

Report #2

Settlement experiences of recently arrived refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in New South Wales in 2018: Full Report

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Abbreviations

ARC	Australian Research Council
BNLA	Building a New Life in Australia (The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants)
BRA	Bilingual Research Assistant
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DSS	Department of Social Services
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ISIS	Islamic State (militant group)
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Qld	Queensland
SSI	Settlement Services International
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UTS	University Technology Sydney
USyd	University of Sydney
Vic	Victoria
WSU	Western Sydney University



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

There is no more controversial issue related to Australia's contemporary immigration program than that of refugees, those who arrive in Australia under the humanitarian component of the annual permanent intake program plus those unauthorised arrivals who are determined by Australia to have refugee status. Refugees were arriving on Australian shores seeking asylum prior to the Second World War. Following the fall of Saigon in 1975, thousands of Vietnamese arrived after a dangerous, perilous journey by small boat. From the 1990s small boats of asylum seekers again began to arrive on north-west Australian shores, this time mostly people escaping conflict and persecution in the Middle East. Since that time – under Coalition and Labor governments – Australia's humanitarian (refugee) intake has become a political football.

Much of the refugee debate in Australia is based on stereotypes, generalisations and pre-determined political ideology. We urgently need to reinsert evidence-based research about the settlement experiences and outcomes of recently-arrived refugees in Australia into this debate.

The present report is the second of three place-based reports on the outcomes of the first year of a three-year research project – funded by the Australian Research Council – examining the settlement, employment and education experiences and outcomes of recently-arrived Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees. It is a longitudinal study: we have interviewed 233 refugee families – 118 Syrian, 82 Iraqi and 33 Afghan families – and surveyed 632 individuals settling in New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld) and Victoria (Vic).

In 2015, the Australian Government announced the one-off resettlement of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in addition to the annual intake of refugees under the humanitarian program. These two groups were identified and targeted as in need of support because the Syrian conflict and the Islamic State (ISIS) persecution in Syria and Iraq displaced millions of refugees and generated unprecedented flows of refugees to Europe. Like the Canadian government, the Australian government opened its doors to Syrian-conflict refugees. Most arrived in Australia in 2017, when the Humanitarian Program was increased from 13,750 refugees in 2016-2017 to 16,250 refugees in 2017-2018. The intake was to further increase to 18,750 refugees in 2018-2019 (DSS 2019).

For the purposes of our study, we have conducted interviews and surveys with **Syrian** and **Iraqi** refugee families in order to evaluate the settlement outcomes of the Syrian-conflict intake. Since the eruption of the Syrian conflict in 2011 nearly seven million Syrians and Iraqis have fled the region seeking safety in neighbouring countries including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey for instance; and beyond, including various countries in Europe, Australia and Canada. The Australian Government placed a priority on 'persecuted minorities who sought refuge from the conflict in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey' (DFAT, 2015). Refugees were selected for settlement in Australia from either United Nations High

Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) camps or directly from urban communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (DFAT, 2017). Between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017, the number of Syrian and Iraqi refugees (mainly Christian) rose to 24,926 – the 12,000 plus Syrians and Iraqis who arrived in the annual humanitarian intake – with the majority settling in metropolitan areas in New South Wales and Victoria, followed by Queensland (Collins et al. 2018, 5).

We also interviewed and surveyed refugee families from **Afghanistan** (mainly Muslim) as a control group to provide an evaluation of the convergence and divergence between the services provided, and settlement outcomes and experiences of the targeted and select group of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and those entering Australia under the main humanitarian program. According to the UNHCR, there are almost 2.5 million registered refugees from Afghanistan (<https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/afghanistan.html>). We spoke with refugee families who arrived from approximately mid-2015 to the end of 2017, though most arrived in 2017.

The focus of this second report is to explore the challenges and opportunities of settlement in Australia from the experiences of the Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees themselves in New South Wales. Ultimately, the aim of reporting on the outcomes of the research is not only to present evidence but also to spark a conversation about, and to contribute to an understanding of the contribution that refugees make to Australian society and how we can enhance the social well-being, employability prospects, economic security and educational opportunities of recently arrived refugees in Australia. Finally, our reports aim to inform policy and services to enhance the settlement experience of this group. The recent Shergold Report (Shergold et al. 2019) presented the findings of *a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia*. After an intensive consultation period with 90 key informants and reviewing 57 submissions, the Shergold report made 7 key policy recommendations. At the end of our three-year longitudinal study we will be in a position to comment on the efficacy of the Shergold recommendations and present the policy implications of our research.

The Research

The project employs a mixed-method approach, which includes face-to-face interviews, a survey and an analysis of primary and secondary source material. In addition to giving voice to refugee families, evidence building also includes insights from conversations with key stakeholders in the field, such as policymakers, representatives from non-government organisations, employers and educators along with our national and international partners many of whom are at the coal face of refugee service provision. Finally, the dominant popular discourse is also assessed with examinations of secondary source material appearing in the media.

The project is funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC)-Linkage Grant, in partnership with industry, including Access Community Services, AMES Australia, Multicultural Australia (MA) and Settlement Services International (SSI) who provide valuable input in interviewee recruitment and research outputs. Challenging and/or affirming our approach to policy and practice on refugee settlement are our discussions and collaborations with these industry partners in Australia along with researchers in Canada, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden and the UK.

A key point of departure from the extant literature and policy documents is that the family is the social unit through which refugee settlement is experienced and negotiated and hence where settlement outcomes are investigated and analysed. In 2018, we interviewed 233 families: that is, a total of 632 individuals, across NSW, Queensland and Victoria, comprised of 118 Syrian, 82 Iraqi and 33 Afghan families (the latter is our control group). Children aged 5-18 years also participated in the research with their parent's consent, although those over 16 could participate without parental consent if needed.

Another key point of departure is that while most refugees settled in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, regional Australia has become increasingly important as a destination for refugee arrivals. In order to evaluate the experience of newly-arrived refugee families in regional areas, we interviewed refugee families in Wollongong and Coffs Harbour in NSW, in Logan and Toowoomba in Queensland, and in Shepparton in Victoria.

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from the New South Wales interviews and surveys which included 133 families in total, 54 from Syria, 56 from Iraq and 23 from Afghanistan. Interview and survey data were collected across six locations, including Auburn (Afghanistan, n=19), Fairfield (Syria, n=17; and Iraq, n=27), Liverpool (Syria, n=3; and Iraq, n=22), Parramatta (Syria, n=19; and Iraq, n=1), Coffs Harbour (Syria, n=6; Iraq, n=3; and Afghanistan, n=4), and Wollongong (Syria, n=7; and Iraq, n=3). Two pilot Syrian family interviews were conducted initially in the region of Bankstown. The informants were recruited through our Industry Partner networks.

Another key point of departure is that the research project is longitudinal in design. We visit the refugee families once a year for three years in order to better capture their changing settlement experiences and outcomes. Our survey questions – answered on iPad and linked to Qualtrics – were derived from some questions furnishing the BNLA (Building a New Life in

Australia) longitudinal survey of newly-arrived refugees in Australia, conducted by the Department of Social Services since 2013. The first wave of data collection ran from October 2013 to March 2014, with following waves conducted in October to March each year subsequently. This allows us to compare and benchmark the outcomes for Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees in 2018 with the BNLA results. It also permits us to measure the change in an individual's outcomes: for instance in terms of number of friends, English language ability, employment and education, and of course, challenges and opportunities during the settlement process – over the three years of the study.

In the next section, we highlight some of the key findings of the New South Wales research with refugee families in their settlement process.

Key Findings

Refugees very grateful for opportunity to settle in Australia

For many refugees in NSW, the decision to come to Australia was one of necessity, not choice. All the Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees we interviewed were very grateful to be given the opportunity for their family to settle in Australia. They all want to repay Australia: the adult refugees through their employment expertise and young refugees by contributing to the community and society. Most want to become Australian citizens as soon as possible.

Diversity of refugee informants

The refugee families from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan were not homogenous, with significant diversity in their religious, ethnic, educational, employment and linguistic backgrounds and family size. This is a strong finding that challenges refugee stereotypes.

Most of the refugee informants from Syria and Iraq were Christians while the refugees from Afghanistan were Muslims. Significant ethnic diversity was also evident among our informants: 45 adults reported that they were of Assyrian background, 28 Hazara, 27 Armenian, 23 Chaldean, 13 Ezidi, 9 Tajik, 8 Mandaean, 8 Kurdish, 6 Aramaic and 3 Pashtu.

While Arabic and English were widely spoken by those from Syria and Iraq, and most from Afghanistan spoke Dari, our refugee informants spoke 20 languages other than English, Arabic and Dari.

Many refugees from Syria had professional backgrounds while those from Syria and Iraq had successful careers and were highly educated, compared to the Afghan families who had often been marginalized in transition countries.

Most refugees from Syria and Iraq arrived on family-sponsored visas (202) with pre-migration family links to Australia, while many who arrived from Afghanistan arrived on a woman-at-risk Visas. The Afghan refugee families were generally much larger than those from Syria and Iraq, were often sole-parent families, and were less likely to speak some English on arrival.

Refugees arrive after traumatic experiences

All our refugee informants had difficult experiences in their homeland prior to fleeing for their safety. While it was not our intention to dwell on these experiences because we did not want to revisit this trauma, it is baggage that weighs heavily on refugee families, particularly the adults, in their life in Australia.

Refugee Family Displacement

Refugee families have been fractured by the processes of displacement from their homeland. All have family back in the homeland and many have family members who are refugees spread across Europe, Scandinavia, and North America. Despite the absence of their family as a support network living with them in Australia, they connect frequently – sometimes daily – on social media, with their family members around the globe. Their virtual family help them to navigate the ups and downs of life in Australia. Most have tried – unsuccessfully – to have parents and other close family reunited with them in Australia. This is a significant worry.

Settlement is difficult for newly arrived refugees

Australia was a strange land to most refugees on arrival. Other than information provided during induction programs immediately before arrival, and the internet, many refugees knew little about Australian culture and life. They were scared and excited when arriving in Sydney for the first time, hopeful but uncertain about their future life in Australia.

Success of on-arrival programs and services for refugees

Most of the refugees were full of praise for the service providers who met them at the airport and guided them through the challenging first six months of settlement. The NSW settlement service providers (SSI and its network of Migrant Resource Centres in Sydney, Anglicare in Wollongong, and SSI in Coffs Harbour) assisted them to find accommodation, register for Medicare and Centrelink, get their children into local schools and to navigate the maze of Australian laws, regulations, and institutions and their immediate surrounds including transport and shopping. The emergent relationship with their case worker resulted in some refugees naming their Australian-born children after them.

Most refugee families arrived in 2017 when the number of refugees arriving in Australia effectively doubled the intake of previous decades,² putting unprecedented demands on resources of the service providers and making these outcomes even more remarkable.

² 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 from the 13,750 intake of 2015-16. These two facts meant a one-off doubling of the humanitarian intake.

Refugee employment a key challenge

In 2018 most of the refugee informants in NSW – like other states – had not yet entered the labour market but were engaged in English-language training. Hence only 11 per cent of those surveyed had paid employment. While this is well below the 21 per cent who had paid employment according to the BNLA survey, it is important to remember that most of those we surveyed had been in the country for between one to two years, while those participating in the BNLA survey had been in Australia for approximately three years (BNLA 2017: 13). Most of the 88 per cent we interviewed who did not have paid work were not employed because they had not started to look for jobs as they were still learning English or had caring responsibilities. Therefore they had not yet entered the Australian labour market

The refugees we interviewed who were looking for work were very unhappy to have no work while relying on welfare benefits in Australia. They want to start working as soon as possible to feel a sense of self, to rebuild their lives in Australia and as a way of repaying Australian society for providing safe refuge for them and their families.

The research in Australia and internationally suggests that for refugees and humanitarian immigrants, getting access to the labour market is perhaps the greatest settlement challenge that they face. We visited them again in 2019 and will also see them in 2020 to monitor their success in this regard.

Gaining recognition in Australia of their professional and technical qualifications is a significant barrier to getting commensurate employment in Australia for the Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

Many refugee informants spoke of their dilemma of the need to get employment as soon as possible versus the importance of waiting until their English language was at the level required for their preferred job.

Encouragingly, 21 per cent of adult refugees surveyed were 'Very confident' about their employment future in Australia and a further 19 per cent were 'Mostly confident'.

Refugee entrepreneurship

Opening a small business is one strategy that refugees adopt to overcome the barriers that they face in getting access to the labour market (Collins 2017a; Collins 2017b). Refugees have the highest rate of entrepreneurship of any category of immigrant arrivals in Australia. Of the refugee informants in NSW, 36 ran their own business prior to displacement from their homeland.

A significant group of respondents indicated that they would like to establish their own business in Australia including jewellers, car mechanics and caterers.

Syrian-conflict refugees exceptional

The Syrian-conflict intake selected mainly Christian refugees from Syria and Iraq who had impressive education achievements, and employment histories and achievements, prior to displacement. 38 Iraqi and 20 Syrian adult refugees interviewed in NSW held a tertiary education degree, together representing 36 per cent of the Iraqi and Syrian informants who answered this question (160 in total). This compares to the 27 per cent of Australians who hold a university degree (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/612854/australia-population-with-university-degree/>). The majority of female refugees did not have paid employment prior to displacement from their homeland.

Many Syrians and Iraqis are professionals: we interviewed engineers, pharmacists, doctors, architects, dentists, finance specialists and the like. They were anxious to continue their professions in Australia. They are well qualified, and their educational attainment at the secondary and tertiary level is comparable to the BNLA cohort and substantially higher the Afghani control group.

Afghan refugees

Most of the refugees from Afghanistan were Hazaras who were subject to great discrimination and persecution by the Taliban prior to their displacement. Many arrived on woman-at-risk visas (204) in large families having a sole female parent. The Taliban also denied education and employment opportunities to most Hazara in Afghanistan, so that the parent(s) often arrive with very little education or employment history.

The majority of the families interviewed from Afghanistan were relieved to be in Australia. They felt safe and happy.

The majority were learning English and for those without employment, they were hopeful for future work with expectations for work in any area of the labour market.

English language training

English language competency was seen by refugees as the biggest hurdle in accessing employment: most were delaying entry into the labour market while their English-language ability was getting up to speed.

Attendance at English language classes at TAFE and other providers (510 hours is available to all newly arrived refugees) provided refugees not only with an opportunity to learn English but also with an opportunity to make new friends in Australia. That is, English language classes assisted adult refugees to build linguistic and social capital in Australia, critical pre-requisites for successful settlement.

While there was a lot of praise for English language classes provided and for their English-language teachers, there was also considerable concern voiced regarding

overcrowding and inflexibility in delivery, including place, time of day and level of education related to language ability (adults in families).

Highly educated refugees wanted English-language training to be linked more to their future employment needs and to their qualification recognition tasks. They were in the same classes as refugees with no education and little literacy in their mother tongue, let alone English.

Respondents noted that they were frustrated by the clash between English language training and employment access.

Women with responsibility for pre-school children and aged, sick and infirm adults could generally not find the free time to attend English-language training classes at TAFE.

Friendly Neighbours

Settling into strange, new neighbourhoods in a strange country is difficult. Feeling welcome by neighbours assists with feelings of belonging.

Most refugee adults surveyed in NSW (92%), the majority of whom are settled in metropolitan areas, reported that the people in their neighbourhood were friendly. This compares favourably to refugees in the national BNLA survey (87%) and to our refugee informants in Queensland and Victoria. The religion of the refugee made little difference in this regard.

Talking to the neighbours

Another aspect of social inclusion and successful settlement relates to whether new refugee arrivals had social relations with their neighbours. Overall, two in three (66%) of our NSW refugee informants reported that it was easy to make friends with their neighbours, a stronger result than found in the national BNLA study. Moreover 41 per cent of our New South Wales refugee informants reported that it was easy to talk to their neighbours, slightly less than the national BNLA study (49%), even though the NSW refugees had lived next to their neighbours for less than a year while those in the BNLA had done so for up to three years.

A good place to bring up their children

In addition to escaping persecution, a key motivation of most of our refugee informants to come to Australia was driven by the need to secure a better future for their children. Many of the adults conceded that while they themselves might have difficulties with language or employment they were confident that their children would have a good life in Australia: 83 per cent of NSW refugees thought that their neighbourhood is a good place to bring up their children. This was only slightly behind the BNLA national result.

Good schools for refugee children

Refugees are motivated to provide a good future for their children. Education opportunity is an important component of this. Refugee adults in NSW (77%) were happier with schools in their neighbourhood than refugees who settled in Queensland or Victoria (69%).

Young refugees agreed that they are receiving good education opportunities in NSW schools: across NSW 80 per cent of young refugees find their educational experiences 'Very good' or 'Excellent'.

Young people are impressive

The young people involved in our research were overwhelmingly impressive in their English language skills given the short time they had been in Australia. They were optimistic about the future, in the main had a wide network of friends from various backgrounds and really enjoyed their schools. Of course, the first six months had been difficult for them, missing friends, extended family and the lifestyle, but they had adjusted with the help of community organisations, school friends and school teachers.

Friendship networks and feelings of belonging of young refugees

A key dimension of the settlement experiences of refugee young people relates to their friendship networks. While we expect that many refugee young people have friends from the same ethnic/religious/national background as themselves (an aspect of bonding social capital), a mark of successful settlement would be making friends of different backgrounds. We found that most have five or more friends of different backgrounds to themselves. Many also said that they would like more opportunities to mix with locally born Australians.

Another very subjective but important dimension of the settlement experiences of refugee young people relates to their feelings of belonging in the local community: nine out of ten young people in NSW felt that they belonged to the community 'Often', 'Most of the time' or 'Always'.

New South Wales a safe place for refugee families

The long and risky journey that a refugee family makes to a country like Australia is primarily motivated by the urgent need to provide a safe environment for themselves and their children. Adult refugees are unanimous that NSW is a safe place to live and bring up their families no matter whether they live in Sydney suburbs or Wollongong or Coffs Harbour. 96 per cent of the adult refugees we surveyed reported that NSW was a safe place for them and their children. This is a remarkable result, stronger than

the results we found in Qld and Victoria (87%) and stronger than the results of the BNLA longitudinal survey (93%).

All young people we surveyed noted feeling safe in their neighbourhood in all locations.

Understanding Australian culture

Like any country, Australia has its cultural idiosyncrasies that newcomers find different and sometimes difficult to understand and to adjust to. This is often seen in colloquial language and expressions as well as other cultural mores. In the national BNLA survey, six out of ten refugees (59%) found it easy to understand Australian ways and culture. The newly-arrived refugees in New South Wales were similar: 60 per cent found it easy to understand Australian ways and culture, despite a much shorter period of settlement. Refugees living in Liverpool (77%) reported the most success understanding Australian ways and culture.

Most refugees happy in New South Wales

In this report we have discussed many aspects of settlement outcomes for refugee families (adults and young people) who we have interviewed and surveyed for this research project. To see how these different aspects of settlement balance out in the minds of the refugees themselves we asked a final question: how happy are you with your current life in Australia? Refugee adults living in NSW were more likely to respond 'Very happy' to this question (44%) than refugees living in other states of Australia. Overall, 74 per cent of refugees were 'Very happy' or 'Mostly happy' living in NSW, compared to 58% per cent of refugees living in the other states. This is a strong indication that despite the great suffering and trauma that these refugees have experienced in the family life, refugee settlement in Australia is judged to be a success in the eyes of the refugees themselves.

Dissecting this finding by the religion of refugees, our research found that Muslim refugees – in this case those from Afghanistan, mostly Hazara – are the most likely (74%) to report that they are 'Very happy' or 'Mostly happy' with their lives in Australia, a similar result to that of Christian refugees (70% 'Very happy' or 'Mostly happy'). 63 per cent of Ezidi refugees reported overall happiness with their life as a refugee living in NSW. By country of displacement, while the results show that refugees from Afghanistan are most happy with life in Australia (82% 'Very happy' and 9% 'Mostly happy'), most of the refugees from Syria (38% 'Very happy' and 27% 'Mostly happy') and Iraq (35% 'Very happy' and 42% 'Mostly happy') report overall happiness settling in NSW, despite their difficulties with settlement, family reunion and employment.

Other findings

We asked our refugee informants about experiences of racism in Australia. Perhaps surprisingly – given the dog whistle politics about refugees that has dominated political and public discourses in Australia for two decades at least – most said that they had not experienced racism in New South Wales. A few informants recounted an incident in public that they felt was racist.

Most of the refugees felt happy with their lives in Australia and positive about their future. All of those interviewed stated that they wanted to take up Australian citizenship as soon as possible and some had in fact already gained Australian citizenship.

All respondents noted that Australia was now their home.

One aspect of our research design was to include refugee experiences of settlement in non-metropolitan areas, in addition to that of those refugees living in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The regional NSW sites were Wollongong and Coffs Harbour. A key finding is that refugee settlement in non-metropolitan areas of NSW appears to have been successful from the viewpoint of the refugees themselves.

Life in Australia has challenged gender relations within families in Australia. In many instances life in Australia meant living in a society with stronger laws, policies and practices of human rights and gender equality, challenging male authority in the family, particularly when males were not working and home with their wife, or when it was the women – who mostly had home duties prior to displacement – who found a job. Young people also had greater rights and this was also a source of tension for some families.

Many of our refugee informants reported that the costs of accommodation – particularly in Sydney – and the cost of living in general was a key area of difficulty for them.



Background



1. Background

In 2015, the Australian Government announced the resettlement of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees – two groups were identified and targeted as those most in need as a consequence of the Syrian conflict – in addition to the existing annual Humanitarian Program intake. At the same time the Government announced that the intake under the Humanitarian (refugee) Program would increase from 13,750 in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, to 16,250 in 2017-2018, and 18,750 in 2018-2019 (DSS, 2019). For the purposes of our study we have conducted interviews and surveys with Syrian conflict refugees from Syria and Iraq, and refugees from Afghanistan as our control group: the latter provides an evaluation of the convergence and divergence between the services provided and settlement outcomes of the targeted and select group of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and those entering Australia under the main humanitarian program. Our focus of investigation is refugee families who arrived from approximately mid-2015 to the end of 2017, though most refugee families in our study arrived in NSW in 2017.

While the legitimate fear of persecution binds refugees in their need to seek resettlement elsewhere, they are a heterogeneous group including men, women and children of different ages and health status, from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, from different socio-economic backgrounds, with a broad spectrum of skills and qualifications and life experiences. They are also different by nature of the social networks to which they have access in their country of resettlement; their broader diasporic networks; and their pathways of entry (selected, as was the case of the Syrian-conflict refugees and those arriving under the standing humanitarian pathway; or as asylum seekers, as was the case with Afghan refugees).



Context



2. Context

In the last few years the world has witnessed unprecedented flows of displaced people. According to the UNHCR (2018) 'we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18'. The UNHCR estimates that nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution. During the second half of 2015, more than 1 million people arrived in Europe by sea, a more than fourfold increase compared to the previous year's 216,000 arrivals (Kingsley, 2016). About half of the people originated from the Syrian Arab Republic, but those from Afghanistan and Iraq also accounted for a significant proportion (UNHCR, 2016: 7). As the OECD recently reported, 'warfare and instability in the Middle East and Africa, with countries in the Mediterranean area under particular pressure' has put humanitarian immigration flows at the top of the global immigration agenda and 'is also causing countries to review the ways in which their humanitarian programmes and procedures are working' (OECD, 2015: 49).

Humanitarian entrants have greater problems with settlement compared to other categories of Australia's immigrant intake despite their great determination to overcome these barriers. They also experience greater socio-economic disadvantage in Australia than do other immigrants (Hugo, 2011). Fozdar and Hartley (2013) point to the problems that refugees face in the areas of housing, employment and health as well as with social connections in Australia. Humanitarian immigrants in particular experience more problems in the labour market than other immigrants. In 2006 the unemployment rate for those born in Somalia was 30.7 per cent and Sudan 28.2 per cent at a time when the average Australian unemployment rate was below 6 per cent (Collins, 2011). When they do get jobs, humanitarian immigrants face what Hugo (2011: 109) calls 'occupational skidding', that is, they do not get jobs commensurate with their qualifications and generally end up working in low-skill and low-paid occupations irrespective of their human capital (Colic-Piesker and Tilbury, 2007). Thus, some humanitarian arrivals are trapped in low income jobs in secondary labour market niches or remain economically excluded as part of a social underclass. As Hugo (2011: xxiv) concludes, 'Much remains to be done to assist humanitarian settlers to enter the Australian labour market and to facilitate their upward mobility'.

The evidence strongly attests that for refugees and humanitarian immigrants, getting access to the Australian labour market is perhaps the greatest settlement challenge that they face. Data published by the Productivity Commission (2016: 476) shows that the unemployment rate for migrants who arrived as part of the humanitarian intake (37.7%) was more than three times that of migrants who arrived as part of the skilled intake (11.6%) and nearly double that of migrants who arrived as part of the family intake (21.0%).

While humanitarian immigrants face substantial barriers in accessing good jobs and overcoming welfare, health, housing and other settlement difficulties, it is critical that a *deficit model* of refugee settlement in Australia be strongly rejected. Perhaps the strongest finding

of our research project has been to uncover the *agency* of newly arrived refugee families, their determination to overcome the barriers that they face and the effort, hard work and innovation that they demonstrate in the strategies that they adopt to overcome the obstacles that constrain their opportunities in Australian society.

While the focus in the literature largely remains on employment, welfare, health and housing, little if any research has focused on the family unit and a cross generational understanding of the experience of settlement in the Australian context. This report, the Queensland report (Collins et al., 2019), and the subsequent Victoria report to follow, aim to address this gap.

The focus of this second report is to explore the challenges and opportunities of settlement in Australia from the experiences of the Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees themselves in New South Wales. Ultimately, the aim of reporting on the outcomes of the research is not only to present evidence but also to spark a conversation about, and to contribute to an understanding of the contribution that refugees make to Australian society and how we can enhance the social well-being, employability prospects, economic security and educational opportunities of recently arrived refugees in Australia. Finally, our reports aim to inform policy and services to enhance the settlement experience of this group. The recent Shergold Report (Shergold et al., 2019) presented the findings of a *Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia*. After an intensive consultation period with 90 key informants and reviewing 57 submissions, the Shergold report made 7 key policy recommendations. At the end of our three-year longitudinal study we will be in a position to comment on the efficacy of the Shergold recommendations and present the policy implications of our research.



Methodology



3. Methodology

A multi-method approach has been employed to collect and analyse data: including a survey (requiring a quantitative analysis), semi-structured interviews with refugees and key stakeholders in the field, and documentary analysis. This report presents a synopsis of the survey and interview findings with regard to refugee families.

Our multi-method approach represents a unique contribution to the study of refugees. In addition to employing a survey tool that mirrors some questions furnishing the BNLA longitudinal survey (Building a New Life in Australia survey), we complemented this evidence with a large-scale interview process involving 233 refugee families in three states in metropolitan and semi-rural areas. We have also conducted interviews with key stakeholders in the field and carried out extensive document analyses. This triangulated approach to evidence building separates our study from the extant literature which typically focuses on either qualitative or quantitative data collection, and on refugees or stakeholders as the main subject of analysis (see for instance Auer, 2017; Delaporte and Piracha, 2018; Elliott and Yusuf, 2014; Phillmore, 2011; Stave and Hillesund, 2015; Szkudlarek, 2019). The scale of our study is also unique, displaying exhaustive evidence-based insights into the lived experience of refugee settlement coupled with insights from the perspective of policy makers and practitioners into the delivery of services surrounding the settlement of refugees.

The process of participant recruitment adhered to University Ethics guidelines, whereby participants were contacted through a third party (for refugees and educators), and directly (for stakeholders), who were informed about the project and could voluntarily opt in or out of an interview. Permission was asked of individuals, both adults and young people, and those in agreement were included in the project population. In the case of young people under the age of 16, consent was also obtained from a parent or guardian.

For the refugee interviews, Migrant Resource Centres and various non-government organisations involved in refugee service delivery played a critical role in assisting with arranging a community event where refugees were invited to come along to an information session to hear about the project. The information session was presented by the Chief Investigators who partnered with a bilingual translator who simultaneously translated the information provided by the CI and any questions emerging throughout the session. Translated information sheets were also distributed at the session.

Following the information session, names were collected from interested participants and they were subsequently contacted by third-party organisations. Representatives from these organisations assisted with creating a timetable of participants. Interviews were scheduled at a time of convenience to the family. With the exception of interviewees in Victoria, the majority of the interviews were undertaken at the homes of the refugee families, with relatively few opting to be interviewed at the Migrant Resource Centre (18 in NSW). All family interviews took between one and two hours. Accompanying each Chief Investigator to all interviews was a Bilingual Research Assistant (BRA).

All BRAs were refugees sourced through the community organisations. In this way the research project could both draw on resources within refugee communities but also train and empower those selected to assist in our refugee family fieldwork. Following a response to the Expression of Interest, all BRAs participated in a training session, involving an ice breaker exercise and in-depth information on the project and the process of interview. All information sheets and question sheets were distributed to provide clarity around the nature of the questions and type of information to be elicited. The BRAs were crucial in building the cultural and linguistic bridge between interviewer and interviewee; and in creating an efficient and effective comfort in the process of the interview.

Overall, qualitative research allows the researcher to capture the lived experience of the participant in their own words (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Accordingly, a semi-structured interview was deemed to be the best way in which to collect in-depth details of the experiences of refugees (Fusch and Ness, 2015; Perry, 1998) and of the stakeholders.

For the refugees the semi-structured interview approach offered participants the ability to present and elaborate on their pre-migration and post migration experience. Similarly, for the stakeholders, the semi-structured approach allowed them to direct the discussion of the challenges and opportunities in policy making and delivery of services.

The discussion was framed by open-ended questions in order to elicit the experience of the informants and to gain insights into how they make sense of their reality. The agency of children, their ability to think and act independently, has been recognised since the 1970s, in both sociology and psychology (Bell, 1968; Sameroff, 1975; James et al., 1998; Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015; Sorbring and Kuczynski, 2018) thus children as young as five years of age have been included in the present study, and are included in the term 'young people'. Bolin (2018) has recently argued the need for service providers to invest in the legitimate knowledge of children; and Bergnehr (2018) explores the agency of refugee children in particular. The semi-structured interview schedule for adults and a shorter one for young people can be found in Appendix A. Our semi-structured interview process involved the use of prompts as a means by which deeper information could be garnered in some of the interviews, while for others prompts were unnecessary as the participants themselves guided the discussion (Rabionet, 2011).

While incredibly useful in providing deep insights, the qualitative approach is not without limitations. For instance, while the overall project population is significant, we present our findings with an element of caution given the heterogeneity of the refugee experience. The second limitation was the reliance of the CIs on the assistance of the BRAs during the interview process. While all the BRAs did an excellent job in translating for the project there were instances when we felt that elements of the discussion were lost. We also noticed a variation between the quality of the BRAs, which for us indicates there may be some variation in the information provided. Having said that we could not have elicited the breadth and depth of information gained about the lived experience of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan

refugees without their assistance. We have used this experience to provide another training round prior to year-two interviews.

The empirical contribution of this research for the New South Wales segment of the project consisted of in depth semi-structured interviews with 133 families in total: 54 from Syria, 56 from Iraq and 23 from Afghanistan. Interview and survey data were collected from across six locations, including Auburn (Afghanistan, n=19), Fairfield (Syria, n=17; and Iraq, n=27), Liverpool (Syria, n=3; and Iraq, n=22), Parramatta (Syria, n=19; and Iraq, n=1), Coffs Harbour (Syria, n=6; Iraq, n=3; and Afghanistan, n=4), and Wollongong (Syria, n=7; and Iraq, n=3). Two pilot Syrian family interviews were conducted initially in the region of Bankstown (these families are not included in charts produced from survey data).

The interviews were all recorded and transcribed before coding was employed, using NVivo and our *a priori* categories of analysis based on the topics covered in the interviews. The analysis of the interviews revealed several themes emerging from our discussions around the pre- and post-migration experience.

Similarly, for the stakeholder interviews – which involved representatives from NGOs; employer bodies, TAFEs, schools and other educators – information was recorded and transcribed before coding was employed using NVivo. The interview findings with regard to these stakeholders will be presented in future reports.

In addition to the qualitative analysis we also collected and analysed survey data from family members. All family interview participants were surveyed drawing on an instrument that reflected many of the questions used in the BNLA. Questions were deliberately framed to mirror the BNLA so as to allow for a comparison of quantitative data over the three year period with the pre-existing longitudinal survey instrument. Adults were asked a total of 25 questions and young people were asked a total of 8 questions. The survey was completed in the relevant community language or in English where relevant. The survey was administered largely by the BRA or by the individuals themselves. It was completed on an iPad using Qualtrics.

3.1. Survey collection and analysis

The adult survey data is grouped into three broad areas: (1) 'demographic': characteristics of the respondent (age, gender, location, ethnolinguistic characteristics etc.), (2) 'integration': relationships within the local community/English language acquisition, (3) employment.

For most of the integration and employment data the effects analysed are for: age, gender, former country, location, and state. Other effects analysed include marital status, religion, language and ethnicity.

The young people survey data also focusses on demographic characteristics and explores relationships with the local community, engagement with school, English language acquisition and sense of belonging. Effects analysed for young people with respect to the above include age, gender, location and ethnicity.

While most survey questions required Boolean (yes/no, Male/Female) or ordinal responses (e.g. Likert scales), some questions concerning ethnolinguistic characteristics (ethno-religion, language etc.) required an open-ended text response. The survey questions for adults and young people can be found in Appendix B. The survey data is described using frequencies of responses to questions. Only population parameters (i.e. not statistical samples) are employed in the analysis.

BNLA data is included in some of the analysis, for comparison and benchmarking purposes, particularly so with regards to integration and employment outcomes. BNLA data is sourced from the Department of Social Services (BNLA, 2017) and pertains to Wave 3 data, which was collected from October 2015 to March 2016, after participants had been in Australia for approximately three years.

Statistical power of survey data

The 500 adults of the Round One survey (as a single cohort) can be used inferentially, based on a 'confidence level' of 95% and 'margin of error' of 5% (common parameters in sample size calculation). Other survey populations, for example Young People or smaller groups of adults, can be used as stand-alone inferential sample data with greater caution (90% confidence level).

Survey anomalies

Blank or invalid responses to individual questions are included in the total number of responses for any given question but they are treated as outliers. That is, they are noted in chart headings or comments as either 'null' or 'not specified', but are not included in the body of the chart. Where frequencies of responses are expressed as a percentage they are calculated with regard to the total number of responses for any particular question, which is indicated by ($n = x$).

Due to a validation problem during distribution, the NSW Young People data contains a 15% population specification error. The proximity of the error population age (19-23) to the target population age (5-18) mitigates impact on the overall analysis.



Refugee Informants In New South Wales



4. Refugee Informants in New South Wales

The refugee informants were recruited using a networking methodology that drew on the refugee families' links to our Industry Partner in New South Wales, Settlement Services International (SSI) Ltd, who guided us in approaching four of their partner organisations – Auburn Diversity Services Inc, Community Migrant Resource Centre, CORE Community Services, and Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre, for assistance in connecting with and engaging refugee families as participants. As explained previously we sought recently-arrived refugee families from Syria and Iraq who were part of the special one-off intake of 12,000 Syrian Conflict refugees, plus refugee families from Afghanistan who arrived at the same time but as part of the annual humanitarian (refugee) intake, in order to compare the similarities and differences in background and settlement experience in New South Wales. We chose Auburn and Coffs Harbour as sites for interviewing refugee families from Afghanistan. Similarly, the research is interested in the experiences of refugee families who settle in metropolitan areas – in this case the Western Sydney region – as well as those who settle in regional areas (in this case Wollongong and Coffs Harbour). In this section of the report we outline the characteristics of our refugee informants in New South Wales (NSW).

Table 4.1: Number of families interviewed in NSW, by Service Provider location

State	Metropolitan or Regional	Location	Number of families interviewed			Total
			Syrian	Iraqi	Afghan	
NSW	Sydney Metropolitan	Pilots (Bankstown)	2			2
		Auburn			19	19
		Fairfield	17	27		44
		Liverpool	3	22		25
		Parramatta	19	1		20
	Regional	Coffs Harbour	6	3	4	13
		Wollongong	7	3		10
Total			54	56	23	133

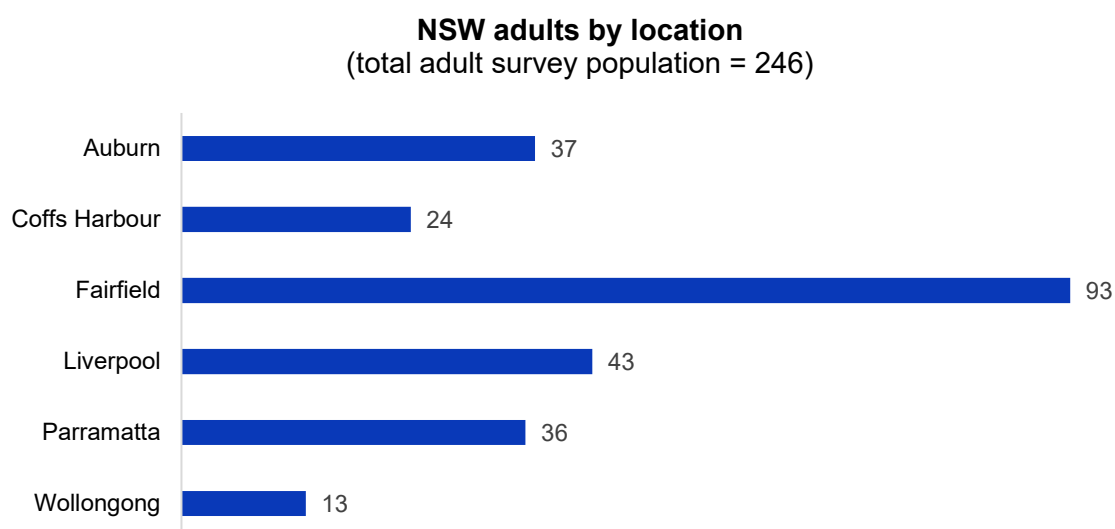
In the first year of the research (2018), in NSW, 133 families in total, 54 from Syria, 56 from Iraq and 23 from Afghanistan were interviewed (see Tables 4.1, 4.2). Interview and survey data were collected across six locations, including Auburn (Afghanistan, n=19), Fairfield (Syria, n=17; and Iraq, n=27), Liverpool (Syria, n=3; and Iraq, n=22), Parramatta (Syria, n=19; and Iraq, n=1), Coffs Harbour (Syria, n=6; Iraq, n=3; and Afghanistan, n=4), and Wollongong (Syria, n=7; and Iraq, n=3). Two pilot Syrian family interviews were conducted initially in the region of Bankstown.

Table 4.2: Number of refugees surveyed in NSW, by gender

State	Adults		Young People		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
NSW	110	136	42	42	330

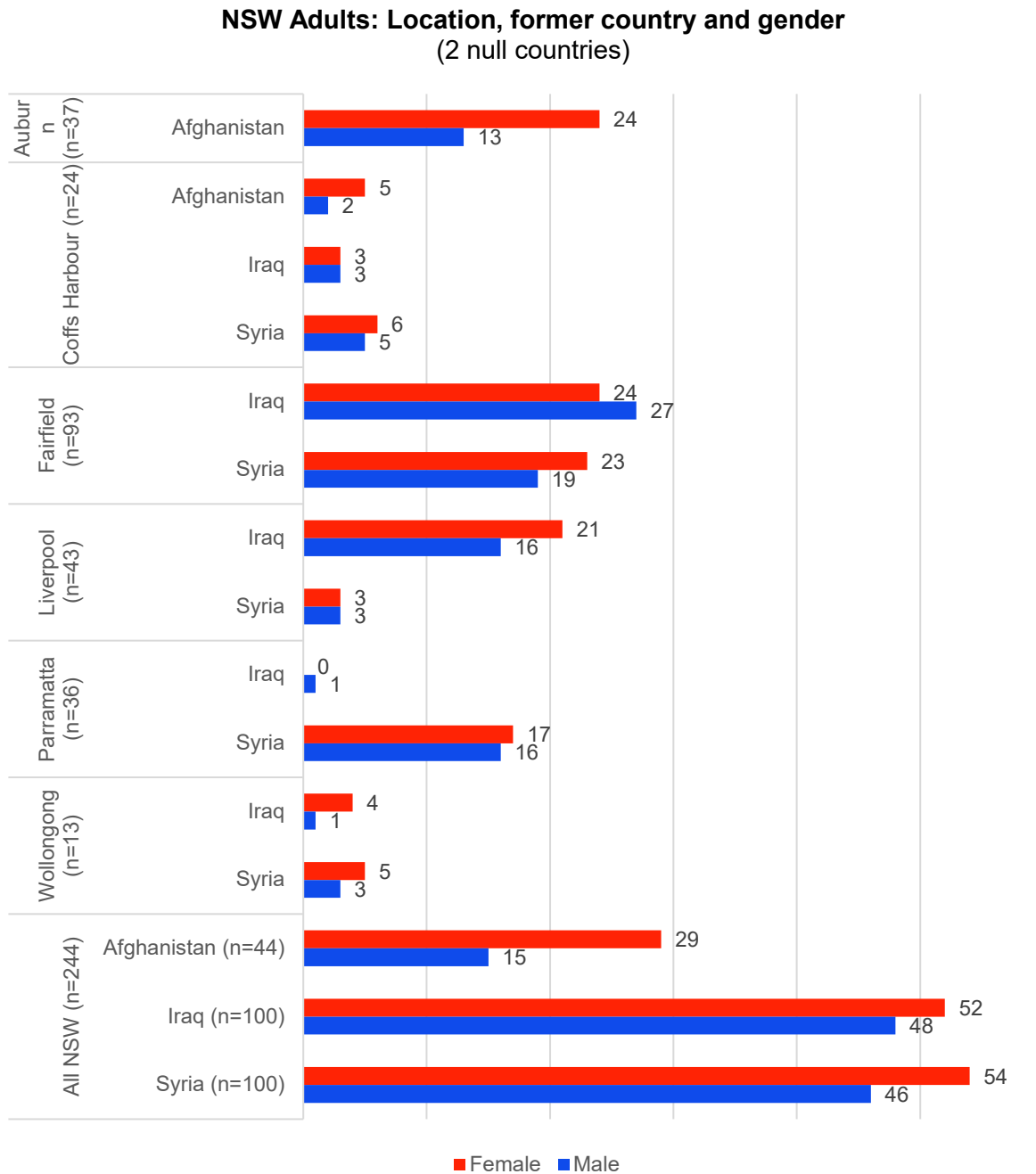
Of the locations in NSW, the largest number of adult informants were drawn from Fairfield (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Number of adult refugees surveyed in NSW, by Service Provider location



In NSW, Syrians made up the largest group in Coffs Harbour, Parramatta and Wollongong; Iraqis were the largest group in Fairfield and Liverpool; only Afghans were interviewed in Auburn (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Number of adult refugees surveyed, by location, former country and gender



Most of the refugee families who we interviewed in NSW had arrived on a 202 family sponsorship refugee visa (Table 4.3). This is in contrast to the refugee families who we interviewed in Queensland, many of whom had arrived on a 200 visa or a 204 (women at risk) visa. This is an important point of difference for understanding the settlement experiences and outcomes of refugee families in NSW: most had family members living in Australia (referred to as ‘proposers’) who sponsored their refugee visa application. It is an interesting question as to whether this made the task of settlement in NSW easier for recently arrived refugees. We will respond to this question in our final report when all of the data has been assessed.

Table 4.3: Visa subclass of families interviewed in NSW

State	Area	Location	Visa 200	Visa 202	Visa 204	Other visa type	Visa type unknown	Total
NSW	Metropolitan	Auburn	7	4	4	1 (100)	3	19
		Bass Hill (Pilots)		1			1	2
		Fairfield	7	29	1	1 (100+866)	6	44
		Liverpool		17	1		7	25
		Parramatta	4	13			3	20
	Regional	Coffs Harbour	7		2	3 (201)	1	13
		Wollongong	4	1	5			10
Total			29	65	13	5	21	133

The large majority of respondents in NSW were in the 30 to 60 year age bracket, however there was a substantial proportion of respondents over the age of 60 in Fairfield (33 out of 93), and none in this age bracket in Auburn (see Figure 4.3). Generally there were similar numbers of males and females, apart from in Auburn and Coffs Harbour, the two locations where Afghan families were interviewed, where females out-numbered males. This gender imbalance reflects the reality of the displacement experience of refugee families from places like Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq where many families lost family members (often males) in bombings and attacks.

Equal numbers of adult refugees surveyed were from Syria and Iraq (100 individuals respectively, out of 244 or 41%), while 44 adults from Afghanistan were surveyed (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.3: Number of adults in NSW, by age and gender

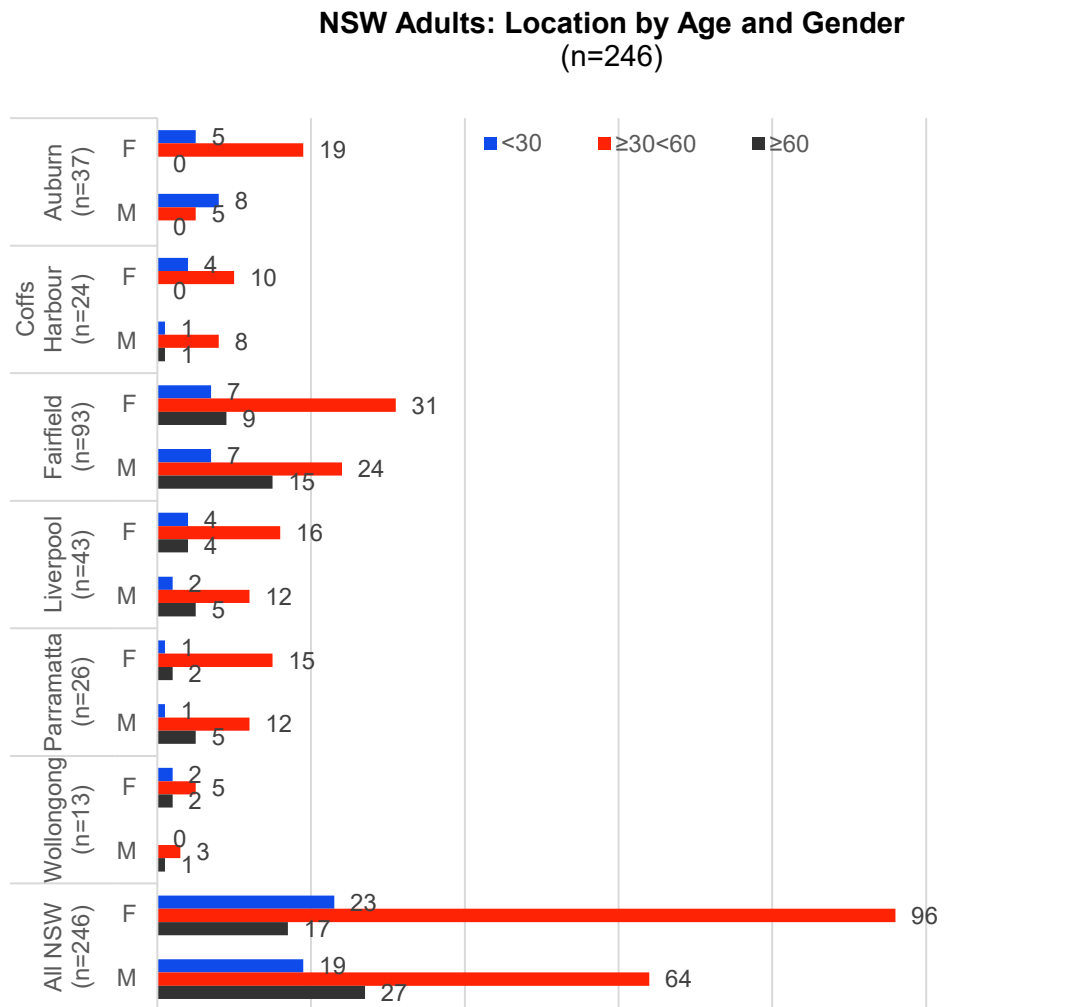
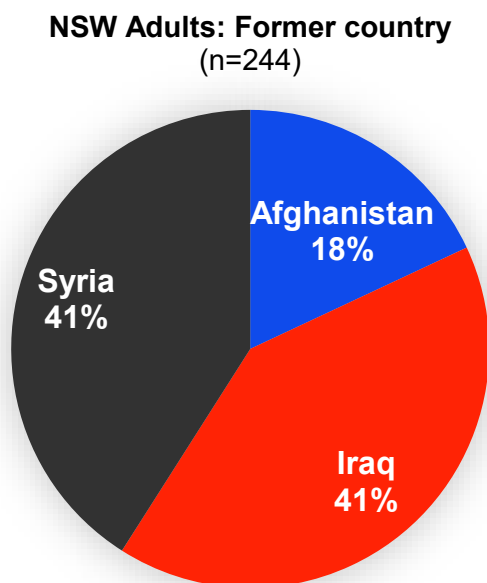
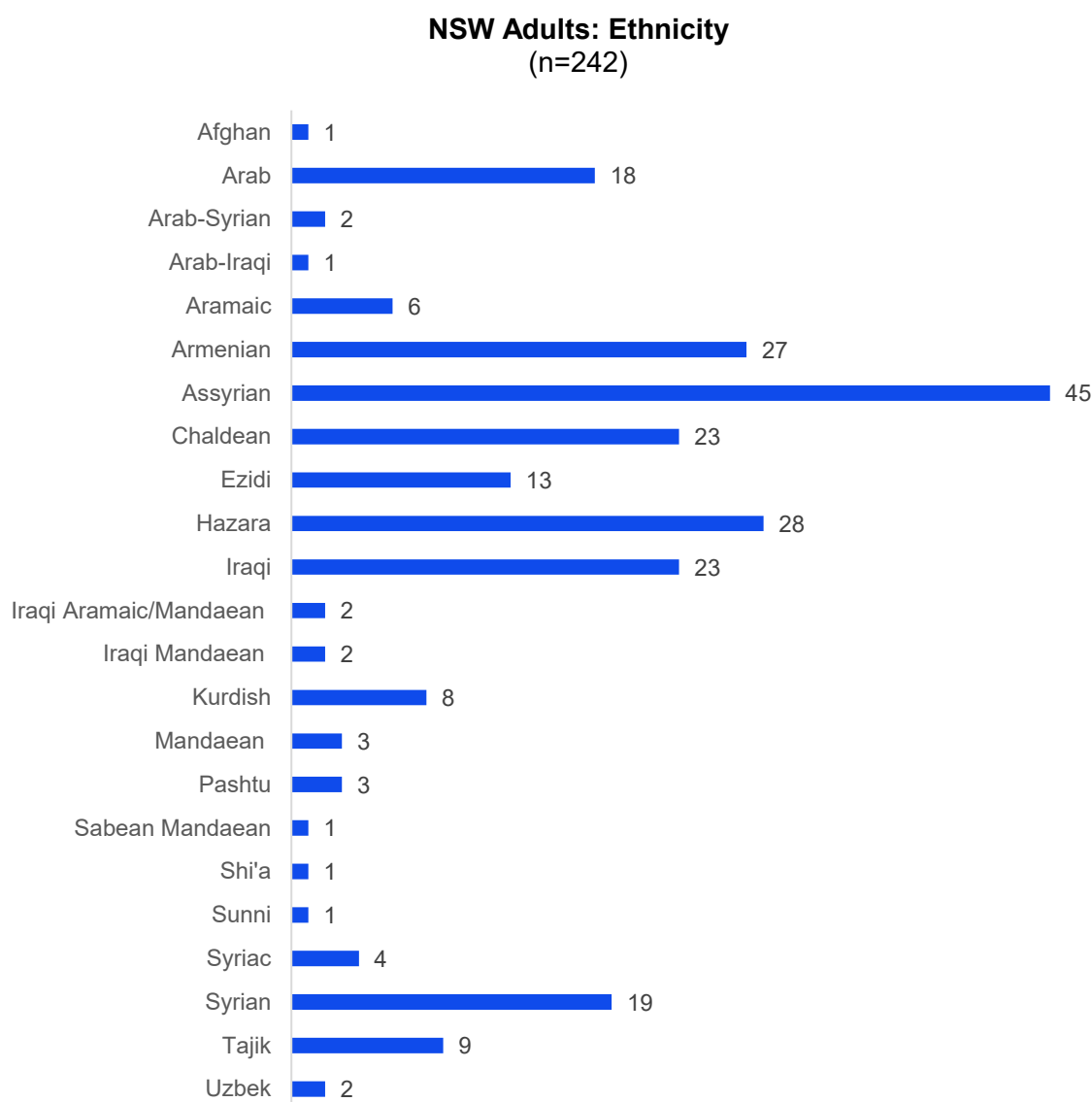


Figure 4.4: Former country of NSW adults



The recently-arrived refugee families from Syria and Iraq in particular were not homogenous, but reflected a diversity of religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The largest ethnic group of adult individuals in this cohort identified themselves as Assyrian (45 out of 200), followed by Armenian (27 out of 200; see Figure 4.5). A little over half of the refugee individuals from Afghanistan (28 out of 44) were Hazara, who were persecuted by the Taliban (Maley, 2016). Figure 4.5 also indicates that we interviewed 13 Ezidi adults in NSW. The Ezidi (sometimes spelt Yazidi) experienced very violent oppression at the hands of ISIS, with many women – young and old – taken as sex slaves (Murad, 2018).

Figure 4.5: Ethnicity of NSW adults



It is not surprising that most of the refugee informants – other than those from Afghanistan – were Christians. As Figure 4.6 shows, 67 per cent of the NSW adult informants were Christian, with 25 per cent Muslim and 8 per cent Ezidi. This reflects the (perhaps curious)

decision by the Australian government to include mostly Christians in the special Syrian-conflict refugee intake: curious since most refugees from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq were Muslim. This does not deny that they too have suffered greatly in the conflict.

Figure 4.6: The major religious groups of NSW adults

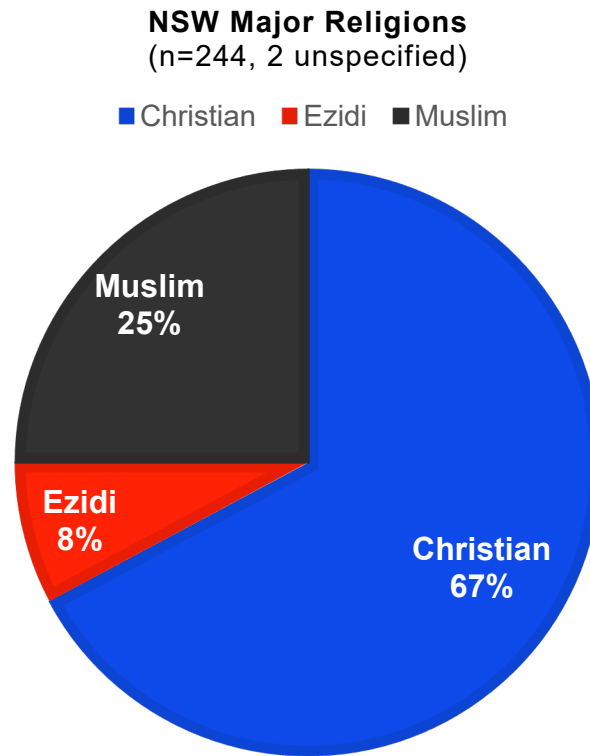
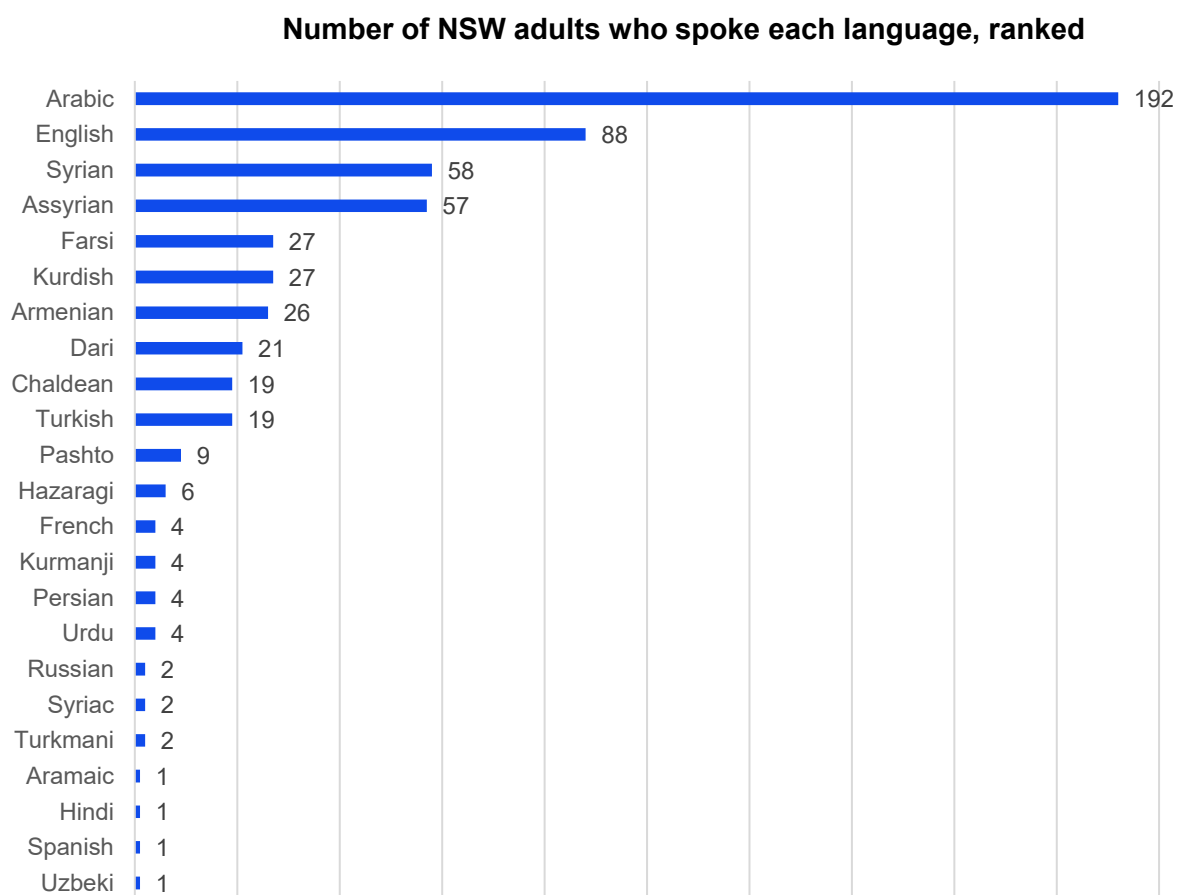


Figure 4.7: The languages spoken by NSW adults



One key feature of the refugee informants was their linguistic diversity. The languages spoken by the adults were ranked by proportionate significance (see Figure 4.7). Arabic and English were widely spoken by those from Syria and Iraq while most from Afghanistan spoke Dari. Many of the NSW adult refugees spoke multiple languages.



Pre-Migration Stories



5. Pre-Migration Stories

We know that all our refugee informants had horrific experiences in their homeland prior to fleeing for their safety. It was not our intention to dwell on these experiences because we did not want to resurrect trauma. Rather we asked our informants (see Table 5.1) about their pre-migration experience before the conflict, war, or persecution that led to their displacement. Without exception, all of those living in Syria and most of those living in Iraq had very fond memories of their life. Most had good jobs or professions; most had good homes and lifestyles. They spoke glowingly of their social life, of visiting family and friends for coffee, meals with family and friends and discussions that went late into the night, with days not ending much before the early hours of the morning. It was a lifestyle they miss very much in Australia, where they find their neighbours and family and friendship networks tied to their houses after work and their neighbourhoods very quiet after 6.00 or 7.00 p.m.

Table 5.1: Gender, former country and location of adults in NSW who talked about their lives before migration

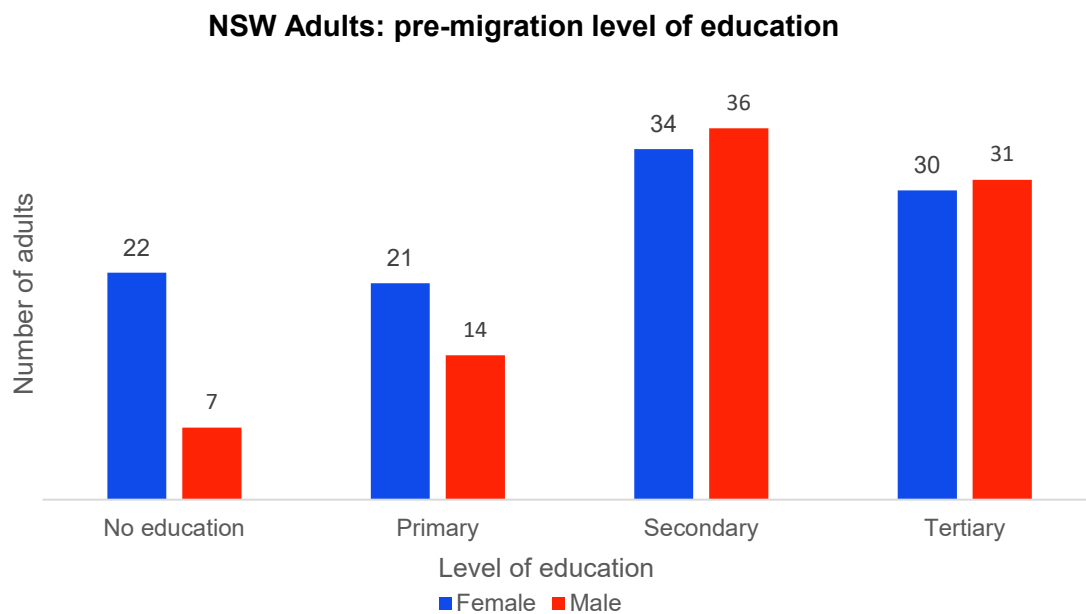
		Number of Adults
Gender	Male	110
	Female	136
Former Country	Syria	100
	Iraq	100
	Afghanistan	44
Location of Adults	Auburn	37
	Coffs Harbour	24
	Fairfield	93
	Liverpool	43
	Parramatta	36
	Wollongong	13
Total		246

N.B. Former Country adds up to 244 not 246 due to 2 blank responses.

Our interest was particularly located in their education and work experiences prior to their displacement. As Table 5.2 shows, educational achievement varies considerably. In NSW, the largest group of adults had received schooling at the secondary level, although almost one in three of our refugee informants (31%) – almost equal numbers of males and females (Figure 5.1) – had a tertiary education background. Many of these are Iraqi and Syrian professionals with engineering, business, economics, and education backgrounds (see Figure 5.3). At the other end of the spectrum, 35 informants had only primary education and 29 had no education at all. Many of the latter were from Afghanistan (Figure 5.2), where the Taliban refused Hazaras access to education. Clearly learning English when you are illiterate or have little education in your own language is immensely difficult.

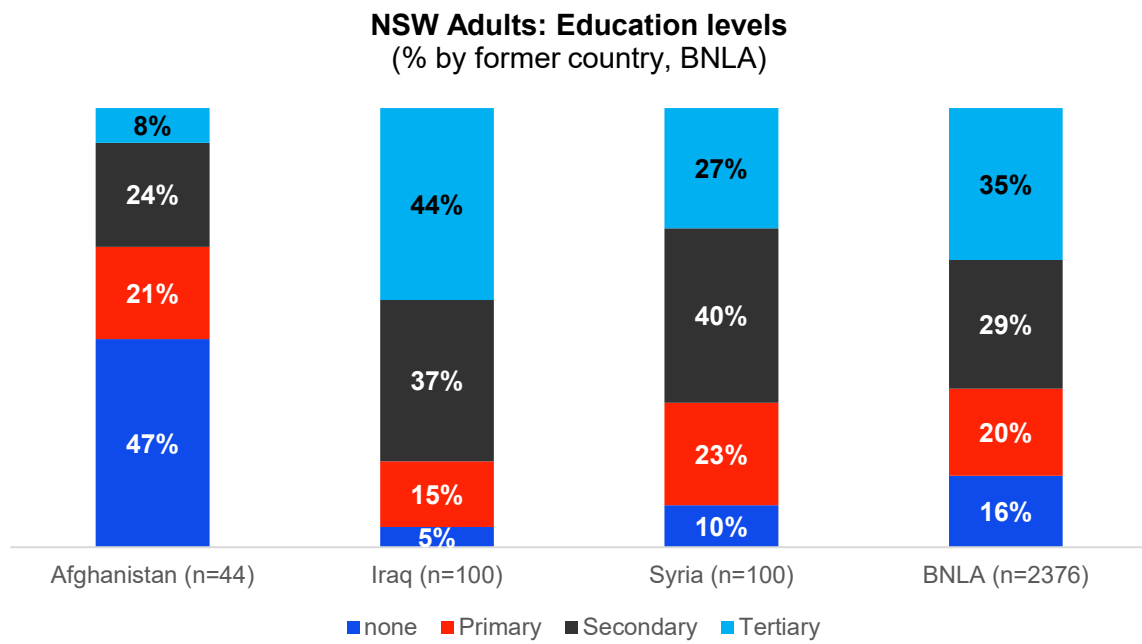
Table 5.2: Level of education attained by NSW adults

Education level attained	Number of adults
Tertiary	61
Secondary	70
Primary	35
No education	29
Total	195

Figure 5.1: Pre-migration education level of NSW adults, by gender

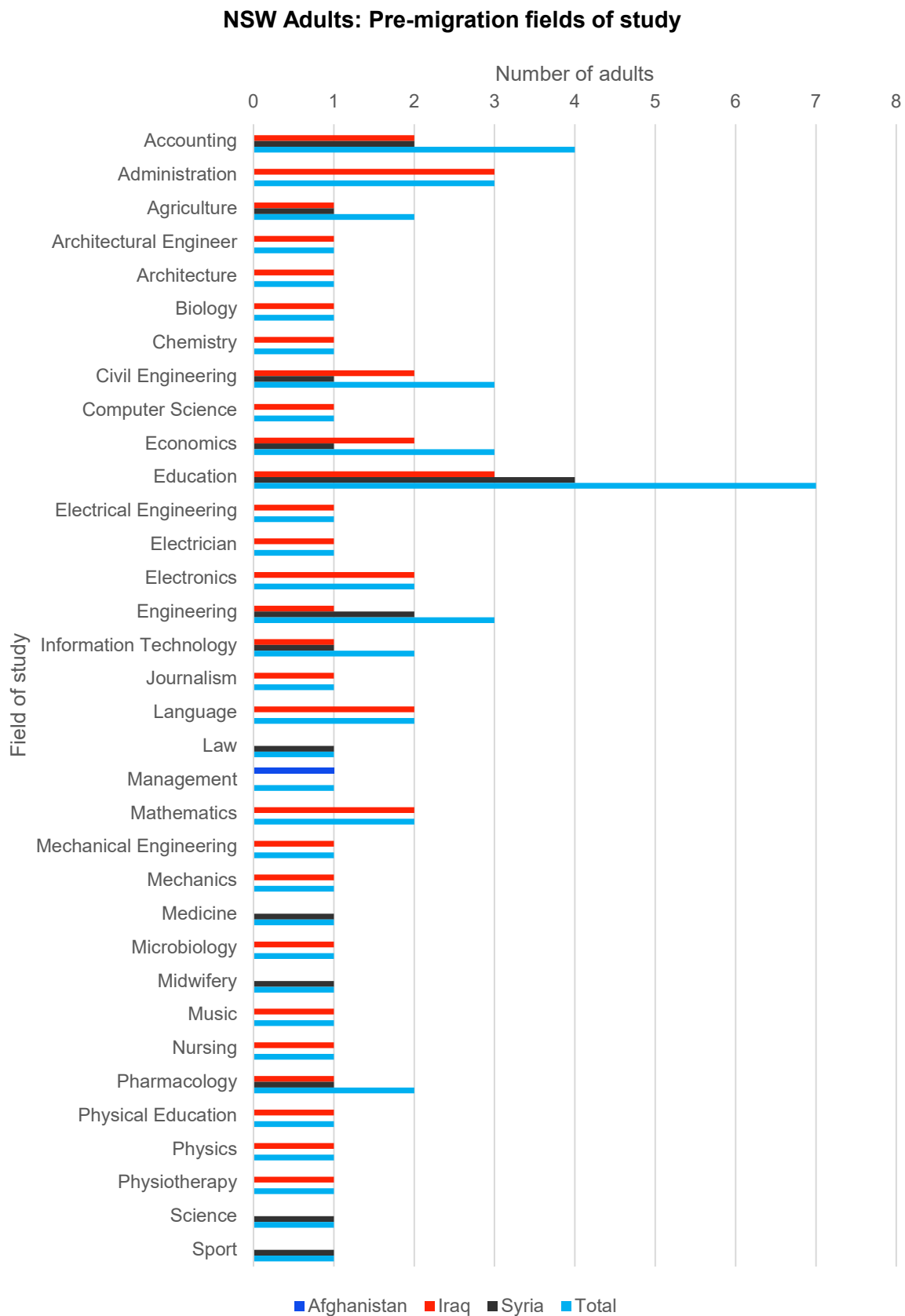
N.B. There were 48 invalid responses in this set of data.

Figure 5.2: Pre-migration education level of NSW adults, by former country



N.B. Two invalid responses in this set due to 2 invalid former countries

Figure 5.3: Pre-migration study fields of NSW adults, by former country



N.B. There were 187 invalid responses in this set. Two invalid former countries, the rest were 'field of study' invalid responses.

Of the NSW refugee adults surveyed, 131 had worked in their home country prior to coming to Australia. Of these, 75 were employed by others while 36 had run their own business (that is, were self-employed). 83 did not work – often the mothers of families – while 18 were studying (see Table 5.3).

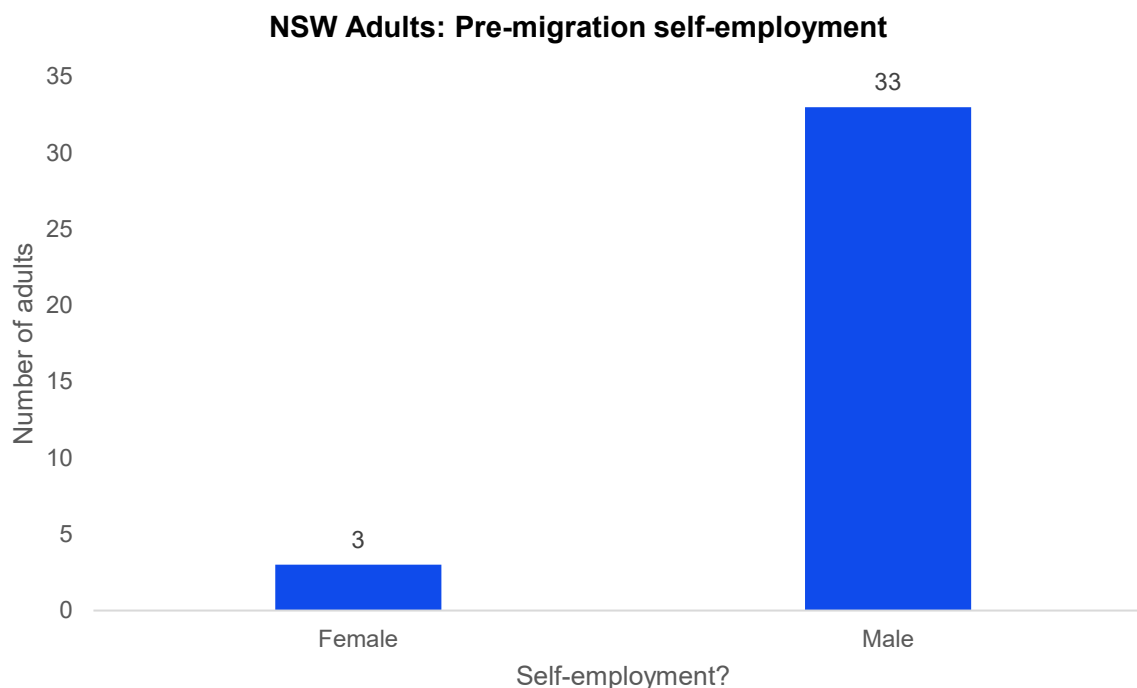
Table 5.3: NSW adults’ previous employment experience

Previous employment experience*	Number of adults
Yes, I worked	131
I worked for an employer	75
I was self-employed	36
No, I did not work	83
I was studying	18

* Respondents could answer ‘yes’ to more than one category (31 nulls)

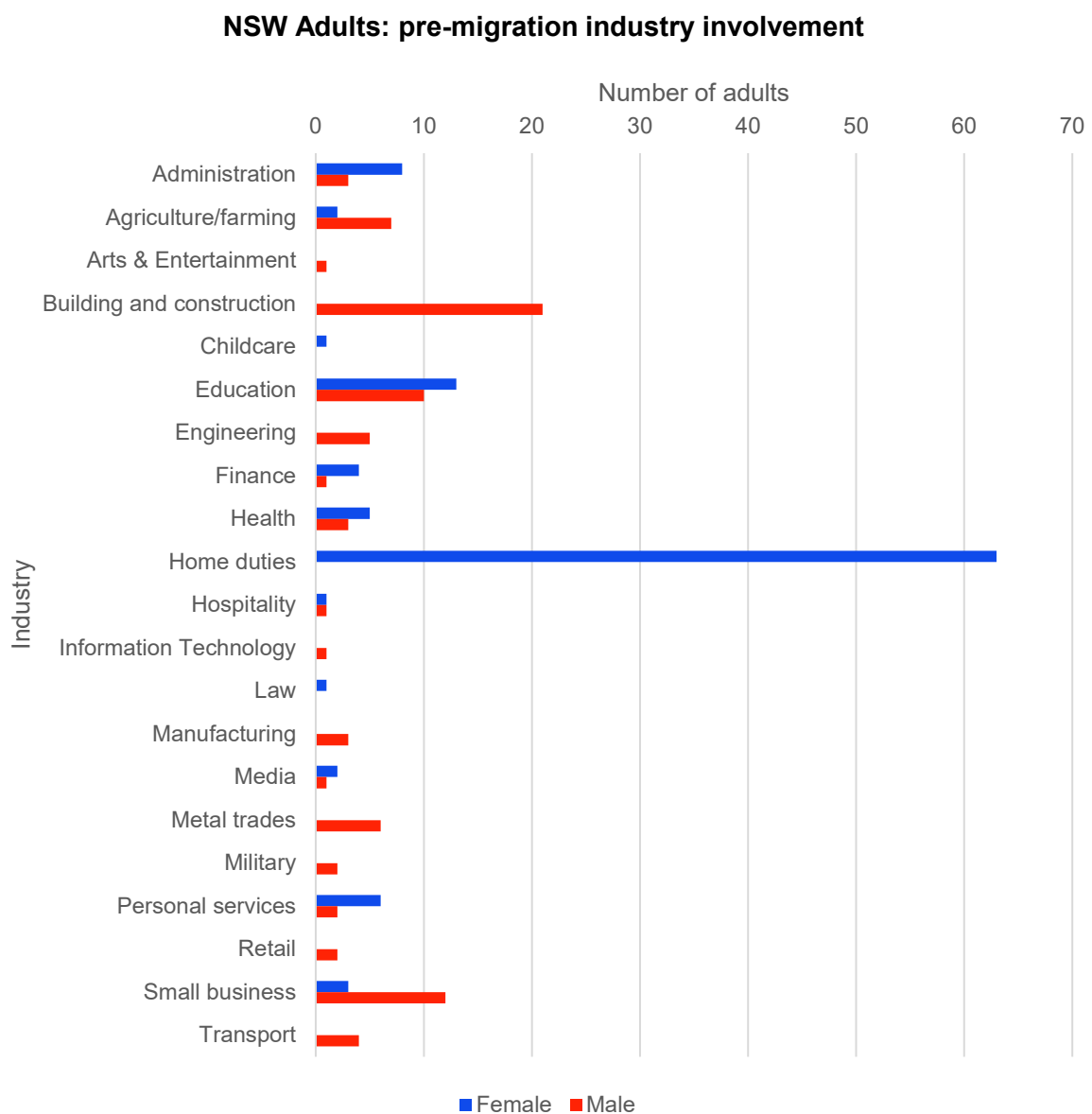
The self-employment data is interesting because for many refugees, establishing a business in Australia is a way of creating their own job and providing for their family (Collins, 2017b). As Figure 5.4 shows, while it was mainly male refugees who had a prior business career, refugee women also had prior entrepreneurial experience and were interested in setting up a business in Australia.

Figure 5.4: NSW adults’ previous experience with self employment, by gender



Finally, as Figure 5.5 shows, the refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan had employment experience across a wide range of industries. They were grateful for the safe haven that Australia had provided them and their families. They valued this safety and noted they wanted to make a contribution to Australian society through their work. It is a cruel irony that many face very large barriers to getting a job in Australia. This is a market failure: they have great human capital potential, but the labour market and more specifically employers fail to unlock it. It also constrains their settlement outcomes in Australia. Innovative solutions are required to address this problem and the related issues surrounding this – job mismatch, a lack of skills and qualifications accreditation, and a lack of local experience amongst other factors.

Figure 5.5: NSW adults' pre-migration industry involvement, by gender





Coming to Australia



6. Coming to Australia

Learning to speak English, getting a job, communicating with neighbours, feeling safe and welcome are critical elements of successful settlement irrespective of the theory or definition of integration/settlement utilised. In this section of the report we analyse the responses to our surveys asking questions that relate to these matters. In our surveys of the refugee adult and young informants we asked them to rate their English language abilities, tell us about their employment experiences and talk about their assessment of the degree of safety in their neighbourhoods, the friendliness of locals and neighbours and their overall assessment of life in Australia and the future for their children. In choosing these questions we linked to those asked in the longitudinal survey of refugees in Australia (BNLA) so that we could compare the settlement outcomes of our refugee informants with other refugee arrivals in Australia. Moreover, we will revisit these refugee informants in 2019 and again in 2020 so that for each adult and child we can trace their English language ability, work experiences, and social interaction over the three year period.

6.1. Language

6.1.1. Adults and the English language

One important settlement task for all refugees is to learn the language of the host country, in Australia's case, English. English language fluency is a necessary condition for most refugees to be able to: enter the labour market, speak to their neighbours and to their children's teachers, negotiate with Centrelink, communicate with doctors, and to communicate with retailers at the supermarket, fruit shop, bakery, and the like. While translation services are available for refugees who do not have an adequate command of English when dealing with major institutions in Australia, they are not available for interactions in daily life. It can be argued then that English language fluency is a necessary condition for successful refugee settlement in Australia. There are different aspects of English language fluency: how well someone understands English spoken to them; and how well someone speaks, reads, and writes English.

As a point of base-line departure we asked our refugee informants to *rate themselves* across these four different aspects of English language fluency. Just over half of our refugee informants self-rated their ability to understand English language conversations as 'Very well' or 'Well', with very few in the former category (Figure 6.1.1). Figure 6.1.2 shows that fewer refugees rated their spoken English ability as 'Very well' (2%) or 'Well' (35%), though these ratings are similar to those of the refugees involved in the longitudinal BNLA survey. 15 per cent of our informants reported that they did not speak English at all.

Figure 6.1.1: NSW Adults: ability to listen to English language, by location

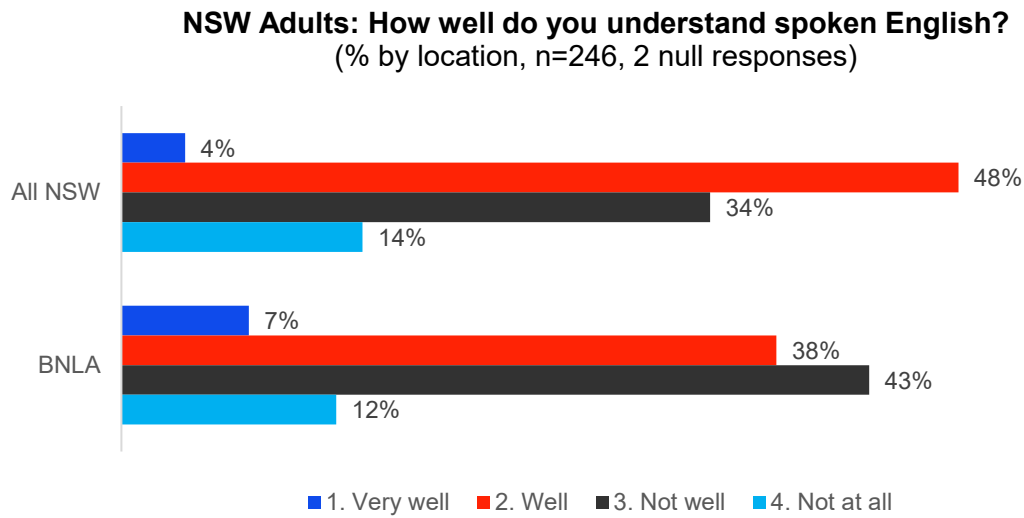
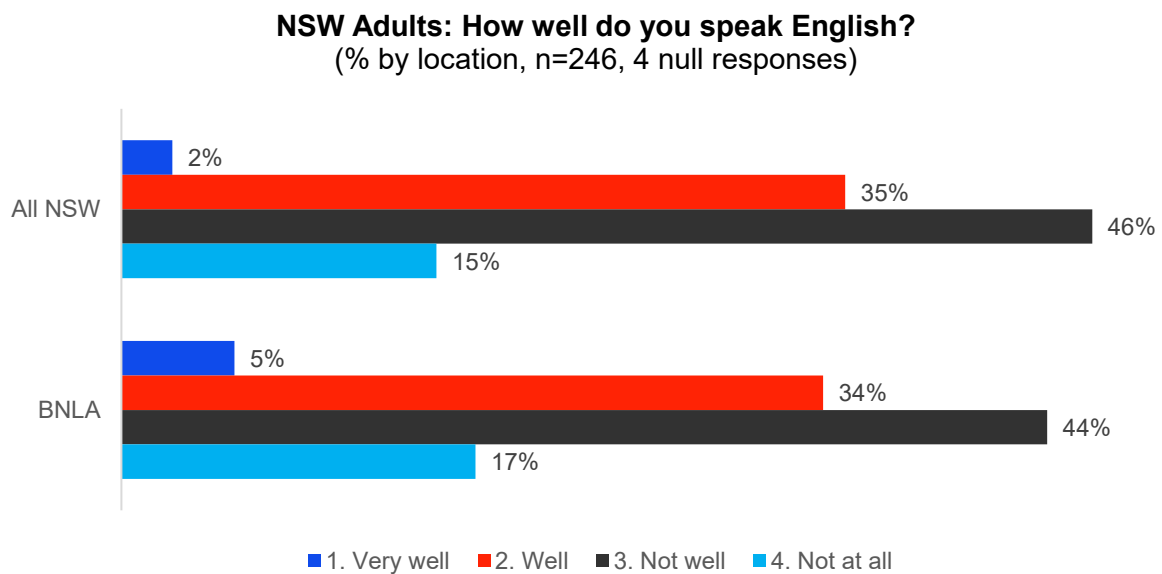


Figure 6.1.2: NSW Adults: speaking ability by location*



* Since blank or invalid (null) responses are included in the total number of responses for calculation of percentages, but not shown in the charts, some percentages will not add up to 100%. The remainder represents the null responses. For example, in Figure 6.1.2, the percentages for All NSW total 98%; 4 null responses for NSW (2%) brings the total to 100%.

Reading and writing English are critical literacy skills that assist newly-arrived refugees to settle successfully in a new English-speaking host country like Australia. In response to the question ‘how well do you read English?’ only 6 per cent of our NSW informants answered ‘Very well’, though an additional 41 per cent answered ‘Well’ (Figure 6.1.3). These results compare very favourably to answers to similar questions in the BNLA survey, where 8 per cent answered ‘Very well’ and 35 per cent answered ‘Well’, despite our informants being more recently arrived. This finding is consistent with the higher incidence of tertiary education qualifications among the Syrian-conflict intake.

Not surprisingly, slightly poorer results were found in respect to the writing of English: 6 per cent of our NSW informants answered 'Very well' and 36 per cent answered 'Well', again slightly better than the BNLA results for this question (Figure 6.1.4).

Figure 6.1.3: NSW Adults: reading ability by location

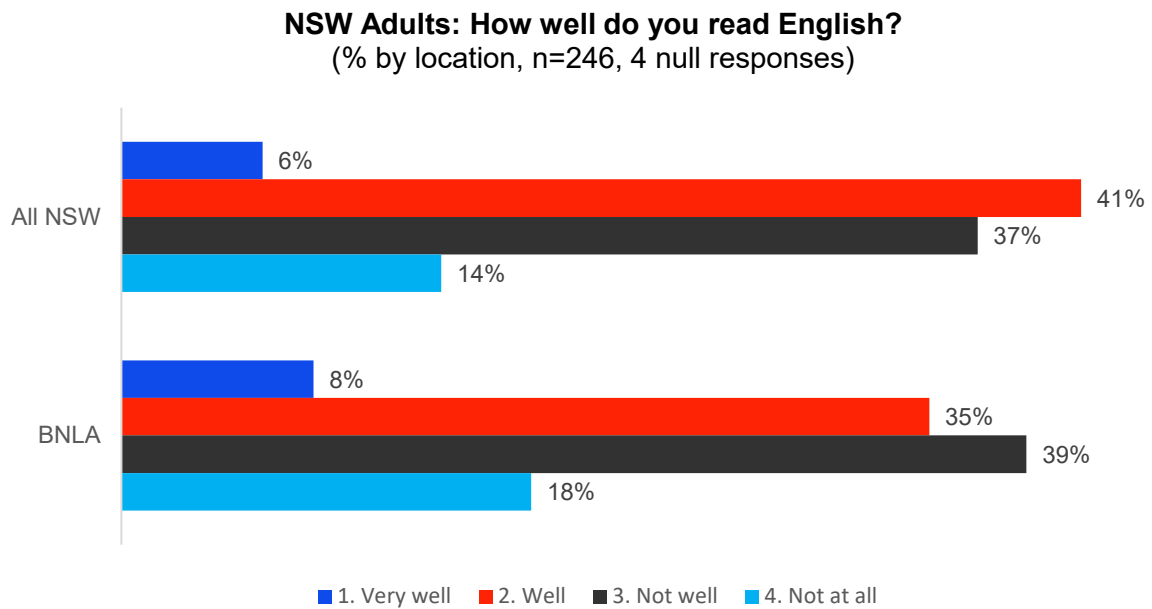
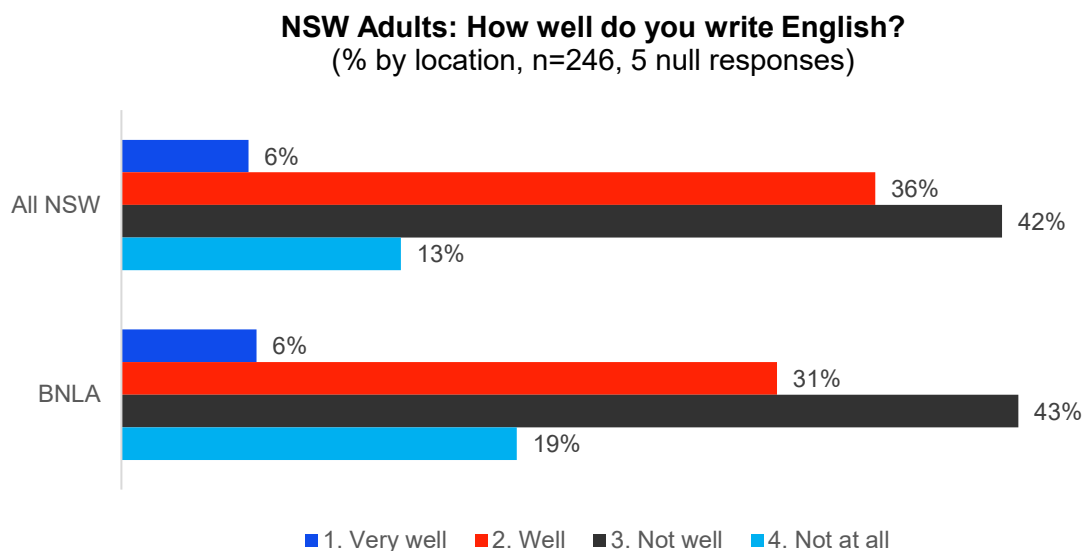


Figure 6.1.4: NSW Adults: writing ability by location



All newly-arrived refugees have access to 510 hours of English-language tuition provided by TAFE or other education providers. Most informants enjoyed the opportunity to attend these classes:

We still got school twice a week, Monday and Tuesday – TAFE. Me and my wife – it's very good.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

The need to learn English is one of the pressures which is part of adjusting to a new land, and can be difficult, particularly for adults. Yet, the importance of English language skills to refugee families was clear, both to feel part of their new neighbourhoods and to get an education or a job. Our refugee informants recognised this and invested great effort into the task:

My brother came five years earlier. My brother left Iraq early at the age of 18 and he had a rough experience but I envy him because he is very well established and part of that feeling of security for him, that he's speaking the language very fluently. I am looking forward to have his English skill to be able to have the same feeling of security.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

For me and my wife I would like us to learn good English and get a good job. We feel that we belong in Australia only the language is holding us back. Only language is holding us back.

(Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

For some informants age, health, or responsibilities to care for young children, older relatives or family members with a disability, make it very difficult to attend English-language classes:

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, North Wollongong, 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 depend on myself.

(Syrian female, Fairy Meadow, 2018)

The combination of inadequate skill in English – which has not gone ahead because of the health situation – so, the language barrier and the health situation together become disadvantage for me to be able to gain work.

(Syrian male, Liverpool, 2018)

Yeah, I go to English language classes, but not every day; but because I care for my husband.

(Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

Yes, I like to go to a school, but because of my son, I couldn't go.

(Afghan female, Auburn, 2018)

Those who could not attend classes because of their responsibilities wanted the opportunity to learn English at home:

I want to learn, and I am willing to learn, and it would be great for me if someone could come.

(Afghan female, Auburn, 2018)

We'd really like it if someone could come and help in here, because of my kids. So, I would prefer that over going somewhere else.

(Afghan male, Auburn, 2018, father of two disabled children)

Some informants with high education levels and some prior English were very critical of the 'one-size-fits-all' class composition and thought that the curriculum was frustrating:

It's not very interesting for me to have to go to school, because it's only grammar

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

I just left the classes because I didn't like being there. I don't have the patience of being there

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

They're not learning it properly because they have no clue and the teacher is trying to teach them [unclear] even though they don't know what the teacher is saying...It's not a teacher problem... if they are illiterate in their own language, there's an even bigger problem.

(Young Afghan male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

It would be better if TAFE have classes for each and every age, different classes. The people who are under 25, they must have a separate class, and the old have a separate class. Because when you sit with the different ages, like the different people and the old age people, that affects your thinking and everything.

(Young Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

The elderly also have particular difficulties learning English:

I am happy with the teachers. They are doing their best. But, as I am of an older age, I can't really understand that well, and I forget what I studied last week. When I get to next week, I forget what last week's lesson was.
(Afghan male, Auburn, 2018)

These concerns overlapped with the strong theme that the English-language classes did not provide sufficient opportunity for **conversational** English, which was regarded as critical for talking to neighbours, employers and people in general:

I studied three months English ... then I felt like it's wasting time ... it's really hard to speak English there. For me it was. I want something more interesting and more effective to my life so I start to look for something different... Yes I'm learning through conversation and talking, and it's a lot of kind of text book grammar learning in those courses.

(Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

Yeah, I got much benefit from their classes. You get like the rules, like grammar rules from TAFE, but when talking with the people in the street you get more.

(Syrian male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Learning English in a formal setting can also present challenges, particularly for young adults where issues of identity and racism come into play. One 20-year-old male was not supported by his classmates at school:

Sometimes our English is not very good, and they make jokes about that. For example, I had a presentation for my assessment in class. There was a boy who was laughing at me because of my accent. He made me a bit nervous about my presentation and I couldn't do very well with my speech. After that, I went to the teacher and said it's not fair that they're laughing at me and why do they have to be like this. That is not helping me. I was really ready, and I studied really well, and I made the assessment really good. I was sure that I would get 100 per cent for that. But, because of that boy, my assessment was bad.

(Young Afghan male, Auburn, 2018)

Not only did English classes provide a purpose during the week but also an opportunity to meet other people and make new friends in Australia.

6.1.2. Young people and the English language

The relationship between language, identity and a sense of belonging has been documented widely (cf. Norton, 2016, 2013; Sivell and Sivell, 2014). While self-assessment of capacity may not tell us a lot about ‘measured’ capabilities, it does tell us something about how young people feel they are settling. We asked the young people (YP) in NSW about how they thought their speaking, reading, writing and listening were developing in English.

Figure 6.1.5: NSW young people: speaking ability, by former country and gender

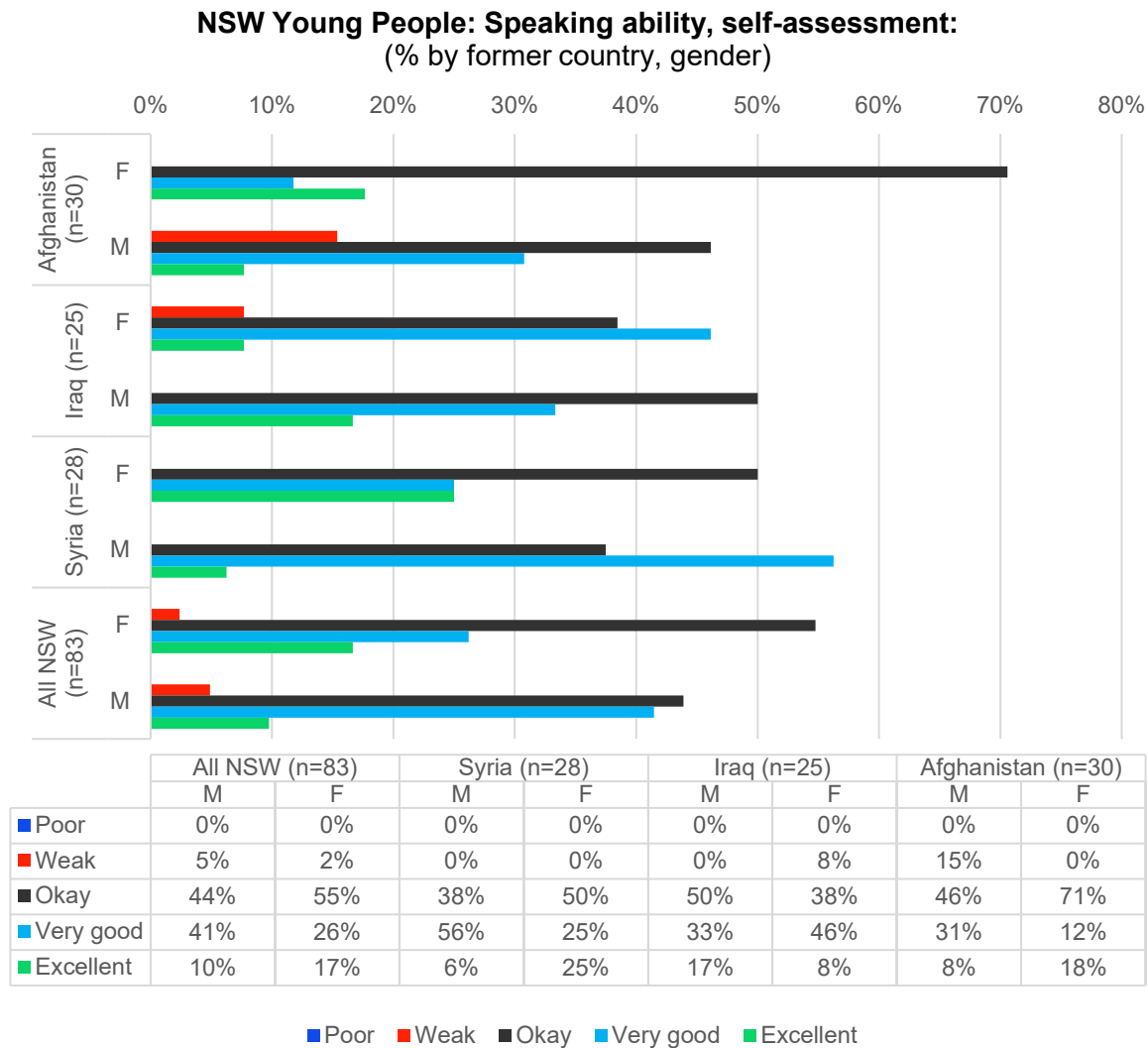


Figure 6.1.5 shows how the young people self-assessed their speaking ability and we can see some differences on the basis of nationality and gender. While the greatest proportion of NSW YP rate their speaking ability as ‘Okay’ to ‘Very good’, less females rate themselves as ‘Weak’ than males (2% v 5%). Afghan YP rate themselves as the weakest in speaking ability but this could be understood as often having education heavily interrupted compared to the Syrian and Iraqi YP. Capacity in the first language correlates highly to success in additional languages. In addition, their religious background is Muslim, compared to the predominantly Christian Syrian and Iraqi cohorts, leading to more interaction with English speaking YP in significant places such as churches. Also, in many cases the Afghan families were

commonly in families with single mothers leading to less income to undertake external activities. Speaking is also the most difficult skill to master since losing face with others creates hesitation, particularly for older young people, as this young female from Wollongong explains.

My speaking skill was the hardest at the beginning. I feel that I am still struggling with English... Upon arrival in Australia, I was a bit shy to speak English, but nowadays I am more confident in speaking. At school, I do have lots of friends from different cultures.

(Young Syrian female, age 18, Wollongong, 2018)

For others it is more a case of familiarity. In a number of cases, YP from Syria in particular have had experience with either French or English and this makes them more open to learning new languages. This YP reveals this in his comment:

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. Arabic, you know, is more easy.

(Young Syrian male, age 17, Wollongong, 2018)

Nevertheless, we can see enthusiasm in the following comment:

I speak so much English. I'm full of English.

(Young Iraqi male, age 7, Fairfield, 2018)

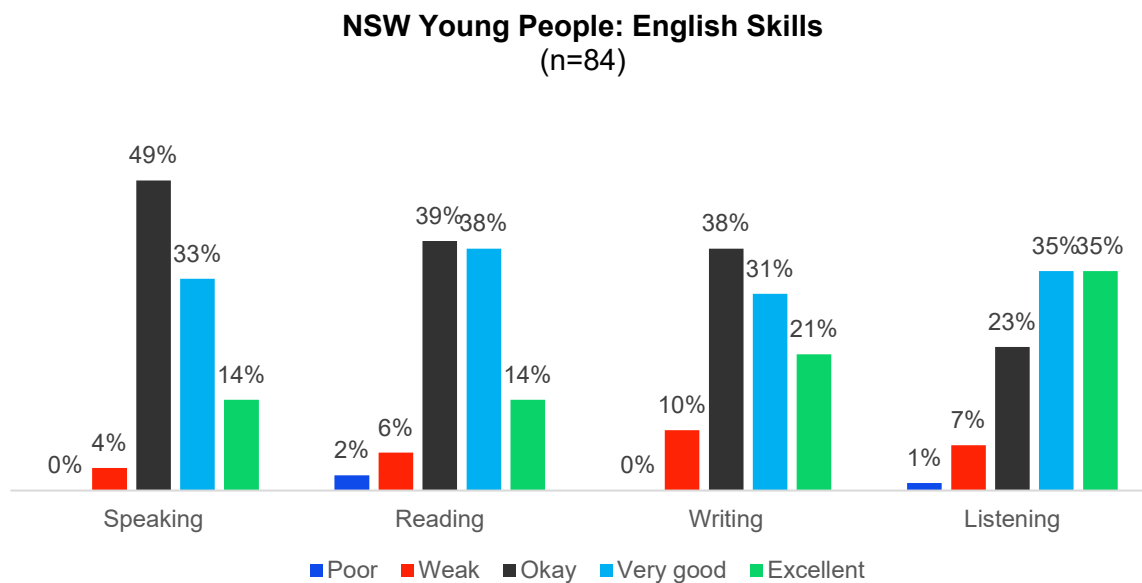
While speaking is difficult, there is a connection to reading since having limited vocabulary also limits speaking. The connection between speaking and reading ability is evident in Table 6.1.1, whereby it is evident that the Afghan young people's confidence in reading, relative to the Syrian and Iraqi cohort, is less. Despite this difference, most young people in NSW rate their reading ability as 'Okay' to 'Very good'.

Table 6.1.1: NSW young people: reading ability, by former country

NSW Young People reading ability, self-assessment (% by former country)				
	Afghanistan (n=30)	Iraq (n=25)	Syria (n=28)	All NSW (n=84)
Poor	0%	4%	4%	2%
Weak	10%	4%	4%	6%
Okay	47%	36%	36%	39%
Very good	33%	40%	43%	38%
Excellent	10%	16%	14%	14%

The speaking, reading, writing and listening skills of the NSW young people are compared in Figure 6.1.6.

Figure 6.1.6: NSW young people: English skills



In general terms, Young People who were widely dispersed across their region rather than located in pockets of settlement had more confidence in their English ability. These YP did not live among people who spoke their first language, although a number were close to churches and organisations that provided these first language opportunities.

Despite some differences young people generally liked learning English language:

I like maths and English, like, I like when you do paragraphs and things.

(Young Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

In terms of writing ability, young people in older age groups were finding learning English more difficult than those who were younger. Despite some variations, an overwhelming number (90%) felt that in the first year of settlement their writing ability in English was 'Okay' to 'Excellent'.

Learning a new language is a complex process, which some enthusiastically undertake, while others miss the comfort of their mother tongue. While learning a language is widely considered easier for younger people, this is not always the case:

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.

(Young Syrian female, age 8, Wollongong, 2018)

I think my writing has improved a lot, since I also attended an English course while staying in Lebanon.

(Young Syrian female, age 18, Wollongong, 2018)

Although a few young people struggled learning English, they had classmates and teachers helping them out. Being 'in it together' (Young Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018) in the English Second Language class has fostered lifelong friendships.

In terms of listening ability 93 per cent of young people (Figure 6.1.6) across NSW assessed themselves as 'Okay' to 'Excellent'. Overall, the first year has revealed that YP are progressing well in learning English, according to their self-assessments. Some reflect on how they approach learning English and their comments below reveal that concentrating on their new language, practice and immersion in an English-speaking context all contribute to building their confidence:

I only read English books, nothing in Arabic. I came second in the school in English.

(Young Iraqi male, age 12, Liverpool, 2018)

Practising English is the key to learning it:

Yeah [my English is good now], probably when I had contacting with the people on street, or on school. Because we need that. Their language is the key of the world. The language is the key of the world. Probably I contact with the teachers, with the student... Because we don't have... most can't speak my other language. Even the new arrival from Afghanistan, if I want to contact with him, I should speak English, because they couldn't speak Arabic or Kurdish, and I couldn't speak Dari. We have a different language. But the key for the contacting together was English, and we need to learn English.

(Young Syrian male, age 17, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

And **immersion**:

I knew some basic words, some nouns. I couldn't make proper sentences [in English, when I came]. I went to TAFE. I was 19 years old. So, I went to TAFE and I did Certificate II and finished in one month and I did Certificate III and I finished it in six months and I got this one. Then I started Year 11. I had a six-month gap where I didn't have anything to do so I went to a school. I sat in the senior college with normal Aussie students to just get the language and that helped me a lot. It was like an extension course. I wasn't enrolled but the principal let me sit in the class.

(Young Afghan male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

6.2. Stories from adults

6.2.1. Employment

Controlling for health issues – which, as noted, many of the refugees indicated they were working through – all adult refugees indicated they wanted to work but were frustrated by a number of things. While the majority of the extant literature has indicated that refugees seeking employment experience barriers such as requests for local experience, job mismatch and lengthy and frustrating delays in trade and tertiary qualifications accreditation, our research has shown that there are significant structural issues which need to be addressed (Newman et al., 2018; Betts et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018). For instance, some of the respondents indicated that completing the English language requirements (510 hours) meant that they were unable to accept work when it was offered. Furthermore, many of the respondents indicated that there were issues around navigating the Australian labour market – highlighting the significant barriers around searching for a job and finding employment. Others indicated that their location impacted on opportunities to engage in employment commensurate with their skills and abilities.

Figures 6.2.1-6.2.4 show the proportion of respondents in employment: overall, and broken down by location, gender, and age.

It should be noted that this snapshot included employment post a year of settlement. It is therefore to be expected that employment outcomes are weak given that the refugee families who participated in the project were focused on settling into housing, navigating new systems and services, English language acquisition, assisting children with settling into schooling and addressing health issues. While women held less positive employment outcomes than men, this is to be expected given the different household expectations determined by the traditional male breadwinner model and the priority given to the male breadwinner in the family unit.

Figure 6.2.1: Percentage of NSW adults employed

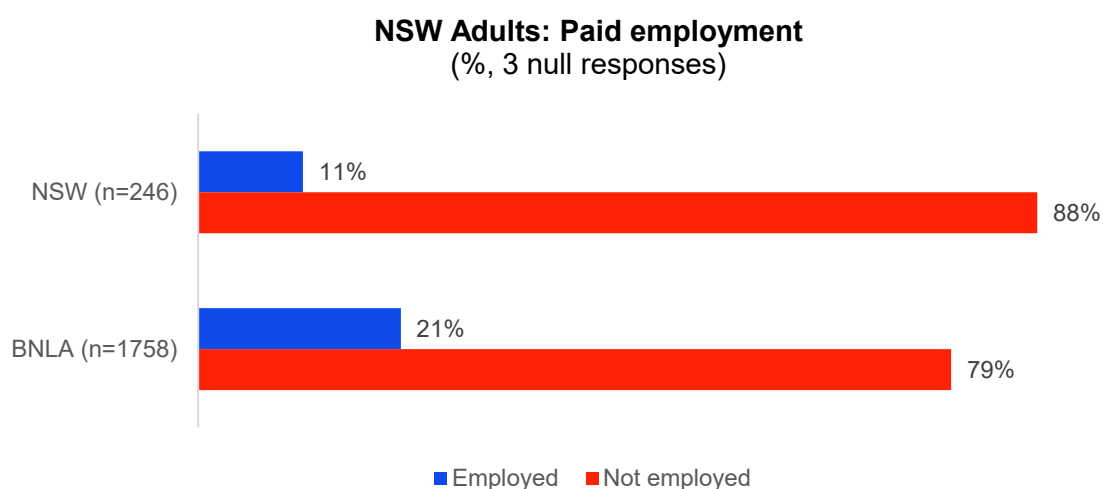


Figure 6.2.2: Percentage of NSW adults employed, by location

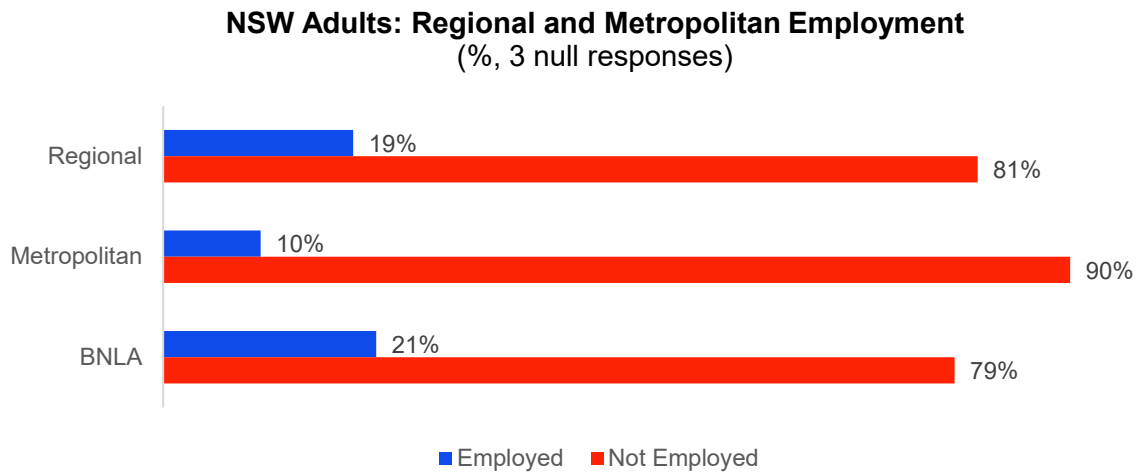


Figure 6.2.3: Percentage of NSW adults employed, by gender

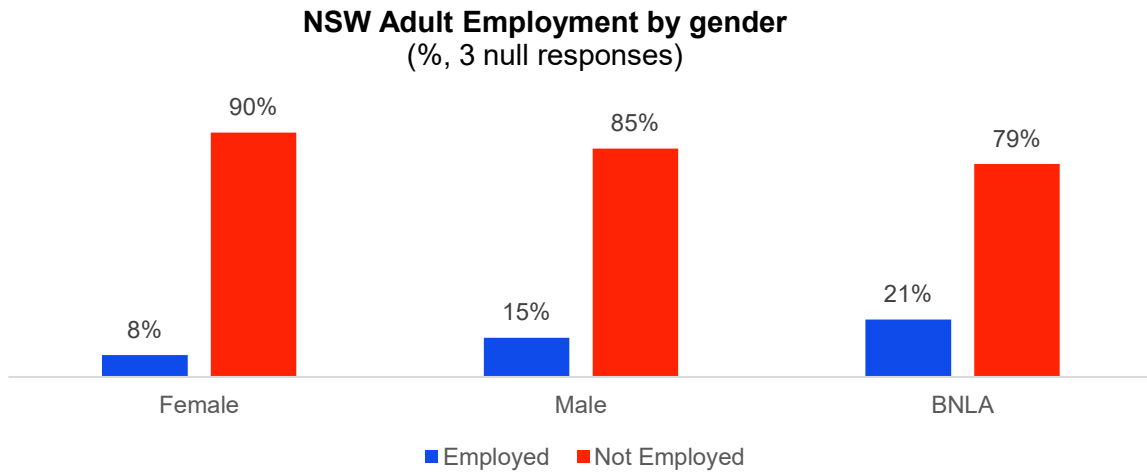
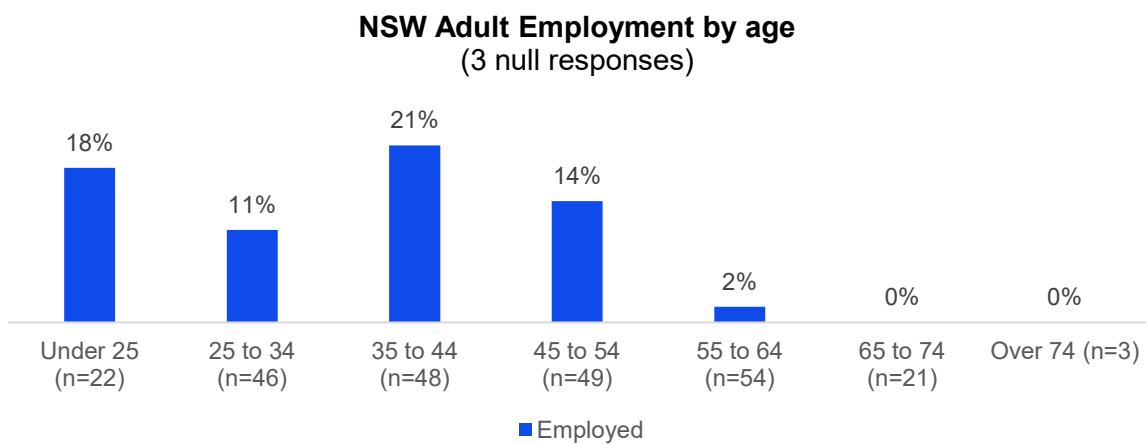


Figure 6.2.4: Percentage of NSW adults employed, by age



6.2.1.1. English language competency

A lack of English language skills was a frustrating barrier to employment for both men and women.

I want work, but where is work for me? I'm not talking very well English.
(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

I'm going to school but I can't understand anything. They send me to jobseeker to find a job but I can't understand anything. How can I find a job?
(Afghan female, Auburn, 2018)

The frustration surrounding English language ability was amplified when age is added to the mix. For instance, while the young people were comfortable using the English language, those a bit older who may have had limited schooling in their country of origin, found learning a new language difficult:

As we left school early, then we find a little bit difficulty with studying here.
(Iraqi male, age 32, Liverpool, 2018)

In spite of the difficulties experienced by some adults, most of the Fairfield interviewees, for example, had completed 500 hours of English language classes at Navitas. This was seen as a good starting point but, unlike the young people in our interviews, many adults had little opportunity to practice English language with others, either at a workplace or through social and community interactions. Learning English on the job was particularly noted as an important site of building language proficiency as noted in the quotes below:

All these people – they can't learn the language in a short time. This 500 hour, 800 hour, that's not enough to learn. Just like one day the teacher said 'we can't put the spoon in your mouth, just we put you on the way'. Just they put us on the way, and 'you need to continue'.
(Iraqi female, Fairfield, 2018)

I've already done 1300 hours, but then I left because I finished my hours. I've already done my hours, but I couldn't catch too much. However, it was a good experience to learn English, because now I can read English sometimes. I could go to far places and can read those signs.
(Syrian male, Fairfield, 2018)

When you go to Navitas or TAFE to learn English, you find the paper, you read, or maybe listen from the teacher, you go home, and you start to speak Arabic, then that information would be useless, because I only listen, I don't use. Work environment would encourage me to learn the English that is related to my occupation. For example, if I work in carpentry, I will learn the tools, and I will try to speak with clients, I will start to make sentences.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

I just want to learn English through work. In my country, I learnt languages without going to language school. I learn Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic... What about here, why don't I have this chance to go and find a job and learn English?

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

The importance of workplace interaction in improving English language ability and therefore in improving their chances to get work was echoed by respondents in Coffs Harbour and Wollongong:

Because the Australian are really good to us, I want to work sometimes for them as a volunteer; but because my English level is low, so they don't want me to work with them [laughing].

(Iraqi male, Coffs Harbour, 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, West Wollongong, 2018)

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, Fairy Meadow, 2018)

6.2.1.2. Employment services: 'Survival Jobs'

Many of the respondents indicated that they were forced to look for work in spite of their advanced age, health issues and studies – to name but a few of the intervening factors. Interview participants noted that there was a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to employment services. They saw the process of job search and welfare payments as 'survival'. They were either forced into working in areas that were unsuitable, or they were forced into applying for work when working was not an option, and this process was central to their survival. Job agencies expect labour-market-active refugees to apply for 15-20 jobs per month and record those attempts on an app (MyGov) as proof. The system allows for demerit points to be

issued and can result in Centrelink payments being revoked where expectations remain unfulfilled. The one-size-fits-all approach ignores factors affecting individuals, such as language level, disability, or age. It also ignores the family context:

I am now 61 years old and I am required to look for jobs and I actually have a pain in my joints, and I find a difficulty, a hardship to do my duties. And there is a threatening all the time. A threatening. I mean not threatening, but there is something like from the Jobactive, or – pressure.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

Companies and shops, they refuse to hire me because – because of my age. Yes, they – they just – it's more desirable to hire young people.

(Syrian male, Fairfield, 2018)

Jobactive still pursued us to find a job. Because of my health issue and my age, most companies and jobs don't prefer to hire me.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

I would like to seek employment once I learn the language, but something that's very easy and not hard lifting is required.

(Afghan male, Auburn, 2018)

I wanted to do full-time English learning and I was told many times as I was instructed 'we don't want you to learn full-time, we want you to work'.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

I used to be an Admin Officer using pen and paper and I wasn't familiar with the computer. I was told 'just sit in front of the computer', without knowing, without having a clue how to operate it, how to use it. I need support; I need assistance from somebody to tell me how to operate and make use of this one. I was left and all what I had to do is to record my start and my finishing time and this is it. (Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

I don't have the basic skills, till now I don't know how to use the computer...From the 1st of the July the system is changed... There is a program, it is called MyGov – 'this is MyGov, you will have to apply for everything, and under MyGov', [so] that the job provider and the Centrelink can see this things.

(Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

At the same time, the refugees we talked to did not feel that they had support in applying for jobs, searching for appropriate and meaningful jobs or in making contacts with employers. This is problematic, because local connections have a striking impact on finding employment, and that is something that new arrivals don't have:

How I can find job, I am here new, I don't know anyone here.
(Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

But everybody says to me 'you're unlicensed and you need to find somebody who employs you as TA – Tradesperson Assistant'. I have to find somebody, I only arrived to the country yesterday.
(Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

A significant proportion of the participants indicated that those with qualifications were in a more precarious position when it came to accepting 'survival jobs'. For instance, Fairfield adults reported being told to downgrade their expectations about employment in Australia in relation to the qualifications they held from their country of origin. At least 20 of the adults had a tertiary education, but as one young Iraqi male said '*educated people are struggling the most in Australia, because there are no educated jobs around*'. Others reported similar experiences:

I showed the caseworker in Jobactive my degrees, and asked her to find a job for me, which suits me, and she told me, 'Put your degrees in the rubbish and find a job'.
(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

For the young people, it's positive to come here. Not for me... I encouraged my son to come here, but my brother, maybe he is 60 years old ... I told him, 'No, you cannot work here'. He has a job in Iraq. He's a manager in Iraq but if he comes here... In Navitas there was a teacher with me and he has a PhD in psychology from Mosul University. When he come here, they put him in to study English and that's it. He has a PhD and he's a psychologist. No future for our age. No future...
(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

Those who found employment did so through their own ethno-specific networks, but they also received warnings that some employers exploit workers by paying them less than the legal minimum wage:

I think sometimes the bosses, like, misuse the situation and they give low wages.
(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

One of my daughters tried to work as a kitchenhand in a restaurant. But the employers were Iraqis and they tried to abuse her by giving her less than the minimum wages. Yeah, cash. She tried to push the employer to fix her job as legal but he refused and they fired her after one week.

(Syrian male, about his daughter, Fairfield, 2018)

Those adults who are able-bodied are keen to work – even in volunteer positions. But barriers to employment can be complex:

Here in Australia... I have the full willingness to work complete voluntary. With any organisation or any company.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

If there is any available jobs for me, even if it's going to be in the city, I will go, I will go, I want just to work. I am willing to find the job, but... at the same time I am carer of my Mum. And sometimes I am suffering from many differences in my mind, 'I want to just do this one, but I can't because of my Mum', and 'I want just to do this one, I can't because I don't have the English', 'I want just to do this one, I can't because I'm sick'. So, it's like a struggle.

(Syrian male, Fairfield, 2018)

For refugees located in regional areas, while work was available there was a lack of security in the seasonal nature of the job opportunities:

Yes [my husband has a job]; since four months he is working in a factory in the packing of blueberries – he's working there, but that's a seasonal job. After two months that will be it, completely.

(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Picking blueberries. It's a seasonal job. It's for a few months. It's for five months. After two months, it will come to an end and I will be jobless again. At the start, they were not giving us the job because I didn't know the language, English, but the boss of the factory or the blueberry packing was Indian. He was speaking in Urdu. I told him, 'If I don't know English, I can speak Urdu and whatever job you tell me, I can do that'. That's why he gave me the job there.

(Afghan male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

6.2.1.3. Qualifications recognition

Many refugees and humanitarian immigrants arrive in Australia with professional qualifications and work experience. This is particularly the case with recently-arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Many of the interview respondents had professional roles in science, education, or health, or were engineers, dentists, architects, pharmacists, IT and finance professionals, to name but a few of the professional groups represented in our group of interviewees. Many others were mechanics, or electricians or held similar trades. The significant barriers posed to professional and technical qualifications accreditation means that many refugees seek alternative employment. This comes at a great cost to the refugee families themselves both financially and psychologically; but there is also a cost to the nation. The problems surrounding the recognition of skills and professional qualifications have been long-standing in Australia (Reid et al., 2014: 85-103) and apply not only to refugees but to skilled permanent and temporary immigrants.

Recognition of skills and qualifications gained overseas is desired, but problematic, as noted in the following:

*I want to get my overseas qualification recognised in PE (Physical Education), continue my study, or to get a job within my speciality and interest.
(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)*

*Companies, like the one that I want to work with them, they think because you are a migrant – they think that you don't have the qualifications to work in this area. Because I've learned, worked for 15 years in electrician in Iraq, but because I don't have a certificate from here they don't accept me, they think that I don't know anything about it.
(Syrian male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)*

6.2.1.4. Unemployment and impact on well-being

Feeling a sense of self-worth and purpose was seen to be inextricably linked to work and the inverse was true where work was unavailable. Indeed, unemployment seems to have made a severe negative impact on the wellbeing of many families, particularly the men who used to be the breadwinners for their families in their country of origin. Working was described as an essential ingredient in having a good life, playing a major role in forming their identities:

I don't work. This is what bothers me a lot. I'm really stressed because of it; I am psychologically distressed because of it.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

I told all of my friends and people, also Australians that I don't know, that if there is any work outside Sydney anywhere, any kind of work that – kind of harvesting machinery, I can go there and work. Go there for months and leave my family here. I can go alone and work.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

Everything here is really beautiful and perfect. The only problem is not being able to work. Because once you work then your – your stress and all of that pressure goes away. If you don't work then you remember a lot; you keep remembering having – especially Armenians. Especially – this is specifically true for Armenians who come here because they have – they all have trades. They all have good professions. They know how to work. But they can't work here, they are having difficulty.

(Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

Work is very, very difficult here. No experience, a little English, but have all people to work. All people like work but not find yet.

(Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

It's the worst thing ever, finding work.

(Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

I didn't think I need help from anyone, because I can work. I'm coming here, not to stay and sit at home, I'm coming here to work, I just need a safe country.

(Syrian male, Liverpool, 2018)

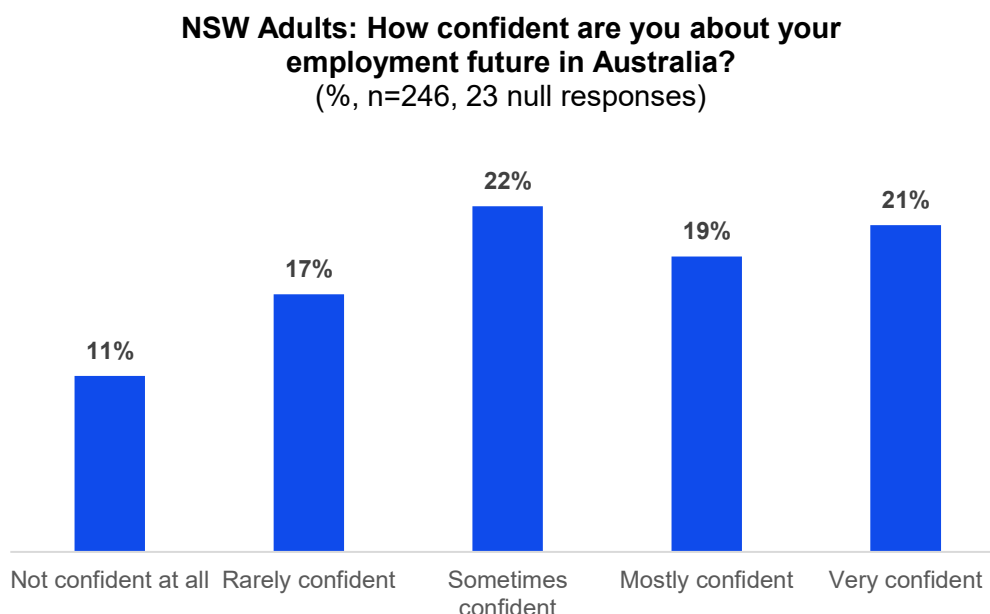
I wish I work, and I couldn't take the money from the government. I don't like the money from the government, yeah, because it's not enough, and I wish to work full-time, better for me. Yes, I would have thought that when I come here, I wouldn't get any money from anybody, finding a job hopefully would have been easier. At least I can feel very happy about myself.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

6.2.1.5. Future employment prospects

Encouragingly, the majority of the NSW respondents were optimistic about their future employment prospects, with most (67%) rating that they are ‘Sometimes confident’ to ‘Very confident’ about their employment future in Australia (Figure 6.2.5).

Figure 6.2.5: Percentage of NSW adults: how confident are you about your employment future in Australia?



Many, as noted in the quotes below, indicated that the pursuit of self-employment was a key dream of theirs. As small business owners in their country of origin they wanted to realise this dream in Australia:

I will be pursuing my dream for me to establish my own jewellery business.
(Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

[I would like] to open a jewellery shop again – my own business, not work with another one. I would like to build my new business.
(Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

I’m very pleased that I am engaged in employment, working as a hairdresser. I want to develop my skills and I want to become a qualified hairdresser. My ambition in the future, when I can, after graduating, is to have my own salon and to run my own business.
(Syrian female, Liverpool, 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, West Wollongong, 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, North Wollongong, 2018)

[...setting up business] – of course. Once I speak the language and I have experience, why not?

(Syrian male, Fairy Meadow, 2018)

6.2.2. Settlement

6.2.2.1. Introduction

For many refugees in NSW, the decision to come to Australia was one of necessity, not choice. Let's hear from two refugee informants in this regard:

We came to Australia not on purpose. But when ISIS invaded our area and they fire at us and they threat us then we came here to Australia.

(Syrian male, Fairfield, 2018).

Similarly, the mother in a refugee family who settled in Coffs Harbour told us:

We never have a chance to choose moving to Australia we just... No choice, you know? We just run away; we don't know why. It's hard for us when we didn't have any choice, you know?

This view was also reflected by the comments of a male refugee living in Wollongong:

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. [No other options], just Australia.

These refugees knew little about Australia prior to arrival. They were provided with 'Introduction to Australia' induction/orientation courses in transit countries before their travel to Australia, which assisted them to visualise and prepare for Australian settlement. Many families took to the internet to learn about Australia once they had been accepted to come here.

As the mother of another refugee family living in Coffs Harbour put it:

We used to watch the internet, YouTube and everything, and before coming here I arranged an orientation session for five days and on those days they give each and every information of the country, they told us about everything in Australia, the laws and the regulations and the rent and everything...they told us about the laws and Centrelink card and making the Medicare cards and everything and how to go to shopping centres, they told us every laws, it was helpful. I think the orientation session they told us about how to rent a house and how to pay your rent, what the rules are for renting a house

Similarly, the father of another Coffs Harbour refugee family said:

We didn't know about Australia or any other country but when we were getting the visa or we were accepted to come here, then a session was given to the people who were coming here and they told us about everything. There was orientation sessions for a week. That was really helpful.

Many refugees from Syria and Iraq arrived on family-sponsored visas. They had family members and/or friends living here where they settled who gave them some insights into life in Australia. As three male members of the Mandaean community – refugees from Iraq – living in Liverpool told us:

We are a minority ...Information is spread very quickly.

Yeah, we heard about Australia ... So Australia wasn't new to me and my wife, because of that connection through our community.

I heard the Mandaeans are big groups here so I started to prepare and friends told me to come here.

Whether they arrived with strong knowledge about or contacts in Australia, or not, the unanimous theme to emerge from the NSW fieldwork with refugee families is that the families are very grateful for the opportunities that Australia has given them to settle and begin a new life for them and their families. As one Iraqi male we interviewed in Liverpool put it: 'Every single morning, I get up and I say, "Thank God we are in Australia"'. Similarly, a Syrian refugee living in Parramatta told us: 'Thanks for government of Australia ...who give us this chance to learn', while an Iraqi female living in Liverpool told us:

Australia is a paradise, I want to show my appreciation to the Australian communities, society and to the Government for their support. Life is good in Australia.

On arrival every refugee family is welcomed at the airport by the settlement service provider. In Sydney, the settlement provider was Settlement Services International (SSI). They were then provided with an SSI case worker who guided them through the necessary first six months of settlement. Invariably the families we interviewed were full of praise for the assistance that they received from SSI: As a Syrian female informant living in Parramatta put it:

Everything was really smooth and nice and careful. We got really good help with the first things you have to know about, like transport and how to do shopping, how to find house, so yeah, basic things. I met my case manager who helps me with my resumé and I used to go for workshops each Friday. So, we were talking and, she's really lovely lady, and she ask me about what I like...

In Coffs Harbour, the settlement service provider is Anglicare:

*Just there is... there were organisation called Anglicare; they would come us. Yeah, they came with one lady, she is from Iraq, she is speaking Arabic; and other man, he speak little bit Arabic. He's from south of...Eritrea. Yeah. And they work with... come us. They help us to settle. Yes, they [Anglicare] did help us. They take us to the shopping, and they teach us how to catch bus, like from house to the hospital together. They brought our kids to school, and us to TAFE. Yeah. And they help us to find this house. Because we stayed two months looking for houses. [Anglicare] was looking for houses. Yes, this one they found for us, and we happy to stay, because it's near to town, near to my son's school, TAFE... yeah, Centrelink. We have Coles, Woolworths – they're near to us.
(Syrian female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)*

But not every refugee family has good experiences with their service provider. This is particularly the case under the old contract arrangements when case managers were appointed for the first six months only. Settlement difficulties take longer to resolve and many refugee families feel abandoned after six months. As one daughter in a refugee family in Coffs Harbour put it:

*When people come to Australia, every family has a case manager which helps them in everything, just for six months. I'm not saying that our case manager was not good or he or she didn't behave well, but the way we needed the help, they cannot help us. They stay only for six months; we need for one year, one and a half year. Then we alone... everything is settled properly. We need someone. It's not enough a case manager to stay with us just for six months.
(Young Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)*

Despite this invaluable assistance, the first months of life in Australia were very difficult for most refugee families, not only because of the trauma of displacement and the worry about those they had left behind, but also because Australia is a very different society than Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, as the following quotes from informants highlight:

It was a big change. I was feeling a bit nervous and worried and everything, like different feelings.

(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

After we arrived in Australia, we felt a little bit unsettled because we had too many things to do, too many duties, too many – too many things to do. So it was a very chaotic situation and we need one or two years to overcome. Yes, we start from zero here.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018);

We feel sad and stressed [when we arrived], because we didn't know the language, we didn't know how people would react, and we didn't know anything about the community.

(Iraqi male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

When someone travel to another country it's like a different world, a strange world. When questions come up to your mind – whether you're going to have a future for your kids, what's going to happen with your relatives, your other family members, and whether there's somebody who's going to speak our language, especially when we first arrived. There was only two of us who could speak our language. You feel stressed.

(Syrian male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

In the beginning ... 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 little scared, because big country.

(Syrian female, West Wollongong, 2018)

Life in Australia – it's okay... But when the first time, when I arrived, no, it's very hard. I not see, I don't hear, very confused for me. But now when you can go and do some things, it's okay. Yeah, more confident, more, yeah, yeah. I don't want any person to help me. If I can, I make it by myself, this is my idea.

(Iraqi female, Fairfield, 2018)

A strong theme that emerged from our fieldwork is that nearly all families were fractured by the process of displacement from their homeland and the long and difficult journey to settlement in Australia. All had family back home (in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan) and many had family members who were settled as refugees in European, Scandinavian or North American countries. Their key concern was to be reunited with their families in Australia. Nearly all had applied for family to re-join them, but most were not successful in this regard. Given the centrality of family to their social lives prior to displacement, this was a source of great worry and stress for them, and contributed to feelings of remoteness and detachment from society in Australia, particularly for older refugees.

6.2.2.2. Warmth of the Welcome:

The refugee families who took part in our research project live in suburbs in western and south western Sydney, in the Sydney Local Government Areas of Parramatta, Fairfield, Liverpool and Auburn, as well as our two regional sites of Wollongong and Coffs Harbour. While employment is central to successful settlement outcomes of refugees – as discussed previously – there are many other aspects of life in Australia that impact on successful settlement experiences.

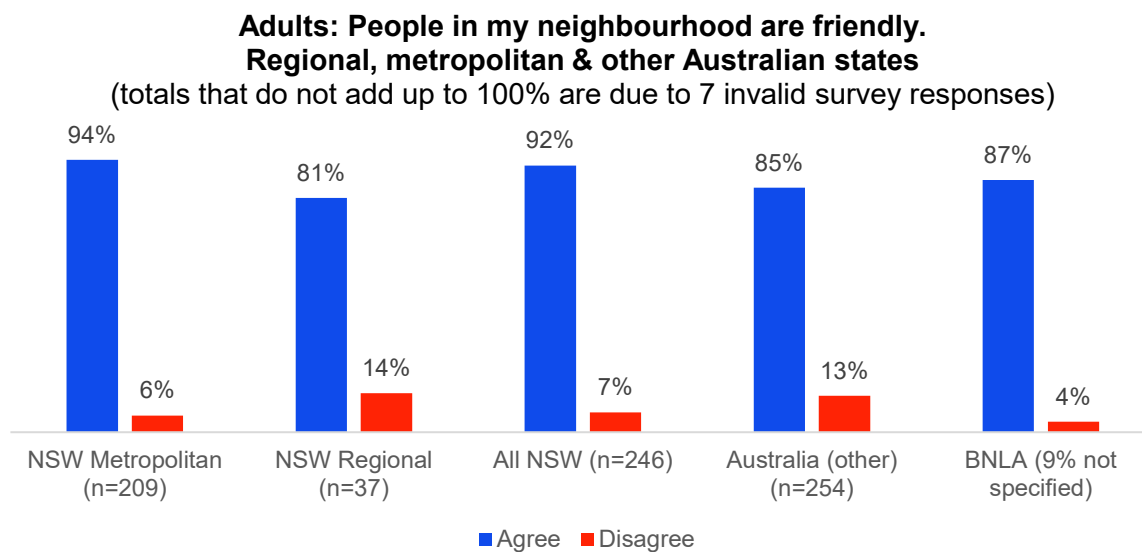
Some of these are subjective. One is the extent to which the refugees feel that they are accepted into their new community by their multicultural neighbours. Here issues related to the warmth of the welcome by – and the social interaction of refugees with – neighbours is a critical element. This is made difficult because many Australians do not know much about the refugees or about their lives in the countries – Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan – from which they came. Australians also know little about the refugees themselves. This is seen very vividly in the words of one female Iraqi refugee living in Fairfield:

Actually, we are very sad because people in Australia think we were very poor in Iraq, that we didn't have anything. They think that we didn't have enough education or jobs. But actually, we had everything, and we were very happy. But events forced us to leave Iraq. We were threatened with killing and kidnapping. We were wealthy in our country and we were well-educated, and we had a respectful life, but people here think we were living in poverty and that we were backward people or ignorant people. They think like that.
(Iraqi female, Fairfield, 2018)

In our surveys of adult and young refugees we asked them if they felt that people in their neighbourhood were friendly? As Figure 6.2.6 shows, the overwhelming majority of the newly-arrived refugees in NSW have a warm welcome from their neighbours. When we compare our NSW findings with the national BNLA survey we find that **NSW respondents reported a higher level of friendliness (92%)**, whereas in the BNLA 87 per cent of refugees felt that the people in their neighbourhood were friendly. Looking in more detail at the refugee experiences, in relation to their interaction with neighbours in metropolitan and regional NSW, 94 per cent of adult refugees living in Sydney (Liverpool, Auburn, Parramatta

and Fairfield) reported that their neighbours were friendly. This is a remarkable result that speaks to the readiness of Sydney-siders in western and south western suburbs to accept new refugee families. Refugees settling outside of Sydney reported somewhat lower rates of neighbour friendliness, however this result could be skewed due to the low number of responses (n=37): 81 per cent of refugee adults living in regional Wollongong and Coffs Harbour reported that their neighbours are friendly to them. 85 per cent of refugee adults in the other states surveyed (Queensland and Victoria) agreed that their neighbours were friendly.

Figure 6.2.6: Adults: are the people in your neighbourhood friendly?



In addition to our survey data, we can gain some insights into the refugee experiences of living in NSW from the interviews that we conducted with them. To quote some of our refugee informants in this regard:

I have Cubans neighbour; she has helped me so much. Like my mother, she helped me all the time... Every day she come, and my English is better because she is coming every day to me.
 (Syrian female, Parramatta, 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, West Wollongong, 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, Gwynneville, 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.

(Syrian female, Wollongong, 2018)

Yeah, yeah, I invite them, they invite me, yeah. Good relationship with the neighbours.

(Syrian male, North Wollongong, 2018)

Yeah, we like living in this neighbourhood, and we are good for all our neighbours, so they are also good for us.

(Iraqi male, Coffs Harbour, 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, Mangerton, 2018)

Since most Syrian and Iraqi refugees are Christian, the Church is a key site of social connection to other refugees and to the broader local community. As one informant put it:

Within our experience of going to church every Sunday, we experienced sharing coffees together, and meeting each other at church, which is more of a friend community, to see people and get to know each other.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

Many interviewees said that Coffs Harbour is a very welcoming place, a finding that replicates that of the fieldwork conducted in Toowoomba in Queensland, suggesting that regional settlement is a good option for refugee families:

The people are really good [where I live] but it depends on the person. When you are good, everyone is good. When you are good with people, the people are good with you back.

(Afghan male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

The people are really good [here]. Whenever they meet us, they talk to us with good behaviour. They talk to us and smile and they greet us.

(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Wherever you go, like hospital, Centrelink, any other offices, we feel respected and tolerant and nobody gives you a hard look, everybody's so friendly. It is the same, like people are still friendly in street or in market and wherever you go if you show respect, we're going to respect you."

(Syrian male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

I am happy with the people [where I live], they're friendly. In Melbourne people are not as friendly as compared to here, like, when the people know that you are a refugee, they used to talk to you and they become friends with you.

(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Many refugees found that while their neighbours were friendly towards them, their social interaction with them was different than they had experienced with their neighbours in their home countries. When we inquired into what it was like living in Syria and Iraq before their displacement, most families spoke very warmly of the late-night social interaction with family and friends, with people visiting each other late into the night. This then became the benchmark for their expectations about, and experiences of, social life in Australia. Many commented that while their neighbours were friendly, they kept to themselves, while social life and interaction seemed to end after work when families in their neighbourhood would be cocooned in their homes:

The neighbours, we don't visit each other; it's not like Iraq.

(Iraqi female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

I still see some Armenian families in the shopping centre, but we don't visit each other. Back in Syria we used to come and... ..offer coffee. It's completely different. The customs and traditions are completely different.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

We're not used to this. You leave in the morning, 'good morning' to this person and 'good morning' to another and we're, like, 'come here, let's have a coffee'.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

You almost need to make an appointment to see our friends and family here.

(Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

Language was perceived as a barrier to developing deeper friendships with NSW neighbours, particularly since the multicultural character of Australian society meant that the

local neighbourhood was very diverse in terms of national, linguistic, ethnic, and religious difference, as the following quotes indicate:

People from Afghanistan, Iraq, China. Yep [I meet new people at the classes]. Yes, we talked to each other, we say 'hi' to each other, because we don't speak good English, we just say 'hi'. Stuff like that, 'How are you?'
(Iraqi male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

This house next to us they are people of Burma and the other are, like, some are different, and people come and go, like, the house changes people. Yes. And people are good but this family – we don't know their language and they don't know our language, they cannot speak English. We just do 'Hi, hello'.
(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Given that many refugee families were still struggling with the English language – particularly older refugees – it is understandable that many of the Australian friends of Arabic-speaking refugees from Syria and Iraq are also Arabic speaking:

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

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.
(Syrian female, Gwynneville, 2018)

But not all refugees we interviewed got to know their neighbours:

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, Mangerton, 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, Fairy Meadow, 2018)

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, Wollongong, 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, Gwynneville, 2018)

We want to pick and choose our own friends. I can't get involved with others I don't know.

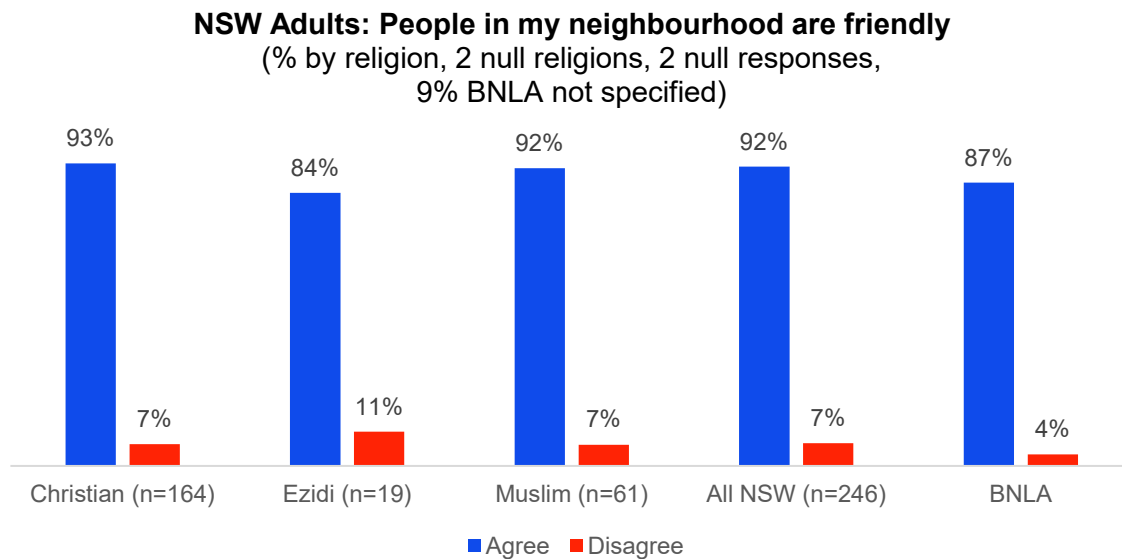
(Syrian female, Gwynneville, 2018)

[Neighbours?] We don't – we don't visit each other; we just greet each other from far away. We haven't visited them; they haven't visited us. Just from far away, just greet each other far away.

(Iraqi female, Mangerton, 2018)

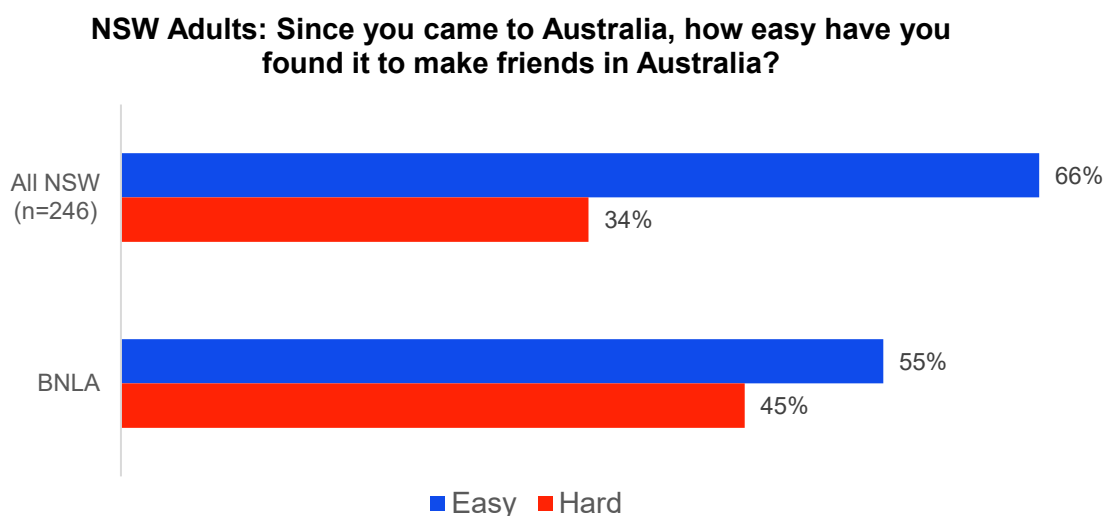
We were interested to see if the religion of refugees played a role in how friendly neighbours were towards them. As Figure 6.2.7 shows, there is no significant difference between Christian (those from Syria and Iraq) and Muslim (those from Afghanistan) refugee experiences in this regard, with over 90 per cent of respondents reporting friendly neighbours. The experiences of Ezidi refugees (also from Syria and Iraq) is lower in this regard, but even here 84 per cent of Ezidi refugees reported that neighbours were friendly to them.

Figure 6.2.7: NSW adults, by religion: are the people in your neighbourhood friendly?



Another aspect of the social interaction of newly-arrived refugees with people living in their neighbourhood relates to how easy it is for refugees to make friends since coming to Australia. As Figure 6.2.8 shows, two out of three adult refugees surveyed in NSW said that it was 'Very easy' or 'Easy' for them to make friends.

Figure 6.2.8: NSW adults: how easy is it to make friends?



Another way of looking at the social integration of refugees in NSW related to how easy it was for them to talk to their Australian neighbours. As Figure 6.2.9 shows, refugees found this more difficult: the NSW average result for this question was 41%, lower than the national BNLA survey, which found that about half (49%) of refugees surveyed across Australia found it easy to talk to their Australian neighbours. Clearly it takes time for refugees to be accepted by neighbours though it should be again pointed out that most of the refugees surveyed across Australia in the BNLA had been in Australia longer than the refugees we surveyed. In this sense, refugees in NSW do not have very different settlement experiences than other Australian refugees. Clearly it takes time to develop a talking relationship with neighbours and it may well be that refugees are not much different to non-refugees in this regard.

Figure 6.2.9: NSW adults: how easy is it to talk to your Australian neighbours?



Some refugees found their relationships with their neighbours difficult. As one of our research team commented about a single female living in Coffs Harbour:

She doesn't know any of the neighbours and says they are not friendly. Her first two friends who were Australian were made through a shop and while she has friends at TAFE she is scared of other people. Her friends there are Kurdish and African. Her English just doesn't appear to be good enough to navigate friendships at the moment.

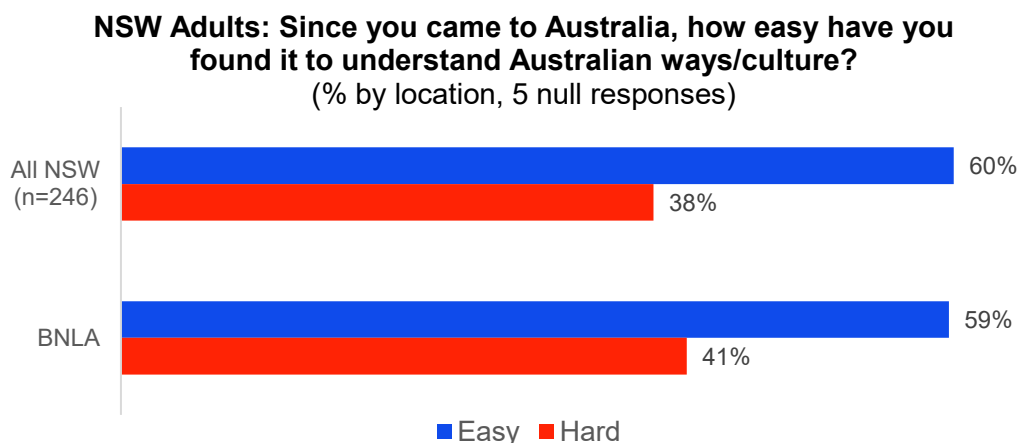
Among refugee informants living in Coffs Harbour we found only one incident where the neighbours have been bad and therefore the family was looking to move to a safer neighbourhood, as one of our research team recalled in her fieldnotes:

The immediate neighbours are Aussies next door and Iraqis on the other side of them. They talk a lot and share food in each other's houses. There is one bad neighbour in a house adjacent to the townhouse property who gets drunk a lot and has hurled abuse at them – name calling about being refugees and speaking English. They understand this is related to the media discourse. As a consequence, they don't feel too safe where they are living, but feel safe in Coffs Harbour.

In Wollongong most refugee families interviewed reported that neighbours were friendly, sociable and extending invitations to each other, although, many mentioned that their interaction was basic and limited to ‘greetings from afar’. Most families did not feel isolated, yet emphasised that their relatives were far away. One of the informants said that she had no neighbours and felt isolated, and as a result, she experienced severe psychological problems. Another informant had neighbours, but still felt alone. Both informants were widows living on their own.

Another dimension of social integration and successful settlement of refugees relates to how easy it is for them to understand Australian ways. Australia is to newly-arrived refugees a strange, foreign land. Many knew little about Australia – let alone Australian social morés – before they arrived in Australia. The first introduction of many refugees to Australian life came at the induction programs that they attended after being selected to come to Australia, before they arrived here. Figure 6.2.10 shows the results to the question: how easy is it to understand Australian ways and Australian culture? The benchmark answer to this question that was also included in the BNLA is that six out of ten refugees (59%) found it ‘Very easy’ or ‘Easy’. The NSW average for the adult refugees that we surveyed is nearly identical to this (60%).

Figure 6.2.10: NSW adults: how easy is it to understand Australian ways?



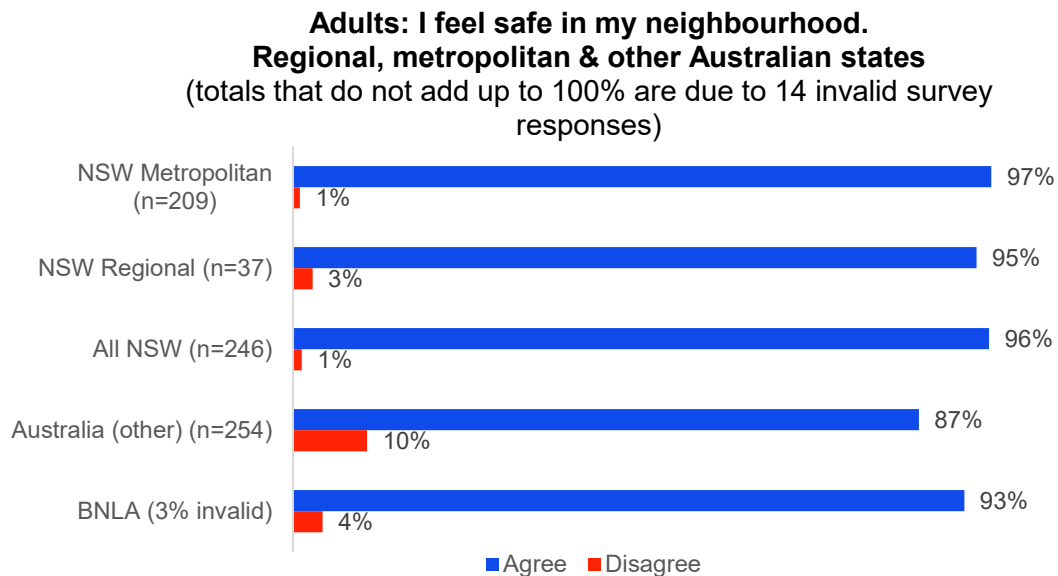
6.2.2.3. Safety

All the refugee Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugee families had experienced great trauma before and after their displacement from their homeland, though our fieldwork did not probe these experiences because we did not want them to revisit this trauma and were interested in what has happened to them after they have settled in Australia. One male refugee living in Liverpool explained more than once during his interview that all refugees are traumatised, and that people here in Australia need to take that into account. An Iraqi female living in Fairfield said: *‘it was good in Iraq, but lately, before we fled from Iraq, there was no safety’*. The main reason that refugee families undertake the risky journey to settle in another country is because they are displaced by conflict that puts them and their families in great danger. They are looking for a safe place to bring up their children, a place where their children will have a better future and where they themselves can finally feel safe. This then

generates two key indices of successful refugee settlement: do refugees feel safe in their new country and is it a good place to bring up their children.

As Figure 6.2.11 shows, almost all adult refugees felt that NSW is a safe place to live and bring up their families, no matter whether they live in Sydney suburbs or Wollongong or Coffs Harbour. This result was slightly better than that for the national BNLA survey.

Figure 6.2.11: Adults: do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?



Our interviews with refugee informants gave us some further insights into how safe they felt living in Australia:

It's really good, yeah. It's safer than where I used to live before.
 (Young Afghan female, age 13, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Yeah, absolutely [feel safe]. That is the first thing we like. I think not just at Coffs Harbour, all Australia, all places in Australia. The first thing we be comfortable about it's safe, you know, it's safe.
 (Syrian female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

We feel very safe here.
 (Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

I don't feel any fear. I hear about things and people, like, lock the door and blah blah blah, but I don't feel anything, I feel safe. I'm not sure about any problems, but around me I feel safe.
 (Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

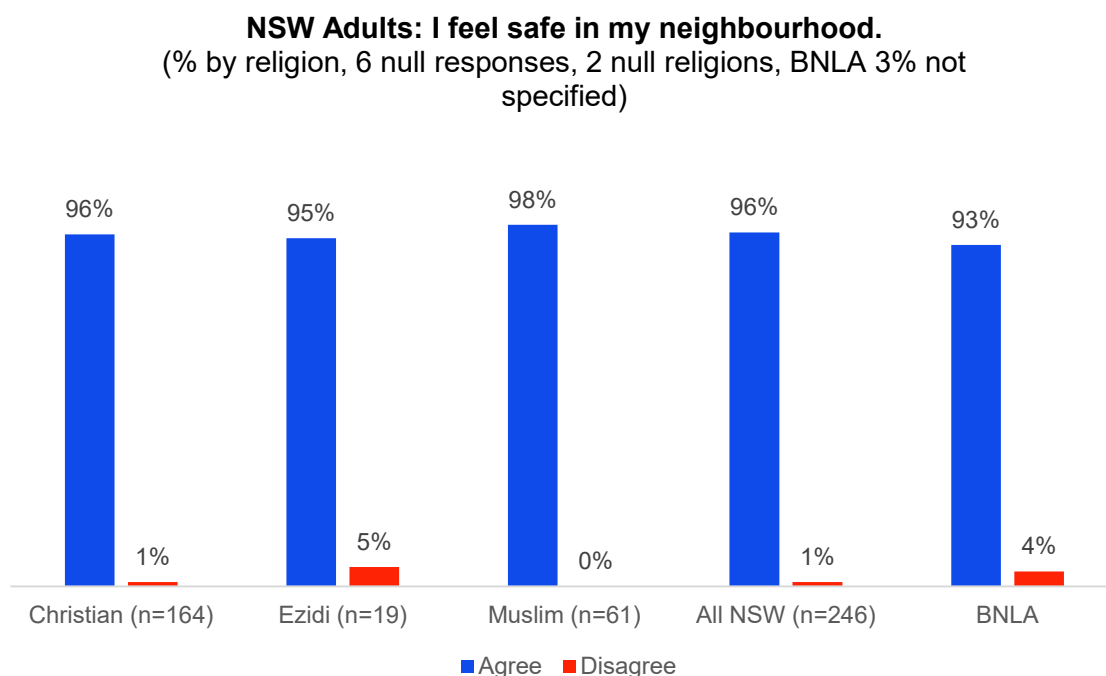
Yeah, of course, I feel very safe.
 (Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

As Figure 6.2.12 shows, religion is not a significant factor impacting on the extent to which refugee adults felt safe in their neighbourhood. This finding is interesting because there is a significant literature in Australia on Islamophobia (Dunn et al., 2007; Hassan 2018; Iner, 2017, 2019; Poynting and Briskman, 2018) and the extent to which Muslim Australians have been the target of those with racist attitudes and practices, particularly since 9/11 (Dreher, 2006; Dunn et al., 2015; HREOC, 2003; Kabir, 2007a,b; Pedersen et al., 2012; Poynting et al., 2004; Poynting and Perry, 2007). How do we reconcile these apparent contradictions? The answer is that both acceptance and hostility towards Muslim Australians occur: those who feel very accepted also report racist experiences. This contradiction is evident in the experiences of a young Muslim female refugee we interviewed in Wollongong:

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.

(Young Syrian female, age 18, Wollongong, 2018)

Figure 6.2.12: NSW adults, by religion: do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?

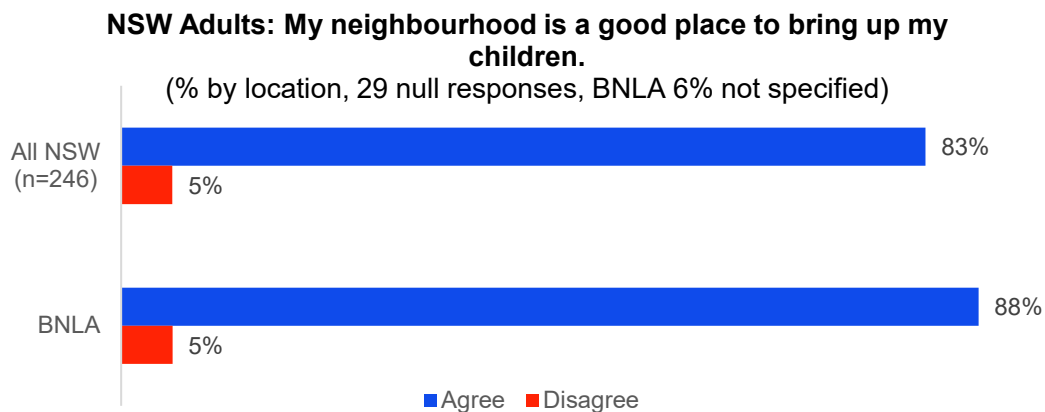


6.2.2.4. Children

This research project has as a point of departure the argument that the family is the critical unit from which settlement outcomes can be analysed. Most refugee families described their motivation to come to Australia as wanting to provide a safe environment to bring up their children. Their main concern was that their children have a successful and fulfilling life in Australia. In order to explore this matter further, we asked our adult refugee informants whether their neighbourhood is a good place to bring up their children.

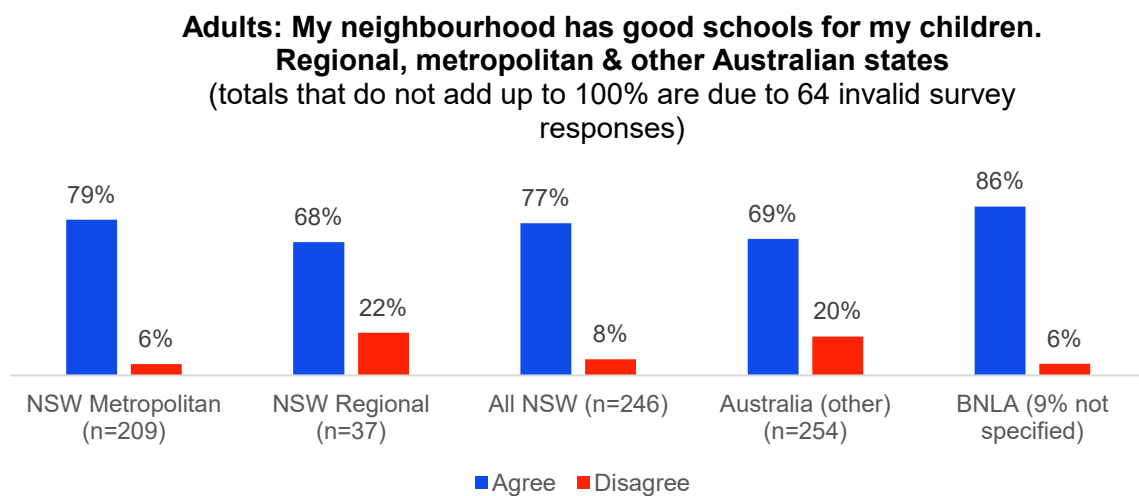
As Figure 6.2.13 shows, an overwhelming majority (83%) of adults agreed that NSW was a good place to bring up their children. This is only slightly lower than results in the BNLA longitudinal survey of refugees in Australia.

Figure 6.2.13: Adults in all states: is your neighbourhood a good place to bring up your children?



Education opportunities and outcomes are critical factors in determining the future lives of refugee children, particularly employment outcomes.

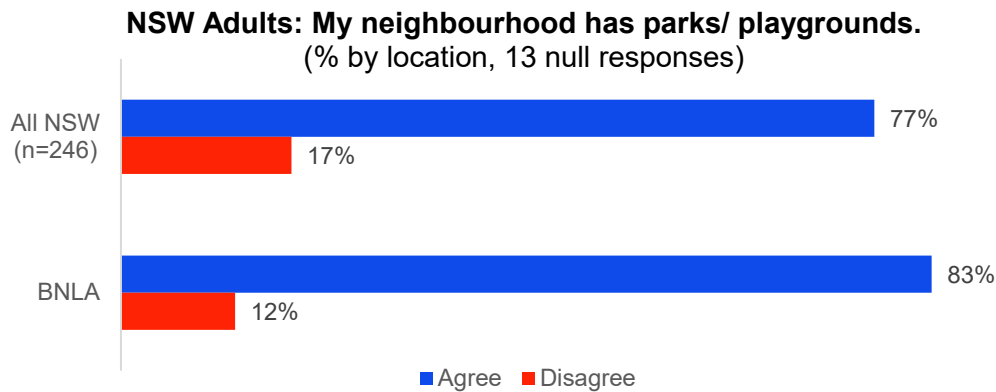
Figure 6.2.14: Adults: does your neighbourhood have good schools?



As Figure 6.2.14 shows, refugee adults (77%) thought that NSW was strong in providing school education, and they were happier with schools in their neighbourhood than refugees who settled in Queensland or Victoria (other Australian states, 69%).

Another aspect of the satisfaction of refugees with their NSW neighbourhood related to the provision of parks or playgrounds for their children to access outside of school times. Figure 6.2.15 shows that refugees settling in NSW were generally happy in this regard.

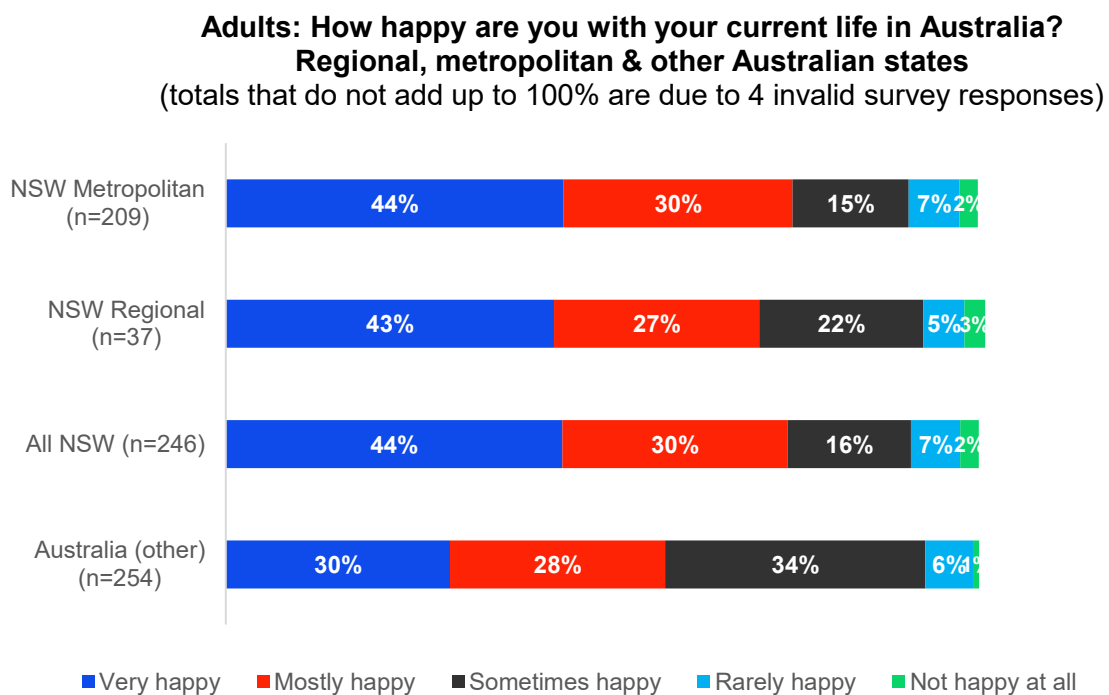
Figure 6.2.15: NSW adults: does your neighbourhood have parks or playgrounds?



6.2.2.5. Overall satisfaction of life in Australia

In the previous section we reported on many aspects of settlement outcomes for refugee families (adults and children) who we interviewed and surveyed for this research project. In order to see how these different aspects of settlement balance out in the minds of the refugees themselves we asked a final question: how happy are you with your current life in Australia? As Figure 6.2.16 shows, 74 per cent of refugees were ‘Very happy’ or ‘Mostly happy’ living in NSW. This is a strong indication that despite the great suffering and trauma that these refugees have experienced in their family life, refugee settlement in Australia is judged to be a success from the eyes of the refugees themselves.

Figure 6.2.16: Adults: how happy are you with your current life?



It is interesting that Muslim refugees – in this case those from Afghanistan, mostly Hazara – are the most likely (74%) to report that they are ‘Very happy’ with their lives in Australia, as Figure 6.2.17 shows. Christian (35% ‘Very happy’ and 35% ‘Mostly happy’) and Ezidi (37% ‘Very happy’ and 26% ‘Mostly happy’) refugees reported very similar rates of overall happiness with their life as a refugee living in NSW. Figure 6.2.18 shows answers to the same question by former country.

Figure 6.2.17: NSW adults, by religion: how happy are you with your current life?

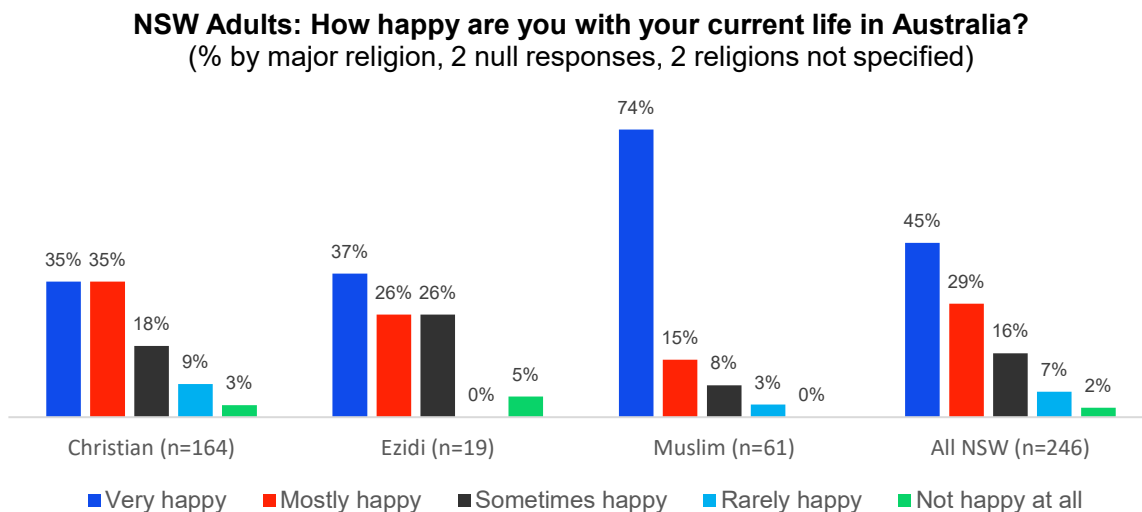
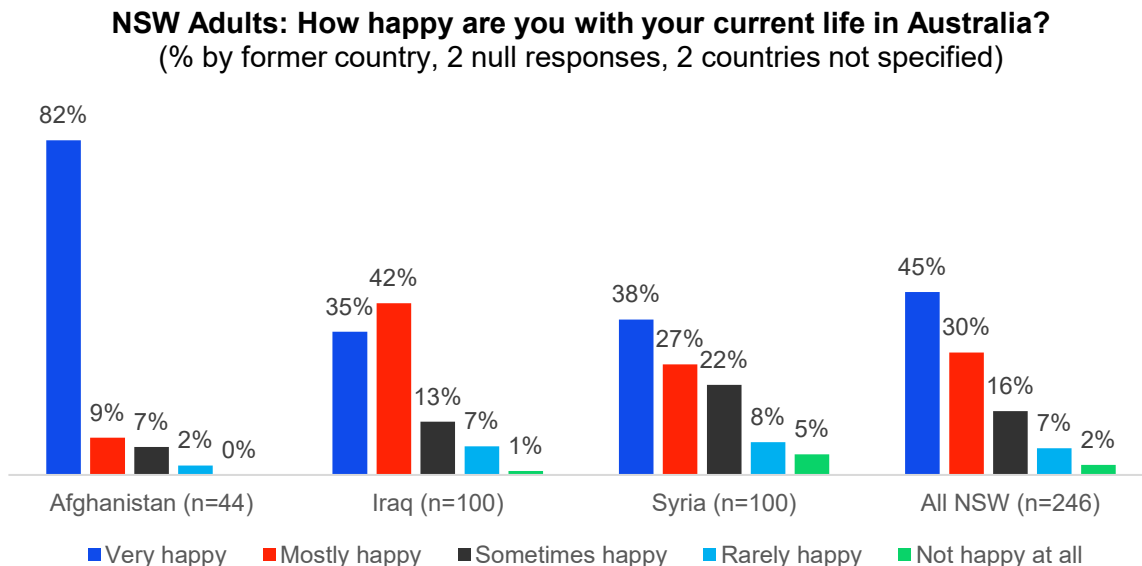


Figure 6.2.18: NSW adults, by former country: how happy are you with your current life?



Our refugee informants spoke about how happy they were with life in Australia:

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, Mangerton, 2018)

[Referring to the life in Australia] it 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, West Wollongong, 2018)

I was happy because I was safe here but sad and worried sometimes because of the distance and being far away from relatives and family. But now this is my hometown. This is my country. I'm happy now.

(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

It's good for me, I be happy really, but also I was worried about how I can start a life. It's a problem because when you think we want to start life in Aleppo, you know, you say 'Oh, it's okay, everything now okay', my sons go to school, they have a plan, my husband has a job, you know?

(Syrian female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

6.2.2.6. Other aspects of settlement

One aspect of our research design was to include refugee experiences of **settlement in non-metropolitan areas** in addition to those experiences of refugees living in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The non-metropolitan sites in NSW were Wollongong and Coffs Harbour. A key finding is that refugee settlement in non-metropolitan areas of NSW appears to have been successful from the viewpoint of the refugees themselves:

Yeah, I like Coffs Harbour. When we went to Melbourne, there was good people, and teachers, and everything was fine; but I like most Coffs Harbour, because there was most of my friends and teachers, so I missed them, and I tell my mum to come back, and we... we came back.

(Young Afghan female, age 12, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Our relatives are living in Melbourne, they rent us a house and then we went to there. We were there for three months but my children were not happy there. My children were not going to school because they were saying they wanted to go back to Coffs Harbour.

(Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

One key issue that emerged from our fieldwork was the issue of gender relations within families in Australia compared to their homeland. The societies where they came from – Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan – have much more entrenched patriarchal traditions where the women were more likely to be homemakers and mothers rather than breadwinners. Power relations within the family reflected this patriarchy. In many instances life in Australia meant living in a society with stronger laws, policies and practices of human rights and gender equality. This often challenged male authority, particularly when males were not working and were at home with their wife or when it was the woman who found a job.

Three sisters in one family all stated that they could not work in Iraq because of gender and religious discrimination. Another female who was single explained:

I was working in hairdressing [in Iraq], but then I get threatened...because the collision between Sunni and Shia. I am Sunni.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

Many female refugees report that they have embraced the different culture in Australia, which treats genders equally:

Especially for girls and women because they are persecuted in Iraq especially. I used to wear a hijab to cover my hair when I wanted to buy something from a shop in Iraq. Here I am free.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

It's a big consolation to me, everything that I have been deprived of in my country and here, I'm very pleased to see that my daughter is having it and I'm giving it to my daughter. If I could not fulfil my dream, I put my dream in my daughter.

(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

Another key issue is **accommodation**. Most refugees settling in NSW live in Sydney's western and south western suburbs, with the Fairfield Local Government Area an area of key concentration of Syrian-conflict refugee settlement. House prices in Sydney are often the highest in Australia and rental properties in short supply, with this flowing on to the cost of renting a house. Many refugees reported that the cost of renting was a key problem for them, associated with difficulty in finding appropriate accommodation. One Syrian refugee woman living in Parramatta complained thus:

I'm not happy in this home but I cannot rent another one, because when you go to information and nobody give you home because you are on Centrelink. It's very hard.

(Syrian female, Parramatta, 2018)

Refugees settling in Wollongong also reported difficulties in finding cheap and appropriate accommodation:

There's one thing – accommodation, looking for different accommodation, for example. It's hard to get, yeah, in general, in Wollongong.

(Syrian male, West Wollongong, 2018)

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, Mangerton, 2018)

Finding accommodation. Finding proper accommodation, okay. That's the main issue, okay.

(Syrian female, West Wollongong, 2018)

The **cost of living** is also a key concern of refugee families. Surviving on Centrelink payments is the main concern for many refugee families who we interviewed. Centrelink money is enough for a modest life as reported by a few interviewees:

If we spend like Australians, it [Centrelink money] wouldn't be enough for us; but we buy from second-hand shops, and we make food at home. We don't buy from restaurants. It is easy enough for us that way.

(Iraqi male, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

I want to help everyone here but I can't. Sometimes my smaller daughter wants to buy something... She's 16 years old... Sometimes she wants to eat ice cream. We can't. You say now, 'It's not expensive. Maybe it's \$5.00.' But \$5.00 is too much for us.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

I think I didn't get all my rights in Australia because I explained to Centrelink about my situation and my health issues with reports and Centrelink ignored all of them... They refused my disability. Newstart for me isn't enough. Because I have several issues and several expenses... Here in Australia it's very expensive and life is not easy at all.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

I need to work here, because life is expensive here, and I have too much expenses, and I want to survive.

(Iraqi male, Fairfield, 2018)

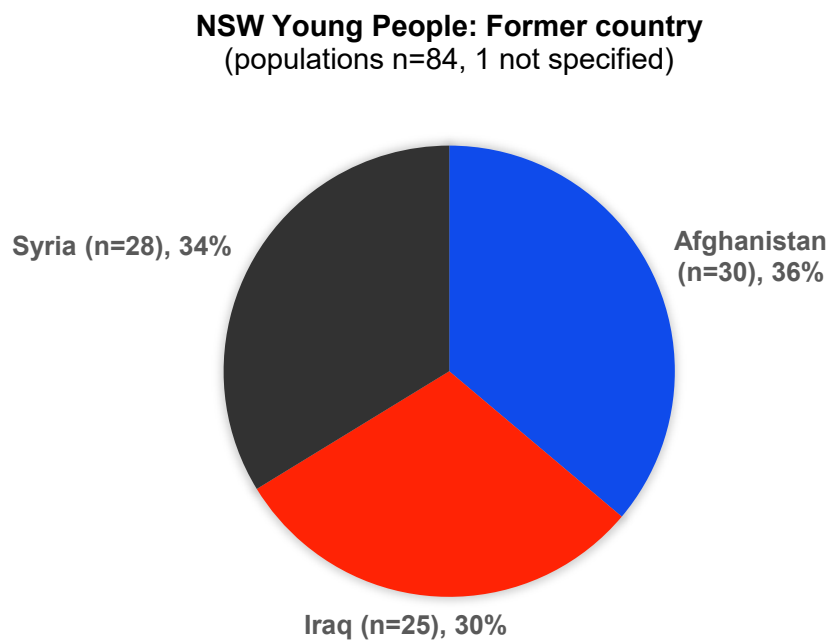
6.3. Stories from young people

What makes this study significant is the inclusion of the whole family unit, including young people between the ages of 5-18 years. Often the mobility of families is driven by the desire for a better future for children and this was a common discussion point in our family interviews.

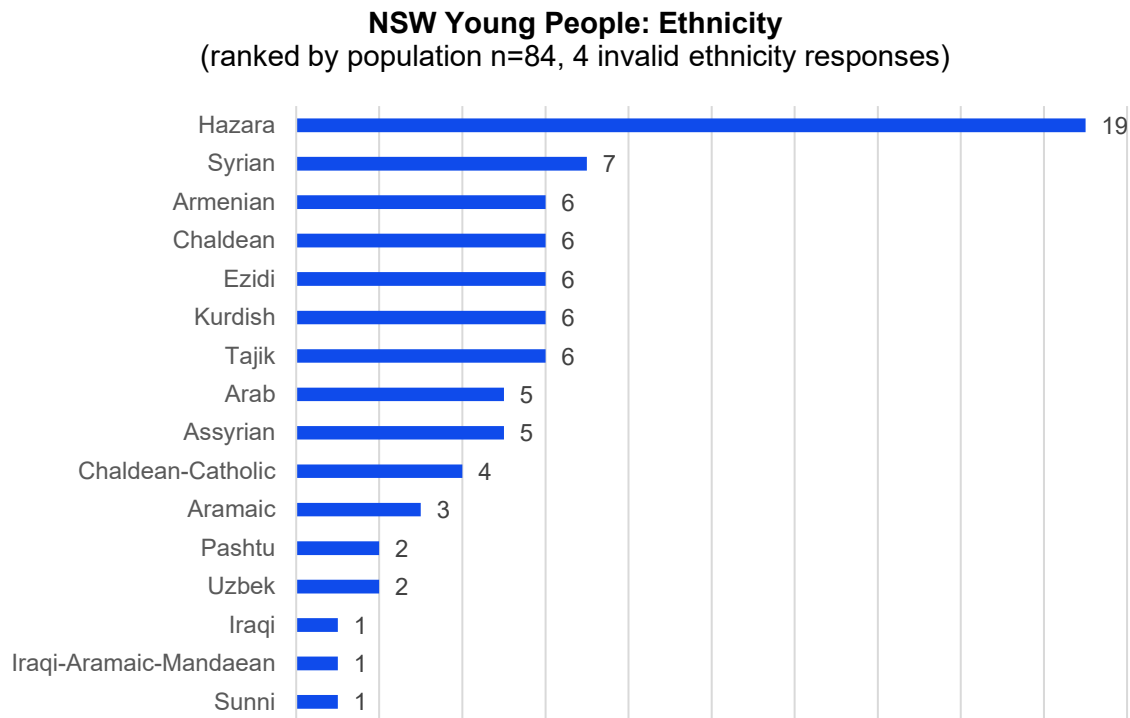
In social research, young people are now considered to be research participants with their own voice, opinions and ways of seeing the world (Cahill, 2007). Given the family focus of this study their inclusion is critical to understanding family settlement.

84 young people were interviewed and surveyed, with theirs and their parents' permission; those over 16 gave permission themselves. There was a fairly even distribution of these young people from the three different former countries (Figure 6.3.1).

Figure 6.3.1: Former country of NSW young people



The largest ethnic group we spoke with among young people were those who identify as Hazara, all of whom were from Afghanistan (see Figure 6.3.2 and Table 6.3.1) and were located in Auburn. Some of those from Afghanistan were Uzbeki or Tajik. Those from Syria and Iraq appear to be more ethnically diverse. All of the Ezidi in NSW were from Iraq.

Figure 6.3.2: Ethnicity of NSW young people**Table 6.3.1: NSW Young People: Ethnicity by former country**

NSW Young People: Ethnicity by former country				
	Afghanistan (n=30)	Iraq (n=25)	Syria (n=28)	All NSW (n=84, 1 null)
Arab	0	0	5	5
Aramaic	0	3	0	3
Armenian	0	0	5	5
Assyrian	0	2	3	5
Chaldean	0	6	0	6
Chaldean-Catholic	0	4	0	4
Ezidi	0	6	0	6
Hazara	19	0	0	19
Iraqi	0	1	0	1
Iraqi-Aramaic-Mandaean	0	1	0	1
Kurdish	0	0	6	6
Pashtu	2	0	0	2
Sunni	1	0	0	1
Syrian	0	0	7	7
Tajik	6	0	0	6
Uzbeki	2	0	0	2
Not specified	0	2	2	4
Total	30	25	28	83

1 null country hence total 83

Most of the young people were of Primary to Middle-school age (Table 6.3.2). There were equal numbers of males and females.

Table 6.3.2: NSW Young People: age, location and gender

NSW Young People: age, location and gender														
	Auburn (n=27)		Coffs Harbour (n=13)		Fairfield (n=16)		Liverpool (n=8)		Parramatta (n=14)		Wollongong (n=6)		All NSW (n=84)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
5-10	3	6	1	3	0	1	5	1	0	5	2	0	11	16
11-14	5	2	5	2	3	5	1	1	2	1	0	0	16	11
15-18	5	2	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	9	8
Over 18	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	6	7
Total	15	12	6	7	7	9	6	2	4	10	4	2	42	42

F = Female; M = Male

6.3.1. Education

Educational opportunity is critical to young people's successful settlement and their experiences are judged in comparison to what they may have known in their countries of origin or *en route* to Australia. Some, particularly Afghan YP, have had a very disrupted educational experience due to limited rights in countries they have passed through, such as Iran and Pakistan. The desire to start again is strong. The following young Afghan woman from Coffs Harbour expressed her frustration about her situation:

As we wanted to study here, to go to school, me and my brother wanted to continue our studies; but as we didn't know the laws and regulations of the education system of here, as they told us that we wanted to go to school, but in school they said that, "You are over-age". I was 21 years old, and my brother was 19 years old. We could not attend the schools. But when we went to TAFE, there was lots of people over-age, and people who were not of our age. So, we become... like, my brother become a bit sad, and he could not learn properly. Then going for some months, and then he quit TAFE. It was kind of like we can say that he was happy to go to school and start his studies from really beginning; he could not do that. And when he goes to TAFE, that didn't... like, worked out what he wanted, then it becomes a bit... that makes him depressed and sad, so he left everything. And I do the same.

(Young Afghan female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Syrian young people have usually had an educational experience that is less interrupted than those from Iraq or Afghanistan, although this is not consistent across families. However, for those who were nearing the end of their school education before leaving their homeland, starting again in a new system at the point they would normally have gone to university or TAFE has been difficult. Making decisions about subjects and courses while learning English has not been easy.

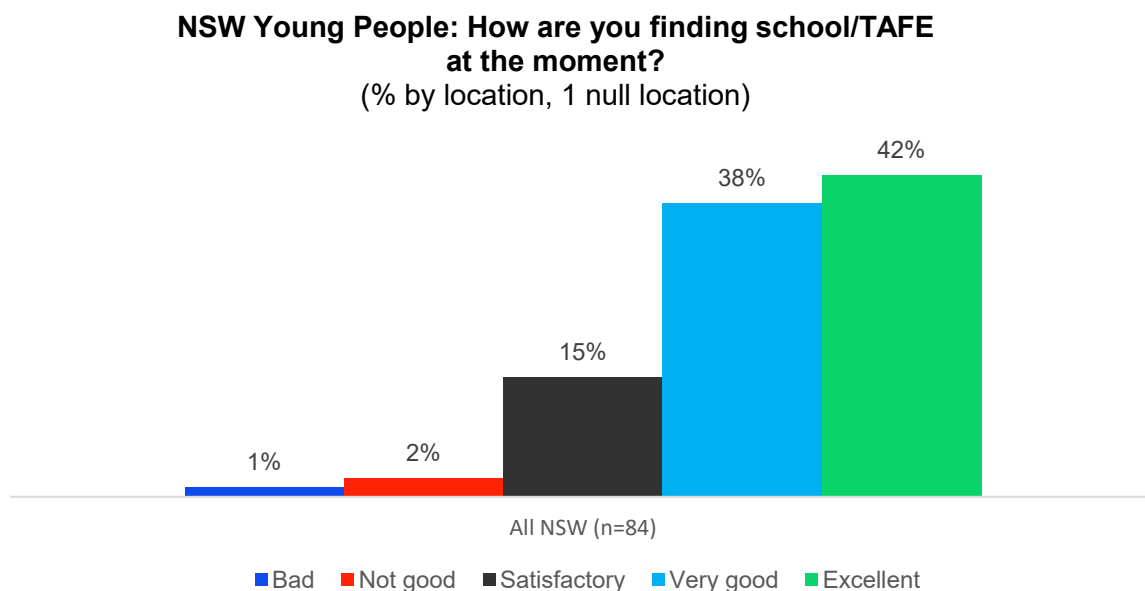
I want to become a surgeon. If I do not achieve a high mark, I think I will change my mind. Maybe, I will undertake Business Administration and work for an international company overseas.

(Young Syrian female, age 18, Wollongong, 2018)

For some YP from Iraq, in particular the Ezidi (known in Arabic as Yazidi), disruptions to education have been accompanied by severe human rights abuses by ISIS, to which schools must now respond and where a duty of care becomes critical.

Despite these provisos it is clear when examining Figure 6.3.3 that most YP are finding their educational experiences productive. Across NSW 80 per cent of YP find their educational experiences 'Very good' or 'Excellent'. A very small number, 3 per cent, thought their experiences were 'Not good' or 'Poor'.

Figure 6.3.3: NSW young people and education



6.3.1.1. Duty of Care

While Australia has legally enshrined the concept of ‘duty of care’ it is another matter to understand what this means for different people. The young people in NSW often spoke of the caring approach of their teachers:

There are very kind and good people. I have good teachers; they are kind, and... our lesson, they learn us. They are so good.

(Young Afghan female, age 12, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Four out of five young people living in Parramatta (86%) thought that their school or TAFE was ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very good’, which was higher than the percentage for the whole of the NSW cohort (80%) (Figure 6.3.3). Young people were enjoying school and interested in learning, and acknowledged their teachers in this regard:

What I like about my school is that the teacher is friendly; they respect you. If you don't understand a word, they will help you to understand the meaning. I do not have favourite subject, now. All subjects are good.

(Young Syrian male, Parramatta, 2018)

These comments about teachers were voiced often. Of the small number of young people in Liverpool who took part in the survey almost 90 per cent thought that school or TAFE was ‘Excellent’ and the remainder thought it was ‘Very good’ (Figure 6.3.3). Some of the young people talked about the difference between Australian schools and those back home, and to some extent these differences explain why ‘care’ is one of the factors they notice:

Yeah, it's a bit different than Iraq. It's not easier or harder, but it's different, like, the way they teach is different, teachers different, resources, everything is different. Different culture, yeah, we have to adapt.

(Young Iraqi male, Liverpool, 2018)

The school in Iraq is not the same at all. In Iraq the teachers scream a lot and they hit you with a ruler like if you did bad things, and for punishment they make you stand on one leg with one leg up; they hit you with a ruler – but not us. We were good so we didn't get in trouble.

(Young Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

Another aspect of care is the support the YP were given for language acquisition.

6.3.1.2. The importance of language

YP often spoke more than two languages, other than English. For parents, there was sometimes a desire that the home language was not lost, while others recognised that English was of critical importance regardless. Some of the parents interviewed in Liverpool chose to send their children to Arabic (Assyrian) private schools in Australia:

We choose this school because there are many students [who] speak Arabic. When you came to Australia, our accent is not clear. Now, everyone can understand what we say. Yeah, now, is easy, but when we came, it was too hard.
(Syrian male, Liverpool, 2018)

Our daughter is in Grade 11. It's supposed to be more but right now it's fair enough to start studying again. She is doing her HSC, Year 11, in a private Assyrian school. Yeah, she is liking the school. She is very happy and she is doing well.
(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

In Coffs Harbour all of the YP thought their education was good, and bilingual classroom workers were part of that:

They had a translation person, he came every two days in a week, and he translates. This really helped me. Yeah. He's speaking Arabic. Yeah, just he's in the class, and when the teacher's speaking, or giving the lesson, something I couldn't understand or I didn't know what it means; maybe just I have my hand up, and I say... maybe I will ask the teachers, and he will explain it by Arabic, and I will understand that.
(Young Syrian male, age 17, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Strong support is particularly important for older young people and some of this is found in schools, while others find it in TAFE or NAVITAS:

All I can say is that my English is improving since our arrival. At the beginning, NAVITAS really helped us a lot find an accommodation and English courses. Currently, I attend High-school at Wollongong. I want to be a surgeon and undertake Medicine at the University.
(Young Syrian female, age 18, Wollongong, 2018)

As we found in *Queensland*, Intensive English Centres (IEC) provide concentrated support in learning English, and students really appreciate this start in a new country:

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.
(Young Syrian male, age 17, Wollongong, 2018)

One of the most important aspects to integration and getting on in a new country is connection to YP their own age.

6.3.1.3. Social capital

School or educational institutions turn out to be the main source of connection to the wider society and the YP are very enthusiastic about their schools and friendship networks, especially if they are very young.

Yeah [I like school]. I learn new things. I have new friends. It's so fun.
(Young Afghan male, age 12, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

One of the important benefits of education in Australia is the diversity of backgrounds of other children. This assists in coming to understand 'how things work'.

I am very pleased watching my daughter thriving and learning within diversity of culture. There is a great deal of harmony that everybody is related, and she's treated like everybody else. That gives me a feeling of security.
(Iraqi female, Liverpool, 2018)

At Fairfield, young people in school were the ones who found it most easy to adjust to Australian ways. Half of the young people in Fairfield who took part in the survey thought that school or TAFE was 'Very good' and a further quarter of them thought it was 'Excellent' (Figure 6.3.3). One young Iraqi male loved school so much he thought that school holidays were boring. His favourite subjects were maths and science:

Like I have a lot of friends from my school, like from different religions. Like I got a lot of people.
(Young Iraqi male, age 17, Fairfield, 2018)

This story was repeated in regional areas, such as Coffs Harbour.

Yeah [many friends at school]. Even all of my class. There's one girl from Afghanistan, and all of them is from Australia.

(Young Afghan female, age 12, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

For YP, being together in classrooms with non-refugee children leads to **diverse social groups**:

Yeah [many friends at school]. A lot. A lot of them are from Australia and some of them are Afghani girls, and from Syria.

(Young Afghan female, age 13, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Lots [of friends]. I only have one friend from Afghanistan and the other ones are from other countries. China and another country, Africa. Some are from here.

(Young Afghan male, age 12, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Yes [many friends at school]. There's like Iraq, like my brother said; Syria, and Afghanistan people. Yeah. And then some of them Australian people.

(Young Syrian male, age 12, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

Many of the young people interviewed in **Fairfield** had already finished school and had moved on to TAFE, which they found very interesting and useful, but they had not yet managed to make friends there. **Like the adults, these young adults spent most of their spare time at home with family members, and wanted more social life.** One young Syrian adult male explained that Fairfield is too busy to have a chance to have deeper friendships, and it is too expensive to actually go out and have a social life. A young Iraqi Fairfield female commented:

Every day is routine. When I wake up in the morning, I eat breakfast and then I just play with my phone sometimes. I go shopping with my mum and then I come back. No, no social life. No, just with cousins only.

Similarly, to other locations, it is the **young people aged 17-21** that are having a hard time finding opportunities that are good for them. This makes them unmotivated and sort of lost.

Age matters to forming friendships as explained by a 17-year-old when he compares his situation to his younger brother (12-year-old) especially:

6.3.1.4. Parent's expectations

Most families want to provide the best education opportunities for their children, even though it may be out of their budget:

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

I put her (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.
(Syrian female, Wollongong, 2018)

Parents felt that their children were generally doing very well but the system was quite different to their former countries. There was also a sense of different cultural values and how these shape family relationships. The differences were mentioned earlier when a YP talked about a less authoritarian approach in Australia. Perhaps one description of the **experience of teaching** at a school in Australia might reveal more:

I said, 'Why not. I've already liked to teach'. But now I change my mind, because it's different from our country. It's hard here than our country. Yeah. How you communicate with a student, it's hard here. In our countries, they respect the teacher more than here. Yeah [Kurdish students also change because school is different here]. No, they respect me. They okay. Because I still use my... how I treat them, like in my country, little bit. But like, in here. Because they need sometimes to be hard with them. Little bit, not a lot. Sometimes you... you will be very soft with them, because some of them have a lot of trauma. Sometimes I'm crying with them, when they are telling me something. Just two days [a week I do this]."
(Syrian female, Coffs Harbour, 2018)

6.3.2. Settlement

In this section of the report we investigate dimensions of the success of settlement from the viewpoint of children and young people who are part of the refugee families from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan who we interviewed and surveyed. 84 refugees aged between 5 and 18 years responded to our young people survey, with equal numbers of males and females.

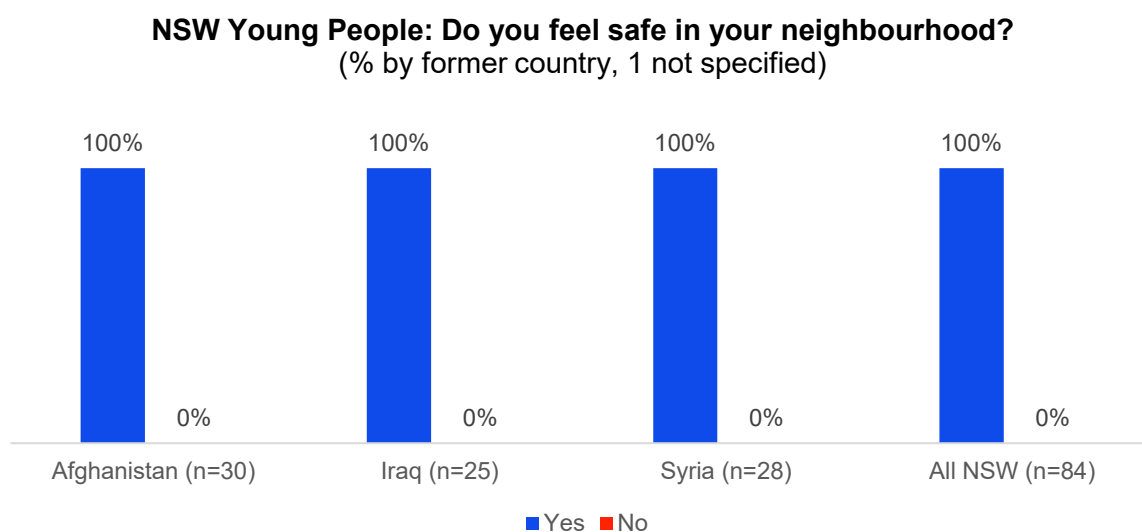
For refugee children and youth, the processes of displacement from their homelands, friends, and families, to an interim resettlement in another country through to the uncertain journey and final resettlement in Australia, were very disruptive. Although most felt that they now belong in Australia – as we see below – many missed their homeland and were confused. As one young Afghan male, now living in Auburn, put it:

My parents Afghan. We was born – we were born Iran. Now we are here, you know. I'm confused about anything – our home, about our country, you know.
(Young Afghan male, Auburn, 2018)

On the other hand, one refugee woman from Afghanistan expressed her relief that her disabled children were truly accepted here:

I prefer Australians much more because they give love to my kids. They don't humiliate me or my kids. Being in Afghanistan, my kids were always isolated, alone in the sand, playing by themselves, which made me cry. Here people say hello to my kids, whereas if this was in Afghanistan they would say things which were hurtful.
(Afghan female, Auburn, 2018; mother of two disabled children)

Figure 6.3.4: NSW young people by former country: do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?



One key aspect of successful settlement for refugee children and young people is safety. As Figure 6.3.4 shows, **all** of the refugee children and young people from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, who we interviewed and surveyed, felt safe living in their new neighbourhoods in NSW. This is a remarkable result; and is true in all of the NSW locations where fieldwork was undertaken: the Sydney southwestern suburbs of Auburn, Fairfield, Parramatta and Liverpool, and regional locations of Wollongong and Coffs Harbour.

Table 6.3.3: NSW young people: how many of your friends are from different backgrounds to you?

Number of friends	Number of respondents		
	Female	Male	All NSW
None	2	4	6
1	1	6	7
2 to 5	20	5	25
5 or more	13	12	25
10 or more	4	13	17
Null	2	2	4
Totals	42	42	84

An important social dimension of successful settlement relates to the extent to which refugee children and young people can make new friends in NSW, particularly when those friends are from different backgrounds. As Table 6.3.3 shows, most have between 2-10 friends from different backgrounds.

Table 6.3.4: NSW young people and belonging to the community

NSW young people and belonging to the community		
	Female	Male
Not at all	5%	10%
Occasionally	5%	5%
Often	14%	14%
Most of the time	33%	26%
Always	40%	38%
Null	2%	7%
Total	100%	100%

Another aspect of successful settlement relates to the extent to which refugee children and young people feel that they belong to the new local community where they live in NSW. This is of course subjective, but subjectivity matters greatly when attempting to assess refugee settlement success. The refugee children and young people were asked if they felt that they belonged to the local community 'Not at all', 'Occasionally', 'Often', 'Most of the time' or 'Always'. As Table 6.3.4 shows, across all NSW fieldwork sites 64 per cent of male children and young people and 73 per cent of females replied that they belong 'Most of the time' or 'Always'. This is a very strong result, being an index of successful settlement soon after arrival in their NSW neighbourhood. Only 10 per cent of male and 5 per cent of female children and young people reported that they did 'Not at all' feel that they belonged.



Conclusion



7. Conclusion

This research project, funded by the Australian Research Council, aims to investigate the settlement outcomes of the refugees who arrived as part of the one-off Syrian-conflict intake of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees, introduced by the Abbott government in 2015. Most arrived in Australia in 2017. Refugees from Afghanistan who arrived at the same time as part of the annual humanitarian intake were also included as a comparator to the Syrian-conflict intake. The quantitative and qualitative fieldwork for this research was conducted in metropolitan and regional NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

This report analyses the findings of interviews and surveys of refugee families in NSW in 2018, the first year of a three-year longitudinal study.³ We have interviewed 233 refugee families – 118 Syrian, 82 Iraqi and 33 Afghan families – and surveyed 632 individuals settling in New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld) and Victoria (Vic). In NSW, 246 adults and 84 young people aged between 5 and 18 years were interviewed and surveyed. Interview and survey data in NSW were collected in Auburn, Fairfield, Liverpool, Parramatta, Coffs Harbour and Wollongong.⁴ Our NSW Industry Partner SSI and other local NGO service providers assisted in recruiting informants. Most of the interviews with refugee families took place in their homes, with others at the premises of service providers. Refugee research assistants were employed to assist with linguistic and cultural translation at every family.

The point of departure of our research was that the refugee family was the critical social unit in which to observe and understand settlement experiences. We interviewed and surveyed all family members aged 5 years and over who were willing to participate in the research project.

The focus of this report is to explore the settlement outcomes – challenges and opportunities – in Australia, from the experiences of the Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees in New South Wales themselves. Ultimately, the aim of reporting on the outcomes of the research is not only to present evidence but also to spark a conversation about, and to contribute to an understanding of the contribution that refugees make to Australian society and how we can enhance the social well-being, employability prospects, economic security and educational opportunities of recently arrived refugees in Australia. Finally, our reports aim to inform policy and services to enhance the settlement experience of this group.

We found great diversity in our refugee informants – in their religious, ethnic, educational, employment and linguistic backgrounds and family size – despite being displaced from just three countries. The refugees from Syria and Iraq arrived with impressive education achievements and employment histories and achievements prior to displacement, while those from Afghanistan had been prevented in gaining an education by the Taliban. Most

³ For the analysis of findings in Queensland in 2018, see Collins et al. 2019.

⁴ Snapshots of our findings in each of these sites can be found at: <https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/centre-business-and-social-innovation/research/projects/settlement-outcomes-refugee-families-australia>

refugees from Syria and Iraq were Christians and most Afghans were Muslim. This diversity undermines refugee stereotypes and one-size-fits-all policy responses to the settlement needs of refugees in Australia.

Refugee resettlement is a difficult process. All our refugee informants had horrific experiences in their homeland prior to fleeing for their safety and during their journey prior to arrival in Australia. Their families were displaced and scattered far and wide. All had family members – often parents – who were stuck back in the dangerous homelands from which they had managed to escape. They arrived in a strange land that they knew relatively little about. Packed with their limited belongings they carried uncertainty together with strong hopes for the future in their suitcases. They were met at Sydney international airport by staff from their service providers, Settlement Services International. They were full of praise for the service providers who met them at the airport and assisted them to find accommodation, register for Medicare and Centrelink, get their children into local schools and navigate the maze of Australian laws, regulations and institutions.

Most refugee families we interviewed were in their first 12 months of settlement. Most (88%) were not employed because they had not yet entered the labour market – they were still learning English, their first big resettlement hurdle. They were very unhappy to have no work and be on welfare benefits in Australia. All families were very thankful for the opportunity that Australia gave them and their families. They want to start working as soon as possible to repay Australian society for providing safe refuge for them and their families.

From a social point of view most adult refugees found the NSW neighbourhood where they settled very welcoming: over 90 per cent reported that the people in their neighbourhood were friendly, while two in three reported that it was easy to make friends with their neighbours. The long and risky journey that a refugee family makes to a country like Australia is in large part motivated by the urgent need to provide a safe environment for themselves and their children. Nearly all (96%) of the adult refugees we surveyed for this research project reported that NSW was a safe place for them and their children.

Refugees were also driven by the need to secure a better future for their children. Most adults in NSW (83%) thought that their neighbourhood is a good place to bring up their children. Most young refugees learnt English very quickly, liked their schools (80% found their educational experiences 'Very good' or 'Excellent'), and made many friends (most have five or more friends of different backgrounds to them). They *all* felt safe in their neighbourhoods; and they were confident about their future life in Australia.

In this report we have discussed many aspects of settlement outcomes for refugee families (adults and young people) who we have interviewed and surveyed for this research project. Overall, 74 per cent of adult refugees were 'Very happy' or 'Mostly happy' living in NSW, compared to 58 per cent of refugees living in Queensland or Victoria. A key finding of this research is that refugee settlement in non-metropolitan areas of NSW appears to have been successful from the viewpoint of the refugees themselves. This is a strong indication that despite the great suffering and trauma that these refugees have experienced in their family

life, refugee settlement in Australia is judged to be a success from the eyes of the refugees themselves.

Most of the refugees were positive about their future. All of those interviewed stated that they wanted to take up Australian citizenship as soon as possible. The costs of accommodation and the cost of living in general is a widespread concern. Life in Australia has also challenged gender relations within families, and in some instances generated generational conflict. Their biggest worries were family reunion – particularly for those with parents and siblings still living in their homeland – and their employment future. It is here that the challenges of policy responses to refugee settlement are most critical, particularly in the Covid-19 environment.

We have revisited these families in 2019, the second year of the longitudinal study. Our 2020 fieldwork, the final year, has been delayed because of the COVID-19 crisis. We will report on the findings of this three-year research project on the settlement outcomes of our Syrian-conflict and Afghan refugee families in NSW, Queensland and Victoria in 2021 – our final report on this research project – when all the fieldwork has been collected and analysed.



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Appendices



Appendix A: Semi-structured interview schedules

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES

Questions for Adult refugees

1. What is the composition of the family unit? (Including number and ages of children)

2. Where was each of you born? What is your nationality?

Pre-migration Phase

Education

3. Can you please tell me about your education background prior to coming here?

(Qualifications and training)

Work experience

4. Can you please tell me about your employment background prior to coming here?

(Work and work experience over time periods; business owner?)

Social Context

5. What was life like for you and your family prior to coming here?

Post-migration Phase

Settlement

6. Please tell me how you came to settle in this location in Australia?

(Previous knowledge? Will you stay?)

7. What is life like for you and your family living in this suburb/town?

(Best/worst aspects, neighbours)

8. Can you please tell me of your family and friends in Australia and other places?

(Contact, remittances?)

9. How happy are you with your current life in Australia?

Education

10. Can you please tell me about your education experiences since coming to live here? (English language, other courses, informal English learning)

Work experience

11. Can you please tell me about your employment experiences since coming to live here? (Job applications, kinds of jobs, difficulties in finding work)

Help us to make things better

12. If there was one piece of information that you wish you knew before arrival in Australia what would that be and how would it make settling in Australia easier?

Hopes for the Future

13. What are your overall hopes for your life in Australia in the future?

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES

Questions for refugee young people in education

There are no right or wrong answers and you don't have to answer a question if it makes you feel uncomfortable.

(How old are you? What is your gender?)

1. How are you finding school/TAFE at the moment?

You could talk about the classes, friends, interests, compare previous education experiences...

2. What subjects and activities do you like/dislike (why)?

3. How is your English learning going?

You could talk about your English classes and what you think of them.

4. What are your hopes and plans for the future?

5. What activities are available in your local neighbourhood? Do you participate in any of these? Do you have friends?

6. What do you do after school/TAFE?

Do you work part time, watch the television, do homework?

7. Help us to make things better

If there was one piece of information that you wish you knew before arrival in Australia what would that be and how would it make settling in Australia easier?

8. Do you want to ask us anything?

Appendix B: Surveys

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES SURVEY – ADULTS

(ONE to be completed for EACH adult in a family)

1. What year were you born?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your marital status?

4. What religion are you?

5. What languages do you speak?
.....

6. To which ethnic group do you belong?

7. Have you found it difficult finding accommodation in Australia? (Please tick one) Yes
 No

If 'yes', what types of things have made it hard? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No references or rental history in Australia
<input type="checkbox"/> Costs too much
<input type="checkbox"/> Language difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of suitable sized housing (e.g. too small/too big)
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of affordable housing in the area I want to live
<input type="checkbox"/> Aspects of the process (e.g. didn't understand the rules, documents, forms)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other |
|---|--|

8. Since you came to Australia, how easy have you found it to... (please tick one in each row)

	Single Response			
	1. Very easy	2. Easy	3. Hard	4. Very hard
a. Make friends in Australia				
b. Understand Australian ways/culture				
c. Talk to your Australian neighbours				

9. How do you feel about your neighbourhood (your local area)? Do you feel that...

(Please tick one in each row)

	Single Response			
	1. Strongly Agree	2. Agree	3. Disagree	4. Strongly Disagree
a. The people in my neighbourhood are friendly				
b. My neighbourhood has parks/ playgrounds				
c. It is a good place to bring up my children				

d. My neighbourhood has good schools for my children				
e. I feel safe in my neighbourhood				

10. How well do you... (Please tick one in each row)

	Single Response			
	1. Very Well	2. Well	3. Not well	4. Not at all
a. Understand spoken English				
b. Speak English				
c. Read English				
d. Write English				

11. How many paid jobs do you currently have? (Please tick one)

None One More than one **If 'more than one', how many?**

12. Have you found it hard getting a job? (Please tick) Yes No

If 'yes', have you found it hard getting a job for any of these reasons?

(Please tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> There were no suitable jobs | <input type="checkbox"/> Hours were unsuitable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't have the necessary skills or qualifications | <input type="checkbox"/> Transport difficulties |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't have Australian work experience | <input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination e.g. age, gender, ethnicity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couldn't get a job in the same occupation I had overseas | <input type="checkbox"/> Health reasons (physical or emotional) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couldn't get an interview | <input type="checkbox"/> My English isn't good enough yet |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> I look after my family |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

13. How confident are you about your employment future in Australia (please tick one)

1 very confident 2 mostly confident 3 sometimes confident 4 rarely confident 5 not confident at all

14. How happy are you with your current life in Australia (please tick one)

1 very happy 2 mostly happy 3 sometimes happy 4 rarely happy 5 not happy at all

15. How confident are you about your children's future in Australia (please tick one)

1 very confident 2 mostly confident 3 sometimes confident 4 rarely confident 5 not confident at all

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES SURVEY – YOUNG PEOPLE

1. What is your gender? (Tick one) male female

2. What is your age?

3. How are you finding school/TAFE at the moment? (Tick one)

1: Bad 2: Not good 3: Satisfactory 4: Very good 5: Excellent

4. If you had to give yourself a mark from 1-5 for speaking, reading, writing and listening in English what would you give? (Circle the response)

	1 (poor) (excellent)	2 (weak)	3 (okay)	4 (very good)	5
Speaking:	1	2	3	4	5
Reading:	1	2	3	4	5
Writing:	1	2	3	4	5
Listening:	1	2	3	4	5

5. Do you feel you belong to the local community? (circle the response)

	1 (not at all)	2 (occasionally)	3 (often)	4 (most of the time)	5 (always)
Belonging:	1	2	3	4	5

6. Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? (Tick one) yes no

7. How many of your friends are from different backgrounds to you? (Tick one)

None 1 2-5 5 or more 10 or more

8. What language/s do your friends speak? Choose as many as you like and add more.

Arabic English Farsi Chinese Vietnamese Dinka

Other _____

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