

Educational and Employment journeys of Syrian conflict refugees in Victoria

RESEARCH BRIEFING, JANUARY 2021

Summary

AMES Australia is a research partner in an Australia Research Council (ARC) funded project led by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) examining the settlement of Syrian-conflict refugees (including Syrian and Iraqi nationals) who arrived in Australia between 2015-2017. AMES oversees the fieldwork component in Victoria with 40 refugee families from Syria and Iraq, comprised of 107 adults (over 18 years of age) and 58 young people (aged 5-18 years.) The longitudinal research follows the families for three years and focuses on pre-migration employment, skills and qualifications, and settlement experiences in Australia including English language learning, education, and employment outcomes.

This research summary provides a snapshot of the qualitative education and employment data collected from the adult respondents in their first-year interviews conducted one to two years after settlement in Victoria. It examines **if there is continuity between experiences and skills gained offshore and respondents' current or desired occupations**. The analysis also examines key barriers and enablers to achieving continuity. In doing so, the paper provides insights relevant to the wider cohort of over 7,200 refugees who arrived in Victoria during 2015-2017 as a direct result of the Syrian war and are establishing new lives in Victorian local government areas including Hume, Whittlesea, Brimbank, Melton, and Shepparton. The findings within this research summary leads to the identification of implications and opportunities to support the unique education and employment challenges faced by newly arrived adult refugees from Syria and Iraq in Victoria.

Key findings

- Syrian and Iraqi adult refugees bring diverse educational backgrounds and experience to Australia. While many are highly educated, there were some respondents that either had no prior education or only primary-level education.
- Common barriers to engagement in education and employment for adult Syrian and Iraqi refugees included English language proficiency, poor health for older adults, and caring responsibilities for family members and children. Some respondents were not aware of overseas qualification recognition processes, or they were lacking general support on how to apply transferable skills to the labour market.
- In the first-year interviews, very few Syrian and Iraqi refugees described continuity between their current and pre-arrival education and employment.
- Some Syrian and Iraqi adult refugees had clearly articulated education and employment aspirations and took flexible, incremental approaches to achieving these.
- Only a few respondents cited enablers of education and employment in their first-year interview, but those that did most frequently referred to social networks/interactions, including with native English speakers.

Implications and opportunities for action

From the findings of this research emerge a number of opportunities to support the unique education and employment challenges faced by newly arrived refugees from Syria and Iraq in Victoria. The findings also bring to light implications regarding English language, education, and employment programs, primary care roles regarding children, overseas qualification assessment, Recognition of Prior Learning processes, career counselling and pathway planning, and volunteering practices:

1. Education or employment programs that consider pre-arrival education and work experience/s, such as pre-accredited training, may be suitable for these refugee communities.
2. English language programs that are accessible at various times and contexts, for example on-arrival, pre-employment, or in employment, would support these refugee communities to continually improve their English language skills relevant to their settlement needs.
3. Digital literacy and remote learning skills are not only important for refugees with accessibility barriers; it is a life skill that could improve opportunities for all adult refugees from these communities.
4. Overseas qualification assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning are processes that support skilled and/or qualified refugees resume their careers in Australia. Due to the high level of university education qualifications among these refugee communities, it is critical that they are supported to access these professional pathways.
5. Caring responsibilities for elderly family members and children may be having a greater impact on women's opportunities to engage in education and employment within these refugee communities. Free childcare or education programs where mothers can bring young children, such as in Community Hubs, should be expanded to address this.
6. Refugees from these communities may benefit from facilitative environments which support them to identify and pursue their learning and employment aspirations.
7. Transferable skills may be an important commodity for these refugee communities. Career counselling, links to professional networks and opportunities for internships could support the process of identifying and applying transferable skills.
8. Newly arrived refugees can be inspired by the success stories of those who arrived before them; these stories should be shared and celebrated widely.
9. Volunteering could be encouraged for these refugee communities as it can have many tangible benefits for new arrivals, especially when refugees are taught how to maximise the learning opportunities found through volunteering.
10. Volunteering Involving Organisations (VIOs) should continue to learn how to best engage and support refugee volunteers as valued members of their volunteer force.
11. Opportunities for engagement with native English speakers may help to informally support English outcomes and build social networks for these refugee communities.

Introduction

Who are Syrian-conflict refugees?

The recent Syrian conflict represents one of the worst humanitarian disasters of our time, generating an unprecedented flow of refugees across Europe and, via resettlement programs, to countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Over 5.6 million people have fled Syria and become registered refugees, while another 6.6 million remain displaced within the country's borders.¹

In 2015, the Australian Government announced that Australia would accept 12,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict region between 2015-2017, in addition to the existing Humanitarian Program intake. Victoria welcomed 7,207 of the total 24,926 Syrian and Iraqi refugees who arrived in Australia during this two-year period. The new arrivals have largely settled in the north-west areas of Melbourne, especially Hume, Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Brimbank, and Melton, where there are already established Syrian and Iraqi communities. They have also settled in smaller numbers in regional centres such as Shepparton and Geelong.²

Most of the recent settlers are young and of working age; between 18 and 44 years with almost a quarter being children under the age of 11.³ While almost 55% of refugees from the Syrian conflict region have tertiary qualifications and many are sponsored by family in Australia, barriers to employment and social integration remain.⁴

Background

Labour market underutilisation and the mismatch between skills and employment for refugees is a commonly cited problem in Australian research.⁵ The term 'occupational skidding' is often used to describe settlers who do not have a job commensurate with their education or skill levels.⁶

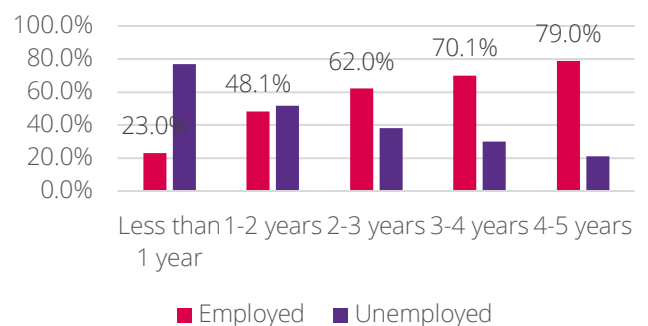
Despite refugees experiencing difficulties during the early years of settlement, there is evidence of economic and social adjustment difficulties even after a longer duration of residence.

A large study of new arrivals to Australia found that refugees (who arrive through the Humanitarian Program) are more likely to be unemployed than migrants who arrived in Australia through the Skilled or Family programs, even after five years of settlement. However humanitarian entrants display

greater involvement in further education activities.⁷ Of those working, job satisfaction was not high. This same study further contributed to the evidence that time lived in Australia affects several aspects of settlement, such as improved language skills, education and employment outcomes.

Another study that analysed Australian 2016 Census data found that the unemployment rate of refugees one year after arrival was 77%, and although rates improve over time, 38% were still unemployed after three years and 22% after 10 years.⁸

Figure 1. Labour force status of humanitarian visa holders (aged 15+ years) by duration in Australia, 2016 Census



There is limited longitudinal research that has closely studied this trend in Australia, other than 'Building a New Life in Australia: The longitudinal study of humanitarian migrants' (BNLA) undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies between 2013-2018.⁹ Close to 2,400 individuals and families who were granted a permanent humanitarian visa from over 35 different countries participated in the research, with the largest refugee cohort from Iraq (39%).

The BNLA research covers several major settlement domains, including English language proficiency and training, engagement in other education study or training, and employment. Most BNLA respondents reported having relatively low levels of English language proficiency or education prior to arrival in Australia, however there was a high uptake of English classes and improvement in English proficiency at the Wave 1 BNLA (year 1) interview. Despite 15% never having attended school and a further 34% having fewer than 10 years of schooling, 66% of primary applicants¹⁰ planned to study in Australia. Of this number 42% are desiring to attain a trade or

technical qualification and a further 30% aspire to achieve a university degree.

At the Wave 1 BNLA interview that is within the first year, employment was low. Despite 68% of primary applicants and 30% of secondary applicants having work experience prior to coming to Australia, at the Wave 1 BNLA interview only 7% of all respondents reported having worked in the last seven days. When examined together however, most respondents reported current engagement in some form of study (including English language classes) and/or paid work in seven days prior to the interview.

The longitudinal BNLA data has been used to analyse the relationship between human capital and labour market participation and employment status among recently arrived humanitarian migrants.¹¹ The likelihood of participating in the labour force is higher for those who had pre-immigration paid job experience, completed study/job training, have better job searching knowledge/skills in Australia and possess higher proficiency in spoken English. Whereas better pre-immigration education did not necessarily determine paid work in Australia, unpaid work experience (which may include volunteering) and job searching skills in Australia was found to be positively related to finding paid work.

Confirming the challenges observed in BNLA data, a 2018 report by Deloitte Access Economics found that 49% of skilled migrants and refugees are not using their pre-arrival skills and experience in the Australian labour market.¹² In 2017, the Refugee Council of Australia highlighted in a major report how some employment service providers prefer to place refugees quickly in low skilled, insecure jobs, rather than working to find 'career jobs' over a longer period of time that match refugees' skills and experience.¹³ A 2014 report by the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) also highlighted the skills mismatch issue, and recommended that skills and overseas qualification recognition processes be reformed, with additional resources allocated to new courses, bridging programs and pathways for new arrivals.¹⁴

The research

AMES Australia is a project partner in a longitudinal Australian Research Council (ARC) funded research project led by the University of Technology Sydney

(UTS) on Syrian-conflict refugee settlement outcomes, with a focus on English language competency, education and employment. AMES leads the regional and metropolitan fieldwork in Victoria with 40 refugee families from Syria and Iraq who arrived between 2015 and 2017. Respondents arrived through the former Humanitarian Settlement Service or current Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) and were recruited to participate through the support of AMES Settlement Services and AMES connections with Victoria's CALD communities and partner providers.

Methodology

AMES recruited four bilingual Arabic-speaking research assistants to conduct interviews in first language to provide optimum conditions for a natural interview. The 40 family interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face, with some conducted over the phone, and each family member was interviewed separately based on different questions for adults and young people (aged 5-18). Family interviews typically lasted one to two hours and included both closed and open-ended questions. Interview questions were designed to explore the settlement experiences of respondents, particularly around their employment, education and social experiences.

An online survey, replicating many of the questions asked at interview, was also completed by each family member to gather quantitative data. The research assistants either transcribed responses to qualitative questions and/or wrote third-person descriptions of the responses in detailed field notes.

All transcripts and field notes were produced in English, having been translated by the research assistants. The transcripts and field notes were de-identified in the process of transcription or writing.

The following findings are based on a secondary analysis of the qualitative field notes and transcripts from the first year of data collection only. Second and third year data that has subsequently been collected and may contain fuller information about the respondent's education and employment has not yet been analysed. Of the 107 adult respondents that have been recruited to the project since its commencement, approximately a quarter of respondents did not provide data relevant to the research questions in their first year interview, or were not present for the interview in the first year,

and therefore the first year analysis included a total of 85 interview transcripts and field notes to be analysed. This sample of respondents are all over 18 years of age and can be described as of working age. The informed consent process included consent for these data to be analysed in this manner.

Research questions

To better understand how respondents' previous education and employment aligned with their current or future occupations, the analysis team developed initial research questions based on current peer-reviewed literature on these issues and this cohort. The questions were then refined based on a research team member's first-hand knowledge of the data. Through this refinement process, the analysis considered four research questions:

1. How do the respondents describe continuities between their previous educational and employment experiences and their current occupation?
2. What do the respondents describe as barriers to engagement in education¹ and employment?
3. How do respondents describe their navigation towards employment based on perceived opportunities or their aspirations?
4. What are the program and policy implications?

The conceptual framework: Continuity

The following is a summary of information critical for understanding the conceptual framework applied in the research – a full account was omitted for brevity. Assessing whether respondents' occupations may be 'commensurate' with their previous skills and experiences was problematic due to the nature and quality of the data collected and limited verifiable information about the qualifications and skills of each respondent. Therefore, the concept of continuity¹⁵ is applied to respondents' descriptions of their own backgrounds, current occupation, and perceived futures.

Continuity is a concept that provides a framework for understanding the alignment between migrants'

pre and post-arrival goals and aspirations, as well as their utilisation of their skills and experience. It places emphasis on the elements of an individual's life narratives that provide consistency—a perspective that is aligned with AMES Australia's strengths-based approach to service provision.

Forced migration research has often focused on the rapid or significant change in migrants' lives that cause 'ruptures' or significant breaks between pre- and post-arrival lives; however, scholars have recently advocated for a better understanding of if, how, and why individual resources are consistently carried forward in migrants' lives via continuities. This research expands on that notion by applying the concept of continuity to migrants' educational and employment narratives within a longitudinal study.

Key findings

Syrian and Iraqi adult refugees bring diverse educational backgrounds and experience to Australia.

While many are highly educated, there were some respondents that either had no prior education or only primary-level education.

The educational backgrounds of Syrian-conflict refugees vary greatly. While some have little-to-no formal education, others have completed postgraduate degrees and have worked in highly skilled professions including in fields such as engineering, dentistry, and accounting. Respondents who have undertaken vocational education and training in Syria or Iraq have trained in fields such as motor mechanics, beauty and makeup, hairdressing, and art-related disciplines.

Figures 2 and 3 on the following page show the educational backgrounds of analysed adult respondents disaggregated by gender. Because the respondents' descriptions of their educational experiences were provided as part of responses to open-ended questions about their previous educational and employment experiences, their levels of education could not be verified or aligned with a standard

¹ Note: the analysis focused on education in addition to and/or beyond the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in which many participate upon arrival. This approach was both to give analytical primacy respondents longer-term aspirations and also due to an insufficient level of detail

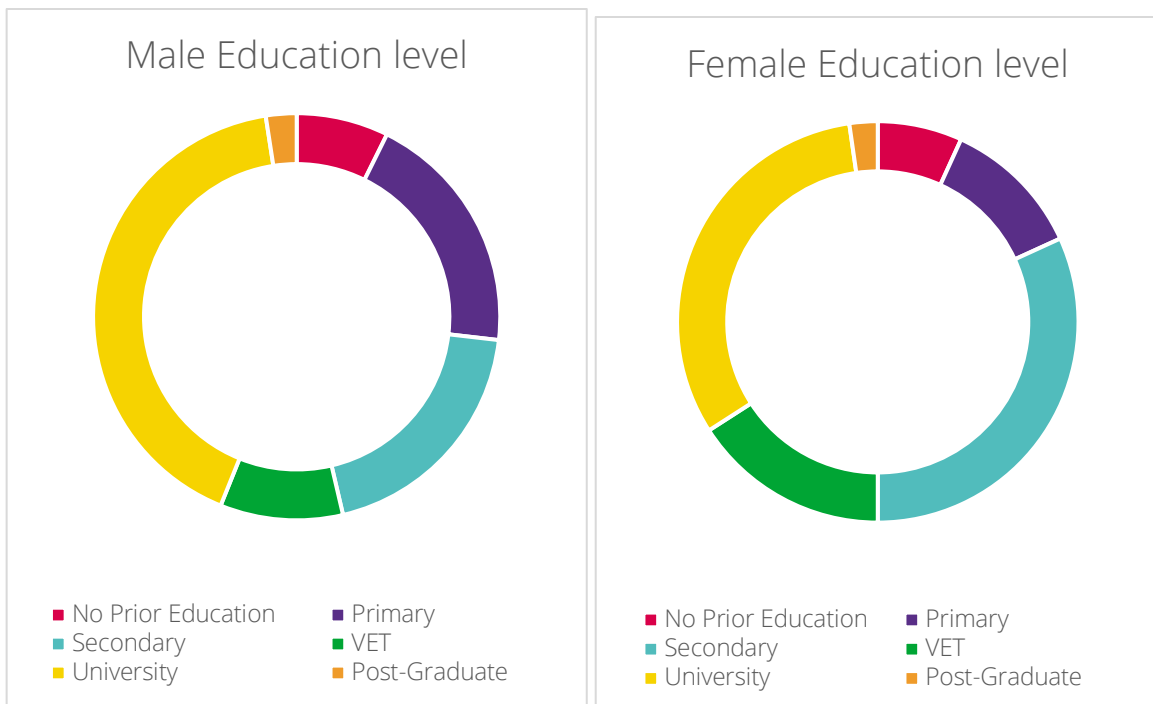
about why and how respondents engage in the AMEP. The data often merely represented if they had participated and how far they had progressed.

Australian framework, for example, the Australian Qualifications Framework. Based on this, the research team categorised respondents' descriptions into: no prior education, primary education, secondary education, vocational education and training (VET), University, and Post-graduate categories.

Overall, the respondents have a high level of education, with a large proportion of both males and females having secondary-level education or above.

However, for both men and women, there are some respondents who either have no prior education (7% for males and 7% for females) or only primary-level education (20% for males and 11% for females). Moreover, there are slightly more females with secondary-level education or above than males.

Figures 2 & 3. Total analysed respondents² by gender and education levels



Common barriers to engagement in education and employment for adult Syrian and Iraqi refugees included English language proficiency, poor health for older adults, and caring responsibilities for family members and children.

Some respondents were not aware of qualification recognition processes, or they were lacking general support on how to apply transferable skills to the labour market.

Syrian-conflict refugees who did not describe continuity between their previous educational and employment backgrounds and their current occupation in Australia identified several barriers. English language was the most frequently cited barrier, with 49% of included respondents identifying it as a significant obstacle to accessing their desired educational or employment pathway.

"I don't have any work experience, I need to improve my language"
- Adult male respondent

² Note that several respondents did not provide data relevant to research questions, and therefore were omitted from the analysis (n=85).

"[The respondent] attended an interview for job at an English school as a teacher supporter to help the new student from the Arabic background as they want a bilingual student supporter, but her interview was not successful. She believes that her capability in English did not help her to show full confidence"
 - Adult female respondent (Interviewer's notes)

Many respondents who noted the English language barrier in fact wished they had begun learning English prior to arrival in Australia, as it may have improved their career trajectory.

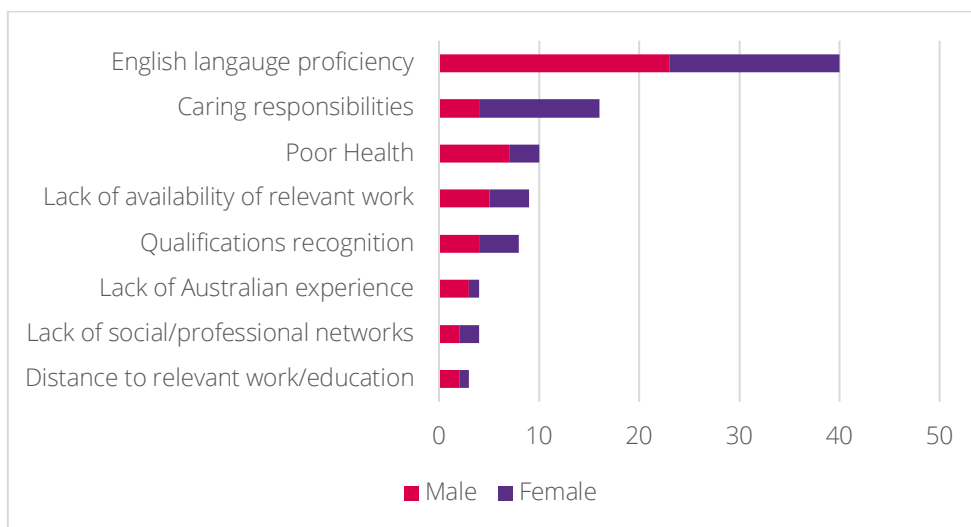
"If I know I should have an excellent English before I could work I might took some English courses overseas which might help me

understand the workplace environment quicker and better"
 - Adult male respondent

"If I know it's impossible to work without proper English I might study English in Lebanon before I came here"
 - Adult male respondent

Other barriers to education and employment cited included health issues for older adults, caring responsibilities for family members and children, and a lack of availability of work relevant to their employment aspirations. Challenges due to not having previous qualifications recognised in Australia were also raised. Some respondents described experiencing a complex combination of more than one of these barriers. Figure 4 below shows the most frequently cited barriers to education and employment disaggregated by gender.

Figure 4. Total analysed respondents who cited a barrier to Education and Employment by gender³



The respondents experiencing health issues often expressed a desire to work but their job search activities or job opportunities were hampered by poor health or injury.

"It's very hard to get a job here the only job they offer here is farming which is hard for me as I have a lower back pain"
 - Adult male respondent

"[The respondent] joined the TAFE for two months but then she started suffering from a psychological problem which [...] seem to be related to the language. She started escape away, in an unusual way, from any English-speaking person...She said only because she cannot understand and feels so embarrassed."

³ The values above are the number of individual analysed respondents (n=85) who cited a barrier in the qualitative data. These barriers were coded using a framework that was inductively refined throughout the analysis. Respondents could identify multiple barriers.

- Adult female respondent (interviewer's notes)

The respondents who cited caring responsibilities for children as the primary reason for not engaging in education⁴ and employment were mostly female. Some of these women were highly qualified and/or skilled.

"This mother really feels that the problem with caring of her children thoroughly affects her ambitions and ability to achieve good job"

- Adult female respondent (Interviewer's notes)

"Caring of children now relatively prevents her from go after these courses but she will do when her life become more stable."

- Adult female respondent (Interviewer's notes)

Despite this, some women were trialling alternative approaches to learning English.

"I have an English Tutor who helps me at home as I cannot attend school"

- Adult female respondent

Some respondents also described how they were caring for elderly family members, or family members with health issues.

"[The respondent] has no work experience as he is looking after his mom as she had a stroke"

- Adult male respondent (Interviewer's notes)

Some respondents did not know how to transfer their skills and experience into the Australian job market. They were also often not aware of qualification recognition processes, or they were lacking general support on how to apply transferable skills.

"[The respondent] has not applied for jobs because there is no guidance... she has not brought any proof of qualification with her"

- Adult female respondent (Interviewer's notes)

In the first-year interviews, very few Syrian and Iraqi refugees described continuity between their current and pre-arrival education and employment

Most Syrian-conflict refugee respondents did not describe continuity between their previous educational and employment backgrounds and their current occupation in Australia. The phenomenon of 'occupational skidding' - where refugees are unable to find work that matches their skills and qualifications - appeared to be the experience of many.

However, many did not accept this reality passively, and recognised barriers they had to overcome to achieve continuity. Most adult respondents were still undertaking English language classes in the federally funded Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at the year one interview. Some respondents identified this juncture in their life as an opportunity to change careers entirely.

"I have not yet found out about getting my qualifications recognised, and I am not interested to get it recognised because I am not going to work in the field. I am thinking to get a course in building"

- Adult male respondent

Partial continuity was demonstrated in those who were employed in fields relevant to their education and skills, but in a lower grade role. Moreover, some had made modest progress along a pathway to resume their occupation but had not yet realised full continuity. For example, some respondents were engaged in relevant education and training.

"I am still studying English language and currently I am at level 3... Also I am doing a course in teaching to work as a teacher aid which I started a month ago... I hope I can finish my study so I can find a job as a teacher aid..."

- Adult male respondent

Respondents who described continuity between their previous and current occupations (of which there were very few at the year one interview) had highly transferrable skills and/or qualifications. They

⁴ In addition to or beyond the AMEP.

were also persistent, and continually learning how to improve their career prospects. For example, one respondent who had hospitality experience described his pathway to continuity in Australia.

“Shortly after arrival [the respondent] did his first attempt to have his own small business. After about one year and half, he opened his current restaurant which had been shut off by his owner before. Now his English is much better, and he has applied a completely different approach to the market. The fame of his new restaurant looks gradually pervading and he can feel encouraging support from the local communities in [suburb] and promising indicators for success.”

– Adult male respondent (Interviewer’s notes)

For respondents who did not describe continuity between their current and pre-arrival education and employment, some expressed a desire to use their qualifications and experience, but were unsure how to do so.

“[The respondent would like to know] how to make use of his previous qualifications from Syria”

– Adult male respondent (Interviewer’s notes)

Some Syrian and Iraqi adult refugees had clearly articulated aspirations and took flexible, incremental approaches to achieving them

Respondents who described continuity, or partial continuity, shared well-articulated aspirations and an understanding of the steps they needed to achieve them. Several respondents tried multiple approaches, and often demonstrated flexibility and an eagerness to learn new skills. The gender of the respondents has been omitted in this section to support anonymity, and thus all will use feminine pronouns.

1. The journey of one Syrian-conflict refugee is a prime example of this adaptive approach. This

respondent, who could be described as being in her mid-career, holds a Bachelor Degree in Engineering, had worked on government projects, and had also studied and worked in art and crafts,⁵ later starting a home renovation and decoration business that she found enabled more independence and was rewarding. She also enrolled in further training courses before establishing her own specialised workshop using her particular artistic skill.

Once in Australia, she applied several approaches to achieving aspirations in line with her training and experience. She took English classes and started volunteering as a teacher-assistant at a local community centre, supporting Arabic speaking students. She then completed a Certificate IV in Community Services including a work placement, before volunteering with an Arabic community organisation for three months before she was offered a part-time job. Moreover, she also completed a coaching and referee course, gaining occasional paid work to referee at matches run in schools or community settings⁶. Lastly, the respondent took an intensive train driving course, and was invited for an interview, however was unsuccessful.

The respondent did attempt to resume her earlier career as an Engineer, and was invited to interview for a position, but was not successful as the position was a much lower grade role (for which she was considered over-qualified). She also attempted to obtain paid work in the arts. Despite the challenges, she demonstrates continued flexibility and an incremental approach to the new opportunities that she identified before her. Her priority was to obtain paid work, first-and-foremost, with clear aspirations for continual, incremental learning and development. However, at the year one interview, she had not yet achieved the continuity that she sought.

“She is working on herself and on her family and still has a lot of new ideas to try.”- -

- Respondent (Interviewer’s notes)

⁵ Unspecified to ensure anonymity of respondent.

⁶ Sport unspecified to ensure anonymity.

2. A second respondent, who could be described as early in her career, had experience working with an international NGO, and later the United Nations before leaving for Australia. Prior to leaving, she had also completed three out of four years of a bachelor degree in Business, but when she left did not bring with her documentation of her studies. Upon arrival, she worked at a large local charity for two months, and then transitioned into a year of volunteering with the same organisation.

This respondent's long-term aspirations are to return to a career in business. At the time of the interview, she was completing a Certificate III level course in English and was intending to start a Certificate IV in Community Services, so as to continue in a field where she is building social networks and local experience in the short term.

3. An early-career respondent arrived in Australia with an advanced Diploma in Engineering and experience working in food manufacturing, as a receptionist, and as an accountant. When she finished her 510 hours of AMEP English tuition, she did a Certificate IV in Business Administration and began volunteering at an educational institution. The institution offered her a job, and at the time of the interview had been working there for nearly two years.
4. Lastly, an early-career respondent had begun studying towards a bachelor degree in translation and interpreting before departing Syria and brought with her documentation of having completed 3 of 4 years of the degree. Upon arrival and completing a Certificate III level course in English she continued to a Certificate IV in Disability Care. When undertaking her disability course, she found that working in disability care suited her and adjusted her aspirations to seek work in this field. She then found a work placement in disability care and subsequently secured a casual job at the same centre.

Only a few respondents cited enablers of education and employment in the first-year interview, but those that did most frequently referred to social networks/interactions, including with native English speakers.

Despite the highly individualised education and employment journeys of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, there were a few common enablers helping to facilitate pathways to continuity. These included volunteering and building social networks—including with native English speakers.

"The work it's for long hours – I am doing voluntary work at the moment (no pay), work from 7am to 4.30pm as a start. They might employ me in the future. It's a design and decoration company"

- Adult male respondent

"[The respondent] decided to join his father and brother who has established good basis and network in construction industry in Sydney. They also welcoming him and encouraging him to join them. In Sydney he can also find suitable part-time courses in construction..."

- Adult male respondent (Interviewer's notes)

"[The respondent's] daily contact with English-speaking friends and customers is very helpful in improving his English"

- Adult male respondent (Interviewer's notes)

"[The respondent] worked with [a charity] as a volunteer with them for one year. He expects to be invited for an interview shortly, with the same organisation to start a longer job."

- Adult male respondent (Interviewer's notes)

Provisional conclusions

This paper provides a window into the unique settlement experiences of some refugee families, namely adults, who arrived in Victoria between 2015-2017 as a direct result of the Syrian war. The findings provide valuable empirical evidence of the persistent barriers to education and employment that many refugees face during their initial settlement years; English language, poor health and/or caring responsibilities. As earlier studies of other refugee groups have shown, Syrian and Iraqi adult

refugees are not being fully utilised in the Australian labour market. Very few had achieved continuity between their previous education and employment and current occupation.

The findings from this research also reiterate the experiences of the approximately 2,400 refugees who participated in the large contemporary Australian study of humanitarian settlement. As with the much larger group, there was significant uptake of English classes amongst Syrian and Iraqi refugees as many recognised little or limited English as a significant barrier to settlement. Due to the focus on improving English during the early stages of settlement, employment rates are low, yet many Syrian and Iraqi refugees have clear aspirations for further study and/or employment. The year one interviews show that some respondents were trialling alternative approaches, such as volunteering, to make valuable connections that may lead to employment; others could identify enablers, such as social networks, that were helping to facilitate this process. This reflects the existing literature pertaining to settlement as a process; with time and appropriate support refugees can successfully re-engage in education and employment pathways to achieve their sense of 'continuity'.

The findings of this paper, while incredibly useful for providing initial insights in the early years of settlement for these refugee cohorts, is based on a secondary analysis of the qualitative field notes and transcripts from the first year of data collection only. Most refugee families who participated in a first-year interview have subsequently participated in second- and third-year interviews which may provide a richer profile of their pre-arrival and current education and employment, as well as how their circumstances may have changed over the three-year period. These findings therefore reflect a moment in time and are presented with an element of caution given the existence of further data to enrich our understanding of the education and employment journeys of Syrian conflict refugees in Victoria.

For more information on the UTS-led *Settlement Outcomes of Refugee Families in Australia* study, on which this research brief is based, please access via the following link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/centre-business-and-social-innovation/research/projects/settlement-outcomes-refugee-families-australia>

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