their old profession. Those women living in rural areas where there were limited or no vacancies available were in the worst position and had little choice but to remain unemployed or take low level jobs if they were available.

Unemployment or underemployment had an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the women in this study. They spoke about losing their confidence the longer they were out of the workforce. They started to doubt their capacity to undertake work in their professional area and their level of skill. It eroded their self-esteem and some experienced depression.

Language was a major barrier for many women in this study. They were mindful that their proficiency in English would impact upon their ability to secure professional work. They spoke about the difficulty of understanding a broad range of English speaking accents, Australian idioms and slang.

Although the women in this study were highly perceptive and were able to get a sense of the Australian labour market very quickly, with support and guidance they could have navigated it more effectively. Gaining local work experience through volunteer positions, internships or work placements would improve their chances of getting a job. Individualised career plans from a qualified service provider or agency could have identified the strengths and transferrable skills of each person and how these might be adapted for specific jobs. With early intervention support and direction a lot of heartache, dismay and confusion could have been avoided for many respondents.

When asked where they would like to be in five years time, an overwhelming majority said that they would like to be working in a good job. Further study and establishing their own business were the next two most common responses.

Employment is one of the key elements of settlement. It allows women to fully participate in the community, use their self-efficacy and develop their own self worth. Women who arrive on partner visas are a hidden asset with a myriad of skills and talents that should be harnessed by workplaces and integrated into the Australian labour market.

Support and buy-in from employers is essential if skilled migrants are to be successful in securing work. Interviews were conducted with ten employers that included Human Resource Managers and Senior Managers involved in the selection and appointment of staff. Employers were located in a range of businesses in Sydney, Melbourne, regional Victoria and Perth.

These interviews provide some useful insights into how skilled migrants generally (rather than partner migrant women specifically) are perceived by a small number of select workplaces. The employers provide invaluable insights and solutions into how best to integrate skilled migrants into their workforce. This discussion will focus on some of the key themes identified by employers:

- key attributes of job seekers and how skilled migrants are viewed
- selection and recruitment practices
- local work experience
- skill shortages
- integration and acculturation.

All the employers who were consulted employed skilled migrants from CALD backgrounds in their organisations. In most instances they constituted a relatively a small proportion of the company's workforce.

Person interviewed	Type of organisation	Location
HR Manager	Public Utility - Water	Melbourne
Consultant Technical Director	IT Company	Melbourne
IT Manager	Public Utility - Electricity	Melbourne
HR Manager	Mining, Energy & Gas	Melbourne
Research Leader	Victorian Public Service	North West Victoria
HR Manager	Local Government	North West Victoria
HR Manager	Public Utility	North West Victoria
Human Capital Performance Manager	Public Utility - Water	Perth
Chief Information Officer	Property Valuation Company	Sydney
Head of Fund Administration	Services for self-managed superannuation	Sydney

Key attributes of job seekers

All the employers interviewed were asked a series of questions around the recruitment of new staff. They were all asked about the three key attributes that they look for when recruiting. Although there were a variety of responses to this question, three themes regularly recurred. The three core competencies that most employers want are:

- skills and knowledge
- being a team player
- having a good attitude.

Other attributes included

- Innovation - being able to look at things from a different perspective
- Customer/client focussed
- Achievement oriented
- Personal ownership/personal integrity/ honesty (this was described by one employer as the ability to be honest when something is not working and to not shield the truth)
- Someone who sees a job through to completion
- Good communication skills.

Generally speaking, employers want staff who are committed and passionate about the positions they apply for. A number of employers spoke about the “scattergun approach” some skilled migrants used when applying randomly for jobs with generic resumes and job applications. This practice was not highly regarded by all employers who were interviewed.

We know a lot of people want to come and work for us because it offers employment security rather than having a real passion for the job.

Selection and recruitment processes

How companies recruit their staff was a key question asked of all employers. This question hoped to elicit the types of avenues used to recruit staff, whether there were any jobs that were difficult to recruit for, the proportion of jobs advertised internally versus externally, whether local work experience was critical for success, how they short listed applications and how the interview is conducted. Although the discussion was general in nature, employers were asked to reflect on their experience recruiting skilled migrants from CALD backgrounds.

All the employers consulted during this study said that they did not view applicants for jobs as locals versus skilled migrants. All of them said that the basic tenet of their selection process was to choose the best person for the role. Each person who applies for a job comes with different types of specialisation and new ideas. Generally speaking, applicants are assessed on their resume and cover letter addressing the key selection criteria. Employers frown upon generic applications where the name and address of the company have been changed and there has been no effort to demonstrate that they have read the position description and answer what is required of them. As one employer explained “a bad CV is a bad CV and we get plenty of these from native English speakers and locals”. Skilled migrants need to be able to clearly express themselves in an application and explain “why this job and why this company?”

Proficiency in English is also important because it reflects on how well they will communicate in the workplace:

When you get 100 applications for a job – you short list to about 6. I provide feedback on applications as requested. When English is your second language – I proof read their applications to see if they are communicating clearly. I want to see if they have focussed on the job description. If they haven’t addressed the key selection criteria I would have concerns about their suitability for the position, their care in the workplace and their care in doing the work itself. I vet the applicants based on the information they provide. I do that if English is their first or second language. If they write a letter and can’t string a sentence together then it doesn’t bode well.

One employer working as an IT Manager has observed that migrants come to Australia with very strong experience in their home country. One of the main challenges they face is the perception that they have poor language skills. This informant believes that this leads to a lack of confidence in their ability to perform at a professional level in the workplace. These migrants are more inclined to apply for entry level roles where they can be massively over skilled and over qualified. Although technical skills are important, soft skills are also equally important. This means the ability to communicate, to effectively engage and build relationships with customers and colleagues. A number of employers were open to assessing a person's transferrable skills for highly specialised roles. The very "small pool of talent" in Australia for this type of work, means that it is difficult to get suitable candidates with the exact work experience.

The behavioural based interview that is employed by the majority of workplaces in Australia can be quite daunting for skilled migrants. A number of employers were aware that skilled migrants can struggle with the interview process and made allowances for these individuals. The employer in Perth, a public utility, has a comprehensive diversity policy in place and provides work placement for migrants. In this context people on the interview panel are mindful of the challenges some skilled migrants face during the job interview.

We encourage people to do the best they can, this includes slowing down or modifying speech and so on and clarifying and giving them time to consider their answers to interview questions.

A local government employer spoke about the difficulty of obtaining a cultural fit when they interview migrants for roles in their organisation.

The cultural stuff comes into play; they tend to be more reserved. The respectful way they deal with other people because it doesn't allow them to relax and deal with people. The interviews we conduct always have a structure, but are relatively informal. They don't tend to shine. You can see the dedication and commitment but for other people it is really easy, they walk in the door and fit the culture.

Another employer based in Sydney has worked closely with job referral agencies like Navitas to improve applicant's interview skills. This includes ensuring that applicants make eye contact with the interview panel and coaching them on how to provide examples of their previous work experience.

One employer said that technical skills were the most important consideration when employing new people. This organisation receives a large number of applications from people from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Manager is not concerned if the person's English is not perfect, she does not see this as a "red flag". Rather their technical proficiency is the most important consideration as long as they could clearly communicate and be understood.

The Sydney employer who receives many applications for IT positions from skilled migrants takes the time to look at where the short listed candidates have worked and the types of customers they have dealt with and the duration of tenure. During the interview he explores in depth people's technical competencies, their achievements and how their work has practically impacted the business. He is also interested to see if the person will fit into his small team and will ask them the types of things they do on the weekend. An important part of the interview process is to set up a practical exercise to test the person's technical

skills. He acknowledges that many skilled migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds struggle with the interview, they tend to speak about what they learnt during their education, rather than thinking more laterally about how to apply these skills in a rapidly changing workplace environment.

This same employer is interested in where skilled migrants see themselves in three to five years time. He asks this question so that he can allocate work in order to achieve their career goals. Many of them cannot answer this question, which he finds disappointing.

Another employer who gets a large number of applications from overseas for highly specialised scientific research roles is mindful that English is the second language for many of the candidates he interviews. He describes the way he conducts a job interview:

We try and ask open questions at interview stage and encourage interviewees to give us as much information as is relevant. We might re-ask question in a different fashion. In reading their CVs I pick up relevant information and reframe the questions during the interview.

All of the employers consulted in this study had a good understanding of visa and work rights. All felt confident that this was not a barrier to people seeking employment in their organisation and that they had the necessary resources and advice on hand to ascertain if a candidate was eligible to work in Australia. With the exception of one employer, all of the other organisations also have mechanisms in place to recognise overseas qualifications. The mining, energy & gas company places the onus on would be contractors applying for work to have already had their qualifications assessed in terms of their equivalence to Australian qualifications.

The experience of recruiting skilled migrants in rural/regional areas of Victoria is quite different to companies based in metropolitan regions. There are very few large organisations in regional areas that employ staff. Given the limited employment opportunities to secure long term and well paid positions, any jobs within these large organisations are generally highly sought after. Staff turnover is very low and people usually stay in roles for many years. Low skilled positions are easily filled by people from the local community. However, highly skilled positions are more difficult to fill and are generally advertised externally using Seek.com, via a recruitment agency or in some instances in professional magazines. Given the current downturn in the economy, two employers, a public utility and the local government - have had no problems recruiting people for positions over the past 12 months.

However, five years ago this was not the case. A large infrastructure project meant that the public utility had to recruit staff on 457 visas to fill specialised engineering vacancies. Many of these vacancies were filled by skilled migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. About half the individuals recruited have remained with the company, the others have either returned to their home country or moved to a metropolitan area in Australia. The Melbourne based employer working in the area of mining, energy and gas employs contractors to work across Australia in remote areas. During the mining boom three to five years ago, they were unable to recruit people from the local market and had to turn to the international market to find suitably qualified staff on 457 visas. A number of staff came from South Africa and Asian countries. The HR Manager stated:

If we can't find the skills we require in our labour market it is very important to draw upon skilled labour elsewhere.

An issue faced by both the rural/regional employers is that skilled migrants who are new to Australia do not understand the distances between regional centres and metropolitan Melbourne. Both had the experience where short listed candidates who had been scheduled for an interview had called asking directions on how to get to the location of the organisation. One employer was adamant that before people put in an application for a position should visit the region and consider whether living in a rural area would be right for them and their family. An employer in North West Victoria notes:

It is always a bad start when they ask where we are and how far away it is. I can tell they think it is half an hour from the end of the tram track or it is half an hour from Melbourne. They just haven't done their research. I am unsure if they will come here they'll get used to it. Probably still getting used to the distances in Australia.

Local work experience

Most of the partner migrant women consulted felt that they needed local work experience to break into the job market in Australia. Local experience could be either unpaid through a job placement or via voluntary work. Most employers looked favourably on skilled migrants who have undertaken volunteer work as a proxy to paid local work experience. Another employer felt that volunteer work is highly valued in the Australian community. It is seen as giving back to society, but it also provides an avenue where migrants can improve their English skills and learn about the Australian community:

I would personally hold volunteers in high regard because it shows a willingness to want to learn about local work environments. This allows them to expand networks. Even in a volunteer capacity they can see how an organisation is run and how people work together. For all of us it takes a while to get a new job. If you arrive in a new place is going to take even longer. It shows a willingness to keep productive.

One rural employer felt that it would be difficult to consider a person if they did not have Australian work experience. This sentiment is summed up with the following quote.

Our attitude is, it is different in the country and so many of the migrants are focussed on the city and are probably used to how the city environment works. It might work in a city context but in a rural context they need to make an adjustment to a country way of doing things.

Conversely a HR Manager felt that it was not important to have local experience except in the case of specific roles that require local knowledge such as regulatory roles. In the view of this informant, engineering is similar the world over. Another Manager believes that local experience is a big issue for many partner migrant women. She believes that women should not get hung up about not having Australian work experience. These women are strong and resilient because they deal with a “lot of stuff” on a daily basis. In her words:

Migrant women need to be prepared to be strong and confident and speak about the skills acquired in their own country. Essentially it comes down to skills and knowledge and they need to redirect the interview to allow them to speak about these.

This same Manager is adamant that having a diverse range of people in her team with different work experiences has been invaluable with trouble shooting and decision making. It has meant that any solutions that are put forward are stronger because they are based on a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

An IT Manager who is also a skilled migrant with many years work experience in Australia, believes that women born overseas actually have better work experience than local women because they come from more technically advanced workplaces, and that these women add high levels of value to the workplace.

Skill shortages

Skill shortages are linked to the state of the Australian economy and local economies. The Australian economy was certainly more buoyant five years ago, but the impact of the Global Financial Crisis has had an impact upon recruitment and therefore generated a more competitive labour market. This has meant that previously hard to fill roles like engineering and IT are now more easily filled.

The employer in Perth found it difficult during the mining boom to recruit engineers, but with the tapering off of the resources sector, engineering roles have become much easier to fill. During the boom period, the company would have to pay a market allowance to be competitive with the levels of remuneration paid by the private sector. At the present time they receive up to 100 applications for such a role.

Most of the employers who were consulted agreed that IT is probably the most difficult to recruit. Many organisations' systems are now largely run by complex IT functions. Specialist HR roles and information management are also difficult to fill.

In rural and regional areas because of the low turnover of staff at the present time there are no significant recruitment issues and high quality candidates can usually be sourced. Most employers were optimistic about the future and felt that the need for more staff was likely to increase over the next two to three years.

Integration and acculturation

Employers were asked whether their organisation had a diversity policy, what systems were in place to support skilled migrants (for example a mentoring or buddy system) and whether migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds held senior management roles in their organisation. Many of the organisations consulted did not have any managers in senior roles from CALD backgrounds. There were organisations that had large numbers of CALD personnel in the junior ranks. It takes some time for these people to gain the necessary work experience to secure senior management positions or for organisations to accept people from CALD backgrounds into these roles.

All of the metropolitan based companies except one had a diversity policy in place. However, the nature of the diversity policy varied enormously. In the company that employs engineers and works in the mining, energy and gas industry which has a mostly male workforce, diversity refers to gender diversity, while public sector organisation were more likely to see diversity in its broadest sense and included gender, age, cultural background, indigenous Australians, youth, sexual orientation and disability. The two rural

employers did not have a diversity policy in place. The reason they suggested was an emphasis on selection based on merit.

One employer stated in relation to diversity policies:

In the corporate world, many companies are committed to equality and diversity in terms of formalised policies. Unfortunately these are not matched by resources to make this happen.

From a practical perspective a diversity policy means that organisations actively work towards targets in terms of recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. The employer in Perth currently has an ethnic composition of 13.8 per cent from CALD background and 1.8 per cent indigenous Australians. There are no senior managers from a CALD background in the top three tiers of the organisations that includes CEO (tier one), Executive Managers (tier 2) and General Managers (tier 3). However, in tier 4 there are significant numbers of people from CALD backgrounds who earn high salaries and manage up to ten people. The informant noted that generally speaking people in tier 4 roles had been in Australia for quite some time.

One Sydney employer is a national company and has two people in senior roles from CALD backgrounds. The main business of the company is property valuation. This is a highly specialised field that is dependent on local knowledge. It would be too difficult for a newly arrived skilled migrant to enter a position without extensive local experience.

The other employer based in Sydney was a relatively new company that had only been in existence for three years. This company did not have a diversity policy in place but had large numbers of skilled migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds working as accountants (70 per cent) and in the IT area (10 per cent).

Employers we spoke with were adamant that the make up of their workforce should reflect the diversity of the community, “*we are a very multicultural society and the workforce need to match the community profile*”.

Most organisations had a mentoring system in place as part of the induction process. Mentoring was provided not just to people from migrant backgrounds, but was available for all new comers. The exception was the Perth based employer that runs specific programs for indigenous employees.

There was one organisation from regional Victoria where there were no systems in place to support staff from a migrant background. The employer was adamant that to work in local government, people needed to spend time in the community to observe and understand how the community works. It was felt that migrants might have some difficulty working in this area because local government is dependent upon “having quiet conversations to get things done”.

Improving the employability of skilled migrants

Employers were asked a series of questions about what types of extra assistance or programs would help skilled migrants to enter the Australian labour market.

One employer from regional Victoria felt that they could do more internally to assist skilled migrants. This employer felt that their organisation was behind their counterparts based in the city in terms of having

systems in place to integrate new migrants into the workplace. He strongly believed that new migrants need to understand that living in rural and regional communities can provide a good lifestyle if people were willing to try it.

Advice from one HR Manager suggested that migrant women target organisations that are “sympathetic” to employing women from migrant backgrounds. This means targeting these organisations proactively without waiting for positions to be advertised. Other advice to partner migrant women included:

- developing their unique abilities and contributions
- presenting information in a way that makes their skills attractive
- understanding the roles that they are applying for
- taking a targeted rather than a “scattergun” approach.

Another key informant who believes that skilled migrants need to target jobs that suit their skills corroborated this view. They need to ascertain what skills they have and whether they are transferrable to specific jobs within the Australian landscape. She provided an example where a person she was mentoring told her that they apply for jobs via text message in their country. This person was surprised to learn that in Australia a full resume and application is required. She also believed that when applying for jobs people should follow up with either face-to-face contact or a phone call. She called this being “proactive”. This employer works as a mentor with skilled migrants and spends a lot of time assisting her mentees prepare for job interviews so that know how to highlight their experience and achievement in their home country within the Australian work context.

One employer who had worked overseas for a number of years feels that Australia is quite progressive in dealing with new migrants compared with other countries. However, she believes that there is still a long way to go. Government policy should support partner migrant women to be the best that they can be.

Migrant women should have the opportunity to secure employment that meets their family expectations, provides career progression and professional development. There needs to be more support mechanisms provided by government to allow this to happen. Unless someone gives you the opportunity to work, how can you get the local experience?

As a skilled migrant, one employer reflected on her experiences of securing work. She said the secret to her success was networking and improving her English. Over the past 16 years she got one job that was externally advertised, all the others were through networks and people she knew.

Her advice to migrant women is to:

- try and improve your English skills
- understand Australian workplace culture
- don't lose your individuality while working within the culture
- maintain your own cultural identity
- get local work experience
- networking - 80 per cent of jobs are not advertised
- get involved in your own community - other migrants will refer you to jobs.

Suggested services and interventions from employers included:

- Provision of work experience or internships in the public sector or within large corporations specifically for skilled migrants.
- Upon arrival in Australia access to high level training packages to educate new migrants about working in an Australian environment with a view to building their confidence and increasing their job readiness.
- Linking partner migrant women to mentors before they come to Australia. This will help them prepare for the Australian work context.
- Information specifically for employers about integrating skilled migrants into their workforces, with a particular emphasis on cultural considerations for specific ethnic groups.

Despite the assistance provided by organisations and workplaces, some skilled migrants still find it difficult to secure employment in their field. An employer who provides work experience to skilled migrants is constantly amazed and frustrated that highly talented individuals cannot find a professional job. He has had some candidates who have come to his organisation “as green as grass” but after 3 to 6 months become absolute stand-out candidates. They have learnt how to effectively communicate in both written and oral English.

They have shown how they can deliver. I give them curly issues to solve because we are a small business. The change over 3 months is significant. I sit there thinking I wish I could keep the candidate as a full time employee. I have no problems in providing a reference or going in to bat for the person. I find out three, six or nine months later they are employed packing bags at Coles. They can't get into another job. I find that disappointing because it is a wasted resource that I have had to release because of my business challenges and restrictions. I don't know if they get enough support after they have finished their term here to get them in the door elsewhere.

Summary

This chapter has described how some employers are more proactive than others in supporting skilled migrants. It should be noted that the positive attitude and some of the actions adopted by the employers in this study provide a good foundation on which to base strategies that may be adopted by other organisations. Generally speaking, it comes down to the willingness and culture of the organisation to consciously build diversity into their workforce. More could be done to bring employers on board and to educate and inform them about the benefits of skilled migrant workers, how they can enhance their organisation in terms of innovation, problem solving and solutions. Having people from CALD backgrounds in senior leadership and management roles is one way to embed cultural diversity within organisations.

There are still significant barriers and hurdles that skilled migrants need to overcome in relation to recruitment and selection processes. The behavioural based interview, high quality letters of application and resumes, the importance of local work experience and developing networks can all be challenging. Meeting these essential job searching requirements without support and early intervention can be daunting for a significant number of skilled migrants.

More support needs to be given to employers in rural regional areas as increasing numbers of both skilled and unskilled migrants move into these areas to fill labour market shortages. As this study has discovered,

some regions need more assistance to assist with the accommodation and integration of people from different cultures.

It was clear from the employer interviews that organisations want to appoint the best person for the job. A diverse and inclusive work force is crucial for companies that want to attract and retain their “top talent”. As exemplified by a number of employers who participated in this study, having a diverse workforce that reflects the community is good for business. Generally speaking, organisations with a culturally diverse workforce have higher levels of innovation and more creative solutions than those with homogenous workforces. As one employer summed up the interview:

Skilled migrants bring a willingness and passion to succeed, they are committed and polite. All organisations should look at employing them, it is a win win for both parties.

The Australian labour market is potentially missing out on valuable skills and experience that can enhance organisations and meet skill shortages.

Introduction

Key informant interviews were held with service providers in Melbourne, regional Victoria, Perth and Sydney. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via skype or telephone using a semi-structured interview schedule. Service providers were chosen either through internet searching and/or by referral.

This chapter provides an overview of the findings based on these interviews. It details the types of services available to assist skilled migrants. Although this is far from a comprehensive overview of services to support skilled migrants, it does provide some insight into the issues faced by skilled migrants in seeking employment and identifies gaps in service delivery in Australia to support them into secure employment.

Overview of service providers in this study

A total of nine service providers were consulted as part of this study. They were located in regional Victoria, Perth and Sydney. Service providers were asked a series of questions about their organisation, the services provided, the types of client groups that access services, funding sources, referrals processes, specific programs that assist skilled migrants with job searching and comments on barriers faced by this group accessing the Australian labour market. Finally, interviewees were asked to consider what additional services may be needed to best support skilled migrants to secure a job aligned to their qualification, skills and experience.

Service name	Service type	Service provided	Location
Undisclosed as this would identify the women who participated in the study	Settlement Service	Settlement services to humanitarian & refugee migrants, partners of skilled migrants.	North West Victoria
Bendigo Community Health Centre	Settlement Service	Settlement service for migrants on humanitarian & refugee visas. Skilled migrants with low proficiency in English.	Bendigo, Victoria
Skilled Professional Migrant Program	Employment preparation for skilled migrants	Job readiness & mentoring for skilled migrants.	Melbourne
Fitted for Work	Job assistance service for disadvantaged women	Transition to work program and work wear for job interviews. Target groups include migrants from CALD backgrounds, women with mental illness and/or disability, single mothers, ex-prisoners.	Melbourne, Sydney
AMEP & SLPET	English classes and Settlement Language Pathways to Employment & Training	English language program and vocational training	Melbourne, Sydney
MercyCare	Not for profit community services	Workforce Development Program for people from CALD background. Provider of aged care, family, health & community services	Perth

Service name	Service type	Service provided	Location
Multicultural Services Centre WA	Settlement Program	Workforce Development Centre Program	Perth
Skillmax	Employment preparation for skilled migrants	Job readiness for skilled migrants	Sydney
Metro Assist Inc	Migrant Resource Centre	Job searching, mentoring, self employment. Settlement program for humanitarian and refugee migrants	Sydney

Specific services for skilled migrants

As noted in the section detailing the desktop analysis of Australian and International interventions (see chapter 6) there are very few agencies in Australia that provide a service to specifically support and assist skilled migrants integrate into the Australian labour market. There are a number of settlement services available to help new migrants and in particular those on humanitarian and refugee visas.

The service providers in this study all worked with migrants and provided them with varying degrees of support to secure a job. Notably, only two services providers worked specifically with skilled migrants with the view to preparing them for the Australian labour market. There are no gender specific services in Australia that cater specifically for partner migrant women. The Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) is located in Melbourne and Skillmax is located in Sydney. Both offer different approaches to supporting skilled migrants.

Information elicited from interviews with key personnel who are involved in the SPMP and Skillmax indicate that there are more men than women that use these services. In 2013 42 per cent of SPMP clients were female and 58 per cent were male. The proportion of males and females attending Skillmax classes varies from approximately equal numbers of men and women to 75 per cent male and 25 per cent female. Further the number on a partner visa is small. Most participants who attend the Skillmax course have between three to five years experience in their home country and are aged in their late twenties or early thirties.

The SPMP is partly funded through accessing training funds from Victorian State Government and partly through fee for service. No dedicated funding is available and eligibility is subject to changing priorities with respect to funding strategies. This has resulted in variable access over time in Victoria. The SPMP is run eight times a year at AMES Flagstaff site in Melbourne central business district. Approximately 200 skilled migrants commence the course each year. Most people find out about the course either through word-of-mouth or via the AMES website. To be eligible for the program clients need to be job ready and have a high level of English. The course is fee based and is calculated according to a person's visa type. This is an intensive program run over four weeks. Participants learn about the Australian job market and workplace culture, preparing resumes and cover letters, understanding job advertisements, applying for jobs, interview skills, networking and effective communication. The Program does not offer work experience, but does provide all participants with an industry mentor who offers ongoing support and advice during their job search. The Program is successful in assisting participants from professional backgrounds to find suitable employment by developing their skills, knowledge and confidence to secure an appropriate job in their field. An evaluation of the SPMP indicates that 12 months after completing the

program, 89 per cent of participants had found work, 64 per cent of these in professional occupations (AMES 2013b).

Skillmax funding by contrast is more secure. It receives an annual budget from the NSW Government of \$1.9 million. It is delivered through AMES (Adult Migrant English Service) based in NSW⁵ and is available through TAFEs in the metropolitan area and regional NSW as well as some community colleges in NSW. It is free for suitably qualified migrants to attend the course. To be eligible to undertake the course the migrant must be “job ready”, this means that they must be available to start work immediately. For example, considerations like childcare need to be in place prior to starting the program. Migrants who undertake this program need to be tertiary qualified with an overseas qualification and have permanent residency. There are two types of Skillmax courses in place. One course provides 75 hours of tuition while the other incorporates English for employment and provides 150 hours of tuition. All of the job-searching components in each course are exactly the same. Prospective clients need an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) of 6.5 to do the shorter course, while those doing the course with the English language component need an IELTS of 5.5. The course is offered on a part time rather than a full time basis. There is an expectation that while participants complete the course they will be actively job-searching. Some participants find employment before they complete the course.

There is no work experience component in the current course, although previous programs did include work placements. As part of the course, representatives from corporates do presentations and make themselves accessible to participants to ask questions. According to the staff consulted as part of this study, Skillmax is successful because of their highly expert and experienced staff and because it has developed as a specialised service over many years.

Much of the emphasis of the course is getting students job ready by tailoring their resume and cover letter for each job they apply. The aim is to provide clients with the skills to get them through the initial selection process and secure an interview. Skillmax has a strong focus on encouraging their clients to aim high and maintain their professional career path. In order to maximise their chances of securing professional employment, staff at Skillmax encourage clients to apply for positions at one level lower than what they were employed before they came to Australia. This allows the person to access the labour market in a professional role and to learn about working in the Australian context. After a period of time they are ready to apply for roles at a higher level. As noted by Skillmax personnel if a highly skilled person applies for a role that is much lower than their qualifications and experience, employers are reluctant to take these people on as they tend to stay for shorter periods of time and are more likely to leave the organisation as soon as something better presents.

Each year between 700 and 1,000 students complete the Skillmax course. During any seven week period there are six classes running. There are no waiting lists to access the Skillmax program. Most skilled migrants find out about the course via word-of-mouth. Pre-migration networks on the internet in China, Russia and India all have information about Skillmax on their websites. This means that newly arrived migrants know about and can apply for the course shortly after arrival. However, there are a number of clients who come to the program after living in Australia for some time and wished that they had known about it earlier. Skillmax staff are conscious that more could be done to promote the course.

⁵ There is no relationship between AMES based in Victoria and AMES (Adult Migrant English Service) in NSW. Both are separate organisations and legal entities.

In terms of outcomes, a recent evaluation indicates that in 2013/14 financial year 75 per cent of participants from the Skillmax program find employment within 12 months of completing the course.

Many of the clients who attend Skillmax and SPMP have business, accounting, engineering or IT backgrounds. Skilled professionals with medical or teaching backgrounds tend not to use these services. These occupations require professional registration, recognition of skills and upgrading of skills to comply with various professional boards. In many instances, migrants with these professional backgrounds find it difficult to navigate the Australian system without support and guidance. The cost to undertake registration and to upgrade skills can also be prohibitive for some.

Service availability in Rural/Regional Victoria

There are a number of communities in regional Victoria like Shepparton and Geelong that have been receiving migrants into their communities for a number of years and have the necessary infrastructure in place to cater for their needs. According to the 2011 Census, 20 per cent of people living in these municipalities were born overseas (the Victorian average is 32 per cent born overseas). Compared with other regions of Victoria like Bendigo and North West Victoria, that are reasonably new to having migrants move into their communities. These areas have largely been mono-cultural over many years and have only seen an influx of migrants over the past five to eight years. The Local Government Area in North West Victoria has 90 per cent of its population born in Australia, while 88 per cent of the population in Greater Bendigo were born in Australia. This study focussed on newer settlement regions because they are next frontier for skilled migrants. In addition there have been numerous studies that have focussed on the Geelong and Shepparton regions. (<http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/18464/statistical-data-for-victorian-communities>)

The movement of migrants into these regional areas has been driven by skill shortages (<https://employment.gov.au/national-state-and-territory-skill-shortage-information>). The settlement services in Bendigo and North West Victoria receive funding to assist humanitarian and refugee clients. The funding for North West Victoria funds one worker on a part time basis. One of the key deliverables is to assist partners of skilled migrants. Both of the Settlement workers who were consulted as part of this study acknowledge that partners of skilled migrants who may also be highly skilled professionals find it very difficult to secure employment and that there is limited assistance to support them in their areas.

The North West Victoria service works closely with the partners of skilled migrants by providing referral to education and training programs, job search services, assisting them with writing resumes and interview preparation. They have a collaborative relationship with a volunteer organisation where they refer partner migrant women to gain local work experience in a voluntary capacity. This agency also provides activities such as a homework club, playgroup for young mothers and other social activities such as a walking club. The body that auspices this Settlement Service is a local business development organisation that wants to encourage new migrants into the region in order to ensure the viability and sustainability of this part of regional Australia into the future.

In the Bendigo area the local government was funded to provide a program to assist skilled migrants, but this service was defunded around four years ago. The Settlement Service is specifically for humanitarian and refugee migrants. It can assist skilled migrants if they have low levels of English proficiency. Very few

skilled migrants access the service. Personnel at the Community Health Centre were patently aware that there is a significant service gap in the region for skilled migrants.

The economies in each of these regions are highly dependent upon skilled migrants to fill labour market shortages particularly in the health field - doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists and aged care attendants. Apart from specific industries in North West Victoria, which is largely an agricultural area, there are limited employment opportunities. There are some major employers like local government, service utilities and some light industry. In Bendigo there are more employment opportunities for skilled migrants with a large teaching hospital, university, TAFE and private hospital. There is a manufacturing sector, animal processing, steel casting business and the mine. There is a gap between matching skilled people to available jobs.

Another mitigating factor is that these local communities do not have infrastructure or systems in place to cater for culturally diverse people. Some parts of the community display high levels of conservatism in dealing with people from different backgrounds. This was exemplified by a small number of people who were opposed to plans to build a Mosque in Bendigo⁶. The Settlement Worker in North West Victoria describes the community in which she lives as a “traditional community” which needs time to accept the recent demographic changes.

The partner migrant women from rural areas who were consulted spoke about the limited services or no services, not knowing where to get help, the lack of employment opportunities, being forced to change careers and being channelled into lower skilled feminised roles such as aged care and childcare. The Settlement Worker in North West Victoria corroborates this finding. She is often asked by partner migrant women for assistance to modify their resumes by removing qualifications and work experience so that they do not appear overqualified for roles. Due to the lack of employment options, these women often apply for entry level positions even if they have post-graduate qualifications. Some are channelled into undertaking a Certificate IV in Childcare yet there are still no guarantees that a job will be available at the end of the course.

Social isolation and loneliness is also a significant issue for partners of skilled migrants. These women are forced to stay at home while their partners are at work because they cannot drive and/or there is limited public transport. As one of the Settlement Workers stated this makes it difficult for these women to “settle and make this their home”.

The Settlement Service at Bendigo has 3 EFT (equivalent full time) staff. They do not have time nor are they funded to work with the partners of skilled migrants. Yet, the settlement worker believes that skilled migrants should have access to the same sort of services as humanitarian and refugee entrants. She strongly believes that a component of Humanitarian Settlement Service (HSS) funding should be allocated to partners of skilled migrants to improve their English, and to provide an introduction to life in Australia such as humanitarian and refugee migrants receive.

Skilled migrants in Bendigo either use mainstream job seeking services or access services in Melbourne. There are limited employment opportunities in these regions for many partner migrant women. To secure

⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-02/objections-to-bendigo-mosque-discriminatory-council-says/5934442>

employment, women either have to accept entry level positions if they are available or to travel outside the area. This can be potentially disruptive for families and may not be viable over the longer term.

General services for migrants

AMEP

Skilled migrants when applying to come to Australia are awarded points based on their proficiency in English. Most who arrive in Australia generally require an IELTS of more than 6⁷. Those who require additional support to improve their proficiency in English (including partners of skilled migrants) may be eligible to undertake the Adult Migrant English Language Program (AMEP). The level of English required for a Skilled Migrant Visa is higher than that required for AMEP eligibility. Skilled migrants are assessed on English Proficiency as part of a point system, which is required to secure a Skilled visa. The English proficiency of partners is also assessed as part of the points system. In some instances partners who have less than functional English may have to pay an “English Education Charge” to cover the English language tuition.

Migrants who have completed the AMEP have a social proficiency in spoken and written in English that is equivalent to an IELTS score of 4. This level of English is generally not sufficient to undertake vocational training (IELTS 5.5), tertiary training (IELTS 5.5) or enter the labour market as a skilled professional (IELTS 5.5 plus)⁸. This anomaly means that there is a whole group of migrants from CALD backgrounds who do not have access to services to improve their English to access the labour market.

Skilled migrants who arrive in Australia and who are not eligible for AMEP must find employment through mainstream services. These include on-line job searching, commercial recruitment agencies or applying directly to organisations for work. This group must also manage their own settlement issues such as securing accommodation, accessing services and ensuring that their families are settled into the community independently.

Those skilled migrants who come to Australia on a 457 Visa may have employers who actively find accommodation, provide assistance to link into services, schools and so on. Two employers who were interviewed as part of this study had employed specialised skilled staff on 457 visas. Both organisations actively assisted their staff member with settlement. The upside for the company is that the employee can focus on the job without the distraction of other settlement issues. As one employer stated “it is amazing how quickly a person can settle into a role when those other elements are taken care of”. One employer was patently aware of the employment needs of the female partner and fully understood that it was paramount to consider the partner’s employment needs to maintain the incumbent in the role over the long term.

SLPET

All the partner migrant women who participated in the focus groups in Sydney and Melbourne were completing the Settlement Language Pathways for Employment and Training program (SLPET). All of these

⁷ <https://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/pdf/points-tested-migration-fact-sheet.pdf>

⁸ IELTS is an international standardised test of English language proficiency. Scores range from 1 (no knowledge) to 9 (expert user). IELTS is used to assess English language competence as part of the process for registration of professionals from non-English speaking backgrounds for accreditation and skill recognition.

women were tertiary qualified, some with post-graduate qualifications. By undertaking the SLPET course, participants have the opportunity to learn more about Australian workplaces and how to prepare for work in Australia. However, SLPET does not offer a direct pathway into professional work but rather assists with career progression by providing local work experience.

SLPET is available to current or ex AMEP participants (with at least 1 hour of their 510 free hours of English) remaining. The course enables participants to study English in the context of the Australian workplace. It covers workplace communication, industrial relations, OH&S, employability skills assessments, job seeking skills, resume writing and between 30 to 60 hours of work experience related to the clients course. Students select a specific occupation in which they would like to receive vocational training. There are different types of vocational training depending on the client's proficiency in English.

Navitas' approach to employment placement is to support the employer, as they are fundamental to a successful placement. Employers come from a range of small to medium size enterprises and they have relationships with large corporate organisations and chains. Where other providers may have an emphasis on the client, Navitas makes an effort to ensure that employers have a good understanding of working with people from a range of cultural backgrounds. This may include a better understanding of language and accent. Navitas understands that some clients have a limited understanding of how an Australian workplace functions, they ensure that prospective employers are fully apprised of this fact. Regular meetings are held with Navitas staff, the students and the employer to ensure that the placement is running smoothly and that employers feel comfortable. Employment outcomes indicate that 25 per cent of students will find a job within four weeks of the completing the SLPET course. Students who undertake SLPET are highly motivated and keen to secure a job.

Fitted for Work

Fitted for Work is a not-for-profit organisation based in Melbourne CBD and Sydney (Parramatta). This organisation provides services to disadvantaged women including women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Approximately 38 per cent of those who use the service are from a migrant or refugee background. This figure has doubled over the past two and a half years. It is free for clients to use the service. Fitted for Work provides a program called "Transition to Work" that is run over 6 months. It covers:

- Who am I, what are my barriers, what would I like to do?
- Life skills, health and wellbeing
- Referral to English classes and courses to develop their IT skills
- Budgeting and superannuation
- How to find a network, writing a letter of application, resume development, job interview preparation
- Identifying a career path - including moving to further study and training.

As part of the Transition to Work Program, women are offered a mentor who is matched to their needs and has a similar background and interest. The participant works with the mentor to develop a network, improve their English skills, polish their resume as well as explore volunteer and work opportunities. If clients are successful in getting a job interview, Fitted for Work provides them with suitable business attire to attend an interview.

Local trainers in regional areas can deliver the Transition to Work component. There is also an online mentor program available to women living in rural and remote areas. However, the fitting service is only delivered from Melbourne and Parramatta. The Transition to Work service is very much an on-the ground local level service. An informant from the City of Cardinia who runs a Girls Friendship Club (funded by the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition) hopes to facilitate a Transition to Work Program. Many of the women who attend this group are stay-at-home partners of skilled migrants who are also skilled. These women are not linked into any settlement services nor are they in contact with any job search services. In this context the Transition to Work Program operates at a grass roots level and can be accessed by a broad range of clients who may not be connected with any other services.

Based on the experience of working with migrant women the Fitted for Work CEO believes that the two biggest barriers for migrant women getting employment are the lack of work experience and not having any networks to draw upon. She also believes that work experience in the form of an internship or volunteering is essential for women to improve their job search chances. Many migrant women are daunted by Australian recruitment practices, particularly the behavioural based interview style where they find it difficult to talk about their strengths and achievements. For many cultural groups this can be a confronting and foreign experience.

Migrant Resources Centres & other Settlement Agencies

Interviews were held with three agencies that provide a range of services to migrants including employment and job searching programs. These were included as a point of comparison with Settlement Services that are funded to assist humanitarian migrants and refugees. Essentially, these services are open to all migrants from CALD backgrounds - including skilled migrants. This study was interested in finding out the extent to which skilled migrants use these services and the sorts of help they receive in relation to job seeking. Interviews were conducted with Metro Assist Inc in Sydney, the Multicultural Services Centre of WA located in Perth and MercyCare in Perth.

MercyCare works in partnership with Multicultural Service Centre WA to deliver the CALD Workforce Development Centre Program. This program covers Perth metropolitan area and South West Western Australia in the Bunbury region. The program has been running for three years. This Centre offers career advice, training advice and pathway information designed to enable people from CALD backgrounds to make informed choices about their employment opportunities, further education and training. Migrants on all visa types can use the service. There is a mix of both low and high skilled migrants, with more than half the client base being skilled migrants. The program focuses on preparing migrants from CALD background for employment. This includes resume development, letters of application, transferrable skills, recognition of prior learning, recognition of qualifications and interview techniques. Training includes undertaking Certificate II or III level qualifications with the view to gaining an Australian qualification to gain entry to the labour market. The Program makes referrals to employment agencies and labour hire companies, and sets up offers job alerts from specific websites.

This Program is not funded by the Commonwealth Government, but is funded by the Western Australian Government. There is no recurrent funding for this service; it is funded until June 2015. There is no certainty that the funding will be maintained after this time.

Providing employment support through the *Just for Work Program* is a relatively new for the Metro Assist Inc (formerly known as Metro Migrant Resource Centre) that is based in Western Sydney. In the past the funding received by the Centre under the Settlement Grants Program did not include supporting migrants in securing employment. Workers at the Centre had to be creative in the way that they could deliver an employment support service that “flew under the radar”. The *Just for Work Program* supports migrants and refugees by providing them with employment support. This includes providing referrals to relevant training organisations, linking people with mentors and supporting women to start their own businesses. Skilled migrants are linked with professionals of a similar background in the community to help them navigate and access employment in their chosen field. Mentors also help women who are doing tertiary studies to mentor them through their course. One-on-one relationships with mentors have been successful in terms of employment outcomes with significant numbers of people getting work. A local service club has funded the mentoring program. Metro Assist is looking for more corporate sponsorship to the fund the work it does.

One of the workers at Metro Assist believes that is critical to get male partners on board and to extol the benefits of having two partners working in a household. He believes awareness-raising in relation to women’s employment and the impact this has on the family in terms of caring responsibilities is an important and integral step for migrant women entering the labour force.

Summary

Evidence from the service provider consultation indicates that there is a significant gap in services specifically designed to assist skilled migrants. This research included two services in Australia that specifically assist and prepare skilled migrants for employment. Both are located in metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne. The evidence from this research indicates that skilled migrants need to rely on mainstream job seeking services. For those who are highly proficient in English there are fee paying options available at some of the TAFEs. The cost of these courses may be prohibitive for some, particularly if they are not eligible for subsidies via VET funding. The employment needs of women who arrive in Australia as partners of skilled migrants are often secondary to their husbands/partners. Limited household resources may be channelled into securing employment for the husband, leaving their with the job of settlement on behalf of the family. All the service providers that were consulted as part of this project acknowledged that many partner migrant women who arrive in Australia on a partner visa have problems securing employment irrespective of their geographic location.

A number of service providers were critical of the services provided by Job Search Australia agencies. However, this service is not mandated to assist skilled migrants on temporary visas or those who have been in the country for less than two years. Eligibility to use this service is dependent upon Centrelink access. Despite this, they are often places of last resort particularly in areas where there are no other services available.

More needs to be done to ensure that skilled migrants have access to some form of support services. At the current time those who have a social proficiency in English are excluded from AMEP and they are not eligible for settlement services. Other migrant services such as migrant resources centres have become de facto providers of job services either through advice or through programs that are offered at the centre. Where these are not available, women are largely left to find jobs on their own through mainstream

avenues such as Seek.com or through private recruitment agencies. There is certainly evidence from this study that there needs to be some intermediary step where skilled migrants who arrive in Australia receive some form of orientation to the Australian labour market soon after arrival.

CHAPTER 6

National & international review of services & interventions to assist skilled migrants

Introduction

A desk top review was conducted on the types of services and interventions available in Australia and internationally to assist skilled migrants to find professional employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications. This review focussed on four states in Australia: Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. It also looked at overseas examples from Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Switzerland and Finland. Websites were primarily used to gain an insight into the range of services available. In some instances personal contact was made (via email or skype) to gain more information that was not available on the website. As a disclaimer, this review provides a snapshot of a small number of services that assist skilled migrants. Large countries like the USA and Canada have many more agencies that have not been included.

This review documents the key features of each service including, target populations and eligibility to access the program, similarities and differences in program content, funding models and outcomes. Based on the evidence from this desktop analysis, a proposed model of early intervention will be put forward for consideration.

Overview of services

Although the aim of this review was to identify services specifically designed for skilled migrants, in some countries it was not possible to find any such services for this target group. As a point of comparison, a small number of services for skilled refugees and asylum seekers have been incorporated.

A total of 20 types of services have been included in this review. A breakdown of the number of services from each country is as follows.

Country	Number
Australia	5
Canada	5
USA	4
United Kingdom	3
Switzerland	1
Finland	1
Netherlands	1
Total	20

Service name	Service provider/Agency	Location	Country	Target group
Skillmax	AMES NSW	Sydney	Australia	Skilled professional migrants
Skilled Professional Migrants Program	AMES Australia	Melbourne	Australia	Skilled professional migrants
ProMap - Professional Migrant Assistance Program	Access Community Services	SE Queensland, Logan	Australia	Skilled professional migrants
Certificate IV in Employment Professionals - Bridge to Employment	Various TAFEs & private colleges	Australia wide	Australia	Skilled professional migrants
Transition to Work	Fitted for Work	Melbourne & Sydney	Australia	Refugee & migrant women
Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)	The Mentoring partnership	Toronto	Canada	Skilled professional migrants
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association	Employment skills program Bridging the Gap	Calgary	Canada	Skilled professional migrant women
Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organisation	Career Mentoring Program Job Search Workshops	Ottawa	Canada	Skilled Professional migrants
Microskills	Bridge to employment for internationally trained individuals	Toronto	Canada	Skilled professional migrants
Back in Motion	Skills Connect	Vancouver	Canada	Skill professional migrants
Helsinki Region Immigrant Employment Council	The HERIEC project	Helsinki	Finland	International students under 30 completing graduate studies
Decouvrir Femmes Migrantes Qualifiees	ProAct-e	Geneva	Switzerland	Skilled professional migrant women
Transitions	Transition to work	London	UK	Refugees & asylum seekers
Bridges Program	Employability Support	Glasgow	UK	Refugees, asylum seekers & migrants
National Careers Service	National Careers Service	Whole UK	UK	Generalist service for whole of UK population
Dutch Council for Refugees	Work for refugees aka Emplooi	Amsterdam	Netherlands	Refugees
New York City Economic Development Corporation	Immigrant Bridge Program	New York	USA	Skill professional migrants
Nationalities Service Center	Refugee Employment & Advancement Program	Philadelphia	USA	Skilled refugees
Upwardly Global (aka UpGlo)	Job Seeker Services Program	San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Detroit	USA	Skilled Professional Migrants
Global Talent Bridge	Pathways to success	National focus	USA	Skilled Professional Migrants

Target population & eligibility to use service

The target population for most of these services are skilled professional migrants who are job ready, with high proficiency in English and overseas qualifications and experience. Some of the programs specifically targeted people who arrived on skilled migrant visas, while others allowed people from humanitarian and refugee backgrounds that are skilled to use their services. All programs cater for individuals who have work rights in their respective country of settlement. In Australia, those wanting to access the TAFE programs must have permanent residency. The mentoring partnership program in Toronto Canada had a time limit in which skilled migrants could access the program. Prospective clients needed to have lived in Canada for less than three years and have no Canadian work experience, while the Skills Connect Program in Vancouver, required migrants to have been in Canada for less than five years. Some of the programs specified that the clients should have tertiary qualifications while others like the Microskills- Bridge to Employment for Internationally Trained Individuals based in Toronto accepted people with three or more years work experience in their country of origin. A number of programs like Skillmax require that individuals applying for their program have a high proficiency in English.

The program in Finland was specifically designed and targeted at postgraduate and graduate students under the age of 30 years from overseas who had come to Finland to study. The aim of this program was to provide a pathway for these qualified young people to enter the Finnish workforce.

The UK did not have any specific programs for skilled professional migrants. Personal contact was made with the National Careers Service that provides mainstream job searching assistance to the UK population. A spokesperson confirmed that this service does not provide any specific programs for either refugees or for highly skilled migrants. Other programs in the UK specifically target refugees, asylum seekers or other migrants who have English as a second language. It was not clear from the websites whether some of the people who use these services arrived under the skilled migration program. Similarly, in the Netherlands the only service identified in this analysis provided programs for refugees.

The United States examples offer programs that are specifically for skilled migrants, for example the Immigrant Bridge Program and the Global Talent Bridge. UpGlo and the Refugee Employment and Advancement Program were for skilled refugees.

There were only two programs that were specifically for women. The programs offered by the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association were available to partner migrant women. They offered generalist bridging programs for skilled female migrants and a specific program for accountants. The latter program was highly sought after with over 100 applicants wanting to undertake the course. There are two intakes per years, with 15 women in each intake. Participants were selected based on those clients who were perceived to have the greatest need. For example, if a client had been successful securing job interviews prior to applying for the program they were less likely to be accepted. A waiting list was in place for those who missed out on the course. The other women only program was based in Switzerland. This program called ProAct-e, targeted partner migrant women with high levels of French.

Program content - similarities & differences

Many of the agencies providing programs for skilled migrants offered a similar approach. There were some core features of each program that were common to all or many of the services contained in this review.

These include:

- Individual vocational counselling and planning
- Job market and industry awareness in the context of local conditions
- Learning about local workplace culture - such as local slang and idioms, conditions of employment and what to expect in the workplace of the adopted country
- Preparing new migrants to be “work ready”
- Preparing resumes and cover letters - tailored to meet local labour market conditions
- Interview preparation - particularly for behavioural based interviews
- Networking and communication strategies
- Self-marketing strategies

This evidence review also found that there was a great deal of variation among the programs in terms of what they did or did not offer. Some of the programs provided mentoring only, while others offered work experience or a combination of both. A number were generalist programs, while others were occupational specific. The following provides an overview of the range activities and curricula available across the programs.

Mentoring - provided by either volunteers who are local employers, skilled migrants who have secured employment, corporate organisations and interested professionals. In many instances mentors and mentees are matched based on their similar backgrounds. Mentors provide assistance and advice on local industries and employment conditions. They introduce the mentee into networks and can act as a local referee. Mentoring is a key feature of the Skilled Professional Migrants Program run by AMES Australia and by a number of the Canadian based services. Two refugee programs - the one based in the Netherlands and the Nationality Services Center in Philadelphia also offer Mentoring.

Work experience, job placement and internships - a number of the programs provided clients with work experience or internships. The Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association provided 10 week practicums to women who undertake their programs. They have specialised personnel who find job placements for these women in both profit and not-for-profit agencies. The TAFE courses in Australia offered a supported industry placement in their relevant professional field for four to six weeks in either a metropolitan or regional area.

Occupation specific programs - The TAFE colleges provide occupation specific programs for accountants, business and IT professionals and engineers. These programs focus on workplace English, communication skills as well as technical and knowledge required by these occupations. The Calgary Women’s Immigrant Association provides a program specifically for women accountants.

Gender specific programs - for women who are skilled migrants. As noted above these programs are available in Geneva and Calgary. The Geneva program does not specialise with a particular occupation group.

Job search/recruitment agency- these agencies provide a job search service once individuals have completed their programs. This was common in the USA where different agencies worked collaboratively to provide a holistic service to cater for new migrants. This enabled them to learn English, undertake job seeking programs and be linked with a recruitment service.

Working with local employers and industry partners - the now defunct service based in South East Queensland worked collaboratively with employers in their region to identify the need for skilled migrants. They then provided programs to assist skilled migrants become job ready so that they could fill vacancies resulting from skill shortages. UpGlo in the United States works with employers to assist them to understand client's experience and expertise. They have an extensive network of employers upon which to draw and can refer suitable clients to companies aligned to the agency.

Cost to access the program - The cost to access programs varied from free to fee for service. The Australian TAFEs provided either full fee paying courses that could be as high as \$2,500 or subsidised courses to students eligible for VET (Vocational Education & Training) fee help. With no external funding, the AMES Australia Skilled Professional Migrant Program charged a fee that is based on a sliding scale. Skillmax, which is funded by the NSW Government, was free. All of the Canadian programs were free, as they are all part funded by the Canadian Federal Government. The programs for asylum seekers and refugees were free. In the US, the UpGlo program was free to clients on the proviso that once they had professional employment they gave back to the program by providing mentoring to new clients.

Qualifications and accreditation - Some of the programs offered a qualification when clients complete the courses. Skilled migrants who finish courses at TAFE receive a fully accredited Certificate IV in EAL (English as an Additional Language) Employment Professional. At Skillmax participants receive a Certificate IV in Spoken and Written English. It is unclear from the overseas websites whether participants receive a qualification.

Time frame for delivery of program - Each program varied in terms of the time frame for delivery. The Skillmax program is run on a part time basis over seven weeks. The Skilled Migrant Professional Program is an intensive program run over four weeks. The Fitted for Work, transition to work is run over 6 months. The Calgary Immigrant Women's Association Program for partner migrant women is run part time over 14 weeks with a 10 week practicum. The ProAct-e in Geneva is run twice a year over a five month period. The UpGlo program allows migrants to choose which aspects of their program they would like to complete. Other programs had similar provisions where skilled migrants can choose the program or assistance they need.

Presentation of programs - Programs were presented in a variety of styles, this could range from workshops and forums. For example, guest forums hosted by employers who offer clients an insight into how their workplace operates. Workplace visits may be a component of the program to enable clients to observe how a "real" workplace functions. Global Talent Bridge in the USA provides seminars on how to pursue further education, obtain professional licensing or certification and find suitable employment. Class based learning was utilised by most agencies to instruct clients on resume development, interviews and cover letters, improve English skills, accent reduction and to learn about workplace culture. Counselling services may be offered to develop individualised career plans for clients and career coaching. Some agencies offer off-site training with online interactive webinars. Global Talent in the USA and Bridge

to Employment for Internationally Trained Individuals in Toronto provides the opportunity for skilled migrants to get their qualifications obtained overseas recognised. The Skilled Professional Migrant Program at AMES Australia and the Mentoring Partnership Program in Toronto and the Career Mentoring Program in Ottawa offer networking opportunities for skilled migrants.

No or low interest loan service - The Immigrant Bridge Program in New York -offers skilled migrants a loan of between \$1,000 to \$10,000 to “support their transition into higher paying jobs”. This loan may be used to upgrade their qualifications, to acquire the necessary professional registration and to support skilled migrants while they job search and complete the relevant training.

Volunteer assistance - volunteers were used by agencies as mentors, but in the case of *Emplooi* in the Netherlands volunteers were instrumental in assisting refugees find work.

Funding Models

With the exception of the TAFEs in Victoria and Skillmax in NSW, which are part of educational institutions, many of the organisations that provide these services in Australia are not-for-profit community agencies. The funding models for each of the programs presented in this synopsis varied significantly. In Australia the most common funding model is either fully funded by the State or Federal Government. In some instances there is an expectation that participants pay a contribution fee as in the case of SPMP run by AMES Australia. At the TAFEs there is a fee structure that allows either full fee paying students to access the course for around \$2,500 to heavily subsidised courses where concessions are available according to visa type, Centrelink status and access to government funded loan schemes. There is no fee to access the Skillmax because it is fully funded by the NSW State Government. Fitted for Work is a free service for clients. However, the Transition to Work Program is funded by community agencies that commission Fitted for Work to undertake the course for their clients.

In the Australian context, programs that are reliant solely on government funding may experience a higher rate of attrition of clients dropping out or program stopping due to the short term nature of funding and the vagaries of the political cycle - for example the ProMap program ran for two years and was disbanded mid 2014 because the funding ran out. Although Skillmax has been generously funded by the NSW Government, this funding is only for one year at a time and is subject to annual review based on outcomes.

In Canada programs are funded from a range of sources. The primary funder is the Canadian Federal Government with input from State Government. Private foundations and philanthropic trusts are major contributors to funding these programs. In a number of instances large national and international companies provide in-kind support through partnership arrangements.

The Helsinki Region Immigrant Employment Council program was funded by the City of Helsinki. In Switzerland the *Decouvrir Femmes Migrantes Qualifiees* program has joint funding from the Swiss Government, as well as local government and private foundations. The Dutch Council for Refugees *Emplooi* Program is a not-for-profit organisation. What government funding it does receive, are hypothecated from the Dutch Postcode Lottery.

In the UK providing services to skilled migrants is not a priority for the government. There is only one fully funded government funded agency, the National Careers Service. The other two agencies noted in this review Transitions and the Bridges Programmes were both funded from grants, private trusts and foundations and corporate organisations. In the case of the Bridges Program some of the funding was hypothecated from the National lottery. This program also received funding from the Scottish government and the local government of Glasgow.

The United States has different funding arrangements when compared with the other countries in this study. All of the agencies included are not-for-profit and are dependent on funding from private companies, foundations and philanthropic trusts. Companies also provide funding and in-kind support. Generally speaking, it is free for migrants to access the programs but there is a reciprocal agreement that once migrants find employment that they maintain ties with the service to assist and support new clients to secure employment through mentoring.

Private giving and philanthropy is largely culturally based. In the US almost all employment and training programs and immigrant resettlement programs are provided by not-for-profit social service agencies (Salamon 2012, p.41). There is strong community support for not-for-profit agencies to deliver these services as they are not seen as a public spending (i.e. Government) priority (Salamon 2012, p.12). This represents a costing shifting from the government to the social service industry that have taken up the mantle of providing public services to the community. These not-for-profit agencies are largely dependent upon the generosity and good will of the community to fund them.

Program Outcomes

Program outcomes were difficult to glean from the websites. Many of the agencies focussed on success stories including case studies of migrants who had gone through their program and had been successful in getting a job. The Australian services for skilled migrants tended to have high success rates. As noted in Chapter five, 75 per cent of Skillmax clients secure employment within 12 months. Two-thirds of clients who complete the AMES Australian Skilled Professional Migrant Program get a job in their professional area within 12 months. It is unclear what the success rate is for TAFEs as this information is commercial-in-confidence.

In Canada the programs are very successful. The Mentoring Partnership Program website states that it has provided services to more than 10,000 clients over the past 10 years. (Reitz, Curtis & Elrick 2014) reports that the model used by Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) has been so successful that it has been adopted across Canada. The author argues that the strength of this model lies in a collaboration between educational institutions, employers, regulatory bodies and others working to address multiple needs faced by migrants. They also highlight that Canada has a program in place called the Canadian Orientation Abroad program⁹, which is a joint project with the International Organization for Migration and the Canadian Federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration. This program has been running since 1998 and is funded by the Canadian federal government. It provides pre-departure information and orientation to refugees, skilled workers, those coming on Family visas and other visa types. The orientation program is run over three days and its aim is to provide information to migrants to:

⁹ <http://www.iom.int/cms/coa/about-coa>

- help them develop realistic expectations about settling in Canada
- provide accurate information about life in Canada
- increase their awareness of the skills necessary to adapt to their new life in Canada during the first 6 months
- increase migrant's capacity to enter the Canadian labour market
- address any questions and concerns that the migrants may have regarding their move to Canada.

The Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) programs have positive outcomes with 95 per cent of participants who complete the Bridging program and the program for accountants getting a job within 12 months.

All of the Canadian services have been operating for many years, the TRIEC programs for more than 10 years, CIWA has been established for 32 years and the bridging program for skilled migrants has been in existence for seven years. The Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organisation has been existence since 1978 and Microskills since 1984. The fact that all of the Canadian services in this review have recurrent funding from the Canadian Federal government indicates a commitment to the integration of migrants into the labour market by providing them with the necessary support. These programs have had time to refine and respond to the needs of clients over many years. Canadian organisations are also mandated to have a culturally diverse workforce including more women, migrants and aboriginals. In contrast, there is no mandatory requirement in Australia for organisations to have a diversity policy. The Diversity Council of Australia¹⁰ found that over the past decade there was a higher level of cultural diversity in ASX companies, but there was still a long way to go in terms of the make up of ASX Boards and Senior Executives reflecting the culturally diverse community in which we live.

The Dutch Council for Refugees describes a mentoring program run by volunteers. In 2012 this project assisted 1,700 people to find paid employment, work experience, or voluntary work.

The Nationalities Service Center in Philadelphia in 2013 generated more than 30 new employer contacts and 73 out of 99 active cases were employed. UpGlo since its inception has assisted approximately 5,000 skilled migrants. Approximately 2,000 (40 per cent) of these clients had found work in the field of expertise.

The program in Finland had only just been established and was currently being piloted. It was too early to glean any outcomes.

The Geneva based ProAct-e program was been running since 2007. It has assisted 103 participants from 82 different professions. According to the website 80 per cent of participants secure employment, an internship or pursue further education.

The ideal intervention

The evidence from this desk top review has shown that programs that support skilled migrants to integrate into the labour market are outcome based with a high success rate of participants accessing the labour market. This review has identified a number of components that are fundamental to any program wanting

¹⁰ <http://www.dca.org.au/dca-research/capitalising-on-culture---asx-directors-2004-2013.html>

to successfully transition skilled migrants to employment in Australia. The key features are detailed below.

Understanding recruitment processes & development of self-marketing tools

Understanding Australian workplace culture, developing resumes and letters of application and learning about job interviews were key findings in the interviews with partner migrant women. Many of them do not receive support or have access to services to guide them on recruitment processes and develop tools to apply for jobs that are suitable for the Australian work context.

Orientation to life in Australia

Settlement services in Australia specifically cater for humanitarian migrants and refugees. Yet, in the absence of an Orientation Abroad Program for emigrants bound for Australia, this means that they are essentially landing here without any formal direction on where to get help. Of course family and friends may provide an introduction into the Australian community, but there are still significant numbers of migrants who arrive in Australia without this sort of support. There is a need for some sort of orientation or settlement program for all migrants so that people can learn about laws and customs, how to access services as well as understanding the local labour market and expectations of Australian workplaces.

Vocational level English

When thinking about a service to support skilled migrants accessing the labour market there is always a role for English classes. Currently, AMEP is available for those with low levels of English, but as discussed in an earlier chapter, skilled migrants who have an IELTS of between 4.5 where eligibility for AMEP ceases and 5.5 (vocational level proficiency) are not catered for. In this context any intervention to support skilled migrants into the labour market would need an English component.

Work experience and mentoring

Local work experience and networking are two key areas that have been identified by employers and respondents in this study. They are seen as essential facets of securing work. The ideal combination to support skilled migrants is to provide work experience in the form of job placements, practicums or internships. These placements need to be at least 10 to 12 weeks in duration to allow the client to gain an understanding of the workplace and develop their skills and confidence in a particular job.

Mentoring is also very important and has been used extensively worldwide (Accenture 2013). Mentoring by a skilled migrant or another person in the same occupation or industry provides invaluable support in terms of coaching, understanding the local labour market, access to networks and a local referee. AMES has successfully run the *Working the Australian Way Program* (AMES 2013a) where representatives from corporate organisations speak with SPMP and high level SLPET clients seeking professional employment in a workshop style format over two days. Key corporate organisations host the program on their premises. Participants get the opportunity to participate in mock interviews with HR staff from Corporate Organisations represented, be involved in networking opportunities with a range of professionals and learn about the expectations of working in a corporate organisation.

Employer engagement

The engagement of employers is a critical component in skilled migrants securing work. The most successful services such as the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association and the Immigrant Bridge Program have collaborative working relationships with employers. Ultimately it will be employers who lead cultural change in relation to extolling the benefits of skilled migrants. Service providers have an obligation to forge a close working relationship with employers to ensure that the skilled migrants who attend their courses/programs have the right skills and capabilities to enter their workplaces.

Access for all

All of the services cited in this review are based in large cities or metropolitan areas. Yet, this study has identified a need in rural, remote and regional Australia that is currently not being met. The AMEP Distance Learning Program that clients undertake does touch on job searching and requirements of the Australian labour market but a more comprehensive approach similar to what is available in metropolitan areas needs to be put in place. One agency noted above, uses webinars and other online courses to assist skilled migrants. Although this type of approach may help migrants become job ready its does not address a fundamental problem in many areas - the lack of suitable jobs for professionals.

Recurrent funding

Funding is the core to any sustainable service development. One of the issues faced by Australian agencies is the lack of medium to long term recurrent funding. There is certainly a place in the Australian context to move towards the Canadian model where core funding is provided by the federal government with support from State Governments, philanthropic trusts and corporate organisations. Having corporate organisations on board to assist with mentoring and job placements is a win-win for all parties concerned. When large corporations demonstrate leadership and actively recruit skills migrants and espouse the benefits of a multicultural workforce, other workplaces are more likely to adopt similar practices.

Other considerations

Other issues to consider when developing an intervention include:

- Should professional skilled migrant programs be co-located with settlement services?
- Should job placements be paid or unpaid volunteer work?
- Should there be gender specific skilled migrant program?
- What fee structure if any should be in place or should programs be offered at no cost to ensure maximum uptake? There is some evidence to suggest that where there is a fee structure in place that finite family resources are given to the male partner in the first instance, which means that women on partner visas either miss out or have to wait to access these services.
- When should skilled migrants be eligible to access these programs? As soon as they arrive or within the first two to three years of settlement?
- How do skilled migrants find out about what services are available to assist them? On the Canadian Federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration website every service available for all migrants no matter what their visa status is, can be found using an interactive map. The user can go to any location in Canada and see what is available.
- Should information about services and support be available prior to migration?

Evaluation

Interventions need to be developed using a sound evidence base. Initially, an intervention could be trialled in a number of sites across Australia. In order to ascertain the efficacy of the service the trial would need to be rigorously evaluated in terms of process and outcomes. The service could be refined taking in local and regional issues so that it can be unilaterally rolled out to all Australian capital cities, regional centres and through some type of distance learning mechanism via the internet.

Summary

This chapter has detailed the findings of a desk top review that was conducted on programs to assist skilled professional migrants in Australia and internationally. With the exception of programs offered by the TAFE sector, Australia has two dedicated programs solely for skilled professional migrants. Compare this with Canada that has numerous programs that have been established for many years and are fully supported and funded by the Canadian Federal Government. The USA has a number of good programs in place where there is extensive collaboration between services to meet the needs of skilled migrants. However, the funding model for USA based agencies is culturally specific in a country that depends on a large philanthropic base to provide social and community services. The European examples are interesting, the funding for two of these programs were based on hypothecated taxes from lotteries (Netherlands and Glasgow). The Swiss and Finnish examples are very much locally based initiatives that have been developed and supported by the city governance structures in which they are located. The United Kingdom is a long way behind other developed English speaking countries in terms of assisting skilled migrants. One assumes that they use mainstream job services to assist them secure work.

More work needs to be done to ascertain the key features of an intervention to assist skilled migrants within an Australian context. If Australia is committed to bringing skilled migrants and their partners to Australia more resources need to be made available to support them to enter the labour market quickly. Ultimately, this enhances the settlement process and the whole Australian community benefits.

Introduction

This report has reframed partner migrant women arriving in Australia on a partner visa as Australia's hidden assets. The findings encapsulate the notion of the "trailing spouse" where migrant women are not necessarily considered in economic terms, as valuable and skilled assets to the Australian economy, but rather are bound up with the traditional breadwinner paradigm where their position is largely supportive and domestic in nature.

For almost 20 years Australian government policy has prioritised skilled migration. As noted in chapter one, the majority of skilled migrants are male and most family migrants are female. There is a perception that migration policy is gender neutral but this ignores the disparity between men and women in relation to how they transition to life in Australia. The primary/secondary categories reinforce women as dependent spouses. Women arriving on a Temporary Spouse visa are financially dependent upon their partners for a period of two years while they validate living in a bona fide relationship. Even though women arriving under this visa stream have work rights, they are reliant on their partners to support them until they secure paid work. As revealed in this study, the social and political construction of family migration and those who arrive as secondary applicants under the Skilled stream entrench traditional gender roles and expose women to new vulnerabilities such as social exclusion and isolation.

When looking at migration from a purely economic perspective, the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency's (AWPA) (2012) paper on *Australia's Skills and Workforce Development Needs* notes the changing composition of the labour force. It describes how there has been a shift from manufacturing and production industries employing large numbers of blue collar workers to a growth in the service sector. The changing nature of work in Australia and other western economies has seen a demand for high level skills and an increase in professional and managerial occupations. One of the main tenets of the AWPA report is that migration will play an important role in ensuring that the Australian economy has sufficient skilled workers to maintain growth and to offset the large number of older people who are retiring and dependent upon government support.

The AWPA (2012) stipulates the importance of maintaining high levels of national productivity to keep the Australian economy viable over the long term. This can be achieved by using the supply and demand equation in terms of assessing available talent in the labour force. In order to supply industry sectors and meet skill shortages, companies should be looking toward harnessing and deploying available skills in the community, particularly when there are individuals from migrant backgrounds not being fully utilised in the labour market. The findings of this study have revealed that there are significant numbers of partner migrant women in the community who fall into this category. With assistance from government funded services and input from employers via early intervention programs, these women can become job ready and available to enter the labour market, fill job vacancies and meet skill shortages. As has been demonstrated in chapter six, investment in job readiness programs and interventions dramatically increases employment participation for partner migrant women and skilled migrants generally.

The current Federal Government is committed to migration with the majority of places available in the Skilled stream. There is a preference for skilled workers in “industries that need to grow” rather than family reunion. The Coalition Government has a focus on people who can “make a contribution from day one in the job”.¹¹ In order to expedite this process, programs are needed that specifically target migrants and assists them with the transition to the Australian labour market more quickly and effectively.

Summary of findings

Partner migrant women

The research for this report was undertaken on four fronts. Firstly, consultation with migrant women on partner visas to gain a first hand view of their experience seeking employment in Australia. Secondly, interviews with service providers who assist skilled migrants. Thirdly, employers who have experience of integrating skilled migrants into their workforces were interviewed. Finally, a desktop review was conducted looking at services in Australia and internationally to determine best practice to assist skilled migrants to secure employment in their chosen country.

The findings in this research have demonstrated that the experience of securing employment for many partner migrant women can be a solitary and frustrating one. This study revealed that the process is often one of trial and error as they search for reliable information relevant to their situation. The respondents repeatedly found that time and resources were wasted trying to discover the relevant support services (if they were available) and to identify where to find suitable jobs commensurate with their skills, experience and qualifications in an unfamiliar and foreign labour market and community. Without understanding the expectations of Australian workplaces in terms of recognition of skills and qualifications, proficiency in English, understanding soft cultural skills and workplace culture it was difficult to secure a job. Many experienced unemployment, underemployment in temporary, part time and casual jobs, and deskilling as a result of working in low skilled occupations.

The partner migrant women in this study had similar job searching experiences. There were themes that emerged repeatedly in relation to securing employment. In relation to expectations of finding work in Australia, some respondents thought it would be easy but realised after a period of time how difficult it would be to break into the Australian labour market without local experience. Others had been fully apprised by family and friends of the difficulties of accessing the job market upon arrival.

The findings explore the experience of respondents who were currently employed. A number were in professional work (19 per cent) but most were in non-professional jobs. It was evident from the demographic data that they had experienced a downward trajectory in their careers with just less than three quarters working in professional jobs prior to migration. Post-migration more than one third were unemployed. Economic and financial imperatives meant that a number of respondents had to find a job and were prepared to work in unskilled and low paid jobs such as hospitality, retail, low level administration and labouring.

Respondents were asked about the range of strategies and services they had used to secure work. Most women in this study did not access any services to assist them. They were reliant on family and friends to

¹¹ <https://www.liberal.org.au/our-plan/education>

provide guidance, but ultimately most women were self-directed in how they approached prospective employers. Internet searching on Seek.com was popular for identifying jobs. Those who contacted private recruitment agencies had limited success and were not contacted for an interview. Developing a resume and a cover letter addressing key selection criteria were challenges and many found that they could not get through the initial selection process and be shortlisted for interview. Without support and direction from an expert agency, many struggled to understand the recruitment requirements and expectations of Australian workplaces. This lack of support and direction ultimately hindered and impeded their ability to secure work in their professional occupation and/or other types of paid work.

Local work experience was identified as one of the key reasons for not getting a job. Respondents believed if they could get experience in an Australian workplace either through a job placement or volunteer work it would put them in a stronger position to get through the selection process and secure paid work.

Gaining recognition for skills and upgrading qualifications and registration to practice was both time-consuming and expensive. Even though a number of respondents from teaching and medical backgrounds were fully apprised of this requirement to work in Australia, they still found it emotionally and financially difficult.

Women living in rural, regional and remote areas were more disadvantaged than those in metropolitan regions. These women were less likely to have access to any support services. They were also in a difficult position because there were very few if any professional roles available to them. This meant that they had to reconsider their employment options. For some this necessitated undertaking vocational training in childcare, disability or aged care, to improve their chances of getting a job. In some rural and regional areas these were the only types of jobs available in tightly held labour markets. Women living rural areas also had the issue of transport. This included either limited or no public transport. The imperative to get a driver's licence to provide them with the flexibility of getting to and from places was noted by a number of women living in these areas. In terms of job searching, having a driver's licence meant that these women were in a better position to travel further afield to larger regional centres to look for work.

The findings from this study demonstrate that unemployment has had a significant impact upon the settlement process of respondents. Those who had found work, even if it was casual and non-professional, had a more positive outlook on their settlement than those who were unemployed. The impact of unemployment on the mental health and wellbeing of participants was a significant issue with a number reporting a diminished self-esteem, loss of confidence in their skills and abilities, and in some instances depression.

In terms of solutions, the partner migrant women in this study said that they required a service to support their job searching, work experience (either as a work placement or volunteer), mentoring programs, access to university and TAFE courses, assistance to get their qualifications recognised and childcare.

This study has focussed on women who have arrived in Australia as partners of migrants on Skilled visas or spouses on Family visas. The women interviewed all had at least an intermediate level of English. Yet, the findings indicate that these women face significant barriers in entering the Australia labour market, particularly in areas that use their overseas skills and qualifications. Further research is required to

investigate the issues and outcomes for women on these visas types but with low levels of English. This would augment current knowledge and evidence to support the full range of women arriving on these visas.

Service providers

The service providers in this study gave some useful insight into the types of programs available to assist skilled migrants. The two programs in Australia identified in this study specifically designed for skilled migrants, Skillmax in Sydney and the Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) in Melbourne are both successful in terms of employment outcomes, even though they offer different approaches. Skillmax is funded by the NSW State Government and has the capacity to assist up to 1,000 skilled migrants each year. In contrast, the SPMP, because of limited funding and resources, assists a considerably smaller number of migrants in a year. The TAFE sector provides programs for skilled migrants but these are costly and may preclude partner migrant women on partner visas from access. None of these programs are specifically for migrant women. More men than women attend these courses.

In the absence of other specialised services in rural and regional areas of Australia, settlement services and other migrant services have taken up the mantle either formally or informally to assist skilled migrants to gain access to the labour market. Mainstream job search agencies like Job Services Australia are not mandated to assist skilled migrants on temporary visas, nor are they able to provide assistance to skilled migrants with permanent residency as eligibility to access their services is based on access to Centrelink (this may be available two years after arrival). Some of the women had approached JSAs in their region for assistance to find jobs, but could not be helped other than having access to computer facilities. Other services such as Migrant Resource Centres also provided direction to migrants on how to secure work in an Australian context. However, these are not specialised services that assist skilled migrants to access professional work. The services in Perth were funded to support refugees, including skilled refugees, but did not have a mandate to provide assistance to people coming to Australia on a Skilled visa.

Service providers in this study were patently aware of the issues facing women migrants arriving on Family visas and as secondary applicants on Skilled visas. Those in rural and regional areas were conscious that these women had accompanied their partner who generally had employment. For many there were limited employment opportunities available because of the lack of job vacancies. This meant that their role had shifted from being an employed professional in their home country to one where attending to the household and domestic responsibilities became their primary focus. Some service providers tried to orient women into certificate level training programs such as disability, childcare and aged care with the view that these women could be mobilised into these key areas where job vacancies were more likely to occur. Service providers identified social isolation and the lack of transport as major issues for migrant women in these areas.

Employers

All of the employers in this study had skilled migrants in their workforce and provided useful insights into how to integrate skilled migrants in their workplace. They spoke about recruitment practices and wanting to get the best person for the job. They identified some of the issues with migrants applying for work in their organisation and cited examples where they had received numerous applications from new migrants

who had taken a “scattergun” approach, applying for any sort of job without tailoring the resume or letter of application to specifically meet the selection criteria of that job. In some instances the applicants were not even qualified to do the job. Most of the employers were conscious that new migrant women needed time to understand the requirements of applying for jobs in the Australian context and understanding Australian workplace culture.

The behavioural based interview presented a challenge for many partner migrant women. Some of the employers were aware of this and made allowances for applicants when English was their second language. Although a number of the organisations had diversity policies in place, many of the larger organisations still did not have migrants from CALD backgrounds in senior roles. Several employers felt that the composition of their organisation should reflect the same cultural diversity found in the general community.

The skilled women migrants in this study raised the issue of not having local work experience. For most of the employers interviewed this was not a major issue if the job applicant could demonstrate how the experience they had in their home country could be transferred and utilised in an Australian context. Overall, the employers were positive about the skilled migrants in their workforce. They were of the belief that a diverse workforce engenders high levels of skill, commitment and innovation.

Comparative review on interventions to assist skilled migrants access employment

The desktop analysis reviewed services to assist skilled migrants both nationally and internationally. It found that there were many common features in programs across the globe including resume development, how to compile a letter of application and understanding workplace culture. There were also variations between one program and another in terms of: the inclusion or exclusion of gender specific programs, occupational specific courses, opportunities for networking, mentoring, work placements or internships, career counselling and assistance to gain recognition of skills.

Funding models varied from one country to another. The Canadian agencies all received funding from their Federal Government along with funding from State government, corporate and philanthropic trusts. The funding of services in the USA was largely from corporate and philanthropic sources with no government funding. In Glasgow and the Netherlands the refugee services were partly funded from hypothecated revenue raised from lottery funds.

This review found that there was no one consistent or national approach to the provision of job searching programs to assist skilled migrants in Australia. In contrast, the Canadian Federal Government provides significant funding to migrant services across the country. In Canada a concerted effort is made to support and assist skilled and humanitarian migrants to integrate into the general community and labour force. They also offer a pre-migration program to would be emigrants on what to expect when they arrive in Canada.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1- Develop and pilot an early intervention program

It is recommended that an early intervention program be developed and piloted. The intervention would specifically be designed to meet the needs of skilled migrants including partner migrant women to assist their transition to the Australian labour market.

Through the consultations with migrant women, service providers, employers and the desk top analysis this study has gathered information to support the implementation of an intervention to assist partner migrant women and skilled migrants generally to transition into the Australia labour market. There is strong evidence that an early intervention program works in terms of outcomes and the increased likelihood of participants getting work. As noted in chapter 6 this intervention should have a number of key components:

- Understanding recruitment processes & development of self-marketing tools
- Orientation to life (including finding work) in Australia
- Vocational level English (where participants English is not at a high enough level to operate in professional employment)
- Work experience and mentoring
- Employer engagement
- Access for all
- Recurrent funding
- Other considerations include location, gender specific programs, access eligibility

It is recommended that a pilot program be introduced in two metropolitan areas - Brisbane and Perth as these two cities do not have any programs to assist skilled migrants. In addition, a pilot should also be conducted in a rural/regional area. It is suggested that a pilot be conducted in regional Victoria. As identified in this study, there is a high need for a program to assist skilled migrants and partner migrants in the Bendigo region. The aim of the pilot would be to test what components should be included in an Australian model and test different types of funding models to ensure the long term sustainability of the intervention.

Ultimately, this intervention should be available Australia wide in major cities and large regional centres. To ensure that partner migrant women living in rural and remote areas are not disadvantaged, the intervention can be made available using a distance learning type model supported by the national broadband network and virtual interactive learning environments. This not only gives women living in these areas the same information and opportunities to learn about the requirements of Australian workplaces, it also allows women experiencing social isolation in rural and remote areas to connect with other partner migrant women to learn together and share experiences.

This intervention would not have a recruitment and job search service attached, but would forge connections with mainstream recruitment agencies to identify suitable jobs for clients.

Recommendation 2 - Funding options

It is recommended that funding options be explored to finance a nationwide intervention to assist partner migrant women to access paid employment.

Supporting partner migrant women and skilled migrants generally in seeking employment is a long term investment for Australia. Not only do skilled migrants become productive, tax paying members of the community, work force participation enhances their long term settlement in Australia.

Funding options should be explored on how to finance this intervention to ensure it is available to users Australia wide. As shown in the desktop review, the Canadian Federal Government provides some level of funding to numerous migrant specific programs. Other funding models used in Canada and elsewhere utilise a combination of sources emanating from State and Federal governments, corporate organisations and philanthropic trusts.

The cost of accessing programs that support skilled migrants to secure work should not be a barrier. This research found that a higher proportion of men than women undertook programs specifically for skilled migrants. In some instances women miss out on accessing these services because priority is given to the male partner who is the family breadwinner. The family resources are more likely to pay for programs that assist men to secure work. If there is no cost or a cost structure that does not duly impact upon family finances, women may be more likely to take up the program.

Many of the services, in Australia and overseas, are free for clients. Other programs charge a fee for service. In the USA one program offered interest free loans through corporate sponsorship with one or more banks. The aim of the loan was to assist skilled migrants to cover the costs of job searching courses/programs.

A HECS style scheme might be an alternative, where skilled migrants pay back course fees once they get a job. This scheme may also be available to assist with the cost of upgrading qualifications or getting appropriate registration to practice.

Another option may involve mutual obligation on the part of the person receiving assistance. A program in the USA adopted this approach to ensure the long term sustainability of the program. There is an expectation that clients, who complete the program and get work, then mentor new clients commencing the program to assist them to enter the workforce.

Recommendation 3- Information & knowledge about services to support skilled migrants

It is recommended that information and knowledge about the types of services available to assist partner migrant women enter the Australian labour market be widely available and easily accessible.

The Canadian Federal Government's Department of Citizenship and Immigration have a website called 'Living in Canada'. It is an online tool designed to assist new migrants¹². On this website there is an interactive map where users can enter a specific location and find out about services in an area of interest. The user is able to source the service name and a web link to the agency's website to get

¹² <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/map/ontario-list.asp>

additional information. This is a cost effective and efficient method of keeping new migrants fully apprised of services that are available to assist them.

The Canadian Government also has a pre-migration program that provides extensive information about what to expect when they arrive in Canada in terms of integrating into the community but also about securing work. There is a global labour market for highly skilled migrants. Countries like Canada and Australia are competing for the best and brightest talent. The more information that the Australian Government can provide to would-be migrants about the benefits of coming to Australia, including programs to support both men and women to access employment, the greater the competitive edge over its rivals.

A nationally co-ordinated information service should be available in Australia to keep migrants fully apprised of all types of programs including employment assistance services. Access to timely information and knowledge is enormously beneficial to would be clients and to service providers to facilitate appropriate referral. The website could also have information relevant to employers on work rights and visas and how to successfully integrate employees from CALD backgrounds into their workplace.

Recommendation 4 - Employers

It is recommended that employers are involved in the development of an intervention to assist partner migrant women to integrate into the Australian workforce.

This research has demonstrated that employer support is essential to ensure partner migrant women and skilled migrants generally are able to secure paid employment. Employers can play an important role in mobilising skilled migrants into the workforce. Both Fitted for Work and *Working the Australian Way*, which is run by AMES, have forged a collaborative relationship with employers. Employers involved in these programs offer pro bono support by contributing information and advice, providing access to networking opportunities, one to one mentoring, interview practice and making their offices available for new migrants to observe how they operate and function.

Another important way of keeping employers engaged is to highlight the benefits of having a diverse workforce that reflects the community in which they operate and live in terms of gender and culture. There is evidence to suggest that cultural diversity can lead to higher levels of productivity and innovation because there are more resources in terms of skills and views to draw upon when problem solving¹³.

Employers may also require information about visa rights, particularly for partner migrant women who arrive on temporary spouse visas. These women are legally entitled to work. Although they have to wait two years for permanent residency, it is still a legitimate and legally recognised path to PR. Information needs to be available to employers to allay their concerns about the short term nature of this type of visa and that women on a spouse visas can be valuable long members of their staff.

Recommendation 5 - Evaluation of early intervention program trial

It is recommended that the early intervention program trial to support skilled migrants on an Australia wide basis be evaluated in terms of process, outcome and impact.

¹³ Deloitte & Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2013) *Waiter, is that inclusion in my soup? A new recipe to improve business performance*, Sydney.

It is important to evaluate the early intervention program trial to support partner migrant women and skilled migrants generally to transition into employment. This would involve evaluating the program in terms of process, monitoring program outcomes in terms of pathways to employment and training, and the impact that this intervention has on the client group, the community, the workforce in personal and economic terms.

This evaluation would also include assessing the most appropriate funding models to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of the program.

The evaluation would look at the types of standardised reporting on gender and settlement that are currently available and identify gaps. Current data available does not have complete information about the experiences of migrant women. The evaluation could be the vehicle to generate evidence in relation to data gaps and then, based on the findings, formulate recommendations to identify appropriate agencies, methodologies and avenues to collect data that reflects the gendered nature of migration.

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