



Better beginnings. Better futures.

Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities

Fact Sheet 3: Youth Employment in New and Emerging Communities

Employment plays a foundational role in the successful settlement of new and emerging communities and contributes to fostering social cohesion, independence, individual self-esteem and wellbeing.

This factsheet aims to provide information on some of the key issues identified by newly-arrived youth as the main barriers to employment. The information it provides is based on community views presented to FECCA through community consultations and surveys.

Youth employment in context

Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 2013 reveals that the unemployment rate for youth between the ages of 15-24 years reached a concerning 12.4% percent in November 2013¹. This trend is substantiated by academic reports that have noted that humanitarian entrants face additional challenges in gaining and maintaining employment, and have significantly higher rates of unemployment compared with immigrants in other visa categories².

In addition to the challenges faced by all Australian youth in entering the labour market, such as lack of previous working experience and an overall reduction in the number of available entry-level jobs, young people from new and emerging community backgrounds face a series of additional intersectional disadvantages. These relate to their varying language proficiency and literacy levels, levels of educational attainment, incidence of pre-migration trauma, lack of local experience, lack of referees and often limited knowledge of the Australian workforce systems and cultures. In addition, they often face the challenge of having no networks to use in seeking out employment, and the potential to face discrimination, both through

recruitment and on-the-job, on the basis of their cultural, religious or linguistic backgrounds.

The common employment requirement in Australia, that most roles expect an individual to have prior experience in a designated or related area, also presents a significant challenge for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in finding work. A large number of young people arriving in Australia and looking for employment have had a disrupted educational history, or sometimes have received no formal education, which significantly impedes their ability to find work, particularly in an area of their choice.

These barriers are often exacerbated by structural gaps in employment service provision, lack of, or delays associated with, recognition of overseas qualifications, limited mentoring programs and adequate career pathways, as well as limited available government funding targeted at specifically improving employment outcomes for youth from new and emerging community backgrounds.

What are the issues?

In a recent youth employment survey undertaken by FECCA that attracted a significant proportion of responses from young people of humanitarian or refugee backgrounds, participants were asked for their views on the key barriers preventing them from finding sustainable employment. The most common responses included:

- limited language proficiency, including accent;
- lack of experience as a result of their age;
- lack of local experience in Australia;
- experiences of discrimination, prejudice or racism;

Better beginnings. Better futures.

Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities

- lack of Australian qualifications, or limited recognition of overseas qualifications;
- lack of networks to use in seeking out and securing a job;
- limited familiarity with the Australian workforce, employment systems and culture;
- lack of confidence and/or fear of non-acceptance;
- lack of tailored employment services;
- pressure from families to prioritise obtaining a tertiary qualification over finding short-term employment; and
- pre-migration experiences, including experiences of torture and trauma.

“ have tried so many times to find a job, but I haven’t been able to do so. It has been seven months that I have been submitting my resume to different places, such as fast food chains, cafes and shopping centres. I came to Australia by boat, I have no work experience in this country, nor do I have the connections to help me find a job.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Language barriers

Language barriers often present a particularly significant challenge for many young people from new and emerging community backgrounds, who come to Australia with very limited or no English skills. Many come from countries in Africa, the Middle East or Asia, where languages are less similar to English, and education systems diverge more from the structure and delivery of those in the Australian system. In addition, limited experience of, or lack of previous access to, education, as well as disrupted schooling experiences and low literacy levels make learning English a much more challenging process for many young people from new and emerging community backgrounds. This often required more time to learn functional English, as well as necessitating the provision of additional assistance and support to better enable language learning.

Gaps in language service delivery

Services and courses available for learning English do not always meet the specific needs of new arrivals. For

instance, the 510 hours of English language classes provided to new arrivals through the Adult Migrant English Program is often insufficient for many young refugees and humanitarian entrants, to bring their English to an adequate level to assist them in securing employment.

“Our people who come here, they’re confused. They’ve never been to school back home. They come here, they put him in a high level of English.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Making it work

Improvements to English language programs, to ensure that they are adequately designed to cater for a client’s specific needs are important for more effective service delivery. This includes a focus on more tailored service delivery, to meet the specific needs of an individual, for example, through the provision of additional, or fewer, hours of English classes depending on the client’s proficiency. Improvements can also be made in ensuring that industry-specific English language programs are more focused on strengthening employment prospects, and equipping young people from new and emerging community backgrounds with the requisite skills to attain employment more efficiently.

“I haven’t come across a migrant saying that the English courses they have taken in Australia have been very beneficial for them. Employing professional English teachers who speak the migrant’s language can really develop efficacy of these courses.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Lack of local experience, networks, knowledge and skills

Many young new immigrants arrive in Australia with no prior formal education, training or qualifications or with skills that are not recognised in Australia. Those fortunate enough to arrive with previous education, qualifications or skills often face difficulties in having them formally recognised, or face challenges on the

Better beginnings. Better futures.

Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities

basis of skills recognition being an often lengthy and costly process. Moreover, as many employers in Australia do not recognise overseas experience and typically require job candidates to demonstrate that they have local experience, new arrivals who have spent only a short period of time in Australia face significant challenges in securing employment.

“They ask if you have local experience, and it’s impossible when you’ve only just arrived in Australia!”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Due to these circumstances, youth from new and emerging community backgrounds face multiple disadvantages on the basis of non-recognition of their skills, and the obvious practical challenges in attaining local experience immediately after their arrival. Community feedback that FECCA has received has noted that even graduates of Australian tertiary education institutions from new and emerging community backgrounds find it difficult to enter the workforce when they finish their studies as a result of limited local experience and skills³.

“Even when we go to school here, even when you are re-trained here, even when you get your qualifications from here, they will still not give you the job.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

In addition, young people who have spent many years in situations of protracted displacement and have not had the opportunity to gain formal qualifications or experience are at risk of long term unemployment. Further to this, youth from new and emerging community backgrounds who have recently arrived in Australia generally lack established professional networks that they would have otherwise developed through their education, training or previous employment experience, and subsequently use to secure a job.

“For recent immigrants, it is very difficult to find a job as the competition is high and the job will often be given to the person with more Australian-based experience and qualifications.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Compounding the challenges that they face young people from new and emerging community backgrounds also typically lack familiarity with the Australian labour market, the culture and expectations around developing and submitting a resume, responding to selection criteria, gaining on-the-job experience and attaining appropriate qualifications. In addition, they often experience difficulties in navigating the complex workforce system and require additional assistance to develop an understanding of the workforce culture and, if appropriate, seek out career guidance.

Making it work

Feedback received by FECCA through community consultations has suggested that training programs attended by young students should include a practical experience component. Facilitating opportunities to gain such experience has been advocated as being extremely useful. For example, Australian university degree programs that include an industry experience component have been commended to the extent that they assist young CALD job-seekers in entering the workforce more rapidly after graduation.

Further to this, there is also a need to extend apprenticeship opportunities beyond the traditional manufacturing industries in order to meet both Australia’s workforce shortages, as well as the employment preferences of young people with regard to their interests and skills.

Community feedback received by the Refugee Council of Australia has highlighted the need for accessible apprenticeships, internships and volunteering programs for young refugees or humanitarian entrants that will enable them to acquire local experience and knowledge of the Australian workplace systems and culture. In this context, it is recommended that, as a national framework, an incentive scheme for employers could be developed to encourage and support young refugees and humanitarian entrants through providing traineeships and internships.

It is also very important to help employers understand the benefits of having a culturally diverse workforce for improving productivity, innovation and growth. To facilitate this, training programs could be initiated to assist employers in understanding the needs of CALD employees and subsequently provide tips on creating

Better beginnings. Better futures.

Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities

a welcoming, inclusive and culturally appropriate workplace, free from racism and discrimination.

Discrimination

“I have been applying for job and at few places I was called for interview but when they saw me in person they simply said that the place was taken.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Experiences of discrimination are often reported to FECCA in community consultations as a significant barrier to gaining employment. Young people from new and emerging community backgrounds are particularly affected in relation to this, as victims of discrimination on the basis of their age and their more distinctive appearance, names, accent and cultural or religious backgrounds. Anecdotal evidence, for example, reveals that young job seekers and employees from a Muslim background appear to be more prone to discriminatory treatment⁵. In addition, reports have also revealed that young people who are visibly racially or culturally diverse are more likely to be placed in low level skill groups, or receive unattractive jobs, regardless of their qualifications⁶.

“People really need to see us for what we bring, not just the way we look. I think most people will look at you and think you’re black, you’re not good enough. I want people to see what we bring and the qualifications that we have.”

“Sometimes when employers see your name on your resume, they straight away don’t reply. They just assume you’re inadequate.”

“A problem that often faces Afghans and Muslims is that most of the time, when they finish their education and look for a job, they experience discrimination. When someone sees their Muslim name, they won’t offer them a job.”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participants

“There is still some hesitation (racism?) with regard to employing people from overseas. People assume that I don’t speak and understand English well. Also, many are just not prepared to give me a go!”

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Making it work

Promoting the benefits of having a young, culturally diverse workforce through a nationwide campaign targeting employers is proposed as an effective way to eliminate experiences of racism and discrimination with regard to employment. This entails also encouraging employers to develop and implement workplace anti-discrimination policies and multicultural action plans.

Employment services

Some of the barriers faced by young people from new and emerging community backgrounds are exacerbated by gaps in the provision of employment services and programs that should address their needs and assist them to overcome some of the most common challenges that they face.

Responses received through FECCA’s Youth Employment survey with regard to the utility of employment services highlighted the following comments and suggestions:

- CALD-specific employment services should include a youth-specific stream;
- cultural diversity training should be provided to all employers and their staff;
- services should be developed to assist youth in attaining local experience, including paid internships;
- a CALD youth-specific career counsellor and job advertiser website should be developed;
- more grass-root level services for young people and services that will attend to and provide guidance on already-running community services such as youth groups should be provided; and
- mentoring programs should be developed and implemented.

Better beginnings. Better futures.

Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities

- **Gaps in employment service design and delivery**

Community feedback received by FECCA has shown that mainstream employment services fail to address the complex needs of young jobseekers from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds as they lack targeted and tailored programs or strategies to address their specific needs.

Community feedback has also revealed that often, employment service agencies provide inadequate support and/or fail to provide full information about the process of seeking employment. CALD clients have even reported feeling that the focus of such service providers appears to be 'getting the clients off the list' of job applicants, as opposed to acknowledging or addressing specific CALD concerns.

Other issues have been identified as:

- failure of service providers to understand the implications of clients coming from a refugee background, such as disruptive education, spending time in a refugee camp without having access to employment, trauma and other mental health issues;
- service providers lacking cultural competency and embracing a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores and fails to cater for the specific needs of newly arrived youth;
- very limited support from service providers in providing necessary assistance to prepare for job interviews, address selection criteria and prepare a resume.

"I think that service providers think, "alright, you're highly qualified, you've got a good background so you're just going to get in to the job market", but I'm from another culture, I'm from another world."

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Making it work

Developing more flexible mechanisms that allow client differences and needs to be identified on a case-by-case basis is suggested as an effective way through

which to improve the design and delivery of employment services for young people from new and emerging community backgrounds. In addition, it is proposed that introducing a refugee stream that will ensure that the specific needs of CALD job-seekers are catered for and addressed in a culturally responsive way, would also prove effective.

Mentoring programs

A recurring theme regarding employment issues that FECCA has identified through its engagement with young people from new and emerging community backgrounds, is the need for an established and targeted mentoring program. Due to the varied intersectional barriers they face, young people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds require additional support to identify and pursue education and employment opportunities and to navigate the Australian employment system.

Mentoring has been identified as an effective way through which to provide young job seekers with practical knowledge of workplace practices, expectations, culture and systems, and enable them to overcome some of the barriers that they face in gaining and retaining employment. Mentoring programs also help job seekers from CALD backgrounds to develop professional networks, boost their confidence in their skills, and improve their prospects in terms of finding jobs to match their qualifications.

"Services that provide greater support and specifically target CALD and new migrant youth with one-on-one counselling and advice would be very useful, as well as identifying employers who are prepared to Mentor. A mentor program would be fantastic."

- FECCA Community Consultation Participant

Career pathways

Students from new and emerging community backgrounds who complete tertiary education in Australia are often still unable to find employment in their field due to a lack of sustainable and appropriate career pathways. Lack of a career pathway has the subsequent effect of disengaging young people from education and training through creating a sense of

Better beginnings. Better futures.

Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities

hopelessness that there are no real possibilities of finding meaningful employment. It is therefore important that employment services provide mechanisms through which to offer pathways to jobs that are stable, facilitate career advancement, and match the skills or interests of the job-seeker.

Lack of funding for targeted programs

There is a need for more targeted funding for community organisations that run grass-root programs that are geared towards improving employment outcomes for young people from new and emerging community backgrounds.

The cessation of programs such as the Commonwealth Government's Multicultural Communities Employment Fund, whose core objective was to support innovative and sustainable projects that addressed unemployment issues for migrants and refugees, has been identified as particularly problematic in this context. The program's defunding has had a detrimental impact on community organisations' ability to assist young job seekers and the communities they represent.

Due to the complex and specific needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants, community organisations require additional funding to develop tailored and local employment assistance programs such as mentoring, English language classes or internships.

Making it work

Strategies to improve program delivery to assist young people from new and emerging community backgrounds in seeking employment include:

- directing funding to complement and enhance the broader and mainstream programs that already assist refugee and migrant job seekers; and
- replacing the Multicultural Communities Employment Fund with a similar initiative that encourages innovative, community-based initiatives and strategies to improve employment prospects.

References

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2013. '6202.0 - Labour Force Australia'.

² Graeme Hugo. 2011. 'Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second General Humanitarian Entrants'. Available at:

http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/19728/2011_The_Economic_Civic_and_Social_Contributions_of_1st_and_2nd_GenerationHumanitarian_entrants.pdf

³ FECCA Youth Employment Survey. 2013.

⁴ Booth, Alison, Andrew Leigh and Elena Varganova. 2011. 'Does Ethnic Discrimination vary Across Minority Groups? Evidence from a Field Experiment'. Available at:

<http://andrewleigh.org/pdf/AuditDiscrimination.pdf>

⁶ *Ibid.*



FECCA would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the members of FECCA's New and Emerging Communities Advisory Committee and its extended network in developing this series of factsheets.

For further information regarding the *Better Beginnings. Better Futures* factsheets, please contact the FECCA Office on (02) 6282 5755 or email admin@fecca.org.au.

