



MEDIA RELEASE

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Intentions alone not enough to succeed in refugee employment

New study makes recommendations for government and business

Australian businesses want to employ refugees but don't know where to start and require support, according to a new study from the University of Sydney Business School in partnership with Crescent Foundation.

The researchers worked with 35 employers with little to no experience hiring refugees, examining the role of various forms of incentives and support mechanisms available to them, and actions that could encourage employers to hire from this group of job candidates.

Lead author [Professor Betina Szkudlarek](#) said improving the hiring and retention of refugees would have significant financial and social benefits.

"Each year Australia welcomes thousands of refugees, most of whom find it difficult to obtain work befitting their experience and expertise.

"They want to work, and employers say they are willing to hire them, but our research found a substantial gap between employer intentions and actions. There is an opportunity for employers to play a vital role in improving employment outcomes of people from a refugee background, while expanding their talent pool, and an opportunity for government to remove some of the more significant barriers.

"With over 100 million forcibly displaced people in the world today, and the growing threats of war, conflict and natural disasters, successful resettlement of refugees has never been more important," Professor Szkudlarek said.

Employers lack awareness and time

All of the 35 interviewed employers involved in the study expressed some interest in hiring refugee talent, but just five did so over a six-month period.

Professor Szkudlarek said lack of time was a key issue, with most employers not finding any capacity to engage with activities beyond business as usual.

"There seems to exist a gap between awareness and action, where the motivation to recruit refugees rarely turns into hiring if the right resources are not immediately available and the recruitment process is not seamless," she said.

While there are grants and subsidies available to employers keen to work with refugees, few interviewees dedicated any time to explore those.

As one study participant put it: "The issue is companies are busy doing business. They don't have the time to navigate all this. They don't even have the time to look into those files, not even talking about navigating through all the different funds and applications and so on."

"This sends a clear message to the government that the system of incentives needs to change for it to be actually utilised by employers," said co-investigator Dr Eun Su Lee from Newcastle Business School.

The way forward

Crescent Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that has partnered with more than 40 Australian companies to create sustainable employment pathways for refugees. Its aim is to break the educational, cultural and employment barriers refugees face when beginning a new life in Australia.

Crescent Foundation, Managing Director, Professor Talal Yassine OAM said, "Education and awareness are critical in helping employers understand the skills and potential that refugees bring to the table, and in breaking down the barriers to their employment. Australian organisations need to revise recruitment processes and create inclusive guidelines to ensure that refugees and other diverse candidates are not overlooked for job opportunities."

"Collaboration between educational institutions, employers, and service providers can also help create a pipeline of skilled refugee candidates, and ease their entry into certain industries.

"Promoting diversity and supporting social enterprises can help address the mismatch in labour supply and demand, and provide opportunities for underrepresented job seekers, including refugees," Professor Yassine said.

How government can support change

The research team said there is an opportunity for the government to develop a country-wide standard for inclusive recruitment, which would help employers. There is also an opportunity for greater use of procurement targets across industries and states.

Previous research by Professor Szkudlarek showed that employers who hired refugees were subsequently keen to hire more people from a refugee background.

"This is a clear indication that hiring refugees is good for business as much as it is good for disadvantaged jobseekers who are eager to rebuild their lives in Australia," she said.

Dr Lee said that the current funding structure rewards service providers and settlement agencies for helping refugees gain employment, but does not recognise the importance of the work that goes into training a candidate to become job-ready.

"At times, the model leads to increased competition among various support organisations that all aim to work with the most employable refugees whose path to employment is most straightforward," Dr Lee said.

"Funding structures that acknowledge and reward organisations that provide training to refugee candidates prior to job placements could encourage partnerships between social enterprises that tend to have more business acumen, and settlement agencies that have direct contact with refugees. This, in turn, could lead to better collaboration and increased placement of refugees into sustainable jobs."

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