

Three charts on: job prospects for refugees in Australia

Written by The Conversation

While refugees will always face major challenges in making the transition to employment, new [research](#) indicates their job prospects improve the longer they are in Australia.

But for those who do find work, it's not always in their chosen profession. Most are in low-skilled occupations.

The [Building a New Life in Australia study](#) is longitudinal, following the journey of almost 2,400 humanitarian migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, from their arrival in Australia or when granted a permanent visa. The participants come from 35 countries and speak close to 50 languages.

Some 89% have experienced significant trauma such as war and persecution. Most have arrived in Australia with little or no English, and many had their schooling interrupted.

The challenge of finding work

At the first interview for the study (three to six months after arrival for most), 6% of participants aged 18-64 were in paid employment. This had risen to 16% around one year later (during wave 2) and 23% two years later (wave 3). This is a four-fold increase between the first and third interviews.

Employment rates for men were higher than for women, with 36% of men in paid work at wave three compared to 8% of women. [Many women](#) take on family and caring obligations in the early years of settlement, which partly explains their lower rates of employment.

We found searching for a job can be challenging and time-consuming for many humanitarian migrants.

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Most participants had been in Australia for only a few months at the first interview. Over 80% of those job seekers found it hard to get a job. Consistent with previous research, humanitarian migrants' employment is expected to gradually increase as they spend more time in Australia.

Importantly, humanitarian migrants in Australia [seem to be entrepreneurs](#), showing [higher-than-average](#) engagement in small and medium-sized business.

One of the most challenging factors associated with employment is English proficiency. Not surprisingly, participants with good understanding of spoken English were much more likely to be employed.

However, there are [other barriers](#) to employment. These include lack of Australian experience and ongoing discrimination against certain ethnic groups in the labour market. For example, [research](#) has shown that African and Middle Eastern refugees had poorer employment outcomes than ex-Yugoslavs despite having similar levels of knowledge, skills and qualifications.

So [educating](#) employers on the skills of humanitarian migrants may be worthwhile.

What jobs can refugees get?

Even though more humanitarian migrants are finding jobs, certain areas remain a challenge. Our analysis shows some evidence of what is known as "[occupational skidding](#)".

That is when humanitarian migrants cannot obtain jobs in line with their skills and qualifications. Think of the stereotypical surgeon who ends up working as a taxi driver in their new country.

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The following chart shows a decline in the proportion of 18-64-year-olds working as managers and professionals, after arriving in Australia.

As you can see from the data, the most common occupations among humanitarian migrants were labouring (37% at wave 1, 36% at wave 2, and 42% at wave 3) followed by technicians/trades (29%, 26% and 22%).

This contrasts starkly with pre-migration occupations, where sizeable percentages were working in professional occupations (21%) and technicians/trades were most common (28%). Examples of professional occupations include engineers, teachers, doctors and lawyers.

There were almost as many managers as there were labourers prior to migration (11% and 16%). By the time of the third interview, no participants reported working in managerial positions.

Previous Australian [research](#) shows there are niches (cleaning, aged care, meat processing, taxi driving, security and building) where humanitarian migrants tend to find employment and that the process for recognising skills can be difficult in Australia.

Employment prospects improve over time

The longer humanitarian migrants spend in Australia, the more likely they are to find employment. Despite some improvements, many still struggle to obtain work in Australia commensurate with their previous skills and qualifications. This is also a problem in other resettlement countries such as [Canada](#) and [Sweden](#) .

The Australian government is piloting the [Careers Pathways Pilot for Humanitarian Entrants](#) and has recently launched a new [Humanitarian Settlement Program](#)

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We expect these programs will improve outcomes as employment helps to create new social and professional networks, improve English skills and can lead to financial independence.

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