



Settlement
Council
of Australia

Submission: Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services

Settlement Council of Australia

March 2023

The Settlement Council of Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate, the Ngunnawal people. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which migrants and refugees settle across Australia, and on which our sector operates.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to our lands and waters.

About the Settlement Council of Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is the peak body representing the vast majority of settlement agencies across Australia providing direct services and support to people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Our members include organisations large and small, who are committed to the successful settlement of migrants and refugees across the country. Their services range from greeting new arrivals at the airport, through to assisting them to secure housing, learn English, make social connections, access services and find their first job. Australia's settlement services are recognised as being among the best in the world.

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List of acronyms

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
SCOA	Settlement Council of Australia
SETS	Settlement Engagement and Transition Support

Introduction

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the House Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services. SCOA represents settlement agencies across Australia for people of refugee and migrant background, many of which provide employment support and services.

Over the years, SCOA has published extensively on employment and employment services, appeared before Senate Inquiries into jobactive, and advocated for a more comprehensive approach that focuses on a job seeker's strengths, and the necessary steps to attain employment readiness as opposed to a strict, compliance-focused model.

SCOA's main recommendations in this submission include:

- 1. Employment support should be customised to a person's educational and employment journey, without a 'work-first' approach.**
- 2. The government should open a new tender round enabling settlement agencies to tender and adequately recognise and value their specialist expertise.**
- 3. More 'CALD' and 'Refugee' licenses should be issued in areas that have high caseloads of those cohorts.**

In this submission we offer policy and program recommendations to the employment services system based on extensive consultations within our network, and within the broader sector. Our submission is based on previous consultations conducted over the past 24 months, in which issues relating to employment were raised across the SCOA network. SCOA conducted the following targeted consultations for this submission:

- SCOA Network Meeting with over 40 attendees from across over 30 member organisations (Oct 2022)
- SCOA Network Meeting with over 55 attendees from across over 45 member organisations (Jan 2023)
- One-on-one consultations with the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), the National Employment Services Association (NESA), AMES Australia, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), and Settlement Services International (SSI) (Sept 2022)
- A meeting with SCOA members involved in delivering employment services (Jan 2023)
- Policy consultation with the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) and the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) (Feb 2023)
- Consultation with Workforce Australia participants (Feb 2023).

Workforce Australia replaced jobactive in 2022. According to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and refugees make up almost one quarter of the Workforce Australia jobseeker caseload, and there is an increasing concentration of both disadvantaged cohorts.¹ As Workforce Australia introduced

¹ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [DEWR]. *Public hearing 3 November 2022 – Department of Employment and Workplace Relations – presentation slides Caseload*. Available online at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Additional_Documents

'CALD'² and 'Refugee'³ licenses for specialist providers when it began, we will primarily discuss these cohorts. Though these cohorts have distinct needs, settlement agencies have a strong understanding of, and engagement with both cohorts, and are therefore highly capable of supporting their employment outcomes. These groups often face greater barriers to finding work in Australia, such as language and cultural barriers, lack of local work experience, and limited networks. Specialist licenses for these cohorts reflects Australia's commitment to helping the most disadvantaged migrants successfully integrate into Australian society and contribute to the country's economic growth and social cohesion.

Importance of employment for migrants and refugees

The significance of employment cannot be overstated when it comes to integration into society. It provides a sense of purpose and self-sufficiency, facilitates connections within the Australian community, and helps improve English language proficiency.⁴ SCOA has written extensively about employment and labour market participation of migrants and refugees.⁵

The headline focus on unemployment fails to give due recognition to the wasted capacity and potential poverty trap that is encompassed in underemployment.⁶

Unfortunately, underemployment is a widespread issue in Australia, with difficulty in finding a job that matches one's skill level being the primary obstacle to obtaining meaningful employment. This is particularly true for highly skilled and qualified migrants and refugees. To address this, employment services can make a big impact by helping these newcomers have their skills recognised, accessing internships and training programs, understanding available training options, and ultimately securing employment that aligns with their qualifications. SCOA believes settlement services are well placed to provide this assistance.

SCOA's vision

SCOA believes Australia's employment services should make bold changes. We see the objective of the employment services system as not only increasing job readiness and encouraging workforce participation but also aligning a person's aspirations and needs with meaningful employment. Maximising employment potential and its associated social and economic benefits for both the newcomer and Australia as a whole can be achieved through effective employment support. However, this requires a fundamental shift in the approach of most current employment services. These services must cater not only to the unemployed, but also to individuals currently in low-skilled jobs seeking career advancement. Additionally, services should be available to all, including skilled migrants, their family members, temporary migrants

² Workforce Australia defines CALD as: Indicates that the participant has disclosed that they were not born in any of the following countries: Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, The United States of America, South Africa. If the participant was born in any other country outside of the list above, they are recorded as CALD. This information is derived based on Services Australia Registration data.

³ Workforce Australia defines a 'Refugee' as: Indicates the participant disclosed that they were granted a Refugee or Humanitarian Visa by the Australian Government. This information is derived from the participant's response to the JSS's Descent/Origin section.

⁴ Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166-191. Available online at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262>

⁵ SCOA. (2022). *Submission: Employment White Paper*. Available online at: <https://scoa.org.au/submission-employment-white-paper>; SCOA. (2022). *Submission: A migration system for Australia's future*. Available online at: https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/SCOA_Migration-Program-Review-Paper.pdf

⁶ National Employment Services Association [NESA]. (2022). *Reach Beyond the Headlines: Strengthening Australia's Employment Assistance*. Available online at: <https://nesa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NESA-Reach-Beyond-the-Headlines-20.05.2022.pdf>

and students facing challenges in the job market, and not limited to those receiving welfare payments.

For those with prior skills and professional backgrounds, the focus should not be on securing any job, nor should it involve extended periods of unemployment waiting for a job that aligns with their professional background. Instead, effective support should aim to chart a pathway back into the profession of choice and provide assistance as the individual navigates this journey. There needs to be greater investment to build the capacity of settlement providers to guide migrants and refugees through the process to have their overseas qualifications recognised and return to practice in their profession. As it stands, the system is too complex for many to navigate on their own, and settlement providers are not resourced to provide the necessary guidance. In addition, even for those with limited prior qualifications and experience, an approach that prioritises work above all else is still not suitable. Compelling individuals to enter the workforce does not result in lasting benefits for either job seekers or employers.

A 2019 government review into employment outcomes for refugees argued that to improve economic participation the government should use specialist place-based employment services to “work with refugees to develop and implement a personal plan based on their strengths and aspirations and labour market opportunities.”⁷ SCOA believes positive and individualised engagement through a skills-building journey can bring about the best results. The worry at the moment amongst some Workforce Australia providers we spoke with is that there will be sanctions on the organisations who provide this assistance sensitively and thoroughly – not fast.

Recommendation 1

Employment support should be customised to a person’s educational and employment journey, without a ‘work-first’ approach.

Settlement services should deliver employment services

A 2019 independent review into employment and settlement outcomes for refugees provided advice to government on how to better support refugees into employment.⁸ The review suggested that mainstream employment services are not equipped to provide the specialised support that refugees require. Generalist employment providers often lack cultural understanding, have insufficient language support, may not have the resources or capacity to effectively match refugees with suitable employment opportunities, which can result in a mismatch between skills and job requirements. Providers with prior experience in assisting refugees and a targeted approach may be better suited to help them. This will also allow for a more localised approach to employment services and ensure that services are grounded in communities that have local level labour market knowledge. Localised and established settlement services have the advantage of having a footprint of offices, familiar organisations and better access to interpreters, all of which will contribute to better outcomes. The distribution of service providers should be realigned towards locally based settlement services that are integrated into and responsible to the needs of the local community or specific groups. Many

⁷ Shergold, P., Benson, K., & Piper, M. (2019). *Investing in refugees, investing in Australia. The findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia*. Available online at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>

⁸ Ibid

Workforce Australia providers are large state or national organisations which can offer valuable resources, however, it is important to maintain localised services to ensure that clients can access familiar services without having to travel long distances. For refugees or other vulnerable populations, transportation can be a significant barrier to accessing services. Therefore, exploring options such as partnerships with local organisations can increase accessibility and ensure that clients receive the support they need.

Settlement agencies possess specialised and extensive knowledge regarding the diverse and unique needs of refugee and migrant job seekers, and have significant experience in supporting these groups in finding employment. Notably, the barriers to employment for migrants and refugees often relate to settlement needs, such as English language learning, navigating housing, and addressing health issues. Settlement service providers are well-positioned to address these barriers across all settlement needs, and leveraging their expertise would be beneficial for refugee and migrant jobseekers, as well as for employment outcomes more broadly. However, to effectively harness this expertise, it is crucial that the tender process remains accessible to small and medium-sized service providers, who comprise the majority of settlement service providers. Moreover, the tender process should prioritise the evaluation of specialised knowledge in delivering services to the target cohort, ensuring that settlement service providers can effectively compete in the tender process. To this end, SCOA is calling for the opening of a new tender round for the appointment of more settlement service providers to the Workforce Australia panel.

Throughout SCOA's network there are many examples of settlement agencies delivering employment programs that generate exceptional employment outcomes. We believe Workforce Australia providers should be a hub for referring to these programs and other similar initiatives. One successful program, run by some of SCOA's member organisations, is the Diverse Queensland Workforce program. The program assists migrants, refugees people seeking asylum and international students into employment independently of the time they have been in Australia. The program focuses on understanding each participant's work experiences and skills and create career goals to be able to achieve employment that aligns with their career aspirations. We hear from our Queensland members delivering the program that it has been highly successful in supporting people who would probably be falling through the cracks due to being disqualified from other settlement support due to length of time in Australia or visa category. The program, funded by the Queensland Government, had more than 80% of participants being able to find employment in their desired fields of work.

Another program is the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP) delivered by Settlement Services International (SSI) which is a voluntary initiative that has proven to be highly successful.

“The successful employment outcomes are due to RESP’s unique service model, which acknowledges that humanitarian migrants are not a homogenous group but have varying levels of education and skills.”⁹

Almost 30% of RESP participants have been able to secure sustainable employment through this program.¹⁰ RESP's success in achieving employment outcomes can be attributed to its unique service model, which recognises the diverse education and skill levels of humanitarian entrants.

⁹ Settlement Services International [SSI]. (2022). *NSW government extends employment support program for refugees*. Available online at: <https://www.ssi.org.au/news/media-releases/2928-nsw-government-extends-employment-support-program-for-refugees>

¹⁰ Ibid.

The program aims to counteract the phenomenon of 'occupational skidding' where refugees struggle to find work that matches their qualifications, by avoiding a standardised approach. Instead, RESP develops customised employment pathways that are tailored to each individual's needs and designed for long-term success.

Recommendation 2

The government should open a new tender round enabling settlement agencies to tender and adequately recognise and value their specialist expertise.

Collaboration and referral systems

SCOA has heard from our members that there have been detrimental impacts on migrant and refugee jobseekers due to a lack of collaboration between employment service providers and settlement services. Having strong collaborative relationships with employment services, allows for better outcomes for clients including referrals to AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) classes, training and so on. SCOA has heard outcomes and referrals are highly dependent on individual relationships and the extent to which employment service providers prioritise tailoring their services to migrants and refugees. Improving referral systems would ensure that people's needs are being met effectively. This could involve regular communication and feedback between service providers to ensure that referrals are working effectively, and clients are receiving the support they need. SCOA also understands there has been a considerable reshuffle of local providers in some employment regions, meaning jobseekers are having to re-introduce and re-explain themselves and their experiences. There is also very little uniformity across providers, which is to be expected, but some clients are receiving good service, while others are getting very little support. SCOA has heard there is limited flexibility in current arrangements with some clients being asked to take time off TAFE, or miss their English language appointments (AMEP) to attend their Workforce Australia appointments. Having connections and rapport between Workforce Australia providers and other facets of the settlement system (i.e., TAFE, AMEP etc.) is absolutely paramount to ensure there is understanding across the board.

We've got all our connections gone. Our staff knew who and where to refer and all that fabric has been destroyed. – SCOA Member

Having one-on-one employment support that is culturally appropriate and aligns with a person's goal can play a critical role in helping refugees and people from CALD backgrounds achieve their employment and life goals. For many refugees, finding employment and settling into a new country can be an overwhelming and daunting task. Employment consultation can provide refugees with guidance on how to navigate the job market, including job search strategies and resume building, can help refugees develop personal and professional skills, build confidence, and set achievable goals. By providing training and resources to employment services providers, they can take on a life coach type role and make smart referrals, ensuring refugees have access to the support they need to succeed.

Recommendation 3

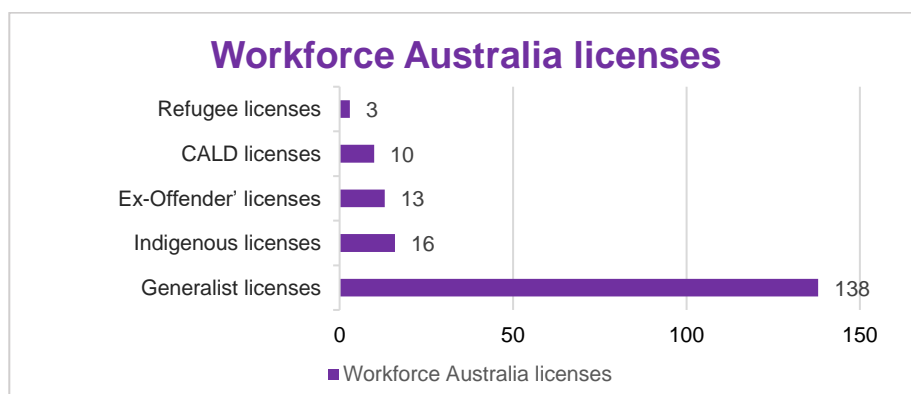
Collaboration with knowledgeable referrals should be a requirement in order to ensure CALD and Refugee job seekers have their needs addressed.

Issue more CALD and Refugee specialist licenses

SCOA strongly supports the addition of specialist services under the new employment model. In particular, SCOA commends the establishment of specialist licenses, which recognises the needs of those who may require specialist support, such as refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse job seekers. Rather than relying on generalist providers with limited cultural competency and insufficient multicultural service networks, having dedicated specialist services that fully understand the specific requirements of refugee and migrant job seekers is the preferred approach. This will ensure the provision of adequate employment support and the attainment of positive employment outcomes. However, in the last tender round, only 3 ‘Refugee’ licenses and ten (10) ‘CALD’ licenses were issued across Australia, while 138 are ‘Generalist’ licenses, 16 are ‘Indigenous’, 13 are ‘Ex-Offender’ specialist licenses.¹¹

SCOA believes there should be more ‘Refugee’ and ‘CALD’ licenses due to almost one quarter of Workforce Australia’s caseload being people from CALD and refugee backgrounds. Out of 180 licenses, at least 45 should be CALD or Refugee if they were to reflect the caseload size of these cohorts, and provide the tailored services required. A 2019 government review into employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia argued “the current mainstream employment services are not best placed to provide the specialised support that refugees need. We remain unconvinced that even with a new contractual model for jobactive that the generalist employment network could deliver results as effectively as providers with experience of refugees and a targeted approach to helping them.”¹² Having less ‘Generalist’ licenses and more ‘Refugee’ or ‘CALD’ licenses requires no additional cost to government, it is just a redistribution of licenses.

Table 1: Workforce Australia license types



¹¹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE]. *Successful Organisations for Workforce Australia Services (previously referred to as Enhanced Services – Generalist and Specialist)*. Available online at:

<https://tenders.employment.gov.au/tenders/b0bb0fc3-23ae-ec11-983f-002248d3b28f#LICENSES>

¹² Shergold, P., Benson, K., & Piper, M. (2019). *Investing in refugees, investing in Australia. The findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia*. Available online at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>

Recommendation 4

Issue more CALD and Refugee specialist licenses.

Issue more licenses in areas where it is most needed

Among the three (3) 'Refugee' licenses issued across Australia – all are in Melbourne. Ten (10) 'CALD' licenses were issued across Australia – one (1) in Sydney Greater West, one (1) in Sydney North and West, one (1) in Inner Metropolitan Melbourne, one (1) in North Eastern Melbourne, one (1) in North Western Melbourne, one (1) in South Eastern Melbourne and Peninsula, one (1) in Western Melbourne, one (1) in the Gold Coast, one (1) in Wivenhoe and one (1) in Adelaide North.¹³ Table 2 below showcases that despite having the highest caseload of CALD and refugee jobseekers in Australia, Sydney South-West was not issued any 'Refugee' or 'CALD' licenses.¹⁴ Only two SCOA members have Workforce Australia licenses, while another two are on the Workforce Australia Services national panel but do not hold licenses.

Overwhelmingly SCOA has heard from its members that they are confused about the lack of specialist 'Refugee' and 'CALD' licenses, and are not sure why specialist licenses were not granted in areas of high density caseloads. There are settlement organisations on the Workforce Australia national panel who have considerable experience and are grounded in local communities with demonstrated expertise and capacity, who were not granted Workforce Australia specialist licenses. SCOA believes established organisations with proven track records of positive employment outcomes should be issued specialist licenses.

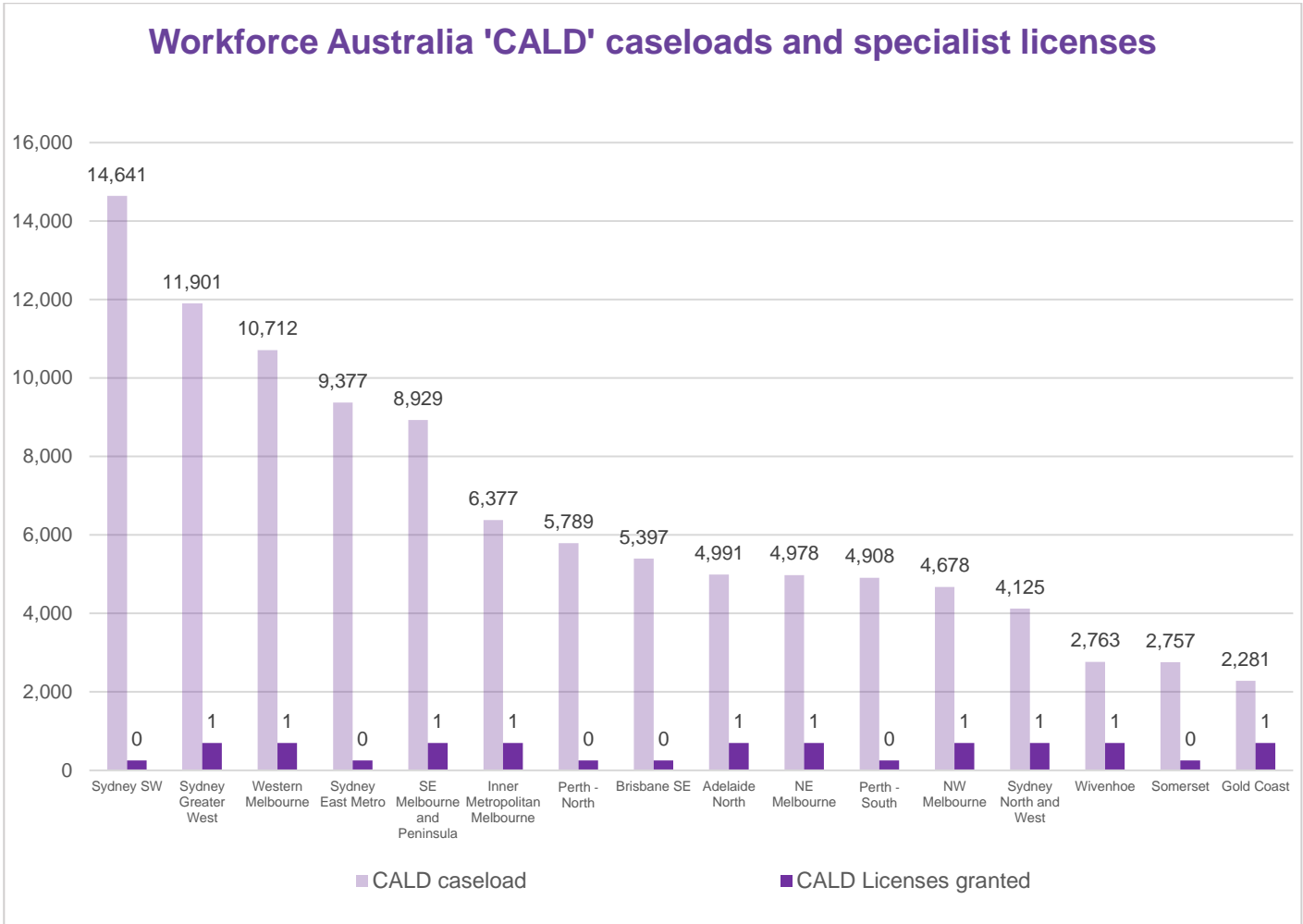
As you can see from the tables below, despite having 18,919 refugee/CALD jobseekers in Southwest Sydney, there are no 'Refugee' or 'CALD' licenses in that region. Other areas of Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth with high caseloads also do not have 'Refugee' or 'CALD' licenses.

¹³ Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE]. *Successful Organisations for Workforce Australia Services (previously referred to as Enhanced Services – Generalist and Specialist)*. Available online at:

<https://tenders.employment.gov.au/tenders/b0bb0fc3-23ae-ec11-983f-002248d3b28f#LICENSES>

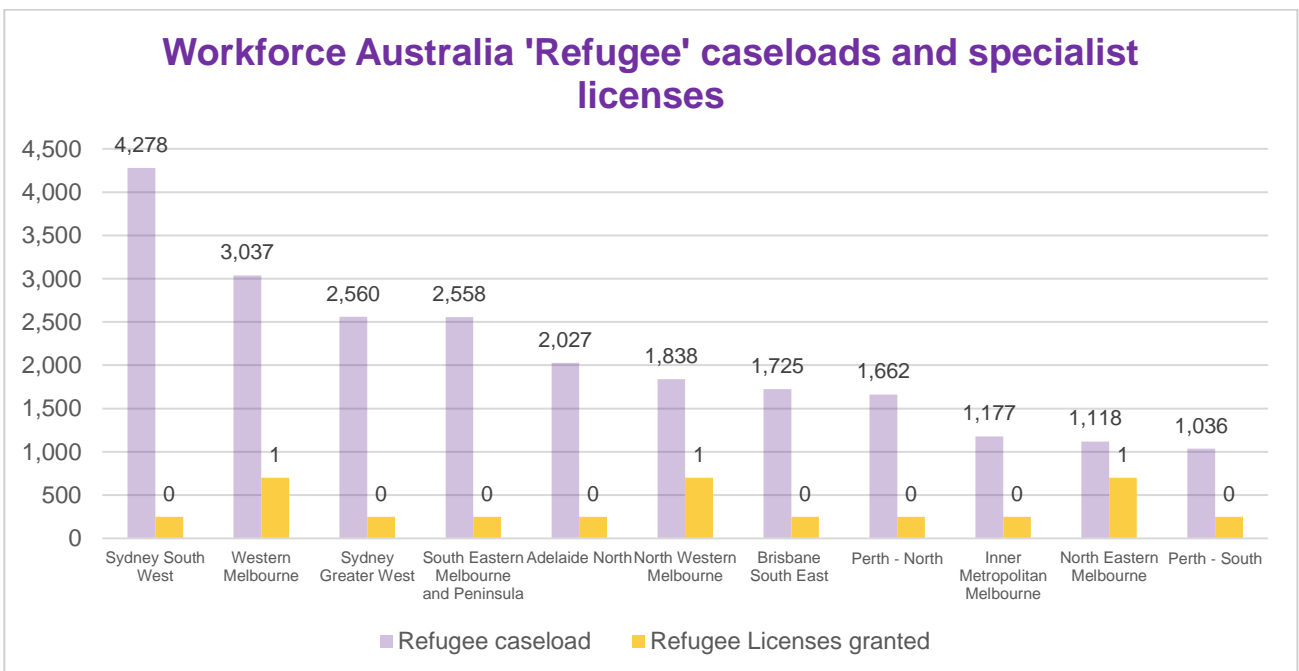
¹⁴ Settlement Services International [SSI]. (4 August 2022). *Workforce Australia review cannot overlook migrant and refugee jobseekers again*. Available online at: <https://www.ssi.org.au/news/media-releases/2929-workforce-australia-review-cannot-overlook-migrant-and-refugee-jobseekers-again>

Table 2: Workforce Australia specialist 'CALD' licenses contrasted with caseloads



Source: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations- Workforce Australia Cohort by Employment Regions updated Caseload data tables

Table 3: Workforce Australia specialist 'Refugee' licenses contrasted with caseloads



Source: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations- Workforce Australia Cohort by Employment Regions updated Caseload data tables

Recommendation 5

Ensure areas that have high caseloads of CALD and refugee jobseekers have specialist CALD and refugee services.

Capacity building of generalist providers

SCOA recommends that if Workforce Australia specialist 'Refugee' or 'CALD' licenses are not granted in areas where they are needed, capacity building of generalist providers should be considered. This means that even if specialist licenses are not available, generalist providers can still be trained and equipped with the necessary skills to effectively provide support services to refugees and migrants from CALD backgrounds. By investing in capacity building programs, generalist providers can gain the necessary knowledge and experience to work with CALD communities, and develop culturally appropriate approaches that take into account the unique needs and challenges of these communities.

Recommendation 6

If Workforce Australia specialist 'Refugee' or 'CALD' licenses are not granted in areas where they are needed, capacity building of generalist providers should be considered.

Insights from those with lived experience of Workforce Australia

Feedback from Workforce Australia clients, that has been fed through our network, shows a very mixed experience. Some have found Workforce Australia employment providers helpful, however many have found changing from jobactive to Workforce Australia providers difficult, with some voicing that their previous employment provider had given more support. SCOA has heard from service providers there was an incredible amount of chaos when the new Workforce Australia providers were switched from old providers with clients confused about who to go to. Clients have said there are a lot of changes between what their old provider used to do, and what their new provider does (i.e., come into appointments rather than do over the phone, travel further distances).

“I found the change very difficult. The previous employment provider had provided more support.” – Jobseeker

Some clients have successfully found employment in their field of interest, while others have found Workforce Australia employment services offered them little assistance. We have also heard from those using Workforce Australia they have been threatened with having their payments cut off if they do not find a job. Experiences seem to be extremely varied from one appointment to another, with one staff member being helpful and another not as much. One client said their employment provider had changed when the program switched from jobactive to Workforce Australia, and the outcome was much less support. The client said the previous service provider offered much more support by sharing more job vacancies, calling frequently and checking in and assisting with CV and cover letters. They said despite asking for translator/interpreter work, their current Workforce Australia provider had found them a job at

their current job (a butcher). Many clients described their Workforce Australia provider as 'useless' and ended up finding jobs themselves.

“Our clients engaged with employment services...the feedback is quite negative.” – SCOA Member

Many CALD/refugee clients access Workforce Australia in person, rather than through digital services. However, we have heard from some that it is hard to opt-out of digital services, in favour of face-to-face services. This process needs to be made easier to ensure that CALD/refugee clients can access services in a way that is culturally appropriate and meets their needs. We have heard the Workforce Australia is currently not designed with multilingual needs at all, and regardless of their situation everyone who is part of the program is required to use the web page or mobile app to report their mutual obligation requirements. This presents a significant challenge for individuals with limited English proficiency, who may struggle to navigate the digital platforms effectively. This highlights the need for more comprehensive language support and accessibility measures to ensure that all participants in these programs have equal access to the resources they need to succeed and are not penalised if they cannot understand their mutual obligation requirements.

In addition, SCOA has heard examples of people having to travel quite far distances to their new Workforce Australia provider. Local and accessible services are extremely important as it is unrealistic to expect people to travel long distances for assistance. Building relationships and providing effective help requires proximity, and if the closest service is too far away, more local options are needed.

Recommendation 7

Workforce Australia needs to be more accessible and multilingual, and opting out of digital services needs to be easier.

Mutual obligations

Mutual obligations are contentious and complex policies. Under Workforce Australia, those receiving income support payments must have a Job Plan that outlines the actions committed to in order to fulfill mutual obligations (i.e., actively seeking employment, undertaking training, education). Individuals should be afforded greater autonomy and authority when it comes to their Job Plans, and only be obligated to partake in programs that enhance their likelihood of employment.

The emphasis on compliance and meeting certain requirements may not address the underlying issues that prevent some jobseekers from finding and keeping employment such as a lack of appropriate skills, limited work experience, or mental health issues, which require more individualised and targeted support than what is provided through mutual obligations. Financial penalties can lead to significant hardship for vulnerable jobseekers who are already experiencing financial stress. That is why we emphasise a flexible approach, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, which may place jobseekers in activities, training programs, or jobs that are not relevant to their interests, leading them to disengage.

We have had clients who have been told they would lose payments during that period when they were not meant to be getting any punitive measures. – SCOA Member

SCOA welcomes the government's "clean slate" policy so people who accrued penalties or demerits under the old system are able to start fresh.¹⁵ SCOA believes there should be leniency in penalties for not meeting tasks/requirements to receive income support payments. The government should remove any of the most punitive forms of mutual obligation, such as suspensions of payments or threats of suspension and instead adopt more constructive forms of communication. Providers should continue to be flexible with jobseekers under Workforce Australia. SCOA has concerns about the way mutual obligations currently work, with the support person also being the punisher. Workforce Australia providers should not also be responsible for punishing jobseekers for non-compliance.

"We don't like having that capability. You cant be the supporter and the sanctioner." – Workforce Australia provider

SCOA has found that voluntary employment programs can have very good outcomes for refugee and CALD jobseekers due to their flexibility. Programs such as the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP) and the Jobs Victoria Employment Service (JVES) are voluntary with no mutual obligation requirements, and they have had very positive results. Truly being a support program, without the threat of punishment, is an effective way to assist jobseekers in their search for employment. When jobseekers feel supported rather than threatened, they are more likely to engage with the program and take positive steps towards finding work. The absence of punitive measures can also reduce the fear and anxiety that jobseekers may experience when engaging with the program, leading to a more positive and supportive environment. By creating a supportive environment that focuses on the needs of the jobseeker, rather than just compliance with program requirements, support programs can help individuals to build their confidence, skills, and experience, making them more competitive in the job market. Ultimately, this can lead to more successful employment outcomes, benefitting both the jobseeker and the wider community.

Recommendation 8

There should be flexibility and leniency in mutual obligation requirements, with financial penalties being a last resort. The employment service providers should not be the ones to penalise jobseekers if their purpose is to build a positive relationship.

Conclusion

SCOA's recommendations are aimed at improving the employment support system for CALD and refugee job seekers. A 2017 Centre for Policy Development report found if there was a 25% improvement in the labour market results for a single year's intake of refugees (i.e., more refugees into more jobs quickly), these refugees would be \$465 million better off over the next

¹⁵ Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, The Hon Tony Burke MP Media Release. (2 August 2022). *Workforce Australia Select Committee*. Available online at: <https://ministers.dewr.gov.au/burke/workforce-australia-select-committee>

decade, and the Australian government would save \$175 million in budgetary savings.¹⁶ Migrants and refugees want to work – but they want meaningful employment that aligns with their skills and career goals.

Getting more refugees into jobs faster would be a triple-win for Australia: it would benefit vulnerable people, boost the budget and improve social cohesion.¹⁷

The current model is not working. Without tailored support from experienced settlement service providers, migrants and refugees will be left behind without the assistance they need to lead them on a successful career path. Workforce Australia needs to grant more ‘Refugee’ and ‘CALD’ licenses to experienced settlement service providers in areas with high caseloads. Workforce Australia needs to be more accessible, multilingual and client centred. The mutual obligation system needs to be revised to ensure that it is more person-centred and less punitive. All groups should have equal access to employment services and the government and employment services should work together to achieve the big picture objective of increasing job readiness, reducing inequity, and encouraging workforce participation.

¹⁶ Centre for Policy Development [CPD]. (2017). *Settling Better: Reforming refugee employment and settlement services*. Available online at: <https://cpd.org.au/2017/02/settlingbetter/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Employment support should be customised to a person's educational and employment journey, without a 'work-first' approach.

Recommendation 2: The government should open a new tender round enabling settlement agencies to tender and adequately recognise and value their specialist expertise.

Recommendation 3: Collaboration with knowledgeable referrals should be a requirement in order to ensure CALD and Refugee job seekers have their needs addressed.

Recommendation 4: Issue more CALD and Refugee specialist licenses.

Recommendation 5: Ensure areas that have high caseloads of CALD and refugee jobseekers have specialist CALD and refugee services.

Recommendation 6: If Workforce Australia specialist 'Refugee' or 'CALD' licenses are not granted in areas where they are needed, capacity building of generalist providers should be considered.

Recommendation 7: Workforce Australia needs to be more accessible and multilingual, and opting out of digital services needs to be easier.

Recommendation 8: There should be flexibility and leniency in mutual obligation requirements, with financial penalties being a last resort. The employment service providers should not be the ones to penalise jobseekers if their purpose is to build a positive relationship.

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