

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT SNAPSHOT 2018: Wollongong, NSW



(Photo: Dimitria Groutsis, 2017)

In 2017 the number of refugees arriving in Australia effectively doubled the intake of previous decades. This is because most of the special one-off intake of 12,000 Syrian Conflict refugees that was announced by Prime Minister Abbott in 2015 in fact arrived in 2017. In addition, the annual intake of humanitarian entrants was increased to 16,250 in 2017-18. Most of these newly-arrived refugee families settled in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Queensland.

As part of a study on Settlement Outcomes of Refugee Families in Australia, funded by the Australian Research Council, and led by Professor Jock Collins (University of Technology Sydney), Professor Carol Reid (Western Sydney University), and Associate Professor Dimitria Groutsis (University of Sydney), the first of three years of data collection has been completed. We interviewed and surveyed newly arrived refugee families from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq and in four metropolitan and two regional sites in New South Wales: Wollongong and Coffs Harbour in regional NSW; and Auburn, Parramatta, Liverpool, and Fairfield in metropolitan Western Sydney.

The report provides a snapshot of the findings of our fieldwork in the Wollongong area. We acknowledge the critical support of two prominent members of the Wollongong community, Dr Mehmet Aslan, Principal of Amity College Illawarra, and Mr Burhan Zangana, who connected us with and engaged refugee families as participants, as well as conducting interviews with them. Mr Zangana, a former refugee himself, identified **10 families, 7 Syrian and 3 Iraqi**, who became participants in Wollongong: a location identified as a settlement zone for refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi conflict. In 2018, these families were interviewed, mainly in their homes, and they provided valuable insights into their settlement experiences. In these Wollongong families, **13 adults (8 Syrian; 5 Iraqi) and 6 young people (aged 8 to 23)** participated in interviews and completed an accompanying online survey. The survey is informed by the national BNLA longitudinal survey of refugees in Australia in order to ensure benchmarking with the survey instrument used for the purposes of this study. This snapshot identifies some of the respondent's hopes, opinions and concerns about their settlement.

Broad themes emerging from the interviews with the Wollongong family members included:

- Coming to a new life in Australia
- English language skills
- Access to and participation in employment
- The local neighbourhood
- Bringing up children / education
- Social integration / belonging
- Hope for the future / family reunion

Starting a new life in a new land is difficult. Although most families were not given a choice of settlement country, all of the Wollongong family members were grateful and happy to be in Australia.

After being accepted by UNHCR, they contacted us, they asked us, 'do you want to go to Australia?' I said, 'why not?' That's what I said. There were no other options, just Australia. (Syrian male, 2018)

I accepted Australia; it was referred to us from the organisation. Besides having my mother and two of my siblings in America, but I wanted to come to Australia, I liked to come to Australia. There were no options. (Iraqi female, 2018)

When we were under UNHCR protection, we have been given three choices: Canada, Sweden and Australia. But we have chosen Australia. I have chosen Australia because I have heard from other refugee families that Australia is a good country and has a nice weather. (Syrian female, 2018)

The families had been happy back in their home country, running a business, working in a job, or attending school or university; but were forced to flee political instability and turmoil.

Before I left Aleppo, the life was all good – until the war started. We were surrounded by family members, relatives and neighbours. (Syrian female, 2018)

I had my own business since 1980. I had a panel beating shop, and I was employing other people, and I was happy. I was an expert of accidents, as well – car accidents. (Syrian female, 2018)

We lived in Mosul. I think it's called Nineveh. That's right, yeah. It's an ancient city. The latest thing with ISIS actually happened in Nineveh. We were not happy. (Iraqi female, 2018)

We lived in the city, Raqqa. It was good before the war but after that it was not liveable. We couldn't live there anymore. I was working. I was working as a tiler. (Syrian male, 2018)

When ISIS came, they took over Mosul... Before that they were kidnapping and asking for ransom, but when ISIS came, it became even worse. There were no jobs, it was becoming worse and worse, and it wasn't safe for us to stay, so what we did, we went to northern Iraq, to the Kurdish side. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Before the war, it was really nice. We didn't have any problem. I used to go to university, no issues. But it changed. Everything changed. So, I was about to complete my university degree. I had three units to complete. I completed two of the units in different state, when we were displaced; I was left with only one unit, and we left. I didn't complete uni. (Syrian female, 2018)

I went to high school but then I got married. They asked me to get married, then I left high school. I finished primary school. I passed primary school. I went to high school. I was 13 years old and I got married and I left school. I didn't work. I was just looking after the children. My husband was working. We had a good life but after the – what we call revolution – everything changed. (Syrian female, 2018)

The adults interviewed in Wollongong had mixed feelings about leaving family behind and coming to Australia where they knew no-one:

In the beginning it was hard, because we left everyone behind. We left family members, we left friends behind us. Here, when we arrived, we didn't know anyone, so it was difficult. (Syrian female, 2018)

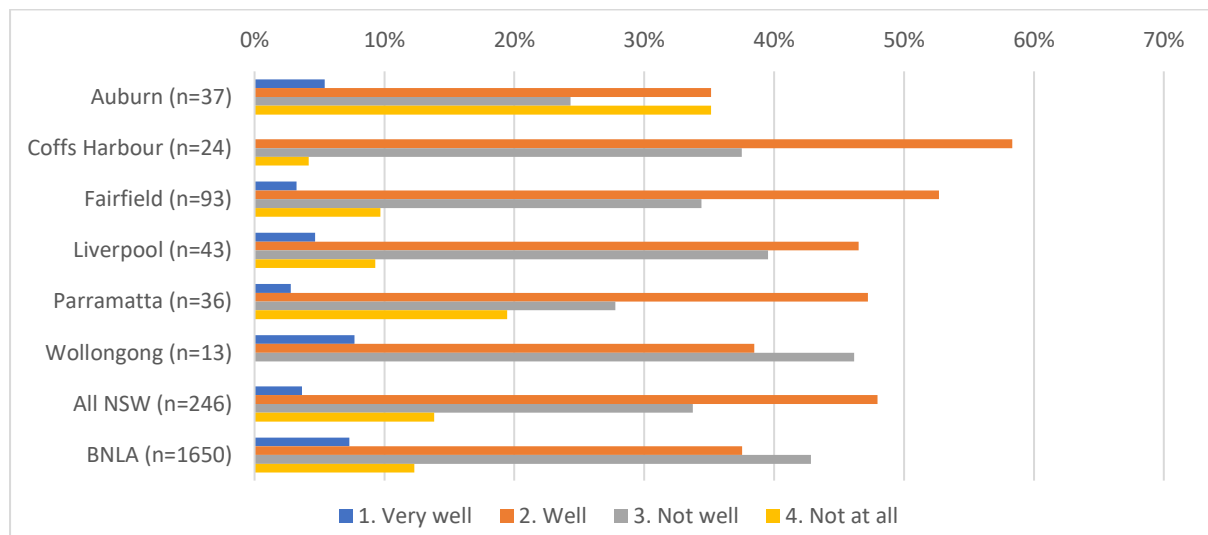
Both feelings, I was sad and happy. I was sad that I left the country of my birth and my family, and my memories, and I was very happy, because I came to a country where I will be safe and secure, and I'll be looked after. (Iraqi female, 2018)

In the beginning, because we were not sure how our life is going to be, but generally, we were alright. Of course, in the beginning – after we've seen our people are treating us well, we felt safe, we felt better. Yes, safe, but a little scared, because it's a big country. (Syrian female, 2018)

So, they offered us Australia, and we were very happy about it. The children were happy about it, too, because of the language, it's English language. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Since English language acquisition is essential, we asked the cohort of adults in NSW living in Wollongong, Coffs Harbour, Liverpool, Parramatta, Auburn, and Fairfield, who were refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, whether they could understand English ‘very well’, ‘well’, ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’. We compare these results to the findings of the national longitudinal survey of refugees, the BNLA survey. **All of the adults in Wollongong were able to understand English to some degree, and the proportion who assessed themselves as being able to understand English ‘very well’ (8%), was the highest proportion of refugees who made that assessment in all locations and in the national BNLA survey (7%) (Figure 1).**

Figure 1: NSW adults: How well do you understand spoken English?



BNLA = Building a New Life in Australia (The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants)

While English classes were useful for some – the elderly in particular commented that it was difficult to retain knowledge, and that their age and ill health posed problems getting to and from the learning centre:

I have just started learning English. I attend courses organised by MAX solutions. I can read a little bit, but communication is still hard. I still have difficulty in speaking. However, I am enjoying the course. I sometimes find it difficult to learn. Currently, I am undertaking 510 hours. (Syrian female, 2018)

Yes, I learn English at MAX Solutions. Yeah. In the beginning, it was hard. I understand, but to answer back, to talk back, it's a bit hard. (Young Syrian female, 2018)

I cannot attend because of my medical issues. I wish I could learn because I struggle a lot because I'm not speaking English. I want to be independent. (Syrian female, 2018)

So, I completed level one at TAFE, then I went to level two, I completed that. Now, I am in level three, but because of my health, I do not attend. Now I do not attend courses or English classes. I have health issues, that's why I am not... I had two operations. (Syrian male, 2018)

I want to learn the language but it's not easy for me. I spend five hours sitting learning the language. I am still learning. Yes, I'm at TAFE still. But even if I study, I just forget. If I don't go and learn the language, they will cut our Centrelink. So, it's a pressure. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I started learning English straight away, after two months from arrival. Yeah, I am going to MAX Solutions after. I am learning. (Young Syrian male, 2018)

A lack of English language skills was a frustrating barrier to employment, as some of the adult refugees in Wollongong explained:

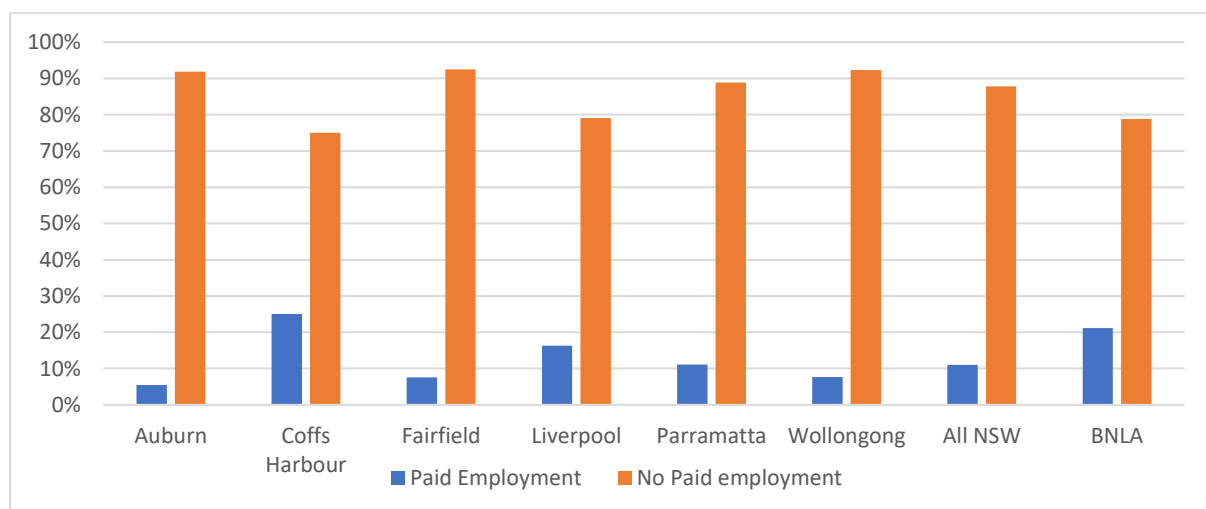
I go to a job search, the job network to look for a job. It's always you need language; you need English language for that. I'm looking for even other jobs with the little English which I have but it's hard. It's difficult. (Syrian male, 2018)

I am studying full-time. I have applied for a job. Not accepted – rejected. I think it's the language. (Young Syrian male, 2018)

There are no difficulties finding work, it's only the language. My boss is very happy with me. The only thing is the language, the language skill, otherwise I wouldn't have any difficulty. Sometimes he tells me to do something – I understand half of it. (Syrian male, 2018)

For adult refugees generally - and for those in Wollongong more specifically - getting a job in Australia is an important priority. Since this was the first year of settlement in Australia for most of the NSW refugees interviewed/surveyed, most of them had not yet found employment because most were still learning English and settling into their life in Australia. Notably, employment outcomes for the recently arrived refugees in NSW were less positive than those refugees surveyed in the national BNLA questionnaire. We will follow these same families over the next two years and hope to see these employment results improve greatly. Of the groups interviewed in NSW, those in Wollongong, Auburn, and Fairfield were most likely not to be in employment (Figure 2).

Figure 2: NSW adults and employment



There was a perception among the adults we spoke to in Wollongong that **there is a shortage of jobs in the region, particularly finding work to suit their skills**:

I am very good with tailoring. That's the hard thing for me, that I used to do tailoring, and I'm good at it, but I've found that it's hard, in Australia, to find a job in that field, as a tailor. (Syrian female, 2018)

It's very hard for me – not because of the English, but I would like to get any position of work to organise my life. (Iraqi female, 2018)

The worst thing about living in Wollongong is that, there is no jobs. Honestly, just one month ago, I applied for 30 – yes, honestly. I will show my email for how many places I applied, Good Guys, Fantastic, Coles, Woolies and I did a course, tutorial service to do this work, you know. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Some families felt pressured to learn English and apply for jobs, in spite of the perceived lack of employment opportunities, as a condition of receiving government Centrelink benefits. Again, this was especially hard for older people and those who have health problems; elderly people in particular mentioned that employers were not willing to employ them due to their age and lack of English skills:

I applied for jobs. Yeah. Nobody wants. 'You are an old man, you can't', they say. Because of the age, I find it a bit difficult. Otherwise, I applied for many jobs. (Syrian male, 2018)

I cannot work due to my health issues. Health wise, I feel very weak and I do not have much strength to work. The job-network encourages us to find a job, but I do not think I will get it since I am not highly qualified. (Syrian female, 2018)

They ask me to apply for jobs. I have doctors' reports but I am applying continuously for jobs. Yeah. Because of my reading and writing, it's hard for me. I am doing that because the job network is asking me to apply for jobs. Otherwise, health-wise I am not fit to work. (Iraqi female, 2018)

My concern is just a job, to find a job. I am trying, I have tried, but it's hard. I want to work, but it's because of the age, it's difficult. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Younger interviewees were reluctant to take up just any opportunity to work. Similarly, **skilled workers did not want to re-train through TAFE to gain Australian accreditation – they just wanted to be employed straight away:**

All that I need is just learn English and work. I don't want to study anymore, because I'm old enough. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I would like to work. I would like to learn language and find a job. No, I'm not interested in studying – just the language for now. (Syrian female, 2018)

I don't want to just study. I've studied before. I spent a lot of time before studying, so now it's exactly the time to start to organise a good life for us because, you know, I'm a single mum. I don't like to depend on another person. (Iraqi female, 2018)

The cost of rental accommodation was one factor driving the need to earn more money:

One thing I don't like about Australia, or the area, is the rents. The rents are very high, very expensive. Here, in Australia, it's a competition. At the end, it's going to be given to an Australian person, someone who is working, and the landlord, it's up to him who he is going to rent it to. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Some of the adult refugees interviewed in Wollongong hope to open their own business, to enable them to use the skills they already possess. Again, the language barrier was one factor preventing new business start ups:

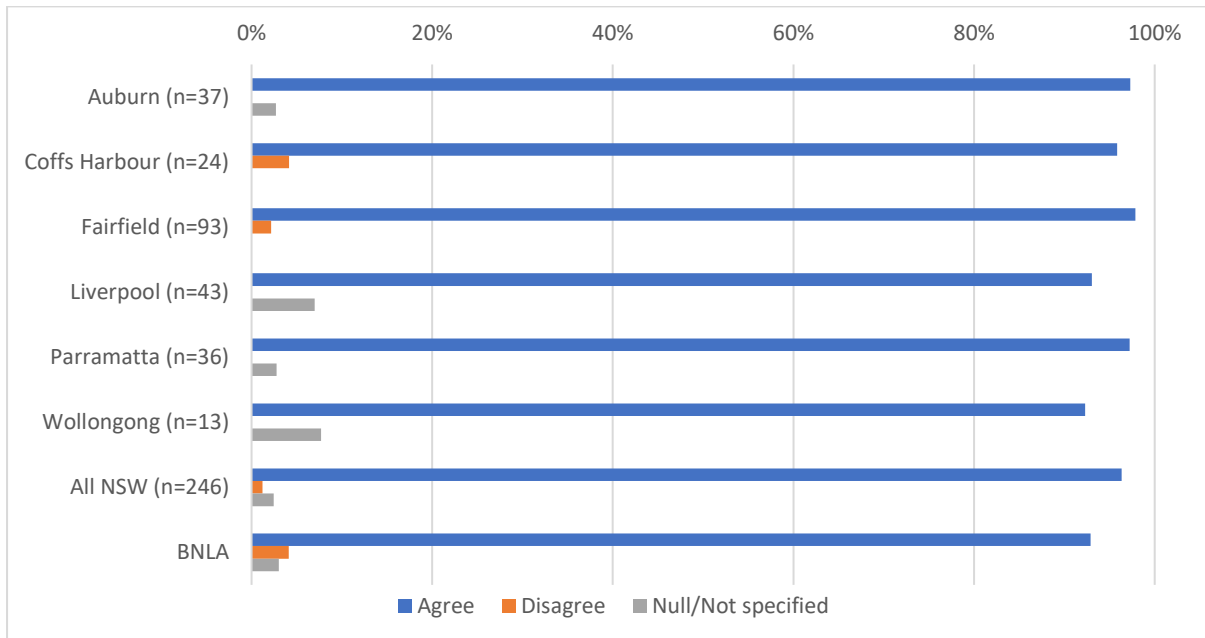
Of course I'd like to be setting up business. Once I speak the language and I have experience, why not? (Syrian male, 2018)

Once I learn language, I'm going to do the proper courses and have a business for myself. I would like to work. I don't want to sit at home. (Syrian male, 2018)

That's my goal, to start a business. I don't like to depend on Centrelink. Of course, that's my wish, that's my goal, to have a business, to have an income, because I can't survive on 500 dollars every 15 days from Centrelink, so I would like to work. (Syrian male, 2018)

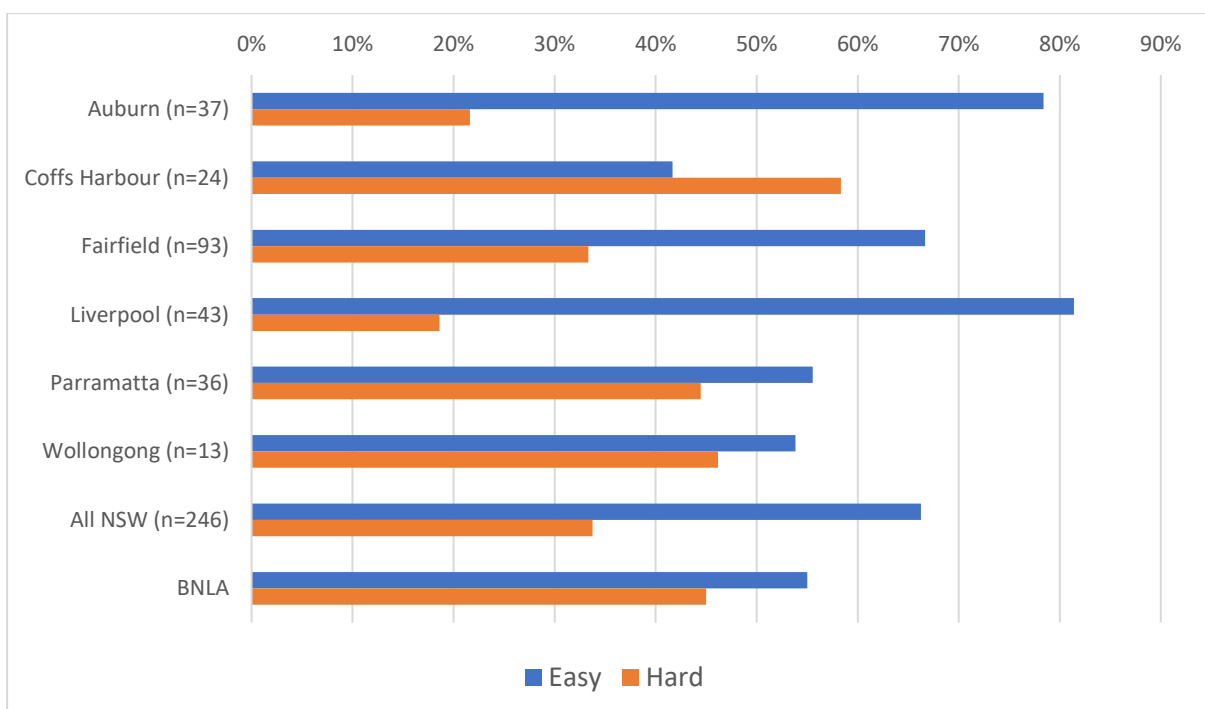
One of the key reasons that refugees come to Australia is to find a safe environment to bring up their families. And like refugees in most other NSW locations, every one of the young family members, and every one of the adult family members in Wollongong who responded to the question (92%), felt safe living there (Figure 3).

Figure 3: NSW adults: I feel safe in my neighbourhood



Moreover, it is very different living in Australia than in the Middle East, yet after one to two years of settlement, over half of the adult family members living in Wollongong (54%) said that it was easy to make friends in Australia (Figure 4). This was a similar result to that recorded by the national BNLA survey (55%).

Figure 4: NSW adults : How easy have you found it to make friends in Australia?



Generally, the refugees interviewed in Wollongong **found the community to be welcoming and inclusive of everyone**. Most of the refugee families were situated in urban areas, where many found their neighbours to be friendly and sociable. Some families attended Church services and made friends there; and some met people through SCARF, a local organisation which helps refugees:

Yeah, I made friends here, from the Arabic-speaking community. Yeah, I met them here, but not relatives. Just friends. (Syrian female, 2018)

I only have Iraqi and Syrian friends. We do shopping and visit each other. Yeah, they're close by. Yes, we visit each other. (Young Syrian female, 2018)

Yeah, yeah, I invite them, they invite me, yeah. Good relationship with the neighbours. (Syrian male, 2018)

My children like Australia, very much, yeah. The best thing living in this city is the treatment of the people. They give us the feeling that we are human beings, they give us that respect, especially when I apologise that I don't speak the language. (Syrian male, 2018)

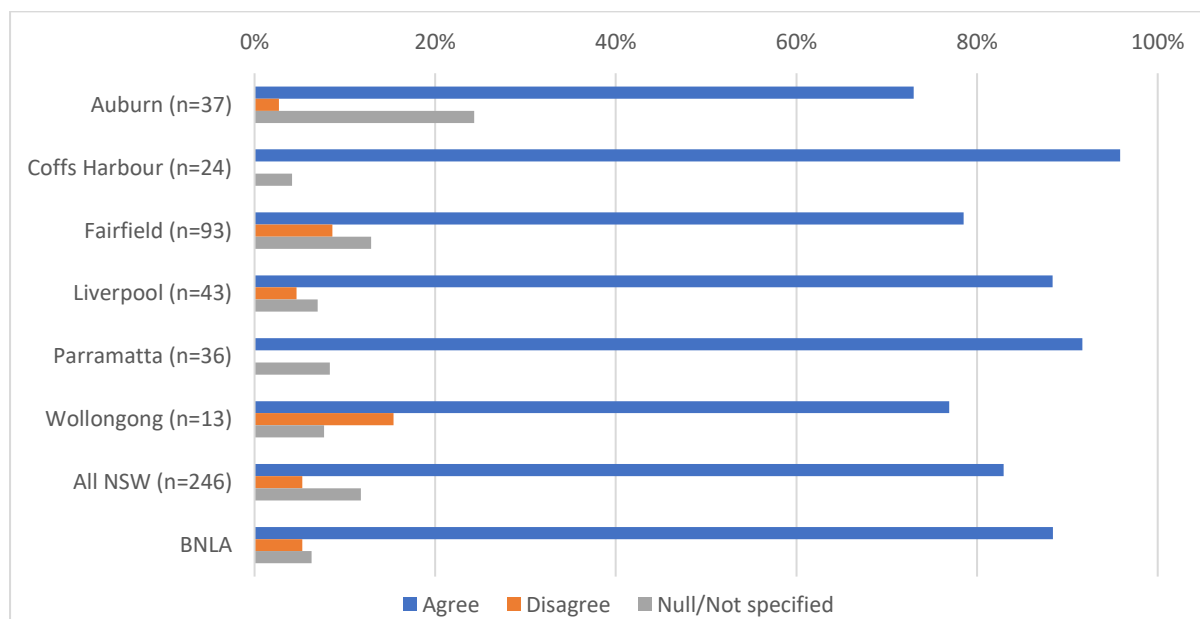
Actually, there are lovely neighbours here. Over time, they've been doing a lot for us. Yes, all of them are Australian. I have friends now, Australian women from SCARF. (Iraqi female, 2018)

We have a friend ... she's coming to us, and we met people at SCARF, it's an organisation here, so we go out and we meet other people – Arabic-speaking community. (Iraqi female, 2018)

We have an Australian neighbour, an older person, by himself; and on the other side, we have international students, from India. And they're quiet neighbours. And this neighbour is very good. The Australian neighbour is very good to us. We invite them for food. We give them food. He comes here, we go too. (Syrian female, 2018)

Moreover, almost four out of five of the adult refugees interviewed in Wollongong (77%) thought that their neighbourhood was a good place to bring up their children (Figure 5):

Figure 5: NSW Adults: My neighbourhood is a good place to bring up my children.



On the other hand, several adults interviewed in Wollongong were **hesitant to engage socially with people whose cultures were unfamiliar**. For these families, social interaction was limited:

I have no interaction with neighbours, because most neighbours have no children. We greet each other, but we would not socialise at all. The language is a big barrier at this stage. (Syrian female, 2018)

I only have one friend who is Arabic speaker, but I am interested in swimming and soccer. I do not associate with others; I have only one friend, who is an Arabic speaker. That's it. (Young Syrian male, 2018)

Yeah, we just greet each other from far away, otherwise we don't associate. They are not getting closer to us. They're Australians, they are Turkish, and there is a foreign – we don't know from where, and from Africa, as well. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I don't know the neighbours. There's a neighbour here, sometimes I want to say hello but they turn around or something. Generally, the other neighbours, I don't know them. (Syrian female, 2018)

The other communities... Because of the language, I have that difficulty at certain times, but generally with the Arabic communities, I don't know them. We don't know where they come from. I need to know them, to know who they are; and then after that, I decide to be friends. We want to pick and choose our own friends. I can't get involved with others I don't know. (Syrian female, 2018)

While all family members missed their relatives far away, most families did not feel isolated. However, some individuals, particularly **women who had lost their husbands and lived alone, did feel isolated and detached from society**. One of these women said that she had no neighbours, felt isolated, and was suffering severe anxiety as a result, while another noted that she did have neighbours, but still felt alone.

As well as experiencing the language barrier, **some adults were equally unskilled in using technology, so that they are unable to receive the support that they require from government and health services as well as other services such as banks, language courses and other recreational services**. One Syrian woman struggles to keep in contact with some of her children, who are displaced overseas, while health issues restrict her from travelling even locally.

Moreover, **some of the refugee families interviewed in Wollongong are conservative in their nature, and worried about losing their cultural, linguistic and religious identity**. So they do not want their children to be integrated into the Australian culture and way of life; instead they want their children to hold on their cultural and religious values. Their children also feel discomfort:

The other issue is how to raise our children morally and ethically according to our culture. We also notice that in the society, moral values are declining which are related to modern day issues. I am a bit scared of losing my children, I hope they do not forget about our language, culture, identity and Islamic values. (Syrian female, 2018)

Yes, I want to share some of my concerns. I love this country; I am happy that we came to Australia. It is a beautiful country. Government agencies helped us a lot here. But at school, I have issues, issues like the scarf and my cultural and religious identity. I feel that some students are a bit prejudice about my scarf and my Muslim identity. Some students sometimes make fun of me or other Arabic background friends. For me, wearing a scarf at school is a big challenge. We sometimes complain but the school does not do anything. I just feel that we are a bit neglected. (Syrian female, age 18, 2018)

Although all of the families interviewed in Wollongong mentioned that the language barrier makes it difficult to embark on day to day activities, including finding a job, and communicating with neighbours and the general public, **some of the young people had found that their learning and their English language skills had improved dramatically:**

When arrived in Australia, my friends welcomed me at school. I talk to them in English. (Iraqi female, age 8, 2018)

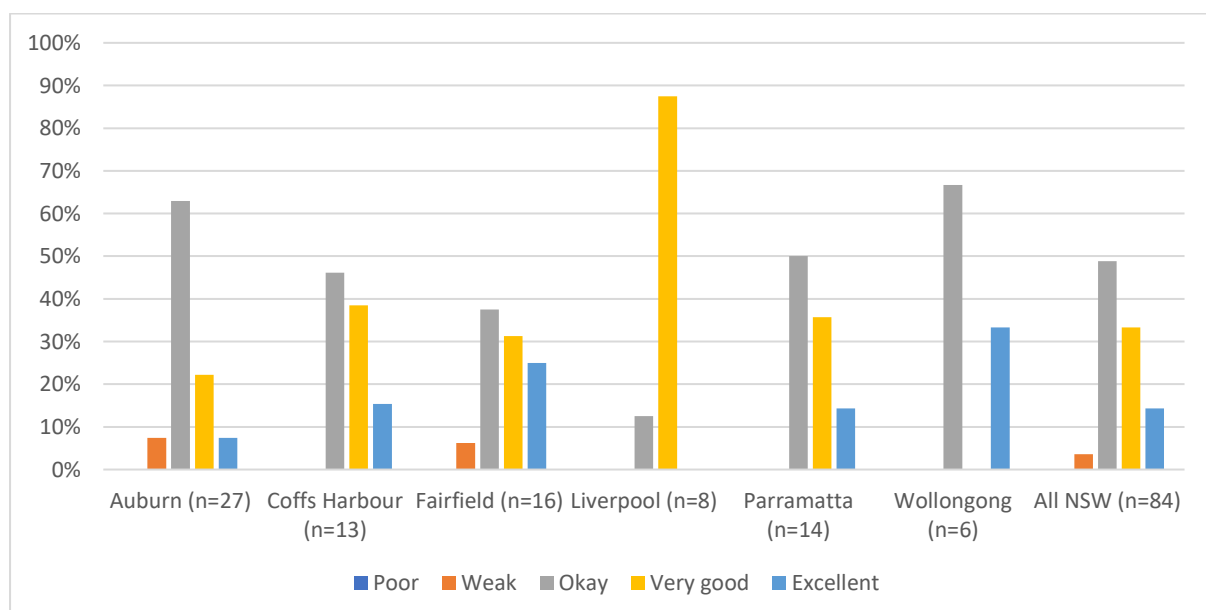
I went to school in Lebanon. I did not know English before coming to Australia. (Syrian female, age 10, 2018)

My speaking skill was the hardest at the beginning. I feel that I am still struggling with English. I think my writing has improved a lot, since I also attended an English course while staying in Lebanon. Upon arrival in Australia, I was a bit shy to speak English, but nowadays I am more confident in speaking... All I can say is that my English is improving since our arrival. (Syrian female, age 18, 2018)

I did not have English before I came. I did not learn French either in Syria. No, no. Actually, I don't like to learn any – a different language, before, because I find it hard... IEC was really good, because they start from scratch, they start from ABC, they start from the letters, and it was really intensive. So, it's really good. I took it easy, I didn't concentrate on it, and so it depends on the person, depends on the young person, when they come here, how much they contribute, how much they would try to learn. Otherwise, the program in itself, it's really good. (Syrian male, age 17, 2018)

We asked the cohort of young people in Wollongong, Coffs Harbour, Auburn, Parramatta, Liverpool, and Fairfield, who were refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, to rate their English language speaking ability as 'poor', 'weak', 'okay', 'very good' or 'excellent'. Of the small number of young people who participated in Wollongong, **all said that they were able to speak English, and one third (33%) assessed their English speaking ability as 'excellent', which was the highest percentage of the NSW cohort** (Figure 6).

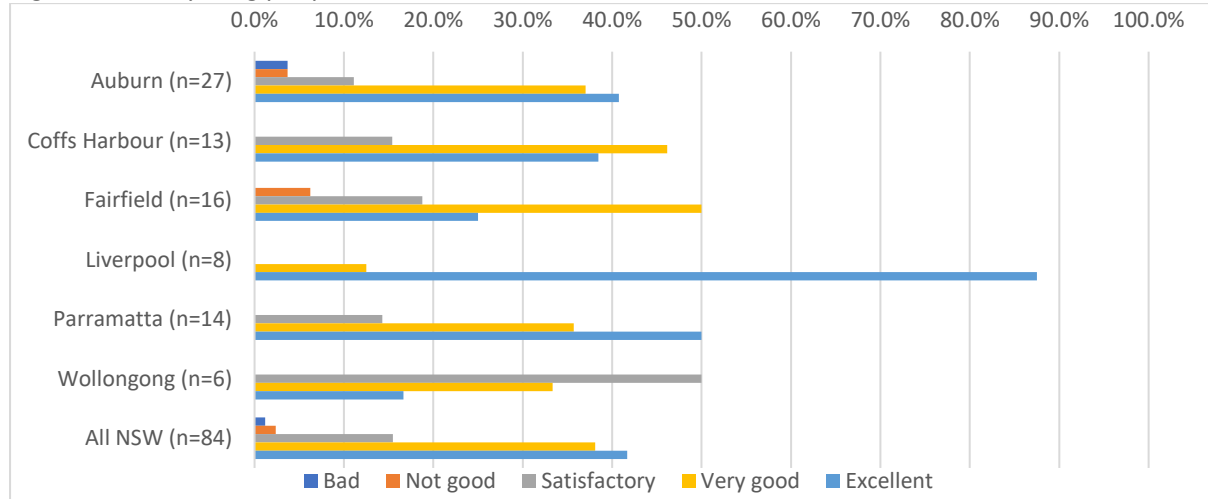
Figure 6: NSW young people: ability to speak English



We also asked the young refugees we interviewed in NSW about school or TAFE. **All of the young people living in Wollongong were satisfied with their school or TAFE, and half of them (50%) thought that their school or TAFE was ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ (Figure 7):**

The subjects I like most are Art and computer. I like them because art is – there’s no wrong and there’s no right. In computer, it’s easy just to type and it’s easy if you make a mistake, because you can easily rub it out. I do not like writing, because sometimes I have to do something really challenging. I mean, like, writing, writing. I do not mean writing stories. Like, writing too much sentences and stuff, like about a drought. (Iraqi female, age 8, 2018)

Figure 7: NSW young people: How is school/TAFE?



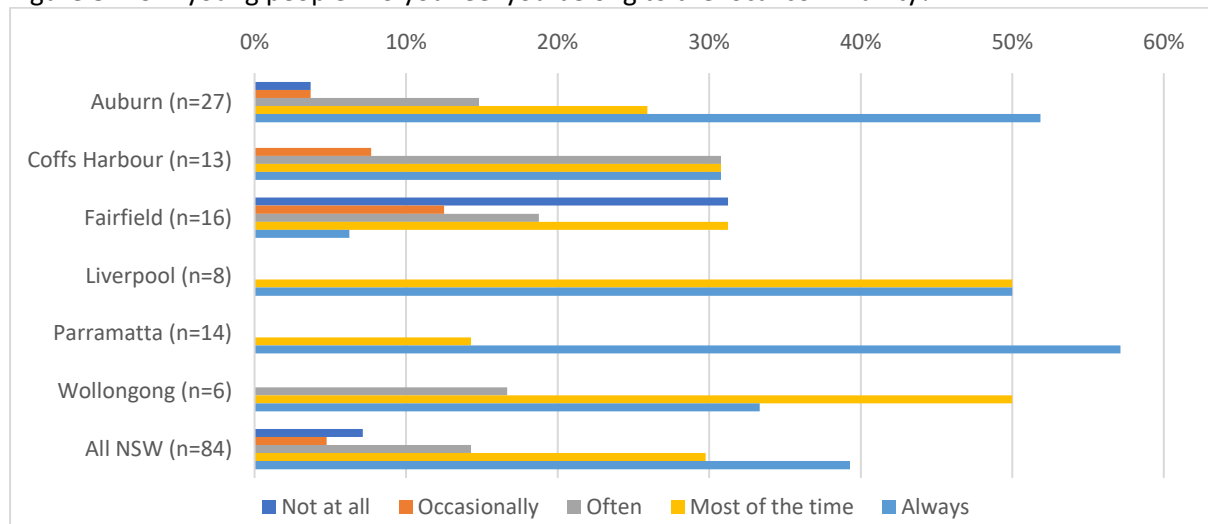
The young refugees in Wollongong had made many friends, of diverse ethnicities, and felt that they really were part of the community. All of them felt that they belonged to the local community, and four out of five (83%) thought that they belonged ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’ (Figure 8):

At school, I do have lots of friends from different cultures. (Syrian female, age 18, 2018)

I have made some friends both Arabic-speaking backgrounds and other nationalities, so that is mixed. All of them live in Wollongong... (Syrian male, age 17, 2018)

I have Arabic speaking friends at school, two in my class, and one from another class. Most of my friends are English, but I have a friend from Burma and also – but there’s one Mexico, it’s a boy. (Iraqi female, age 8, 2018)

Figure 8: NSW young people: Do you feel you belong to the local community?



Moving your family to a new country is difficult, particularly when you are escaping war and conflict. Nevertheless, when asked how happy they were with life in Australia, almost four in five adults in the Wollongong cohort (76%) were ‘very’ or ‘mostly’ happy with their life now, a slightly greater proportion than that recorded by the BNLA survey (74%) (Figure 9):

100 percent I’m happy, because human being here is respected as human being, all the way, all his life, until he goes to the grave. (Iraqi male, 2018)

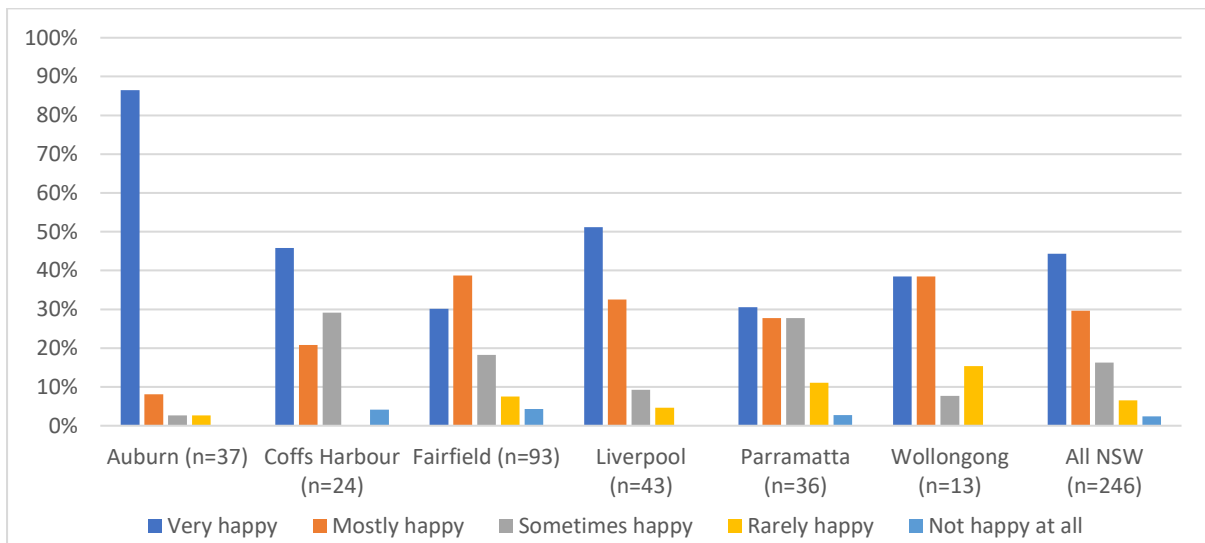
Australia was beautiful when I saw it, because I like the nature, and it’s clean, but the treatment of the people, very good, but – everything in it is beautiful. (Syrian female, 2018)

I thank God every day, hundreds of times, that I’m in Australia, I’m here. I like it. (Syrian male, 2018)

It’s very good in Australia. I’m very happy that we are in Australia. Very good life. (Syrian female, 2018)

It was very hard at the beginning; it was a real cultural shock for me. But I like the country because Australia is well-organised and there are no safety issues. Everyone obeys the rules... It is well-structured and well-regulated. (Syrian female, 2018)

Figure 9: NSW adults: how happy are you with your current life in Australia?



The adult refugees interviewed in Wollongong are very grateful to be in Australia, where they feel protected by the government both financially and personally. They also believe that Australia offers their children many opportunities for a prosperous life. They see Australia as a regulated society where laws are applied equally to everyone, with a social justice system that makes it a fair place to live in. Many families mentioned that becoming an Australian citizen was important, and that Australia is now their home:

I want a good job for myself, and buy a house. We live in Australia; Australia is home for us now. (Syrian male, 2018)

I like the country. I do not want to leave this country. I want to become an Australian citizen as well. If I get Australian citizenship and passport, I will be able to visit my sisters and brothers overseas. But my main concern is my sister in Lebanon. (Syrian female, 2018)

Most of the hopes for the future surrounded family. Like refugees in other locations, adults interviewed in Wollongong hope to be reunited with loved ones scattered around the world, and for their children to flourish in their new home, Australia. **Adults want their children to receive a good education, and find employment, and the young people have similar hopes:**

We are optimistic about our children's future, that they're going to find jobs. And it's safe, it's secure, we are looked after, we get payment from the government. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I'm waiting for my children to stand up on their feet, ... to get their jobs, to be secure. Then I can find a job and live my life. (Syrian female, 2018)

My hopes for the future, I want to become a gymnastics teacher. But I know a lot. Nobody teach me, but I still know. I can do handstands. (Iraqi female, age 8, 2018)

I put my daughter in a good school actually because my uncle helped me. I would like to focus on my daughter, to give her a good education, you know. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I want to become a surgeon. If I do not achieve a high mark, I think I will change my mind. Maybe, I will undertake Business Administration and work for an international company overseas. (Syrian female, age 18, 2018)

I want the best for my children, to learn and graduate... (Syrian male, 2018)

Our children like it here, yeah, 100 percent. Because they all have future here. They have all the rights. In Iraq, they didn't have that. Even if you are a doctor in Iraq, whatever you have, you don't have a future in Iraq. (Iraqi male, 2018)

The most pressing wish was for reunification with displaced family members – children, siblings, parents and even wives, husbands and fiancés – who were dispersed in countries such as Turkey, Egypt, USA, Canada, Germany and Belgium:

I like to bring my fiancé here, to Australia... I want her to come here, so we can get married here. I am hoping. Yeah, that is the most concern for me. (Young Syrian male, 2018)

The question is that "Is there any chance in the future of our family reunion to become easy, and better?" ... I am concerned about my daughters in Syria, okay, about their safety. (Syrian female, 2018)

The most important thing for me is the family members to come here... Especially I have a brother who needs an operation, who has a health condition... (Syrian female, 2018)

I miss family members, yeah. Sisters and relatives. If they want to. I wish to bring them. (Iraqi female, 2018)

One sister in Turkey – I would like to bring her here... I'm just working with her papers. I applied to Immigration to bring her here. (Iraqi female, 2018)

One of the things which I wished for was to be reunited with my daughter. I sponsored her but Australia rejected her application so she ended up going to Canada. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Yes. I intend to travel. I wish to see my son again. That's my dream. A family reunion. For them to come here. I am thinking about them, it's like being in prison. I wish they could be accepted and come here so I can see them again. (Syrian female, 2018)

CONCLUSION

All of the newly arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Wollongong were very grateful for the opportunity that Australia provided for them of a safe haven. They were very confident that Australia would provide a great future for their families, though they were worried about finding a job.

Families interviewed in Wollongong were very satisfied with the on-arrival services provided to them and their families by their service provider. They were supported with accommodation, linked to welfare services and guided through the difficult first months of settlement in NSW. This was even though settlement services had more than double the normal number of refugee arrivals in 2017 when most of the families that we interviewed arrived.

Many of the newly arrived refugees in Wollongong had skilled jobs in Iraq and Syria before the conflict – **their greatest concern is to find a job in Australia.** But a number were elderly and suffered ill health and disability. For this group, they noted how grateful they were for the government assistance and welfare payments. Most were very frustrated that they could not work and contribute to their new society. One frustration was that they could not use their qualifications to gain suitable employment. Another frustration was the pressure to get work, particularly where poor health, age and carer responsibilities made it difficult to search for work which was perceived as unavailable.

Some adult refugees in Wollongong had a good command of English while others did not. Most have attended the English language courses providing 510 hours of tuition, though those with disabilities or caring responsibilities could not always get to these classes. Attending English language classes provided most with an opportunity to make new friends in Australia. However, there was a concern that there was little opportunity for adults to practice English language skills in the wider community.

We will revisit these families in 2019 and 2020 to trace these families' settlement journey in NSW.

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