

Impact Case Study

Fairer Future for Refugee Migrants



Introduction

Settlement providers play a critical role in supporting the successful settlement of refugees and vulnerable migrants across Australia.

Employment is an important milestone in the settlement process while refugees rebuild their lives. Despite this, many refugees continue to face significant barriers to securing decent, stable, and meaningful employment.

In response, the *Fairer Future for Refugee Migrants: Enriching Employment Experiences* project was developed with the objective of providing insightful and pragmatic solutions to improving access to employment for refugee cohorts. This project brought together researchers from RMIT University: Dr Asanka Gunasekara, Dr Pradeepa Dahanayake, Dr June Tran and Dr Rojan Afrouz.

It is a collaborative effort between RMIT University and The Social Policy Group (SPG).



Inspired by the call to action at the 2024 National Settlement Community of Practice Forum in Canberra, this project was designed to strengthen the refugee employment sector by collectively identifying key barriers and developing practical solutions for decent and secure work.

The project sought to bridge the gap between high level policy ambitions and the lived, practical realities of the refugee employment journey.

The Research

The project hosted two workshops in August and November 2025 to identify barriers and develop practical solutions for decent and secure work for refugees.

The workshops had representation from over 25 institutions and were attended by more than 65 participants who were engaged in the refugee employment space, including:

- refugees
- settlement providers
- employers
- government representatives
- academics.

Background

For refugees and migrants, employment is considered a cornerstone of successful settlement, enabling financial independence, social inclusion and wellbeing. However, refugees often encounter multiple, barriers to employment, including non recognition of qualifications, limited local work experience, language challenges, discrimination, and insecure labour market conditions.

Settlement providers are frequently positioned as the first point of support in addressing these barriers, yet are required to operate within complex policy, funding and service delivery environments. While national and state based employment initiatives exist, settlement services are often constrained in their capacity to offer tailored, long term employment support.



Participants consistently noted that lackluster refugee employment outcomes do not arise from a lack of effort or goodwill from organisations or the community – but instead from the way the current system is structured.

Short-term funding cycles and KPIs focused on rapid job placement create misaligned incentives that prioritise speed over skill recognition, career progression, and long-term retention, often funnelling refugees into temporary or insecure work, also known as ‘survival jobs’.



Overview of impact

The two workshops allowed the project team to develop several recommendations to improve employment prospects for refugees.



- **Recommendation 1:** Reforms for Australia's settlement programs, including KPI realignment, Professional development for providers, Recognition of Prior Learning and, Soft skills and work ethics.
- **Recommendation 2:** Strengthening strategic collaborative partnerships, including: Research-led partnerships, trusted collaboration, settlement-sector advocacy, and co-designed language-to-employment pathways.
- **Recommendation 3:** Actions to address structural barriers, including: CEO sponsorship, paid internships, Recognition of Prior Learning, a HECS/HELP type loan scheme, entrepreneurship pathways, and post-training certification/document readiness.
- **Recommendation 4:** Better support for bicultural, bilingual, and lived-experience workers: staffing and leadership
- **Recommendation 5:** Employers: building capacity and improving engagement to achieve better refugee employment outcomes

These evidence-based insights contribute to national conversations on refugee settlement, workforce participation, and social inclusion. It underscores that achieving a fairer future for refugee migrants is not solely a moral imperative, but a shared economic and social opportunity.

"“Ultimately, the goal is to move beyond a “tick the box” KPI culture that prioritises immediate job placement over long-term career progression and professional dignity. ”

— Workshop participant

COSC Research Theme

Multicultural inclusion and organisations

This theme explores issues of inclusion and exclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse people, migrants, refugees and indigenous communities in workplaces and for organisations

Health, wellbeing and organisations

This theme explores how organisations can promote and improve health and wellbeing as well as organisational responses to health and social problems

Funding and partnerships



- Funded by RMIT's Strategic Impact Fund

Next Steps

The five key recommendations provide a foundation for impactful change.



Translating these insights into impact will require sustained commitment, shared accountability, and purposeful collaboration across public and private sectors, and the research community – so that refugee migrants are supported not merely to find work, but to build meaningful, dignified, and enduring careers in Australia.



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