



Employers' experiences and attitudes to hiring refugees

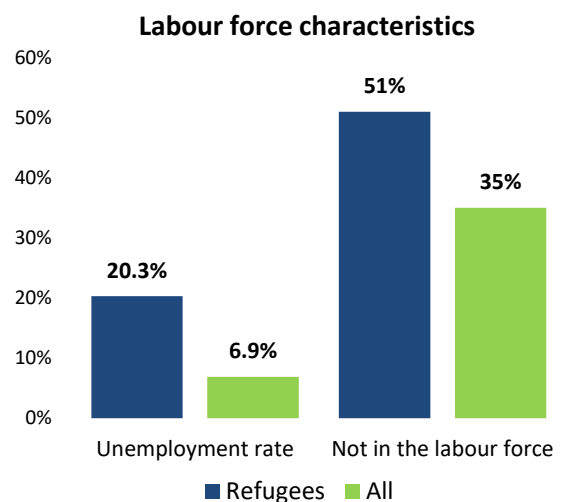
In 2017, the Department of Jobs and Small Business surveyed 3,365 employers about their experiences and attitudes to hiring refugee job seekers. All respondents provided input on their perceptions of hiring refugees, while 74 employers had actually hired a refugee. The survey was undertaken in 15 regions¹, predominantly in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, with large refugee populations. It was conducted as a short supplementary survey to the ongoing Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences.

Many refugees are unemployed or not in the labour force

Entering the labour market and finding employment is often very challenging for refugees.

Research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that the unemployment rate for migrants on humanitarian visas was 20.3 per cent in 2016. Further, 51 per cent of migrants on humanitarian visas were not in the labour force (that is, they were not working, nor actively looking for work).²

Refugee job seekers constituted 5.4 per cent of the jobactive caseload at 30 November 2018 of whom 69.1 per cent had spent more than a year looking for work (compared with 64.4 per cent for non-refugees).³



Tips for refugee job seekers

Develop good language and communication skills. Having good English language skills is essential for many jobs.

Develop and sell work related skills to employers. Having relevant qualifications and training and being able to identify and promote relevant skills will improve the chances of finding a job.

Use a wide range of job search methods. Approaching employers directly, volunteering or using community organisations can open up more opportunities.

Connect with the community. Developing links with others through school, study and community activities can improve networks and provide access to jobs that are not advertised.

Consider various industries and occupations. There is a wide range of opportunities across various industries and occupations.

Many employers reported positive outcomes after hiring a refugee, or had positive views on the benefits of hiring refugees

When discussing the benefits of hiring a refugee, employers most commonly (41 per cent) referred to the cultural diversity they would bring to the business. Some 35 per cent of employers also stated that refugees demonstrated enthusiasm and a strong work ethic. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of employers indicated that many refugees were likely to possess skill sets that would be beneficial to their business.

“They (refugees) are committed, have ambition to succeed, a desire to create a better life and a willingness to learn.”

Employer in Victoria in Accommodation and Food Services

Language proficiency and relevant qualifications are seen as the biggest barriers to employment

“Language barrier difficulties (could be an issue) as they have to be able to read and understand technical drawings in English. There are also safety concerns – they have to have considerable training to understand the safety side of things.”

Employer in Western Australia in Manufacturing

Employers were also asked about the challenges of hiring a refugee. About 55 per cent suggested that English proficiency could be an issue and that refugee job seekers should focus on improving their language and communication skills if they were not proficient. By contrast, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate 67 per cent of refugees thought their English proficiency was good to very good.⁴

“Qualifications would be the only problem; if they had the set skills and qualifications there would be no hesitation in employing a refugee.”

Employer in NSW in ‘Other Services’ (including car repair and maintenance and other machinery repair services)

Aside from language and communication skills, 20 per cent of employers suggested refugees could increase their prospects of employment by demonstrating that they have relevant qualifications, training, experience and skills in their job applications and at interview.

Employers highlighted local knowledge and work practises as potential barriers

Some 14 per cent of employers also indicated that their business relied on workers with local or industry specific knowledge.

Employers suggested that local references from previous employers, or even a general character reference, would help refugee job seekers demonstrate to employers that they were work ready and had the capabilities to do the work.

“A lack of Australian work experience and work references would be a challenge (to hiring refugees).”

Employer in NSW in Accommodation and Food Services

Using community networks and organisations and approaching employers directly can help refugees get a job

Employers reported a wide range of recruitment methods when hiring refugees.

The research revealed that in many cases, refugees were able to find work through their connections with the community. Around 1 in 4 employers hired refugees by “word of mouth”. That is, many employers either knew the refugee personally (e.g. through their children’s school or other community activity) or had the refugee referred to them by someone they knew (e.g. a friend or another employee).

Around 12 per cent of employers provided refugees with a job simply because they knocked on the door, showed initiative and an interest in the job or business. Being proactive and approaching the business directly demonstrates enthusiasm and commitment, which are qualities that are highly valued by employers.

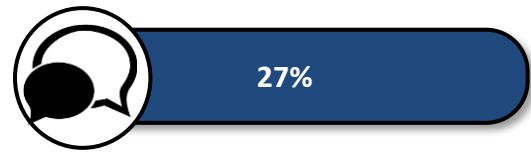
However, many refugees also gained employment through more formal methods, including:

- responding to a job advertisement on the internet or newspaper (22 per cent);
- through a recruitment agency (21 per cent);
- being referred to the business by an organisation, such as a church, TAFE or government department (8 per cent).

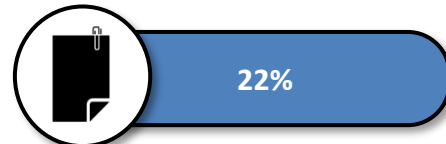
While not prevalent, volunteering and undertaking work experience with the business were also mentioned as reasons for refugees gaining employment.

The high rate of securing jobs through informal methods, such as word of mouth, highlights the importance of establishing wide social networks and emphasises the need for refugees to use a variety of job search methods to improve their chances of getting a job.

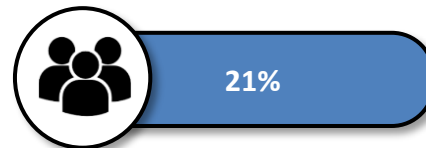
How refugees got jobs



Word of mouth



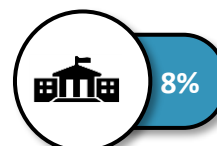
Responded to job advertisement



Recruitment agency



Directly approached by job seeker



Referred by organisation

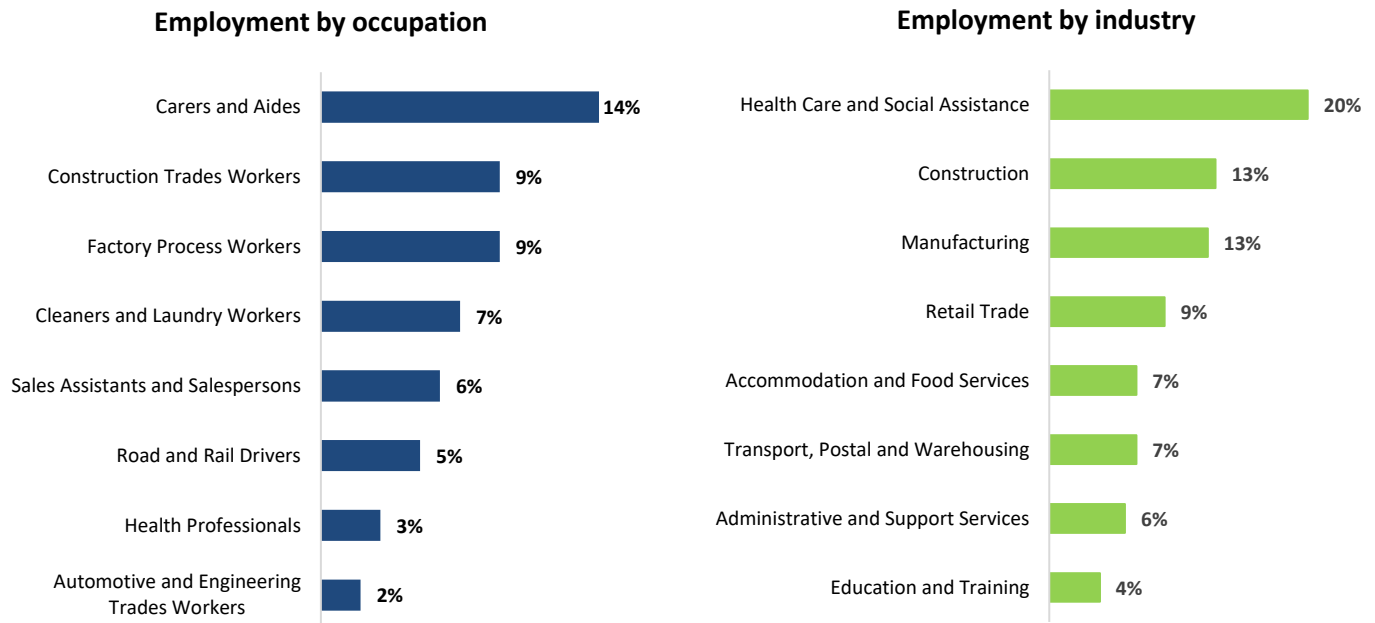


Volunteering/Work experience

Many find employment opportunities in lower skilled jobs in health care and social assistance, construction and manufacturing

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Migrant Outcomes dataset shows that migrants on humanitarian visas are typically hired as carers and aides and in lower skilled occupations such as factory process workers, cleaners and laundry workers. They are primarily employed in the services industries, such as Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Accommodation and Food Services. However, a substantial proportion are also employed in Construction and Manufacturing (each 13 per cent).

The main occupations and industries providing employment for migrants on humanitarian visas are shown in the charts below.



Source: ABS, Understanding Migrant Outcomes, Integrated Dataset, Australia, 2016

While this survey had a smaller sample and a regional focus, its findings were broadly consistent with the ABS data and refugees were employed in similar industries and occupations. This survey also found there were employment opportunities for refugees in the Education and Training industry and in labouring occupations.

Notes

¹Surveyed regions covered: QLD: Townsville, Gold Coast; NSW: Goulburn Murray, Newcastle, Wollongong, Murray Riverina, Mid North Coast, North Coast; VIC: Ballarat, Bendigo, Wimmera Mallee, South Coast Victoria; TAS: Launceston; SA: Murray South East; and WA: Great Southern-Wheatbelt.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Understanding Migrant Outcomes – Insights from the Australian Census and Migrants Integrated Dataset*, Australia, 2016.

³ Department of Jobs and Small Business, jobactive caseload data, correct at 30 November 2018. Note these job seekers have been registered with the Department of Human Services or jobactive for 12 months or more.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Understanding Migrant Outcomes*, Australia, 2016.

Additional resources

Australian Jobs publication:

jobs.gov.au/Australian-jobs-publication

Guide to Australian careers:

joboutlook.gov.au

Labour Market Information Portal:

lmip.gov.au