

# REFUGEE WOMEN AND WORK: RESEARCH STUDY FINDINGS



## The study

This research study looked at pathways to paid employment for good health and well-being for women from refugee backgrounds. It was conducted in 2019-2021 in Adelaide by a team of researchers from Flinders University and the University of Adelaide.

WE INTERVIEWED A GROUP OF WOMEN FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS OVER THREE YEARS TO LEARN WHAT HELPED THEM TO FIND (AND KEEP) JOBS THAT WERE RIGHT FOR THEM.

We are very grateful to these women who gave their time and shared their experiences.

We also talked to service providers and employers from various industries and looked at existing data about refugee women's employment outcomes.

## Study findings

Analysis of existing data<sup>1</sup> showed that refugee women's employment rose over the time they were in Australia, but even after five years it was still a lot lower than refugee men's employment and much lower than the general Australian population. Employed women generally worked in jobs that were lower-skilled than before they arrived in Australia, not many worked full time, and they earned less money per week than refugee men.

For many refugee women, job opportunities in Australia were worse than they expected before arriving, it was hard to know how to look for a job in Australia, and problems finding work had made their life in Australia more difficult.

In the interviews we found some things that made finding work difficult for refugee women, but there were also things that helped.

<sup>1</sup> Data from the Building a New life In Australia (BNLA) study. The BNLA was conducted by the Department of Social Services, but the analysis presented here is ours alone.

## Barriers to work – what makes it hard?

- English language skills
- Difficulties getting qualifications and skills recognised
- Lack of local experience, educational qualifications, and referees
- Lack of jobs to fit with care responsibilities and study commitments (including English lessons)
- Discrimination and racism when looking for work and discrimination and exploitation within jobs
- Temporary visas
- Physical and mental health issues
- Problems accessing services – especially because of temporary visas
- Limitations of services that help women find employment

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*“I think the biggest challenge is trying to work out who’s likely to be willing and open to employing someone from a refugee background.”*

**Service provider**

*“I would like to be at least ready to go for work because in this moment, I don’t know anything, in terms of the language.”*

**Refugee woman –Latin America, unemployed**

*“Sometimes when I want to apply for a job when I see the time - the time doesn’t match with my kids, so I just leave it.”*

**Refugee woman - Africa, unemployed**

## Facilitators to work – what helps?

- Women really wanted to work and had a strong work ethic
- Social networks and friendships to find out about jobs and available support
- Volunteering opportunities, mentoring for women, and relationships between services and employers
- Individualised support that addressed all the important details in each woman’s life
- Services that continued supporting women (and their employers) once employed
- Employers who are committed to supporting refugee women

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*“I find that work will give me balance of my wellbeing to help me, my confidence that I’m a woman of the new society so I need to share my skills.”*

**Refugee woman - SE Asia, employed**

*“I like what they [refugee employment program] did because [the employees] came more ready than others coming from Seek[...] they come ready, prepared for the interview.”*

**Employer – Care sector**

*“The improvement over 15 months was remarkable, but you could tell that she was, she just worked hard to learn.”*

**Employer – retail**

## Recommendations

Bringing together all the information collected, the research team shared recommendations with government, service providers, and employers to improve supports for women from refugee backgrounds to find and keep work that is good for their health and wellbeing

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### FURTHER INFORMATION:

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