

## Report #3

# Settlement experiences of recently arrived refugees from Syria and Iraq in Victoria in 2018/19: Full Report

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Cover illustration: 'Refugees Welcome' (Photo: Dimitria Groutsis, 2017)

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## Abbreviations

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
ARC	Australian Research Council
BNLA	Building a New Life in Australia (The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants)
BRA	Bilingual Research Assistant
CI	Chief Investigator
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DSS	Department of Social Services
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language/Dialect
ISIS	Islamic State (militant group)
MA	Multicultural Australia
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
Qld	Queensland
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSI	Settlement Services International
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
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

### Background

While refugee intakes have been halted with COVID-19, there is no more controversial issue related to Australia's contemporary immigration program than that of refugees, that is, 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 third 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 248 refugee families – 131 Syrian, 84 Iraqi and 33 Afghan families – and surveyed 699 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 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 additional places plus Syrians and Iraqis who arrived in the annual humanitarian intake – with the majority settling in metropolitan areas in New South Wales (14,096; 56%) and Victoria (7,207; 29%), followed by Queensland (1,766; 7%) (Collins et al. 2018, 5).

The focus of this third report is to explore the challenges and opportunities of settlement in Australia from the experiences of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees who have settled in Victoria. 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. The important policy implications relate to 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 following review of 57 submissions, the Shergold report made 7 key policy recommendations. At the end of our three-year longitudinal study, by late 2021, 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 or telephone 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 AMES Australia (AMES), Access Community Services, 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 Round One of the research project (2018/2019), we interviewed 248 families in all states: that is, a total of 699 individuals, across NSW, Queensland and Victoria (see Tables 4.1, 4.2). These comprised 131 Syrian, 84 Iraqi and 33 Afghan families (our control group). These figures include a supplementary group of families in Victoria, recruited to augment the total number in that survey population, and not included in previous reports. The Victorian research did not include Afghan families. 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 Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, regional Australia has become increasingly important as a destination for refugee arrivals. In order to evaluate the experience of newly arrived refugee families in non-metropolitan areas, we interviewed refugee families in regional Victoria, NSW, and Queensland.

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from the Victoria interviews and surveys which included 40 families in total, 33 from Syria and 7 from Iraq. Interview and survey data were collected across two locations in metropolitan (Syria,  $n=24$ ; and Iraq,  $n=7$ ) and regional (Syria,  $n=9$ ) Victoria. 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 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 BNLA 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. The Victorian data 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 Victoria research with refugee families in their settlement process.

## Key findings

### Refugees very grateful for the opportunity to settle in Victoria

In this report we interviewed and surveyed 40 refugee families - 33 Syrian and 7 Iraqi families - living in metropolitan or in regional Victoria. For many refugees in Victoria, the decision to come to Australia was one of necessity, not choice. In contrast, several Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Victoria were sponsored by community members, often family, already living in Victoria, that is, they arrived under the Community Proposal Pilot (CPP) or Community Support Program (CSP) (Visa 202), where their settlement costs were entirely funded by Australian community members. In other words, they chose Victoria.

Notwithstanding the family connection, it should be noted that they were still driven from their homeland. All the Syrian and Iraqi refugees we interviewed were very grateful to be given the opportunity for their family to settle in Victoria. They all want to repay Australia: the adult refugees through their employment expertise and contributions to the labour force and young refugees by contributing to the community and society. Most want to become Australian citizens as soon as possible.

### Diversity of the refugee intake

The refugee families from Syria and Iraq were not homogenous, with significant diversity evident in their religious, ethnic, educational, employment and linguistic backgrounds, age, and family size. This challenges refugee stereotypes which see refugees as homogenous. The largest ethnic group of adult individuals in the Victorian cohort identified themselves as Syrian (41 out of 89), followed by Assyrian and Syriac (each 13 out of 89). Most were Christians, with the nine Syrian families in regional Vic all Muslims. Arabic and English were widely spoken by those from Syria and Iraq though many other languages – including Syriac, Assyrian, Chaldean and Aramaic - were spoken at home by these refugee families.

### Syrian and Iraqi Refugees Highly Educated

Many refugees from Syria had professional backgrounds while those from Syria and Iraq had successful careers prior to displacement. Compared to the Victorian population they are highly educated: 39 of the 89 refugee adults surveyed (43%) held a tertiary education qualification. This compares to the 27 per cent of Australians who hold a university degree,<sup>2</sup> and to the 35 per cent of refugees from all national backgrounds who have a tertiary education qualification (as found in the Building a New Life in Australia study).

### Refugee settlement is difficult

Australia is a strange land to most refugees on arrival. Other than information provided during induction programs immediately before arrival, and information sourced on the internet, many refugees knew little about Australian culture and life. Even those with family

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/612854/australia-population-with-university-degree/>

already in Victoria were both scared and excited when arriving in Melbourne for the first time, hopeful but uncertain about their future life in Australia.

### **Victorian on-arrival services for refugees first rate**

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 months of settlement. AMES provided critical settlement services to the newly arrived refugee families: they assisted them to find accommodation, to register for Medicare and Centrelink, to 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. This saw the emergence of a strong relationship between refugee families with their AMES case worker.

### **Employment is a key challenge**

In 2018 most of the refugee informants in Victoria – like other states – had not yet entered the labour market but were engaged in English-language training. Hence only 18 per cent of those surveyed had paid employment. While this is slightly 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 refugees who did not have paid work had not yet started to look for jobs as they were still learning English or had caring responsibilities.

### **Refugees want jobs not welfare**

Those who were looking for work were very unhappy having to rely 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.

### **Qualification recognition a barrier to Australian employment**

Gaining recognition in Australia of their professional and technical qualifications achieved prior to arrival in Australia is a significant barrier to getting commensurate employment in Australia for the Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Often the process of qualifications accreditation clashed with English language instruction and the need and desire for swift entry into employment.

### **Learn English or get a job?**

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. Refugees reported that they were frustrated by 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.

### **Refugees confident about their employment future in Victoria**

Encouragingly, 13 per cent of adult refugees surveyed in 2018-19 were 'very confident' about their employment future in Australia and a further 22 per cent were 'mostly confident'.

COVID-19 has dramatically reduced employment opportunities throughout most of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. This will make employment outcomes for refugees in Victoria and other Australian states much more challenging.

### **Refugee entrepreneurship in Victoria should be supported**

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. Several refugee informants reported that they had owned their own business prior to coming to Australia and would like to do so again in Victoria. For these refugees, programs to assist them to set up their own business, like Ignite (Collins 2017b), Thrive (The Incus Group 2019) and others (Legrain and Burrige 2019), would greatly assist them to create their own jobs by starting their own business in Victoria.

### **English Language Important**

Attendance at English language classes at TAFE and other providers 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. Women with responsibility for pre-school aged children, those with caring responsibilities, older adults and those with complex health issues could generally not find the free time to attend English-language training classes.

### **One size doesn't fit all in refugee English language classes**

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 profession and qualification recognition tasks. There were concerns about the lack of recognition of the diversity of literacy, educational and professional abilities and needs with regards to English language delivery.

### **Refugees find friendly neighbours in Victoria**

Settling into strange, new neighbourhoods in a strange country is difficult. Feeling welcome by neighbours assists refugee arrivals with feelings of belonging. Most refugee adults surveyed in Victoria (79%), the majority of whom are settled in metropolitan areas, reported that the people in their neighbourhood were friendly. While this result compares less

favourably to refugees in the national BNLA survey (87%) and to our refugee informants in Queensland and NSW, it is still a strong, positive result. Another aspect of social inclusion and successful settlement relates to whether new refugee arrivals had social interaction with their neighbours. Overall, 39 per cent of our refugee informants reported that it was easy to talk to their neighbours, slightly less than the national BNLA study (49%) but similar to results for NSW and Queensland. 56% of refugees who settled in regional Vic reported that it was easy to talk to their neighbours.

### **Regional refugee settlement in Victoria a success**

It is interesting that all refugees who settled in regional Vic found that people in their neighbourhood were friendly, although the number of respondents in regional Vic was small. In addition, all adult refugees who settled in regional Vic found it a safe place to live, and reported that it was a good place to bring up their children. This is a strong argument in favour of more settlement of refugees in regional Victoria.

### **Victoria a good place to bring up refugee 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: 82 per cent of the refugees surveyed thought that their Victorian neighbourhood was a good place to bring up their children. This was slightly less than the BNLA national result and the results for NSW and Qld.

### **Victorian schools get a tick from refugee parents and children**

Refugees are motivated to provide a good future for their children. Education opportunity is an important component of this. 77 per cent of refugee adults who settled in Victoria were happy with the schools in their neighbourhood, like the Queensland result (79%) though behind the NSW result (90%). In this instance, refugees who settled in metropolitan Victoria perceived better schooling (83%) than those who settled in the regional location (56%). Young refugees (YP) agreed that they are receiving good education opportunities in Victorian schools: one in three rated their schooling as 'excellent' with another 48 per cent of YP living in metropolitan Vic (and 26 per cent of YP living in regional Vic) rating their schooling as 'very good'.

### **Young refugees in Victoria are very impressive**

The young people involved in our research were overwhelmingly impressive in their achievements given the short time they had been in Australia. Most were optimistic about the future, had a wide network of friends from various backgrounds and really enjoyed their schools. They picked-up English much faster than their parents, while they all felt safe living in their metropolitan or regional neighbourhood in Victoria. 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 schoolteachers.

### **Most refugees safe and happy living in Victoria**

Like any country, Australia has its cultural idiosyncrasies that newcomers find different and sometimes difficult to understand and adjust to. This is often seen in Australian 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 Victoria were similar: 56 per cent found it easy to understand Australian ways and culture, despite a shorter period of settlement. Slightly more refugees living in regional Vic (61%) found it easy to understand Australian ways and culture than refugees living in metropolitan Vic (55%).

Adult refugees are unanimous that Victoria is a safe place to live and bring up their families no matter whether they live in metropolitan or regional locations. All adult refugees who settled in regional Vic found it a safe place to live while 88 per cent of the adult refugees who live in metropolitan Vic reported that its was a safe place for them and their children.

### **Most refugees judge resettlement of their families in Victoria as a success**

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. The long and uncertain 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. 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? One in two refugee adults living in Victoria were either 'very happy' (13%) or 'mostly happy' (39%) living in Victoria. While refugees who settled in regional Vic were more likely (17%) than those who lived in metropolitan Vic (13%) to respond that they were 'very happy' with life in Australia, 42 per cent of those living in the metropolitan location said that they were 'mostly happy' compared to 28 per cent of those in the regional location. This is a strong indication that despite the great suffering and trauma that these refugees have experienced in family life – and despite the difficulties that they have faced in starting up a new life in a strange country – refugee settlement in Victoria is judged to be a success in the eyes of the refugees themselves.

### **Refugees arrive after traumatic experiences of displacement**

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 part of their lived experience that goes to weigh heavily on refugee families, particularly the adults, in their life in Australia. Refugee families have been fractured by the processes of displacement from their homeland. Most have family back in Syria and Iraq and many have family members who are refugees spread across Europe, Scandinavia, Latin American 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 and by phone. Their virtual family connection helps them to navigate the ups and downs of life in Australia. They are a constant source of support, but also a constant source of worry: most have tried – unsuccessfully – to have parents and other close family reunited with them in Australia. This is their biggest concern as they navigate new lives in Victoria.



**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 because 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 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 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (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 the late Graeme Hugo (2011: xxiv) concluded, *'[m]uch 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, and the Queensland (Collins et al., 2019) and New South Wales (Collins et al., 2020) reports, aim to address this gap.

The focus of this third report is to explore the challenges and opportunities of Syrian and Iraqi refugees settling in Victoria. It may be read in conjunction with the briefing recently published by AMES (AMES Australia, 2021). 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, by the end of 2021, 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 248 refugee families in three states in metropolitan and regional 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 informant recruitment adhered to University Ethics guidelines, whereby informants 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 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 Chief Investigator 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 informants and they were subsequently contacted by third-party organisations. Representatives from these organisations assisted with creating a timetable of informants. Interviews were scheduled at a time of convenience to the family. In Victoria, AMES Australia contacted families to schedule interviews and recruited Bilingual Research Assistants (BRAs), who conducted face-to-face interviews where possible, or interviewed families by telephone. In the other States interviews were undertaken by an experienced interviewer (usually one of the Chief Investigators) accompanied by a BRA, usually at the home of the refugee family. All family interviews took between one and two hours.

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. To gain consistency across the states and BRAs the Chief Investigators provided training in Melbourne each year and carried out a debriefing session to gain their insights.

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 informants 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 informants 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 Chief Investigators on the assistance of the BRAs during the interview process. 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 Victoria segment of the project consisted of in depth semi-structured interviews with 40 families in total: 33 from Syria and 7 from Iraq. Interview and survey data were collected from across two locations: metropolitan (Syria, n=24; and Iraq=7); and regional (Syria=9).

In Victoria, the BRAs either transcribed responses to qualitative questions (in some instances recorded) and/or wrote third-person descriptions of the responses in detailed field notes. All transcripts and field notes were produced in English, having been translated by the research assistants. The transcripts and field notes were de-identified in the process of transcription or writing. In the other states interviews were recorded and transcribed; with each transcription being consolidated, converted to direct speech where interpreters used indirect speech to quote informants, and de-identified. For all states, 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, transcribed and summarised, prior to coding 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 informants 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 informant (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 focussed on demographic characteristics and explored 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**

While the results of 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%, smaller survey populations, for example Young People or groups of adults from the state of Victoria, can be used as stand-alone inferential sample data with greater caution (90% confidence level).

#### **Survey anomalies**

Due to lower populations of informants in Victoria together with high proportions of invalid responses, blank or invalid responses to individual questions are generally not included in the total number of responses for any given question. They are noted on chart headings or descriptions as either 'null' or 'not specified', and 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 valid responses for any particular question, which is indicated by ( $n = x$ ).

Due to a validation problem during distribution, the Victorian Young People data contains a 7% population specification error. The proximity of the error population age (19-21,  $n=4$ ) to the target population age (5-18,  $n=50$ ) mitigates impact on the overall analysis.



# Refugee Informants In Victoria

## 4. Refugee Informants in Victoria

The refugee informants were recruited using a networking methodology that drew on the refugee families' links to our Industry Partner in Victoria, AMES, who assisted in connecting with and engaging refugee families as informants. All Victorian participants were AMES HSP clients (direct or subcontractor), so links were largely generated through AMES HSP teams. 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. No refugee families from Afghanistan, our control group, participated in the study in Victoria. The research is interested in the experiences of refugee families who settle in both metropolitan areas as well as those who settle in regional areas, in this case in Victoria. In this section of the report we outline the characteristics of our refugee informants in Victoria (Vic).

**Table 4.1: Number of families interviewed, 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	13	6	4	23	
QLD	Metropolitan	Brisbane	17	6		23
	Regional	Logan	17	8		25
		Toowoomba	10	7	10	27
VIC	Metropolitan		24	7		31
	Regional		9			9
<b>Total</b>			<b>131</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>248</b>

In Round One of the research (2018/2019), we interviewed 40 families in Victoria, resulting in a total of 143 individuals completing surveys (see Tables 4.1, 4.2). The families comprised 33 Syrian and 7 Iraqi families. Interview and survey data were collected from across two locations: metropolitan (Syria,  $n=24$ ; Iraq,  $n=7$ ); and regional (Syria,  $n=9$ ).

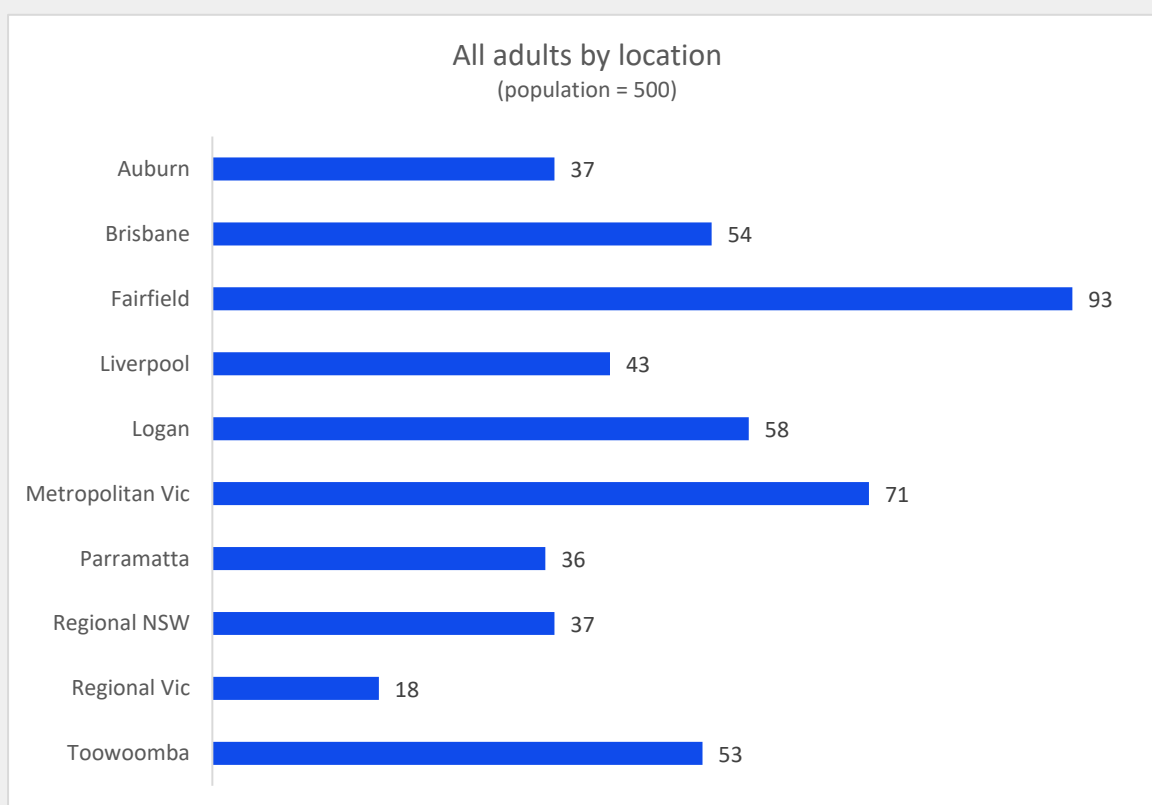
**Table 4.2: Number of refugees surveyed, by gender and state**

State	Adults		Young People		Total*
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
NSW	110	136	42	42	330
Qld	77	88	32	27	224
Vic	46	43	28	26	143
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>697</b>

\* The gender of two young people interviewed in Victoria was not recorded; they bring the total to 699.

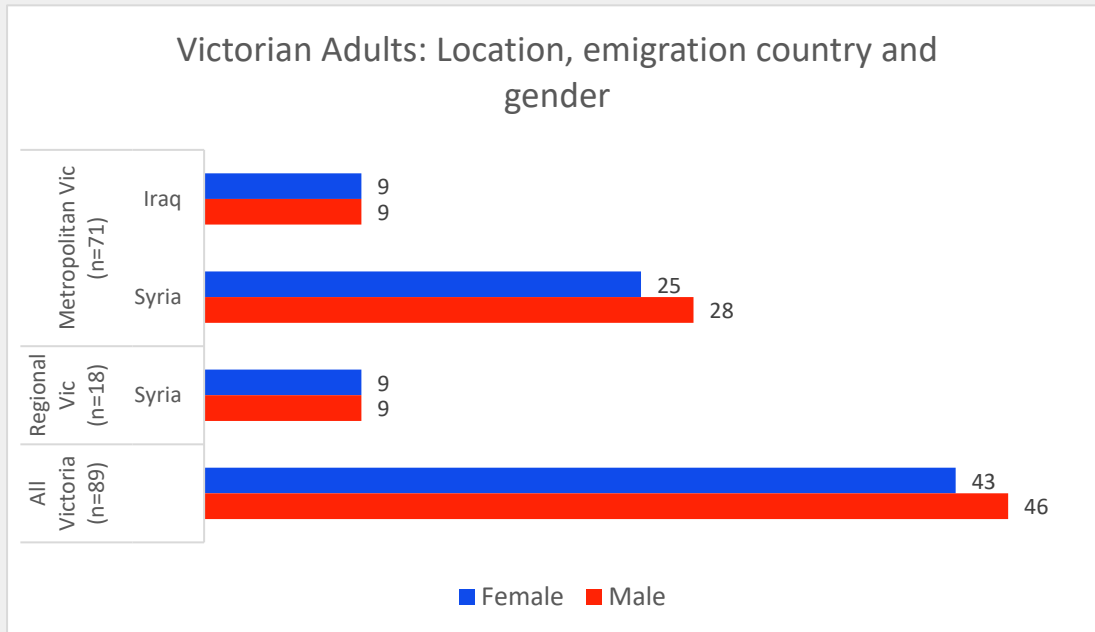
Metropolitan Vic was the location of the second largest number of adult informants in all the States (see Figure 4.1).

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



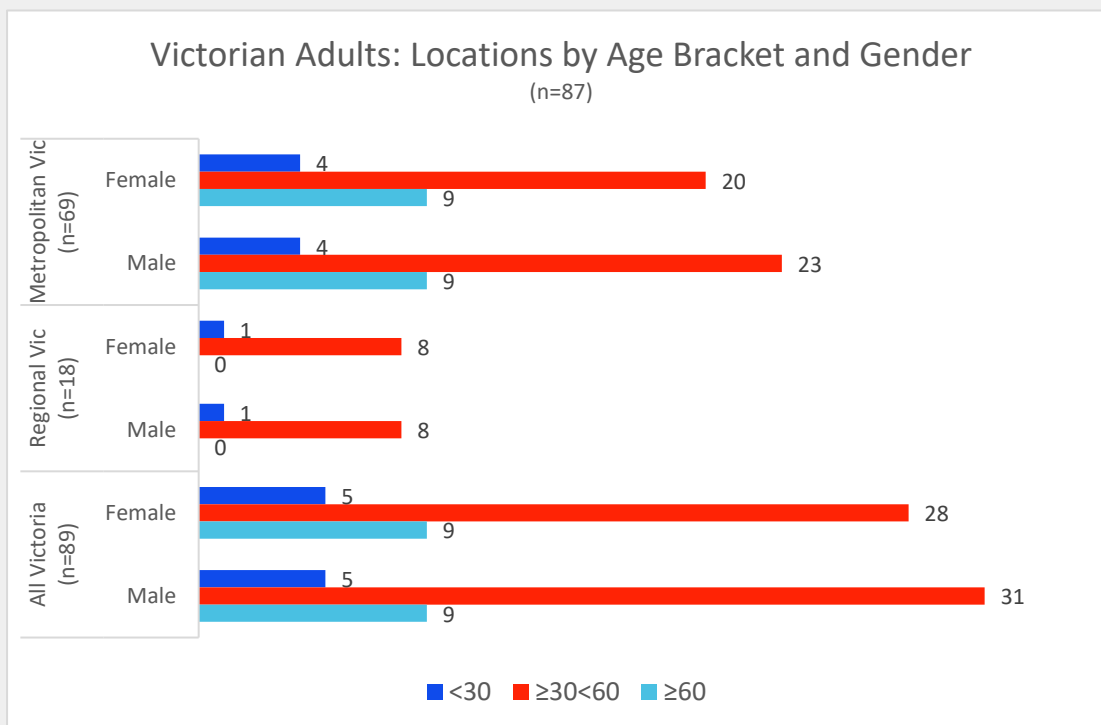
In Victoria, most of the informants in the metropolitan location were Syrian, as were all of the informants in the regional location. The number of Iraqis interviewed in metropolitan Vic equalled the number of Syrians interviewed in regional Vic (see Figure 4.2).

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



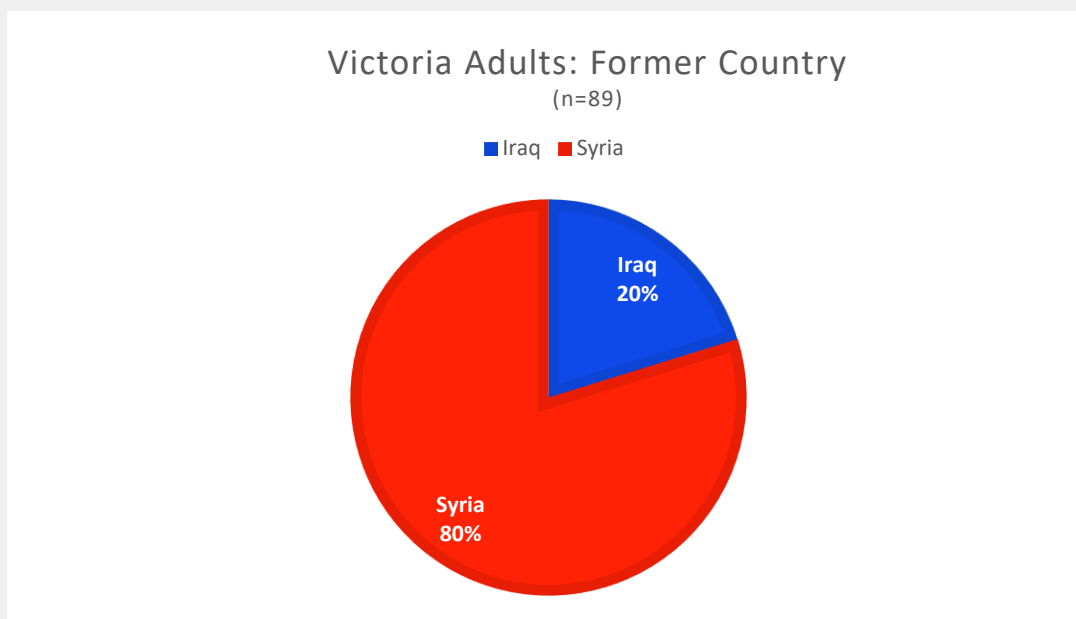
People in the middle age bracket (30 to 60 years) made up the bulk of informants in Victoria (see Figure 4.3). Younger (under 30) and older (over 60) informants were comparatively not well represented. No older people were interviewed in regional Vic. The informants in Victoria appear to comprise a ‘family’ profile: working age people with elderly and younger dependents. Generally, there were similar numbers of males and females.

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



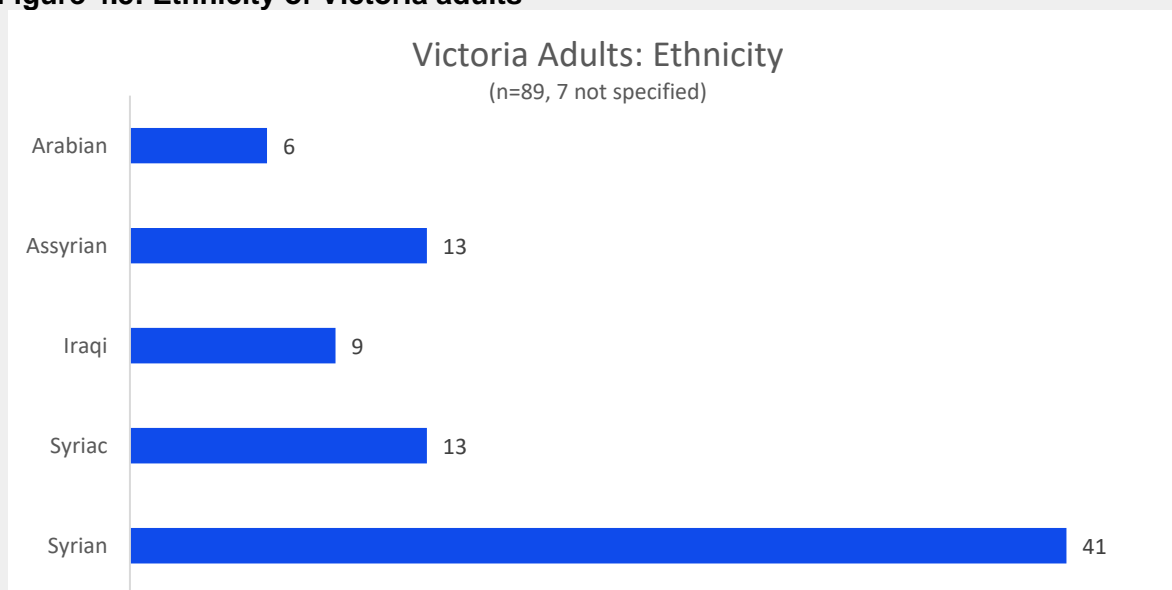
Of the adult refugees surveyed in Victoria, 71 individuals were from Syria (80%) and 18 from Iraq (20%; see Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4: Former country of Victoria adults**



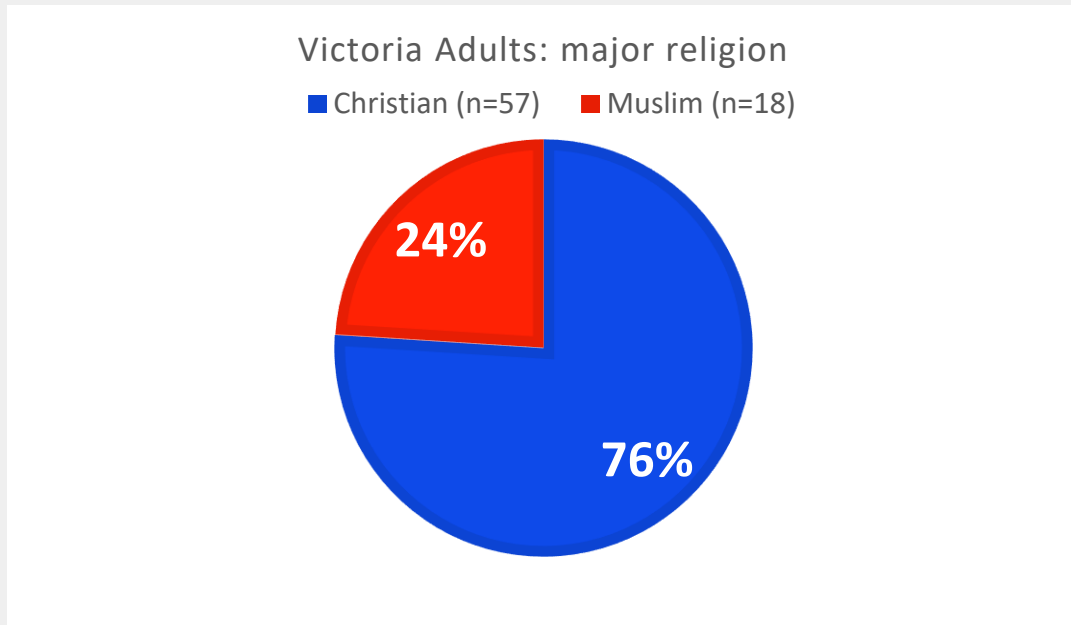
The recently arrived refugee families from Syria and Iraq were not homogenous, but reflected a diversity of religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The largest ethnic group of adult individuals in the Victoria cohort identified themselves as Syrian (41 out of 89), followed by Assyrian and Syriac (each 13 out of 89; see Figure 4.5). These ethnicities are how the informants identified themselves. Some identified themselves in terms of religious affiliation, others in terms of geographical regions. This suggests that there is a great diversity among refugee settlers from the same country, let alone between countries.

**Figure 4.5: Ethnicity of Victoria adults**

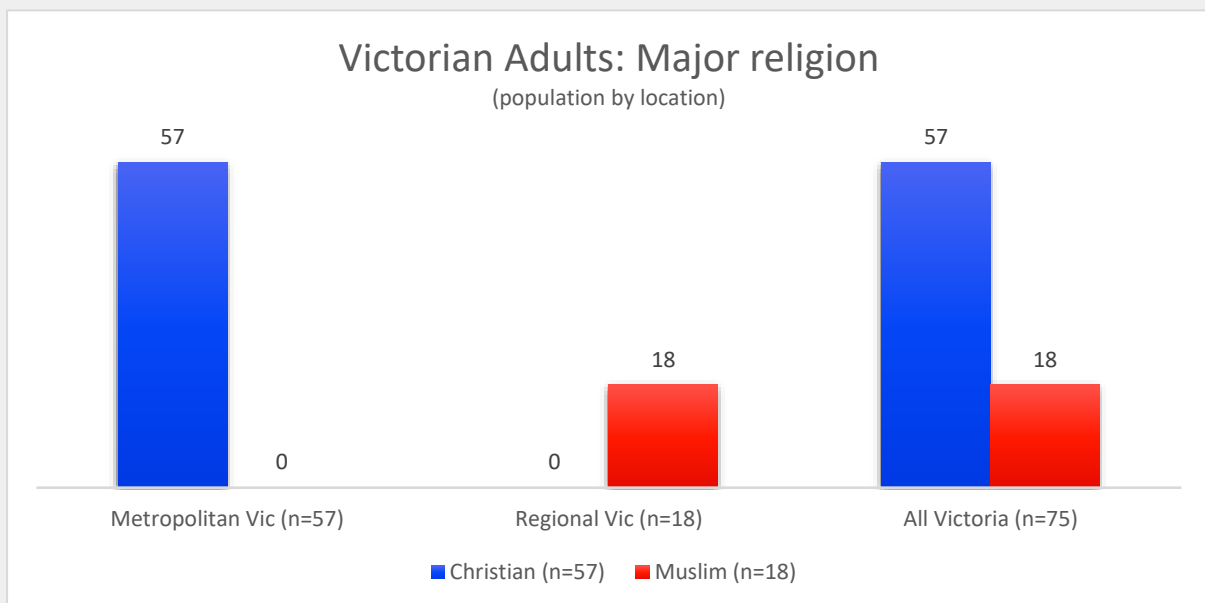


It is not surprising that most of the refugee informants were Christians. As Figure 4.6 shows, 76% of the Victoria adult informants were Christian, with 24% Muslim. This reflects the (perhaps curious) decision by the Australian government to include mostly Christians in the special Syrian-conflict refugee intake (Medhora and Safi 2015): 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 Victoria adults**



**Figure 4.7: The major religious groups of Victoria adults by location**

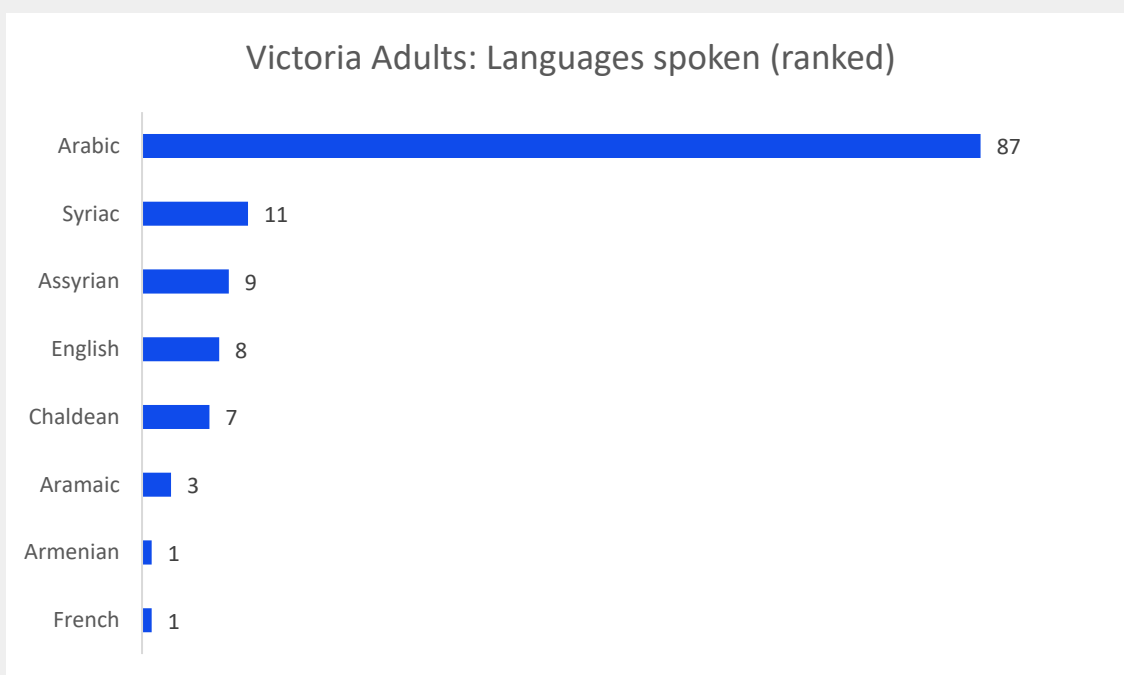


Of the informants who responded to the question about religion, all of those in metropolitan Vic were Christian, and all of those in regional Vic were Muslim (see Figure 4.7). Many of the Syrian-cohort Muslim families in the regional location were 'unlinked', meaning that they had

no family links in Australia before they arrived. Often unlinked clients are settled in regional areas ahead of major cities. Moreover, there is a well-established Muslim community in that regional location, having one of the largest per capita Muslim populations in the country.

One key feature of the refugee informants was their linguistic diversity. The languages spoken by the adults were ranked by proportionate significance (see Figure 4.8). Arabic was the most widely spoken language. Several of the Victoria adult refugees spoke multiple languages, another aspect of the diversity of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees who settled in Victoria.

**Figure 4.8: The languages spoken by Victoria adults**







# Pre-Migration Stories



## 5. Pre-Migration Stories

Gender is an important axis of refugee displacement and refugee settlement to countries like Australia. As Table 5.1 shows we ensured that the gender balance of our informants was roughly equal to give voice to the experiences of refugee women in Victoria. We know that all of 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, during interview, 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.

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

		Number of Adults
<b>Gender</b>	Male	46
	Female	43
<b>Former country</b>	Iraq	18
	Syria	71
<b>Location</b>	Metropolitan	71
	Regional	18
<b>Total</b>		89

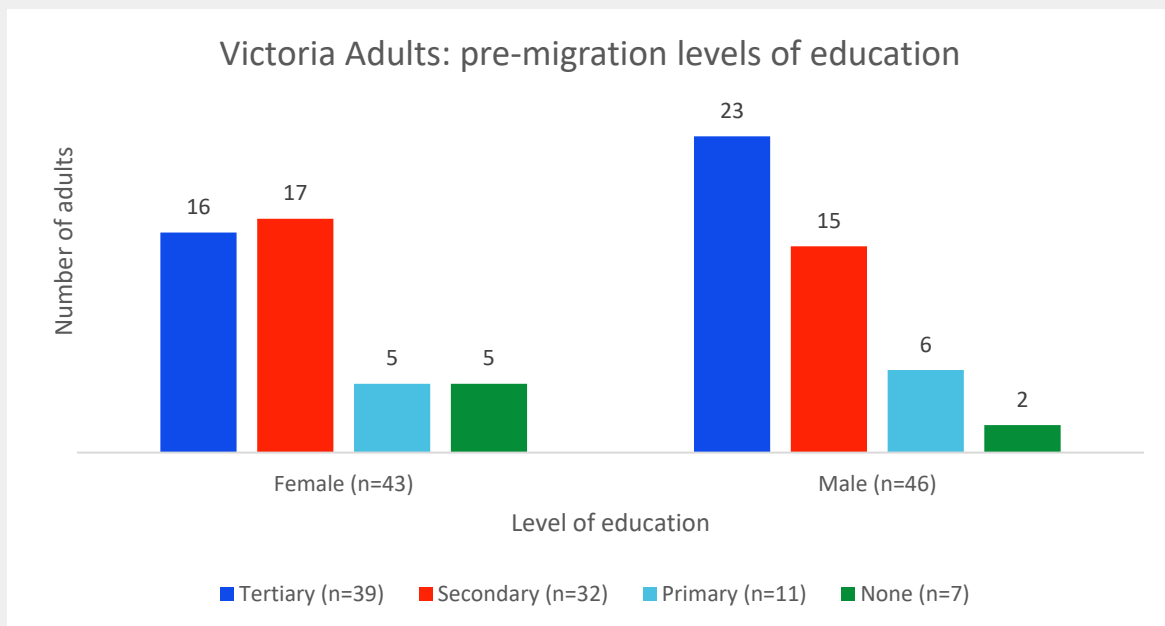
**Table 5.2: Level of education attained by Victoria adults**

Level of education attained	Number of adults
<b>Tertiary</b>	39
<b>Secondary</b>	32
<b>Primary</b>	11
<b>No education</b>	7
<b>Total</b>	89

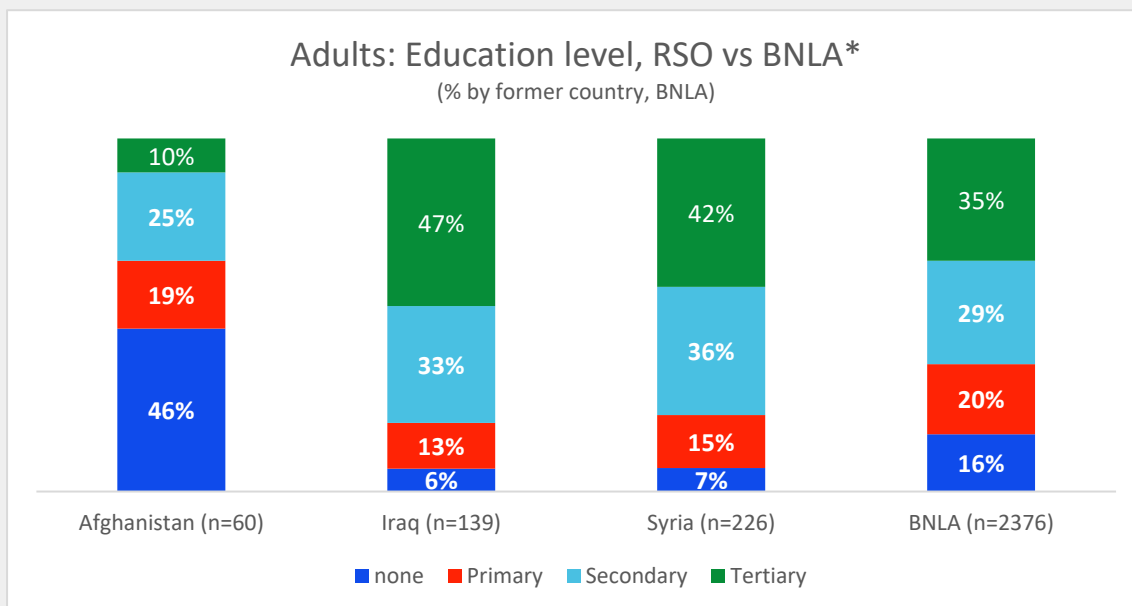
Our interest was particularly located in their education and work experiences prior to their displacement. These questions were not included in the survey, so the data presented here is based on interview notes or transcriptions from first round interviews, but pertains only to individuals who also completed a survey. 'VET', 'university' and 'post-graduate' education were included under 'tertiary' in our analysis to allow comparison with BNLA data, where 'primary' included 7 to 11 years of education; and 'tertiary' included 12 years of education,

trade or technical qualifications or a university degree. As Table 5.2 shows, educational achievement varies considerably. In Victoria, the largest group of adults had received schooling at the tertiary level: almost half of our refugee informants (44%) – including a substantial proportion of females – had a tertiary education background (Figure 5.1). Many of these are Iraqi and Syrian professionals with engineering, business, economics, and education backgrounds (see Figure 5.4). This high educational achievement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees is found in NSW and Queensland as well as Victoria. It means that on average they are more likely to have a university degree than the 27 per cent of Australians who hold a university degree (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/612854/australia-population-with-university-degree/>). They are also more likely to have education at a tertiary level than refugees from all national backgrounds (35%), as found in the BNLA study (Figure 5.2). In theory their higher level of human capital ought to lead to better labour market outcomes for them. However, many immigrant and refugee professionals find it very difficult to have their prior qualifications recognised in Australia. At the other end of the spectrum, 11 informants in Victoria had only primary education and 7 had no education at all (Figure 5.3).

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



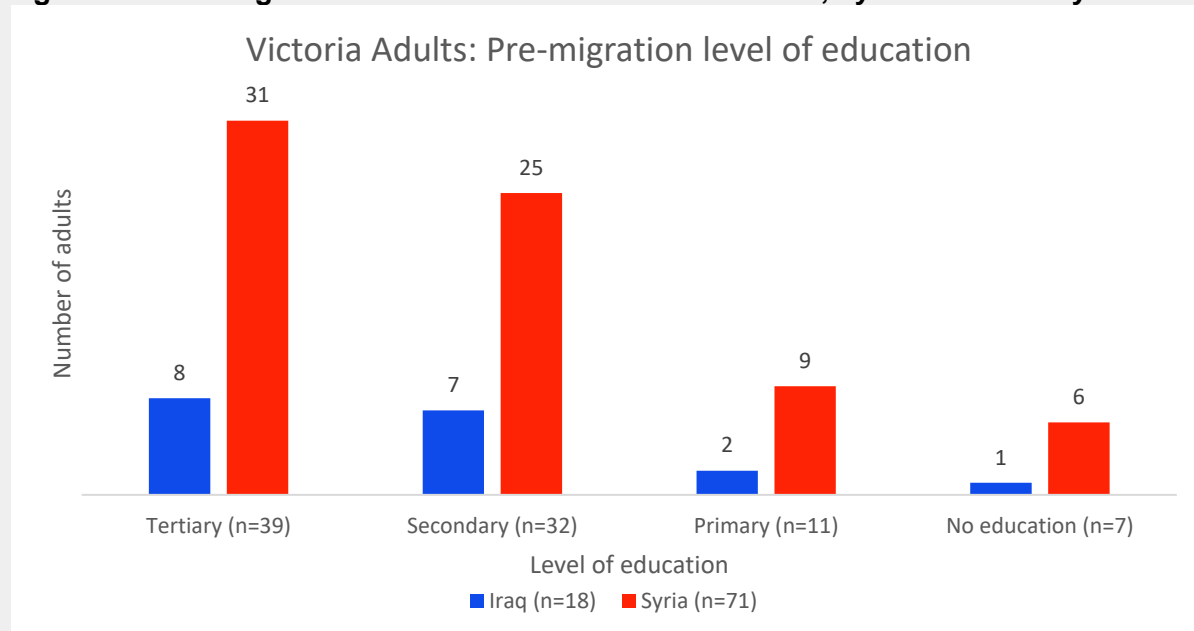
**Figure 5.2: Pre-migration education level of adult refugees surveyed vs BNLA**



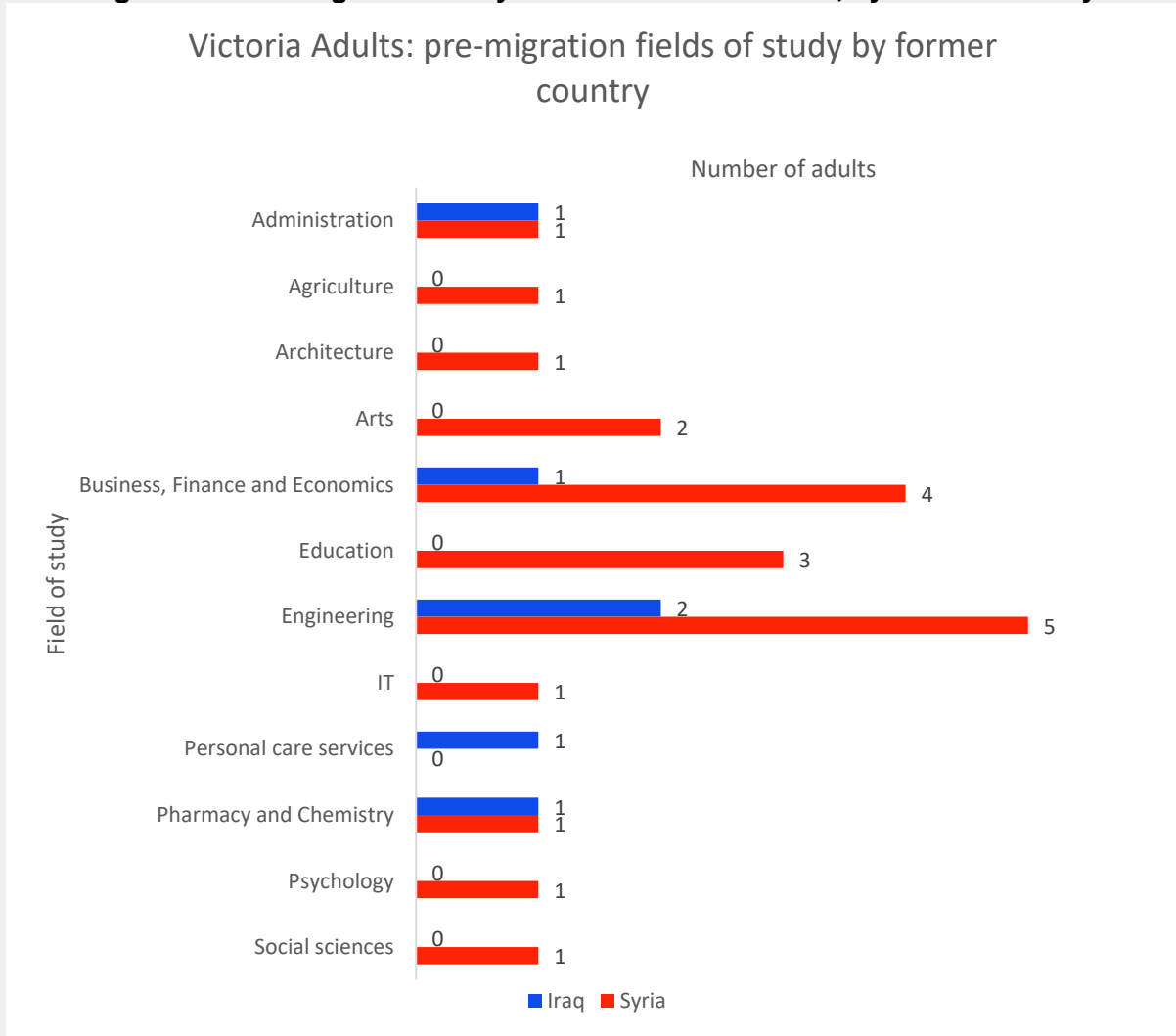
\* BNLA figures include: Primary (7 to 11 years of education); Tertiary (12 years of education; Trade or technical qualifications; a university degree)

As Figure 5.3 shows, in relation to Victorian refugees surveyed, those refugee informants from Syria were more likely to have prior tertiary education qualifications than those from Iraq, although the number of Iraqis providing this information was low. Figure 5.4 shows that while Engineering and Finance were the most common university degrees held by these refugees, the diversity in university education background was very broad.

**Figure 5.3: Pre-migration education level of Victoria adults, by former country**



**Figure 5.4: Pre-migration study fields of Victoria adults, by former country**



N.B. At the time of compilation, this detailed information was available for only 27 of the 89 Vic informants.

Of the Victoria refugee adults surveyed, 55 had worked in their home country prior to coming to Australia. Of these, 47 were employed by others while 13 had run their own business (that is, were self-employed). 24 did not work – often the mothers of families – while 8 were studying (see Table 5.3).

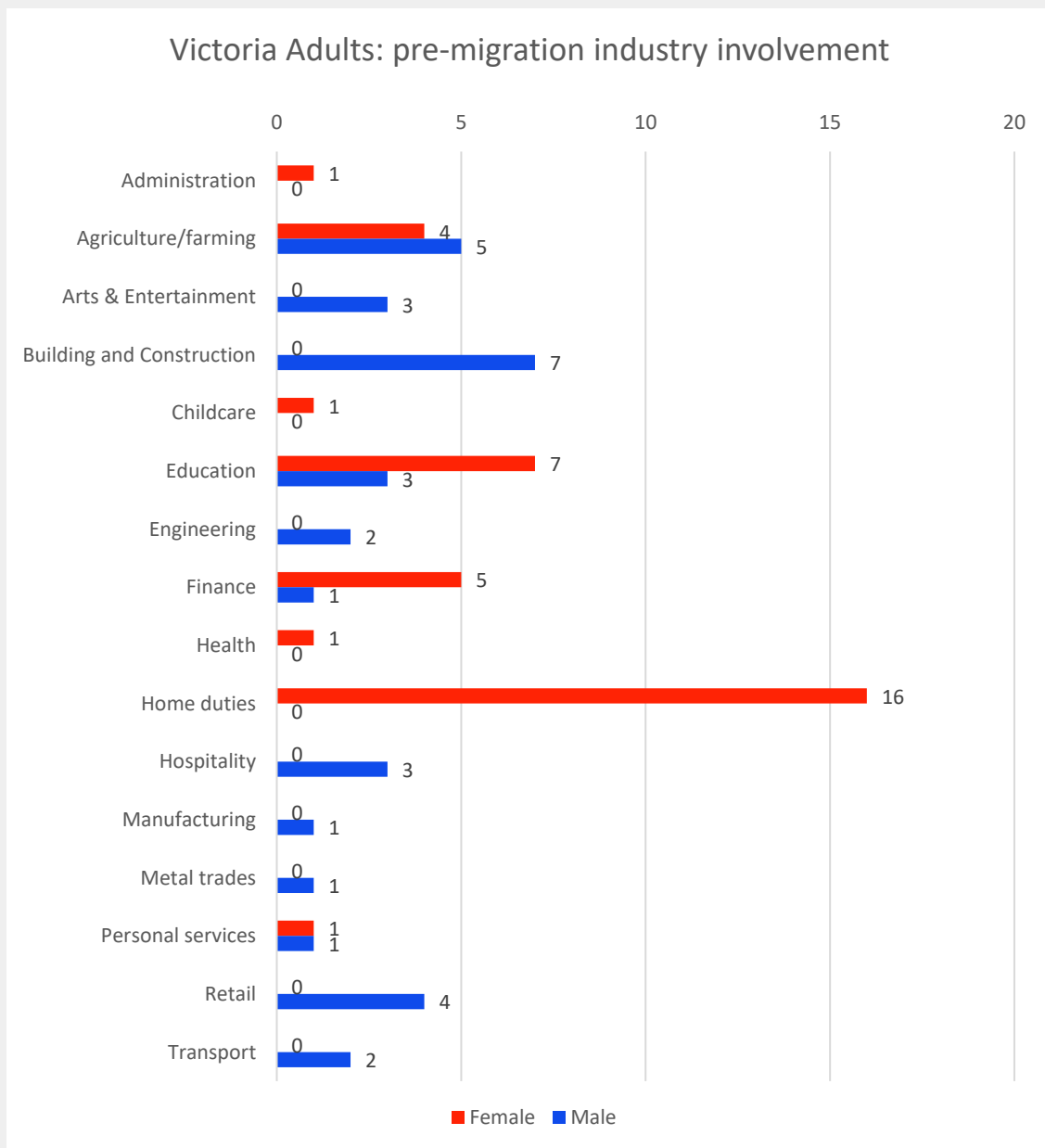
**Table 5.3: Victoria adults’ previous employment experience**

Previous employment experience	Number of adults
Yes, I worked	55
I worked for an employer	47
I was self-employed	13
No, I did not work	24
I was studying	8

\* Informants could answer 'yes' to more than one category (31 informants did not supply this information)

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). While it was mainly male refugees (10) who had a prior business career, refugee women (3) also had prior entrepreneurial experience and were interested in setting up a business in Australia.

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



Finally, as Figure 5.5 shows, the refugees from Syria and Iraq 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 contribute to Australian society through their work. It is a cruel irony that many refugees face very large barriers to getting a job in Australia. This is a form of market failure: many

refugees have great human capital potential, but the Australian labour market and more specifically Australian employers fail to unlock this potential. This *blocked mobility* that refugees face in Australia is often the result of individual or institutional racial discrimination that 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.



# 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 our research questions 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 2019/20 and again in 2020/21 so that for each adult and child we can trace their English language ability, work experiences, and social interaction over the three-year period.

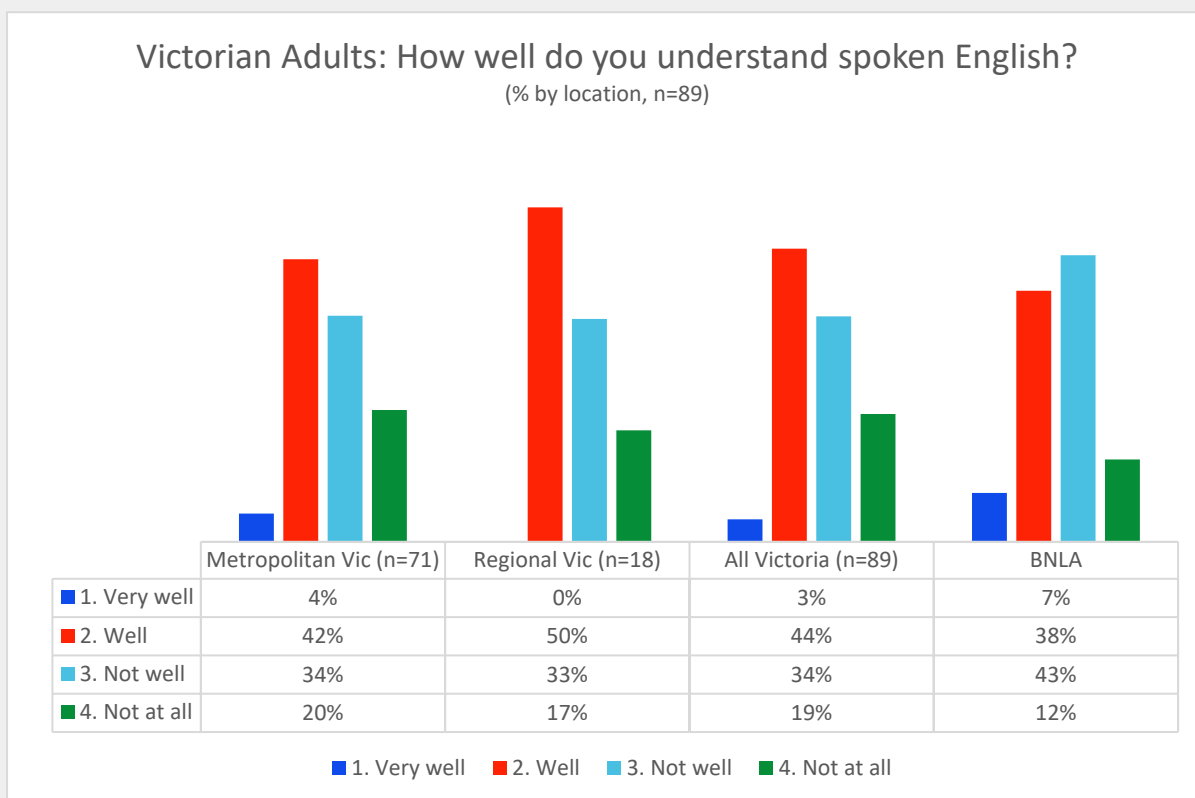
### 6.1 Language

A key issue for all migrants settling in Australia – be they refugees or not – is the need to become fluent in reading, writing, listening/understanding and speaking English. 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. Advancing age combined with deteriorated physical health and mental trauma reduce the ability to learn a new language, and to gain employment.

#### 6.1.1 Adults and the English language

Since the refugee informants in our study come from Syria and Iraq it is likely that many do not have strong English on arrival. This is confirmed in Figure 6.1.1 which shows that in the national BNLA longitudinal survey of refugees only 7% self-assessed that they were able to *listen to* the English language ‘very well’ while another 38% said that they could listen ‘well’. Most refugees in the BNLA survey said that they could not listen to the English language well, or that they could not understand spoken English at all. For the Victoria adults in this study, levels of English comprehension were slightly superior to BNLA findings, even though most of those surveyed had only been in Australia for 12 months, while refugees participating in the BNLA study had been in Australia for at least two years (at the time data was collected in Wave 3; see <http://www3.aifs.gov.au/bnla/>). Refugees who settled in regional Vic had a slightly better listening ability for English among the newly arrived refugees to Victoria, in their own assessment: 50% could listen ‘well’ or ‘very well’.

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



The language barrier can be the primary problem in completing day to day activities, finding a job, communicating with neighbours and the general public. It can be a major barrier to successful settlement in Australia.

**Age is a factor. The elderly, all of whom were in the Metropolitan area, found it particularly difficult to attend English language classes and to learn a new language.**

A couple in their sixties (metropolitan Vic) explained that their English language skills were limited because they did not attend any English language courses and had no exposure to the new language since everyone at their church speaks their own language, and they watch Arabic television channels at home. Other elderly informants commented:

*I didn't get to learn the English language as I am old.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age over 80)

*I did level one in AMEP program, English is very hard language but I understand little English.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 61)

*Learning English it's difficult for me! It's required concentration and memory which I'm not good in both because of my age! but I am learning a few words from my granddaughter and from TV, the church is a bit far and we not aware of any church group running at our church.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 76)

*Regarding my age, 69 years, and having never studied English before, I think that learning English is completely unexpected. Now I attend some English classes and sometimes have a tutor come to me at home, but that cannot result in measurable advance.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

While older refugees may suffer poor health related to age, some younger informants also found that **ill health prevented them from attending English language classes**. Health problems may be physical – two male informants in regional Vic reported disabling back pain, for instance (one age 51, the other 43) – but they may also involve psychological difficulties:

*First, I joined the TAFE for two months but then I started suffering from a psychological problem which extremely seemed to be related to the language. I started to escape away, in an unusual way, from any English-speaking person. I cannot understand why and I feel so embarrassed. Later, I become better and more able to involve with English-speakers... I really want to learn English to become a useful person in this community who generously helped my family.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 32)

**Many informants, from all age groups, were prevented from attending English language classes due to responsibilities of caring for others in their family.** In regional Vic two males, one mentioned above, explained how they had to care for family members with health problems:

*After arriving, I joined the TAFE, where I was enrolled in level 1 of studying English. I continued there for three months, then I stopped because I needed to take care of my wife who suddenly got sick and frequently needed hospital admissions, sometimes in Melbourne, where I needed to attend with her. I also started suffering from disabling back pain. So, I stopped the TAFE courses.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

*Having arrived to Australia, I started with TAFE where I studied English level 0 for three months. But later I faced some considerable health issues with my family members. These include my oldest son needed many surgical operations on his hand due to a previous industrial injury happened before, in Lebanon; also my daughter suffered from frequent severe asthmatic attacks and my wife suffered from some other health issues due to the stress where she needed thorough treatment. As a result, I was exempted not only from English classes but also from actively looking for work by the Jobactive, as I am considered as a carer to my wife.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 36)

On the other hand, several families in regional Vic experienced the joy of welcoming new babies into their lives:

*At the beginning, I was exempted from attending the English classes at TAFE for six months as I had a little girl. Then when my daughter became older, I started with level one at TAFE where I studied for six months before becoming pregnant again and exempted from attending the English classes. Now I am off because of my little son. I already finished level 1 and got a certificate regarding that.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)

*My English is good since I was in Syria where I studied English as a foreign language at school. When I arrived in Australia, I started with TAFE at level 1 where I got further improvement especially in grammar. Then I stopped, exempted, after my wife delivered twins, to help in taking care of them... I am planning to do a course in butchery as soon as possible.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

*I started with TAFE, where I was put with my husband at level 0 to learn English. I showed much better capacity than my husband in learning English, so I was promoted, first to level 1 then to level 2. However, I held off before starting level 2, as I had got pregnant and later delivered and now I am taking care of my new baby and waiting for him to get little bit older to join my English class again.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

Families in metropolitan Vic had similar caring responsibilities: some caring for family members with failing health, others for pre-school aged children:

*I didn't get to finish my 510 hours as I am a carer for my husband as he has a lot of health issues, but I like to learn the language.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*I am looking after my wife because she is disabled. She can't talk.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 68)

*I didn't get the chance to finish my 510 hours, as I am a carer for my mother in law since I arrived to Australia. She is old – 91 years old. But I am attending after-hours classes language school with my husband, two days a week for two hours, Monday and Wednesday 6.00 to 8.00 pm.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 35)

*I did one term in AMEP program because of my pregnancy and my daughter.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 44)

*I am currently caring for my two years daughter.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 32)

*I am rising up my little child – one year. I have an English tutor who helps me at home as I cannot attend school.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 26)

*I didn't do much English language classes. I am looking after my mum and husband. They have disabilities.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 40)

A father in one family (regional Vic, 2019, age 51) wished for 'a facility where somebody to teach my wife and myself English at home'. Several others wished that they had learned English before coming to Australia:

*I wished if I took courses in English before I came to Australia, and wished if I had more information about job opportunities.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 39)

*I wish I had previous knowledge about English language.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 43)

*Being fluent with English [is what I would have wanted].*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 54)

*I wish I had practiced the English Language back in Iraq to get familiar with it here.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 36)

*Maybe more knowledge in English Language so I can communicate here in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*The English language is a challenge for me and if I knew how hard to learn English I would spend more time [before coming here] to improve my English language skills.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 66)

*We wish we know that we are 100% coming here and it's very important to know English very well. At least we could learn some before we came here. We stayed in Turkey for three years.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 43)

Yet some carers manage to excel in their language studies. One mother told us: *'I am studying English language full time and caring for my 11 months daughter, currently I am at level 2 moving soon to level 3'* (Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 36). Another has gained enough English language competency, while caring for her children, to train for a role which will enable her to support her children throughout their schooling years:

*I have never studied English before coming to Australia, the foreign language I studied in Syria is French. So, I started here with level 1 in English where I spent one term before moving to level 2 where I spent one complete year. Then I studied Certificate III in Education Support / teacher aid. I have been always considering the availability of child care when I choose the language school or even when I chose the type of studying, in order to be able to take care of my children, especially the young one who was three year old when we arrived, and especially with the absence of suitable child care for such age. I believe that working as a teacher supporter will help me to be in the same school where my children study till they become in the college, as they can then take care of themselves.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

Some adults, in regional Vic in particular, suggested that English classes would be improved by grouping clients according to their progress in learning the language, by having grades:

*Regarding the English classes at TAFE, I feel that my level is higher than level 1 and I asked the administration to promote me as I want to make the most from my hours, and suggested to them to set an exam to check my real level but they refused. I think it would be much better to grade the attending student in more accurate way and put them in correct levels.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)

*After arriving, I joined the TAFE where I was enrolled in level 0 as I have never studied English before. However, they immediately promoted me to level 1 without doing any evaluation, and actually, I had not learnt the alphabetic yet, I completely felt challenging and disagreeing. Many students complained the same issue with TAFE which is the quick and sudden promoting to the next level without evaluating or making sure that the student is ready for that.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 38)

In spite of the difficulties in learning a new language, some adults were making progress learning to understand English, some steadily, others slowly:

*I joined the English language school – I already finished the first 510 hours – and now I'm doing more in aim to further improvement in English. When I come to a convenient level then she I am planning to continue studying Child Care, which I had already practiced in Syria. My improvement in English is slow but real and I can understand the English speakers well but still have problem with speaking.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 56)

*I completed 510 hours of English language course at Melbourne, then I completed teacher aid course at the same institution.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 35)

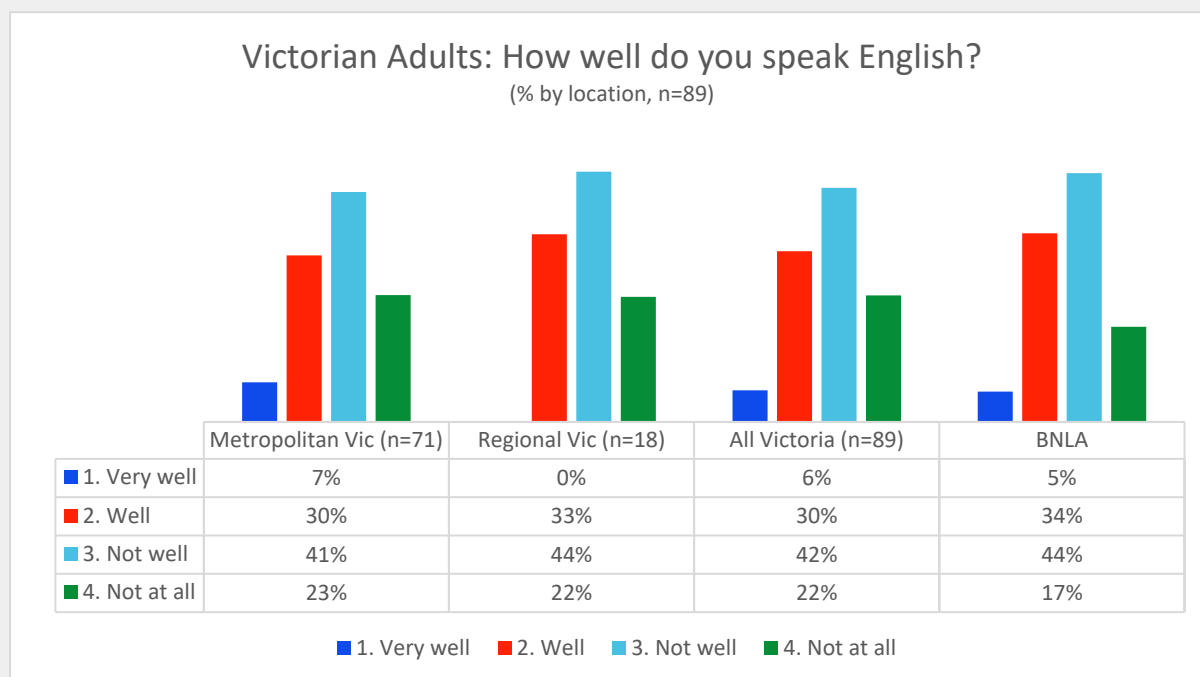
*After arriving, I joined the English class with TAFE where I was enrolled in 0-level. I improved 10 per cent. I enjoyed studying English but I believe that fully concentrating the mind [is needed] which could not be easy to make.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 37)

*Soon after arrival, I started studying English from level 0 with TAFE, where I spent one year. I am now at level 1 and studying English at evening time two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday, as I am working in my own restaurant over all day-hours, planning to be at level 2 within six months.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

**Figure 6.1.2: Victoria Adults: speaking ability by location**



The importance of English language skills to refugee families was clear, both in order to communicate and interact with others in their new neighbourhoods and to get an education or a job. The proportion of adults in Victoria who assessed themselves as being able to *speak* English ‘very well’ or ‘well’ (36%), was slightly lower than the proportion of refugees who responded that way in the national BNLA survey (39%; Figure 6.1.2). Some adults, particularly males, expressed their frustration at not being able to speak the language:

*I started the English classes at level 1, and completed the first 510 hours, then I offered more and raised to level 2, but I still feel completely behind and I am always the weakest student.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*I attended English language course with Polytechnique for one year, but I still struggle with English.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 38)

*The language is very hard to learn and the teachers are not very helpful. I am currently enrolled in an English course.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 54)



*I still have a lot of difficulties with English and I am unable to depend on myself enough in managing my issues when speaking English is needed. I feel that I cannot keep the new English words in my mind.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

*After arriving I started studying English with TAFE, where I was enrolled in level 0. Later, I was promoted to little bit higher level but still below level 1. I am still in AMEP hours, but progress very slowly, 5–10 percent since starting. My English is still below the level of feeling confident even with shopping, and I always need an interpreter to manage with the other facilities, like gas and electricity, Centrelink...*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 35)

On the other hand, others expressed satisfaction with their progress in learning English. One metropolitan couple thought that their English language classes, at level 2, had been very useful, *'we also learn English through watching TV and talking to friends'* (Male and Female, Metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 54 and 42). Two sisters in a family in another metropolitan location said that they had completed 510 hours of English language course and *'we can communicate in English with no issues'* (Burnside Heights, 2019, ages 44 and 42). Two more women – one metropolitan, one in regional Vic – told of their progress:

*I started with English classes, first with level 1 and now with level 2. I am happy and feel like I am steadily improving in English.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019 age 46)

*I attend the English classes with TAFE and find them very useful. I feel significant improvement and have become able to stand alone without the need of an interpreter in some familiar situations, like my diabetologist – when I discuss my treatment or blood tests – even though he is a non-Arabic speaker.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 34)

Adult informants in Victoria were slightly more confident reading English than speaking English: 40% assessed themselves as being able to *read* English 'very well' or 'well' (Figure 6.1.3) compared to 36% who were able to *speak* English 'very well' or 'well' (Figure 6.1.2, above). These figures might also be compared to the proportion who reported that they could *understand* English 'very well' or 'well' – 47% (Figure 6.1.1, above) – which indicates that informants find listening to English easier than speaking or reading the language.

**Figure 6.1.3: Victoria Adults: reading ability by location**



Evidence of *reading* ability might be gleaned from the successful completion of education or training courses. Several adults, mainly young males, reported positive outcomes to their learning experiences:

*After completing Certificate III in English, I continued with Certificate IV in Disability. That was in Polytechnic. I am almost finished the course of one year, waiting the certificate. I enjoyed studying and working with disabled people and I'm planning to continue and develop my career in this field.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 36)

*I started studying English with Certificate III, at Polytechnic, which I completed one year ago. Then I studied Certificate IV in Community Services, at RMIT, which I have almost completed... Although I started some work in community services, I am planning to study Finance – expected to start in one-year time – as I want to return back to business study. After searching, I am now arranging with La Trobe University for that.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 23)

*After I finished my 510 hours in studying English language, I done my Certificate IV in further study, and a course in a business administration, then volunteer at the Academy of International Education in Craigieburn.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 31)

*I completed level 2 in English course in AMES and a Diploma in Accountancy in RMIT University. I am looking for a bookkeeping position.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 23)

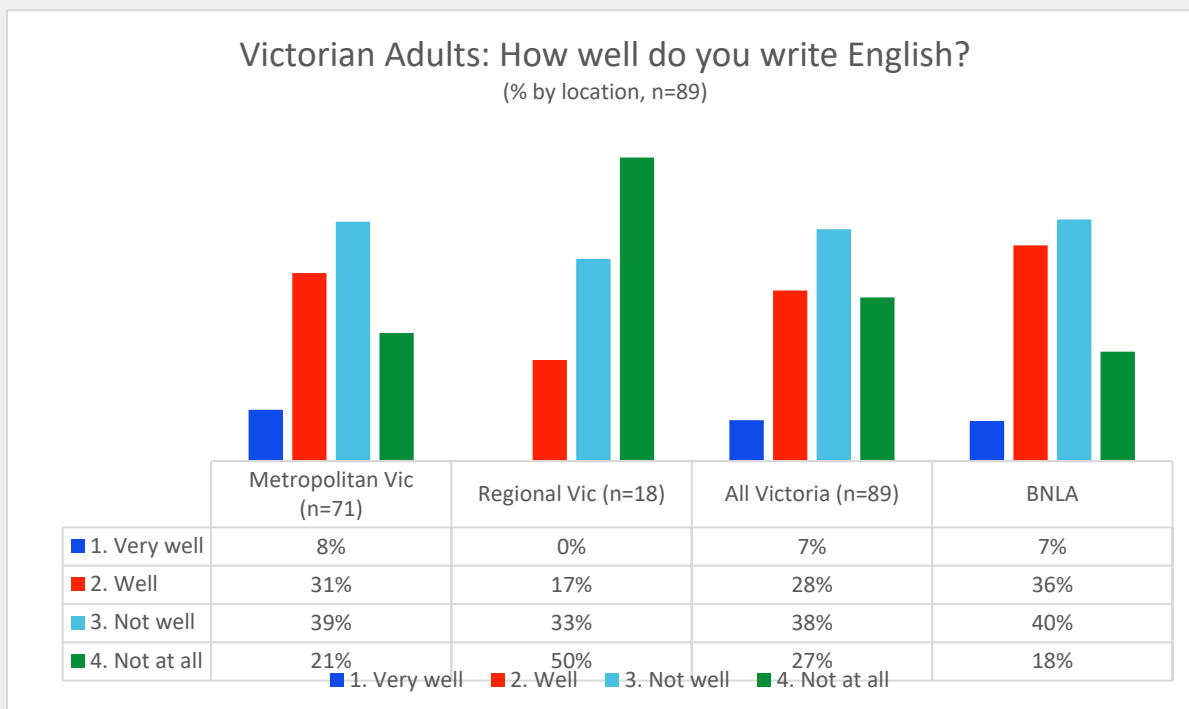
*I started English class with Polytechnic at level 1 for one term then moved quickly to level 2 and 3 without completing any of them, but moved then directly to Certificate IV in Community Services which I have completed in 11 months, at the same institute. I did work placement for 70 hours in community services, which was a requirement to obtain Certificate IV. I am quite happy and confident about my English, give myself 9/10, and I believe that I can relay enough on it in any work or further study... I also did a coaching course in volleyball and referee course in volleyball run online by Volleyball Australia – Melbourne Sports Institute. As I have completed both courses successfully, I have registered with Volleyball Australia and become recognised and eligible to act as a volleyball match referee, which I am now practising.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 51)

Likewise, education and training require *writing* skills. Writing English, like speaking, is less forgiving of mistakes, and an active rather than passive aspect of the language learning process. Therefore, lower assessments for writing ability might be expected than for reading. Figure 6.1.4 shows that 35% of adult informants in Victoria assessed themselves as being able to *write* English 'very well' or 'well', compared to the proportion who reported that they could *read* English 'very well' or 'well' – 40% (Figure 6.1.3, above).

Despite the difficulties of learning English, and writing in particular, one woman in regional Vic achieved a particular personal milestone: although she reported no improvement in her English language ability, '*I became able to write my name in English – I cannot do that in Arabic!*' (Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33).

**Figure 6.1.4: Victoria Adults: writing ability by location**



Nevertheless, one young woman thought that ‘*non-English speaker students still need English language support during their studying*’ (metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 21); and many adult informants indicated that they **needed more time to be able to communicate in the English language**:

*I competed 510 hours English language course at AMES Australia, however it’s not enough to communicate in English. I also completed a six months course in hospitality including three months’ work placement.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 47)

*I competed 410 hours English language course at AMES Australia, then I completed four years electrician apprenticeship at Box Hill Institute. When I finished my apprenticeship I tried to get my licence but I did not pass the exam due to my limited English language skills.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 45)

**Many adult informants in Victoria took opportunities to practice speaking the English language in the community.** One male pointed out the difficulty of understanding the Australian accent:

*I did the level 1 English course, but finding conversation hard, and the Australian accent hard to understand. I did not apply for jobs because of the language barrier.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 60)

*I attend many social and cultural activities and lectures especially in Uniting centre and attending English conversation training sessions.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

*I am now attending some classes in the church where they teach me some direct statements which are useful in shopping, or at the hospital, or the doctor and I found them helpful and now I decided to do my best to make improvement with my English.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*I suffer from being a bit far from [the town] where the most refugee family are there and have more cultural and educational sessions, especially the conversation sessions, which I do not hear of them when they happen, but hear of them later, and find it difficult to share them... My main concern is the language. I hope to find a more effective method than what I have in TAFE. I believe that depending on conversation and practicing some daily needed expressions is more helpful than filling the board by a lot of words and asking the students to write them down in their notebooks or memorise them.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 38)

### **Some learn the language by engaging with English-language media:**

*I am learning English at home through online programs and media.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 35)

*I stopped the TAFE courses, but I still work on my English, depending on some useful online videos and YouTube.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

*I am still suffering from language difficulties and hope to have more support in English. I keep trying to improve my English, depending on the internet and YouTube.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 25)

**The ability to gain employment is predicated on being able to understand, speak, read and write the local language.** One couple in metropolitan Vic completed Certificate III in Spoken and Written English at Kangan Institute, as well as a course in software and photography, but then:

*I applied for many jobs but the opportunity did not arise yet.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 42)

*We are looking for architect opportunity, we are looking to find the good job to start building our experience in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 42)

**Adults in Victoria, as in other states, had to balance the needs of learning the language with the needs of finding work.** One young man simply did not have time for English classes as his need to work took priority. Others expressed the need for language suitable for their potential workplace:

*I didn't finish my 510 hours as find casual job as a handy man and floorboard layer.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 41)

*I completed 200 hours of English language course at Melbourne Polytechnic then I moved to job ready course at the same institution. I found the job ready program more relevant to what I need than the English language course. I am grateful for my teachers because they were very supportive. I am learning English at home through online programs and media.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 37)

*I'm doing level 1 English course. I have difficulties in communicating and learning how to drive. I work as a chef.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 50)

*I am still studying English language as I didn't finish my 510 hours. It's after hours classes language school, two days a week, for two hours Monday and Wednesday 6.00 to 8.00 pm. Currently I am at level 0, I need to improve my language so I can do building course.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 46)

*I'm at level 2 in English and I wish to take a course in child care.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 40)

*I start attending English School and I'm in level 3. I'm doing well at school. When I finish my English language classes then I will start doing some courses regarding to my experience in Lebanon. I want to be a baker.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 26)

*Having arrived in Australia, I had completed the secondary education already in Syria and my credentials were assessed here – I was offered to study a pharmacy course with RMIT. I was first enrolled in English language study which included completion of Certificate 3 and 4 in English, EAL, in the same university. Now I am in the first year. I faced some difficulties like – first of all is the language, where I suddenly faced a huge number of medical and pharmaceutical terminology and jargon language, which are difficult even to the native speakers...*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 21)

Some managed to combine English language classes with work or other training:

*I am enrolled part time in level 3 English language course, also studying Legal Practice at RMIT. I am a volunteer for AMES.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 34)

*I am still studying English language and currently I am at level 1, and working at night shift as a cleaner. I found about this job through job network.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 54)

*Soon after arrival, I started studying English from level 0 with TAFE, where I spent one year. I am now at level 1 and studying English at evening time two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday, as I am working in my own restaurant over all day-hours, planning to be at level 2 within six months. I am planning to continue with level 3 and 4 in English, however I am going to do chef cook course at level 2-3, as I am very ambitious to build a firm basis for my future career.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

Many informants took advantage of courses run by churches, service providers and TAFE, covering a wide range of topics designed to help them settle into their new community. Courses provided information on government services and agencies such as VicRoads, public transport, police services, laws and the courts, firefighting, Medicare, health and hospitals, women's and children's rights and domestic violence. Other courses were more practical and applicable to the home, such as food storage and preparation, and domestic

maintenance. These courses were available in both the metropolitan and regional areas. Sometimes courses eased informants into training for employment:

*I did a course in food preparing and sanitary and how to handle it and taking care of it, which may help in working in kitchen as an assistant. In Uniting.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 36)

*I attended many sessions in Uniting about police services, transport, women rights... I am planning to continue, later, with makeup and grooming courses when my language help.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 32)

### 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 Victoria about how they thought their speaking, reading, writing and listening were developing in English.

**Table 6.1.1: Victoria young people: speaking ability, by former country and gender**

Victoria Young People: Speaking ability, self-assessment (population by former country, gender, 1 null gender, 1 null response)							
	Iraq (n=6)		Syria (n=48)		all Victoria		Total (n=54)
	Female (n=1)	Male (n=5)	Female (n=24)	Male (n=24)	Female (n=25)	Male (n=29)	
<b>Poor</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Weak</b>	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
<b>Okay</b>	0	2	4	8	4	10	14
<b>Very good</b>	0	3	9	7	9	10	19
<b>Excellent</b>	1	0	11	8	12	8	20
<b>Total</b>	1	5	24	24	25	29	54

Table 6.1.1 shows how the young people self-assessed their speaking ability and we can see some differences on the basis of gender. While the greatest proportion of Victoria YP rate their speaking ability as ‘very good’ to ‘excellent’, a greater proportion of females rate themselves as ‘excellent’ (12 out of 25, or 48%) than males (8 out of 29, or 27%). Speaking is a difficult skill to master since losing face with others creates hesitation, particularly for older young people; nevertheless, some YP make swift progress:



*I have become okay in English, but I may still face some difficulties, especially in speaking, but I can understand the teachers' explanation well. Moreover, there are interpreting services available in the class when needed. My writing is also okay, I can write essays.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 18)

*I am finding the English language very hard, but I'm trying to do my best.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 18)

*I feel comfortable with English and generally become using it more than Arabic, even when I speak with friends of the same background. I can understand teachers well and it can satisfy all my needs in not only for studying but also in general life.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*English classes are going very well. I find it easy to speak in English.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 12)

While *speaking* a new language is difficult, a greater proportion of the YP surveyed in Victoria assessed their *reading* ability as 'weak' or 'poor' (Table 6.1.2): where only 2% of YP thought that their *speaking* ability was 'weak' or 'poor' (1 out of 54, Table 6.1.1), 9% of YP thought that their *reading* ability was 'weak' or 'poor'.

**Table 6.1.2: Victoria young people: reading ability, by location**

Victoria Young People reading ability, self-assessment (% by location)			
	metropolitan (n=29)	regional (n=27)	All Victoria (n=56)
Poor	0%	4%	2%
Weak	7%	7%	7%
Okay	24%	26%	25%
Very good	45%	44%	45%
Excellent	24%	19%	21%

Regarding *writing* ability (Table 6.1.3), the proportion of YP in Victoria who assessed their ability as 'weak' or 'poor' was the same as the numbers in relation to reading – 9%.

Nevertheless, for both reading (66%) and writing (63%) two in three YP in Victoria thought that their ability was 'excellent' or 'very good'; and most rated their ability as 'okay' or 'very good' (for reading, 70%; for writing, 74%). Some of the YP elaborated on their thoughts about reading and writing:

*I am good in English. But I find difficulty with writing. I frequently borrow books from the school library, I like reading, and I was appreciated by the school for that and given a prize for that which was a box of books.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 13)

*I find English classes boring; I am good at English but bad at spelling.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 13)

*I have become excellent at English; I am at the top of my class in all language skills, especially writing.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 19)

**Table 6.1.3: Victoria young people: Writing ability, by location**

Victoria Young People writing ability, self-assessment (% by location)			
	metropolitan (n=29)	regional (n=27)	All Victoria (n=56)
Poor	0%	4%	2%
Weak	3%	11%	7%
Okay	28%	30%	29%
Very good	52%	37%	45%
Excellent	17%	19%	18%

There were some differences evident between YP in regional and those in metropolitan Vic in relation to writing: the YP in the metropolitan area had more confidence. While 52% of YP in metropolitan Vic assessed their writing ability as 'very good', compared with 37% in regional Vic, the distribution of those who assessed their ability as 'Weak' was greater in the regional location (11%, compared to 3% in metropolitan Vic).

**Table 6.1.4: Victoria young people: Listening ability, by location**

Victoria Young People listening ability, self-assessment (% by location)			
	metropolitan (n=29)	regional (n=27)	All Victoria (n=55*)
Poor	0%	0%	0%
Weak	3%	4%	4%
Okay	21%	31%	25%
Very good	34%	38%	36%
Excellent	41%	27%	35%

\* 1 null response hence 55 not 56

Similarly, regarding *listening* ability or the ability to understand English (Table 6.1.4), more YP in metropolitan Vic assessed their ability as 'excellent' (41%, compared with 27% in regional Vic), however similar small proportions in both locations assessed their ability as 'weak' or 'poor' (3% in metropolitan Vic and 4% in regional Vic). Most of the population of

YP surveyed in Victoria (71%) rated their ability to understand as 'very good' or 'excellent'. These are some comments by YP regarding understanding:

*I am okay in English but I cannot understand all of what the teacher explains – I have difficulty in understanding English.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I assess myself as good in English, I communicate well with teachers, fully understand the explanations and can run any discussion.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I am good in English, I am grouped in the middle group, which is good. I can speak well and ask questions and understand the teachers very well.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 12)

## 6.2 Stories from adult refugees

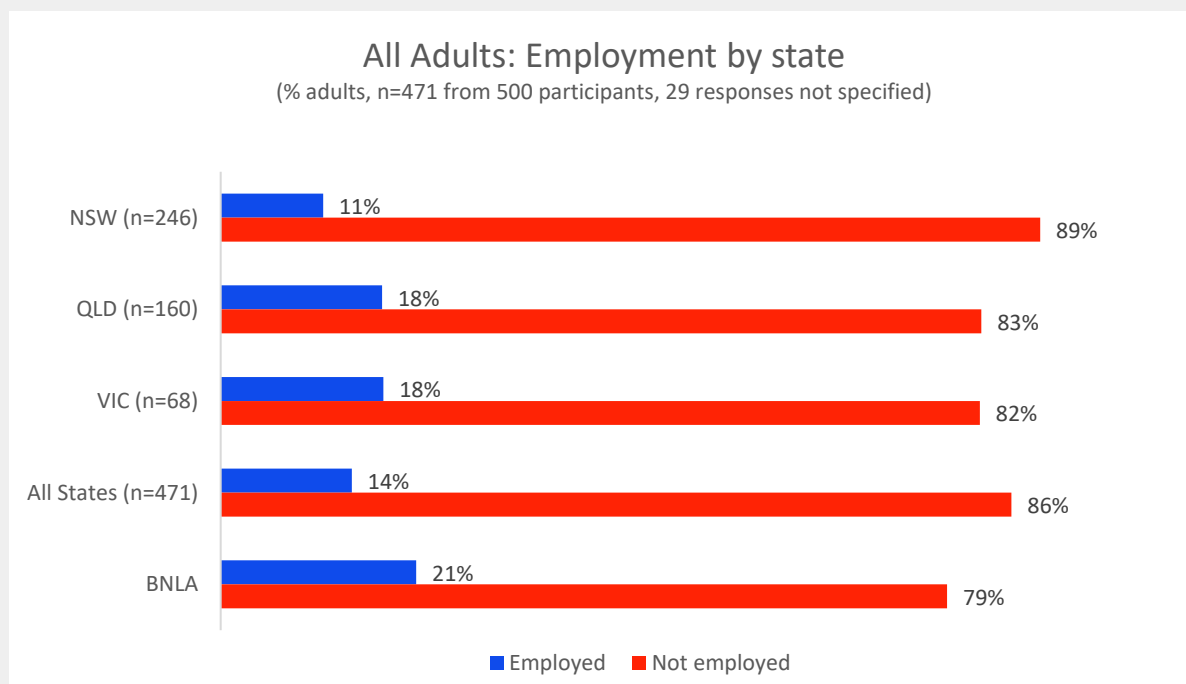
### 6.2.1 Employment

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 factors. While most of the extant literature has indicated that refugees seeking employment experience barriers such as the need for local employment experience before you can get a job, 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 as well (Newman et al., 2018; Betts et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018). For instance, some of the informants indicated that completing the English language requirements (510 hours) meant that they were unable to accept work when it was offered. There is a tension here – noted also in our fieldwork in NSW and Qld - between the desire to learn English very well, in order to get good employment, and the need to get employment as soon as possible even if in less desirable jobs. Furthermore, many of the informants 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.

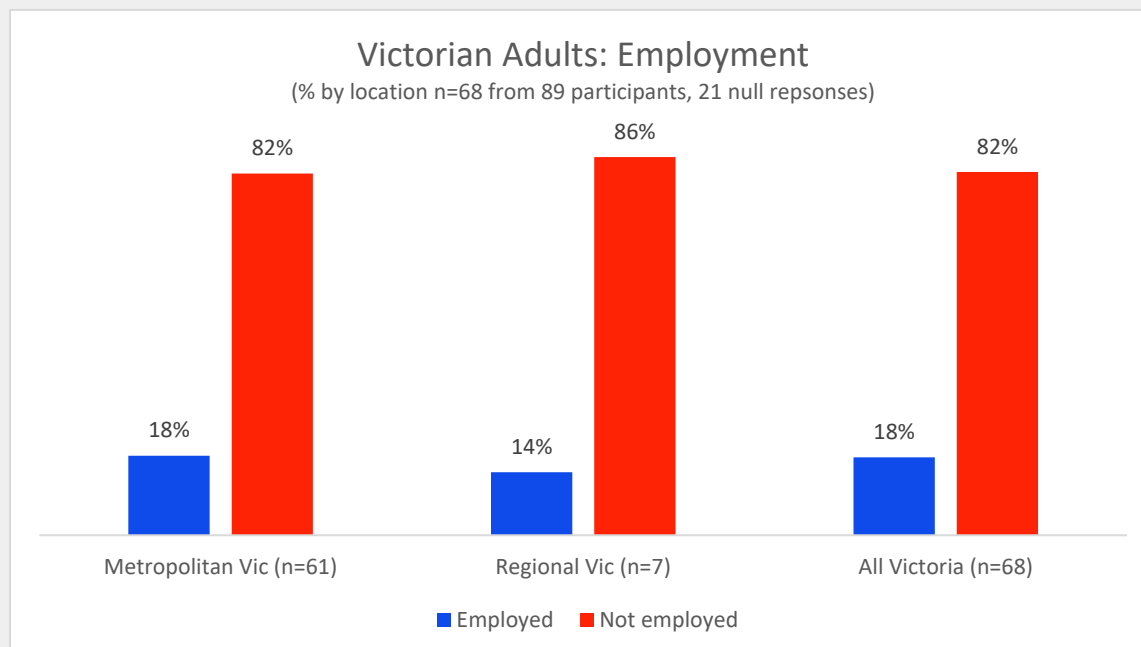
Of the three states sampled, Victoria and Qld had equally successful employment outcomes for newly-arrived refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan – 18%, compared to 11% in NSW – although this was below the percentage (21%) found in the BNLA (see Figure 6.2.1). It is important here not to confuse the numbers not yet in employment with the unemployment rate of refugees. Most of our informants had not yet entered the labour

market because they were still learning English. As such their lack of employment is not counted in the numbers of unemployed as they are not active job seekers.

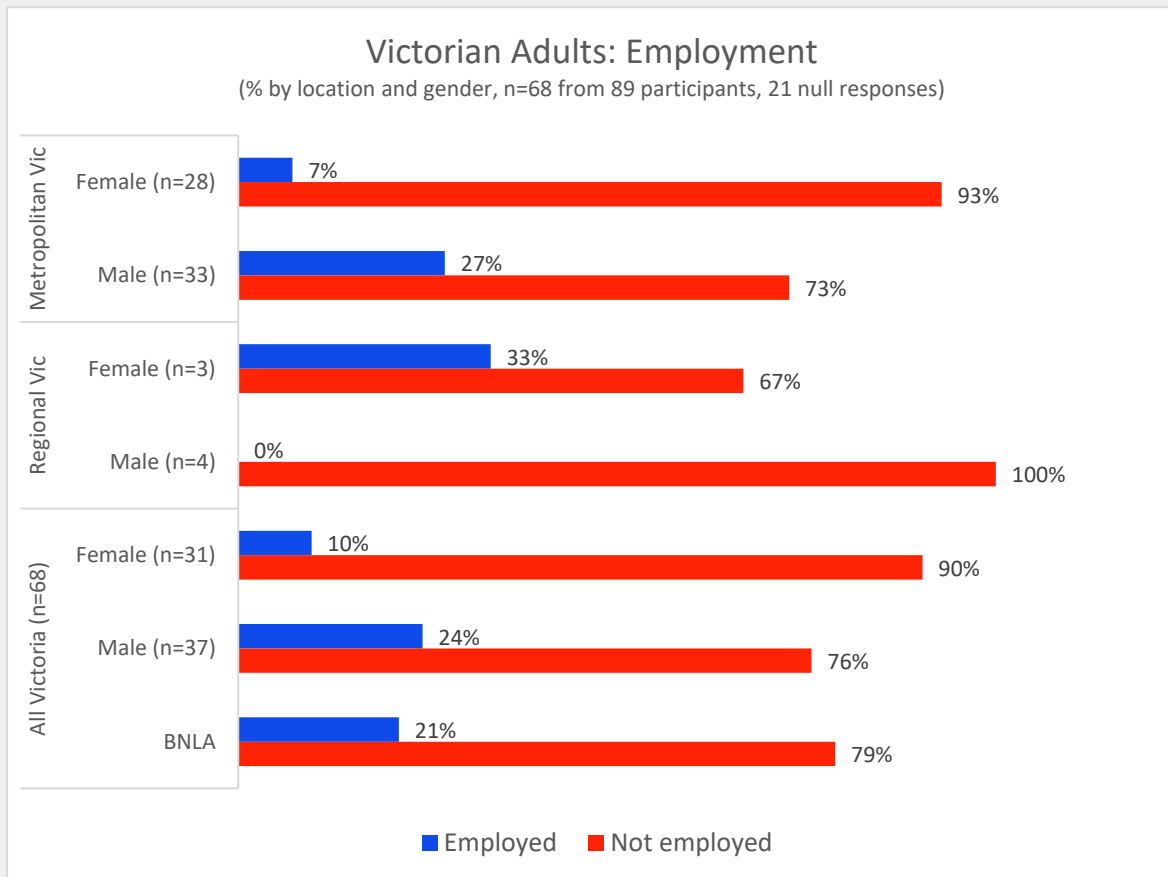
**Figure 6.2.1: Percentage of adults employed, by state**



**Figure 6.2.2: Percentage of Victoria adults employed, by location**



Of the two locations sampled within Victoria, metropolitan Vic had slightly higher employment (18%) than regional Vic (14%) whose small number of valid responses (n=7) had little effect on the overall result (see Figure 6.2.2).

**Figure 6.2.3: Percentage of Victoria adults employed, by location and gender**

The refugees had a broad range of skills, qualifications, educational levels and vocational experience/s. Gender and age were two key variables which featured in the discussions around employment aspirations, experience and outcomes. Employment outcomes for Victoria informants, by gender and by age, are shown in Figure 6.2.3 and Table 6.2.1 respectively. Although females generally had higher pre-migration education levels than males (Figure 5.1, above), only 7% of female informants in Victoria were employed post-migration while 27% of male informants in Victoria were employed (Figure 6.2.3). Again, the small number of valid regional Vic responses distorts the findings for regional Victoria since the one person (out of 7) to have employment there results in 33% of females having employment in the region while no males were employed. Notably, most of the interviews with refugee families in all states focused on the importance of gaining access to employment for the family unit. This was particularly the case for the male head of the household with a large proportion of the women noting that they had not worked in the public sphere, pre-migration (see Figure 5.5 above), and mostly women reporting caring responsibilities post-migration as well. Regarding age, the highest proportion of any age group to be employed post-migration were 45 to 54 (4 out of 6, or 66%). None aged under 25 or over 54 was employed (see Table 6.2.1). For older workers, the struggles with qualifications/certificate recognition coupled with health-related issues created amplified systemic barriers. Older refugees were not optimistic when gauging their employment

futures. Adding to the hurdles noted by older refugees was the difficulty experienced in learning English.

**Table 6.2.1: Number of Victoria adults employed, by location and age**

Victoria Adults: Employment by age groups (population data, n=66 from 89 informants, 21 null employment responses, 2 null ages)						
	metropolitan (n=59)		regional (n=7)		all Victoria (n=66)	
	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed
<b>Under 25</b>	0	5	0	1	0	6
<b>25 to 34</b>	2	11	1	2	3	13
<b>35 to 44</b>	4	15	0	3	4	18
<b>45 to 54</b>	4	6	0	0	4	6
<b>55 to 64</b>	0	7	0	0	0	7
<b>65 and over</b>	0	5	0	0	0	5
<b>Sub totals</b>	10	49	1	6	11	55

To understand these results, it is important to remember that most of the refugees interviewed and surveyed had arrived in Victoria in the previous 12 months. The first year of settlement is particularly difficult and typically 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. Moreover, most of these informants were still learning English at TAFE and elsewhere, so they had not in fact yet actively participated in the Australian labour market. English language competency (see 6.1 above) was raised as an important stepping stone into the Australian labour market and notably created the biggest hurdle in accessing employment:

*I am still studying English language and currently I am at level 3. Also, I am doing a course in teaching to work as a Teacher Aid which I started a month ago. I don't have any work experience. I need to improve my language.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 46)

*I was offered to do a course of feminine hairdressing, but I did not like to do, also a course in tailoring where I attended only for one to two months before I gave up as I found it inapplicable. I believe there are many good courses but still I need to improve my language before commencing any of them.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

The questions probing refugees on employment were derived from the BNLA survey (as was the case of other questions in the survey). While the results give a clear picture of how

many refugees have found employment, the picture around refugee unemployment is much muddier. The question did not allow for informants to tick a third option: 'I am not yet looking for work'. To be defined as unemployed a person has to be actively looking for work and not find a job. In other words, the above charts and tables do not reflect the unemployment rate, as many of those refugees not in employment will not yet be in the labour market. When we return to these refugee families in the second and third rounds of interviews most of those who are able to work will have finished their English language classes and be actively looking for work. We can expect that the employment figures will increase while those not in employment will be reduced considerably, though notably, COVID-19 dramatically reduced employment opportunities throughout most of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. This will make employment outcomes for newly arrived refugees in Victoria and other Australian states much more difficult.

Moreover, the low employment figures above also reflect the number of informants who were not looking for work due to having caring responsibilities. Some adults were caring for members of their family suffering ill health, others cared for young children. Both men and women were carers:

*I don't have any employment experience here in Australia; I am a carer for my husband, but I wish my son can find a job as he is struggling in that.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*I didn't get the chance to work here, but sometimes I help my husband at the shop, as it's difficult with my four children, and my 91-year-old mother-in-law is a lot of responsibilities; raising them and caring for them is my job.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 35)

*I am a volunteer in SBS as sport analyst. The main reasons for not searching [for work] are my mother needs help and my daughter needs someone to look after her.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*I have no experience – I never worked. I am not looking for work, I'm looking after my family. I am looking after my mum and husband – both have disability.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 58)

*I am studying in Broadmeadows, level 1 English. I have no work experience as I am looking after my mom as she had a stroke.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 23)

*I am planning to do some courses to develop my skills in embroidery when my English develops to an acceptable level. I would like to work in farm as I have important experience in this field, but now I am still taking care of my new baby who was born within the last year. Now I am exempted from Jobactive follow up as I have a too-young baby. I have five children.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 34)

*Regarding the Jobactive office and Centrelink, I have been appointed as a carer on my wife and exempted from TAFE courses and from searching for a job... My plans for work include first achieving a minimally adequate level in English then finding a job suitable to my age (51 years) and fitness.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

One woman felt strongly that the problem of caring for her children detrimentally affected her ambitions and ability to achieve a good job:

*[There is a need for] good and affordable solutions for mothers who have young children to be more comfortable with working – good childcares are still too expensive for low income families.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

Many who were bound by caring responsibilities at the time of interview were keen to be working as soon as the opportunity arises:

*I am planning to do some courses in female tailoring... and other feminine handworks which I like to build my career in them. Caring of my children now relatively prevents me from go after these courses but I will do when my life become more stable.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)

*I completed three months work placement as a teacher aid at one of the primary school, however I could not find a job. I received a phone call from one of the schools a few months ago to work as a teacher aid however I rejected the job because I am a full-time mother now with an 8-month-old daughter.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 35)



*I go to language school part time as I look after my family and my little daughter... I would like to study interpreting after I improve my English. I can't work in a farm as I never done before.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2018, age 34)

*I believe that my job should be sweet-making and hope that I will be able someday to develop it and establish a sweets and confectionary shop where I can skilfully practice with my husband my beloved job. I have never started any job searching yet as I am still taking care of my new baby. I am interested, and I believe talented, in making the traditional Syrian sweets, but I have not developed it to be of economic value; I just freely performed in my big family and neighbourhood [back in Syria].*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*I am now exempted from reviewing the Jobactive office because of my young twins. I believe my health is quite fit for work. I am keen to work but afraid about the difficulty to find a job especially due to language problem. I have a considerable experience in agricultural and farming works; cultivating and mechanical ploughing, driving tractor, pruning, irrigation, fruit picking and packing, harvesting – these works are the life I love and I hope to be back working in these jobs in [this area] as soon as possible.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*I was attending regular appointment with the Jobactive but I am now exempted because of the recently born my daughters, the twins. I have not applied to any job yet as I believe I should first do a course, in order to be more employable... however, I told the Jobactive office to register my name as a 'ready to work' as a I worker in a butchery or any related job whenever available. I want to work on tax [on a legal basis]. I hope that more work opportunities will be available.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

The elderly, and those with health problems, were not looking for work:

*I don't have any employment experience here in Australia, I am a pensioner and my wife a carer for me.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 76)

*We are pensioners and we never worked in Australia and we are not looking for a job.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, ages 67 and 65)

*I am currently not enrolled in any course or have work experience here.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 82)

*I am a pensioner and I have no work experience.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 75)

*I have no work experience; I am a housewife. I am exempted from searching for a job due to my health issue.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 38)

*I tried to work when I arrived to Australia, however I couldn't continue because I have asthma and I am sensitive to food smells. As a result, the doctor advised me not to work. I am currently unemployed and I am getting pensioner benefit.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 66)

When we explored the experiences that the refugee informants faced in getting employment, English language competency, qualifications recognition and the adequacy of employment services to deal with their particular employment concerns were the major issues mentioned.

### English language competency

The importance of **English language competency** to gain employment in Australia has been evident in over seven decades of post-war migration and is one obstacle the refugees share with other migrants arriving from non-English-speaking countries. Many of the informants in Victoria indicated that they lacked the English language skills needed for the work they wanted to do:

*I was in connection with the Jobactive office and I advised them that I am ready for any available job especially with the city council, as I have experience in rose and flower culturing and caring, and may be useful if I work in the council teams, especially in organising public gardens and street decorations. However, they advised me that my English still under the expected level. The language is the main hurdle, but there is no work in [this area].*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 37)

*It is very difficult to find a job here in Australia, not so many job opportunities, I tried to apply to a few places but because of my language barrier I couldn't get some jobs.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 41)

*I tried to contact some goldsmith shops in person, but I was not able to make any success because of my poor English. I do some non-rewardable work in my home, only for my interest and pleasure. I was a goldsmith for more than 50 years, owning a workshop and had three hired workers.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

*[There is a need to] establish programs to help the refugees who are professional but still have not command English well, in finding jobs where language is not a critical requirement.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

Adult informants in Victoria reported that they are not learning English because people in classes are of the same background and just speak in their own language. As one informant commented: 'we go there to socialise, not learn English'. Families who are illiterate are mixed in the same English-language classes as doctors, and other professionals, those with university degrees or those who had finished high school. This leaves no opportunity for the professionals and university educated to learn specialised language for work, such as medical English, nor does it allow space for those who come to English classes with little formal education or who are illiterate in their first language.

In Germany, language training occurs at the workplace rather than in the classroom (<https://www.netzwerk-iq.de/network-iq-start-page/language-training.html>). The benefits of learning English on the job by practicing and interacting with locals was emphasised by several of our informants, as captured in the following:

*I am working in my own restaurant... My daily contact with English-speaking friends and customers is very helpful in improving my English.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*I become better and more able to involve with English-speakers [because of] shopping, which helped more than the school in reconciling with English.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 32)

Weak English language skills contributed to unsuccessful attempts to gain employment for one male who was looking for manual work, even though he had been a primary school teacher in public schools for 30 years previously:

*Work and finding job is the other problem. I keep following the Jobactive regularly and agreed for any job. I was sent twice for interviews; the first one in delivery, which I have good experience in it. However, I failed in obtaining the jobs, almost, because of the age, discrimination against age, and weak language. I tried to contact the rural regions and farms as I have experience in farm works. I got one offer to do pruning for vines, and I really have good experience especially in vine works and care, however the place was 200 km away and there was no accommodation facility, so I need to travel total of 400 km daily, which is completely impossible after a long day of hard work.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

### Employment services: 'Survival Jobs'

Nationally in the stakeholder interviews we conducted there were criticisms raised of the employment services offered to refugees by Jobactive providers, such as the lack of focus on matching the refugees to meaningful employment. Informants in Victoria were largely consistent in this trend. The positive responses for the services and support provided by Jobactive were few and far between; support was guided by a willingness on the part of the refugees to take-on lower-level and/or entry positions. As one man commented: '*there are not many job opportunities and if there is any it will be uninsured long hours and lower paid jobs*' (Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 46). These low-skill and low-paid occupations offered to refugees were often not commensurate with the qualifications, skills and human capital (cf. Colic-Piesker and Tilbury 2007) of the job seekers. Reports of this kind of 'occupational skidding' (Hugo 2014: 37) – a situation commonly faced by humanitarian immigrants – were frequent among the Victoria informants. These include the following, from all walks of life:

*I found a job six months ago as lab technician in a high school. I could not find a job in other fields as I have no experience in other fields... [Before,] I completed a degree in biology, and worked as a high school teacher for three years.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 37)

*I am working at night shift as a cleaner... [Before,] I worked on my own farm growing all kind of vegetable and fruits.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 54)

*I am working now at a laboratory... I have a Bachelor Degree in Dentistry. I had government employment [for five years] and my own clinic [for twelve years].*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 33)

Another male had worked as an electrician for 14 years pre-migration, running his own business with 29 employees; now:

*I started working as an electrician assistant since 2015. Once I will get my license, I will start my own business. I completed 410 hours English language course at AMES Australia, then I completed 4 years electrician apprenticeship at Box Hill Institute. When I finished my apprenticeship, I tried to get my license but I did not pass the exam due to my limited English language skills.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 45)

For the vast majority, 'survival jobs' defined their employment status. This term was coined by one of the informants to describe lower-skilled/entry level temporary positions, which, while not providing long-term security and meaningful employment, do provide a means to survive in the present moment. Informants in Victoria expressed the problem in terms of not being given meaningful work, where the work was just filling a gap; as one male said: '*I don't want to be a tool in your toolbox*'. They perceived that Jobactive is interested only in Key Performance Indicators and is not specialised for the diversity of clients including, for instance, plumbers or doctors. Moreover, with employment services moving to online delivery, more problems are created for those refugees who are not tech savvy. The following quote captures the approach taken largely by Jobactive service providers, and the frustration of one informant:

*The Jobactive team were always ignoring my skills and experience and sent me to inconvenient jobs although I kept explaining to them about my preparations and plans for works. At the same time, they did not refer me to the pilot program for professional refugee, or at least tell me about it. One time, I was forced to go to an interview for a job in a kitchen where I found that it was just an unskilful cleaner job. The employer was so sorry and angry of the Jobactive team... Jobactive should study every case individually and in professional way and find out its requirement and work on it. Moreover, it could be very necessary for companies and employers to be involved more seriously in this process, maybe they can share more in evaluating the job seekers from refugee background and advise about the best pathway for them to secure jobs. Otherwise the Jobactive plans will be ineffective and limited to only applying pressure on the newcomers to find any jobs... Most refugees do not know what the Centrelink can offer them, nobody tell them; some lucky refugees have been paid or reimbursed for the courses they did or other expenses by the Centrelink while many others have not, and this is also another failure in Jobactive duties.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 51)

With a degree in Civil Engineering and Construction, this man started his career as a civil engineer, being substantially involved in many major projects, especially bridge building. Following that, he started a partnership business which focused mainly on home reconstruction and finishing. He went on to train in mosaic art and craft works, establishing, besides his business in home decoration, his own specialised workshop for mosaic art and iconography. But looking for meaningful and appropriate work in Australia, clearly, has been disappointing.

Job agencies expect labour-market-active refugees to apply for 15-20 jobs per month and record those attempts on an app (MyGov). The system allows for demerit points to be issued and can result in Centrelink payments being revoked if expectations are not fulfilled. The one-size-fits-all approach ignores factors affecting individuals, such as language level, disability, or age. Some of the Victoria family members interviewed were not seeking work due to age, disability or illness.

Without English skills, the kind of work mostly available is manual labour:

*I attend the language school part time as I have some health problems. It's very hard to get a job here – the only job they offer here is farming, which is hard for me as I have a lower back pain. I was a business owner. I owned a shoe factory [for 22 years].*

(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 43)

*I completed a six months course in hospitality and had three month's work placement at one of Melbourne 5-star hotels. I worked in a café at the city and I had back injury. Since then I find it hard to secure a job due to my back injury.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 47)

*I believe that I am almost unsuitable for normal jobs as I still struggle too much with English – I may be suitable only for simple sort of cleaning jobs. My GP has offered me a certificate which has made me excluded for compulsory search for work. I am trying to find an opportunity to work with churches just to feel some satisfaction. [Before coming to Australia] I had started tertiary education studying French literature. However, I failed many years in year one and left the university as I started suffering from psychological problem.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 38)

*Another issue is discrimination against age – all people will be not able to secure a job if they reach 60 years, so as a country receiving refugee who frequently are in late fifties or reached 60 year old, the government should deal more seriously with age-related issues in working.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

Stories mentioned above demonstrate that several informants had previously owned their own business and would like to do so again. Others in this situation include the following:

*I connected to Jobactive program, and refer them regularly, applying to ten jobs every month. I got one job interview, computer works, but I did not success. I feel that my experience in computer work was not enough. I am planning to do Certificate III in Aged Care as I like this work; the alternative can be childcare. I do not have any network to help me to secure job so far, but I will try to build such a network. I hope also to have my own small business like in Syria but now I can't afford. I had my own shop for selling kitchenware. I hope that job opportunities become more in number and more real.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019 age 46)

*Applying for different job is very hard – looking for the same job I used to work before. I've applied for many jobs – construction, civil engineer. I am now doing cleaning. It was much work to find them, using job network searches. It is very hard – no experience in Australia. I am looking for any job at the moment. But I hope I can find something related to my experience as a civil engineer. I can't find any help [to have my overseas qualifications recognized]. My greatest worries? – not find what I want and am looking for. If God wishes, if possible, I would like to establish a business. I have worked in the Civil engineering project and worked for an engineering press for four years ... and had responsibility for planning and coordinating construction projects. I have 25 years of experience. I ran my own business for 15 years.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 54)

*I have applied for sales person jobs. I am now working doing baking – casual. I look for work through friends and job search. I've had no assistance. I will do any job. My overseas qualifications [in hairdressing] are not recognised. My greatest worry is not to find a job. If God wishes we will start a business. I have worked in different hair dresser shops in my city... I have 10 years' experience as a hairdresser and 3 years' as a sales person. I worked with my husband in our family business for 15 years.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 42)

Some informants in Victoria were already setting up or running a business. One man and his wife persevered to set up a business in their new homeland. He had extensive experience in various positions and capacities working for restaurants and fast-food shops in Aleppo and Lebanon, but the language and start-up costs in Australia were barriers:

*Shortly after arrival, I did my first attempt to have my own small business. That was when I found a recently closed restaurant and made a deal with the owner to reopen it... However, I continued only for 2 months then I gave up as it was unrewardable, because of language difficulty... After about one year and half, I opened my current restaurant which had been shut off by the owner before. Now my English is much better, and I have applied a completely different approach to the market. The fame of my new restaurant looks gradually pervading and I can feel encouraging support from the local communities in [this area] and promising indicators for success. At the same time, I am still followed by Jobactive office as I am still on Centrelink support. I got a loan from the Centrelink about \$3000 and I am paying it back in instalment. I tried to get another fund from the council to establish vacuum system for ventilating, but I failed that because of language difficulties. I hope to be supported by loans to develop my business as it needs more decorations, advertisement especially in the media; and I hope also to have some supports and advantages like limited exemption for some period, or discount, concession, regarding the expense I paid for the council or other services, water, electricity, gas – similar to home services.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*I help my husband with his newly established restaurant. I am regularly followed up by the Jobactive office, every three months, who recently asked me to do some volunteering work. Then they agree for me to consider my work in my husband restaurant as a volunteering work. I worked as a qualified hairdresser in Lebanon for four years, I have a professional certificate in that from the UN.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

Another informant has opened a business even though he has no prior experience of that kind:

*I tried to apply to a few places but because my English was not good, I couldn't get any job, then I decide to work in trading. I open my own business, a grocery shop in Craigieburn old shopping centre and export foodstuff from Syria and Middle East. In Syria my first job was working in a Restaurant, then worked as an Accountant. And before I fled to Lebanon I worked as a construction contractor.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 46)

Issues surrounding self-employment were raised by several refugees. As in the story above, some who had never previously owned a business would prefer to be running their own business in Australia, given the limited options available to them for decent and appropriate employment. This includes another Syrian couple:



*I looked after my family all my life after marriage. I am studying the language part time, three days, because I have to look after my little daughter. We tried to work at SPC factory but it did not work. We are planning to have our own business – a fruit shop.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2018, age 33)

*I worked all my life in Syria as a builder for about 17 years. Then moved to Lebanon and managed to work as a manager and cashier to a small supermarket there. I am studying the language here full time. I am applying for a job – 15 jobs a month – but could not get any. I would like to work in shops as I have an experience in costumer services. Shops like Coles or Kmart. Or any other factory.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 38)

There is a well-founded literature (Betts et al. 2017, Alaslani and Collins 2017, Centre for Entrepreneurs 2018) related to the importance of self-employment and establishing a business as an option for those immigrants and refugees who need to work yet face incredible obstacles in gaining skills and qualifications accreditation.

### **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 those we interviewed 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 recognition in Australia of their professional and technical skills is often a significant and for some an insurmountable barrier to them gaining commensurate employment in Australia. 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.

In Victoria, one couple who could not find work in their field were both qualified architects:

*We are looking for architect opportunity, we are looking to find the good job to start building our experience in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 42)

*I applied for many jobs but the opportunity did not arise yet. [Back home] I was working in consulting designing firm.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 42)

Qualified teachers were among those who did not know how to go about finding employment:

*I am studying Level 3 in English. I have not applied for jobs because there is no guidance and I have not brought any proof of qualification with me. I was an English teacher for 16 years and assistant school principal.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 38)

*[I wish I knew] how to make use of my previous qualifications from Syria, and I need more financial help. I worked as a primary teacher for ten years teaching English, Computer literacy, Arabic, History, Geography and Science.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 34)

*If I knew more about the work market and the Australian law my settlement journey could be a lot easier. The orientation sessions should cover work related matters and the overseas qualifications assessment process so we can transfer our skills to the Australian standard... I completed a degree in biology, and worked as a high school teacher for three years.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 37)

Australia could benefit from considering fast-tracking of teachers such as those in Sweden. In addition, most state education departments have a process through which teachers with qualifications from overseas can apply for recognition or partial recognition.

Young people also had problems finding work in their field of training:

*In my home country, Syria, I was studying business, in year 3 of the bachelor course of 4 years, but I do not have the all documents regarding that. I worked with St Laurance brotherhood for charity works for 2 months. That was after serving as a volunteer with them for one year. I expect to be invited for an interview shortly, with the same organisation, to start a longer job. But I do not plan to work long time in community services field, but in business and finance as I was looking for when I was in my homeland. However, I do not have any network so far to help me in future to achieve my goal.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 23)

*I did Level 3 and 4 of the AMP program, and have a Diploma in Translation. I would like to apply for biomedical science. I applied for many jobs in Brotherhood of St Laurence, but unfortunately they didn't give me any job. [Before coming to Australia] I spent my life studying, then I joined university to study dentistry – second year in dentistry college. I came with high expectation, I wish if I had known more about the education system in Australia. No one tell me that the system is different and I will start from zero. Even the three years of biomedicine is hard to do it because I am not sure they will accept me to study dentistry.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 24)

*[There is a need to] create more employment opportunities for refugees, as suitable as possible to their previous careers, especially young persons.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

Professionals from all kinds of disciplines and trades expressed their frustration:

*If I know I need my work experience and certificates I would try hard to bring them with me. I have Assistant Engineering [qualifications].*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 37)

*Same as my husband [above]. I have a diploma in Finance.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 32)

*[I wish I knew] how hard it is working with an overseas qualification. I graduated Medical School after 6 years, trained for a year, and worked as a doctor from 1997 to 2015 in a hospital and a clinic. I am having difficulties finding a job.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 42)

*There are not many specialised employment services for skilled refugees. I need a course to transfer my skills to the Australian standard. I worked as an electrician for 14 years and I used to own my business and had 29 people working for me.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 45)

## The importance of finding work to newly arrived refugees

One frustration expressed by many refugee informants relates to the fact that they are not given the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for work. Most of the informants were proud of their career achievements prior to the conflicts that displaced them from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Many were very successful in their career. They are very eager to get work and contribute to Australian society.

The importance of gaining employment to the informants in Victoria is evident in the overwhelming number, of all ages and employment backgrounds, who mentioned their work situation in relation to a question about what they wish they had known before coming to Australia. These newly arrived refugees would have liked more information on the employment landscape, opportunities and potential barriers when attempting to get a job. The following is just a sample of similar responses to the question asking what they wish they had known:

*One word – ‘Employment’... and ‘job opportunity’. It could be the single most important matter for me and for every new arrival, especially parents who are very concerned about the future of their children. As I believe that the new arrivals really face a completely unexpected difficulty in finding a suitable jobs correlate to their previous careers, at least meet the minimal expectation. Otherwise everything can be manageable.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 56)

*Maybe wish if I knew the work system in Australia, how to find work, and what kind of job opportunities are available, and by finding a suitable job I can provide a better life and education for my family*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 46)

*More information about education offered in Australia and how hard finding a job is.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 25)

*I have learned a lot about Australia, but I surprised that the chances of work is very rare.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*Maybe to know how to find work in Australia, so that can make our settling in Australia easier.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 31)

*Maybe to read more about the work ways and the codes of doing job in our fields like to study the code of building in Victoria, as an architect. We hope that we had more information about job skills here in Australia.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, ages 42 and 42)

*I wished if I had more information about job opportunities, and wished if I took courses in English before I came to Australia... [In Syria] I [had] my own business in decoration and design.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 39)

*[I wish I knew about] the struggles of finding a job... [Before,] I worked in a sweets and pastry shop for two years.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 40)

In this same context, some expressed the need for more connection to jobs, particularly for those developing English language capabilities. A great many would have welcomed the opportunity to learn the English language *before* arrival, to help jump start their job:

*Create more job opportunities, especially for people who still have problems with language. As it is better for those to work even in limited jobs until their language become better than waiting in language school and depending on the Centrelink.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)

*I think [this area] needs to be supported by more work activities from different types. And provide more job opportunities. I am ready to do any work for the community even volunteering work just if it does not need language as my main problem is language.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 36)

*Establishing programs [would] help the refugees who are professional but still have not command English well in finding jobs where language is not a critical requirement.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

*Create more employment opportunities for refugees as suitable as possible to their previous careers, especially young persons.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

*Maybe more knowledge in English Language so I can communicate here in Australia and of course it would be easier to find a job. I applied for few jobs like in a factory making caravans, and some of them are rejected and some are really far and I don't drive at the moments.*

(Male, Craigieburn, 2018, age 38)

*If we know it's impossible to work without proper English we might study English in Lebanon before we came here.*

(Male and female, Roxburgh Park, 2018, age 33 and 26)

*English language is a challenge for me and, if I knew that, I would improve in English language skills prior to arrival. There are not many specialised employment services for skilled refugees.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 47)

*If we know we should have an excellent English before we could work we might took some English courses overseas which might help us understand the workplace environment quicker and better.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, ages 33 and 33)

The willingness of so many informants in Victoria to undertake work on a *voluntary* basis, or to re-skill by undertaking training courses, also demonstrates their enthusiasm for work. The following comments are representative of these:

*I did level 2 English in Melbourne Polytechnic Epping; King Khalid TAFE language for two months; AMES in the city undergoing Day Care study. I volunteer in a restaurant till I find a suitable job.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 25)

*I do volunteer work at the Academy of International Education in Craigieburn, then they offer me a job to work there as an administrator. I am working there for two years now, I don't have any worries at the moments. I finished in Syria my advanced Diploma in civil engineering. In Syria my first job was working as a supervisor at a chocolate factory, school receptionist, then an accountant.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 31)

*I finished level 3 in English language and will start studying Diploma in Electrician next semester. It's very hard to find a job here although my English is fine and I have a long experience. I have Assistant Engineering [qualifications] and [spent] twelve years working at Carrefour Mall travelling between Syria, Dubai, Iraq, as clerk then promoted to become a Central Cashier Manager.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 37)

*After completing certificate III in English, I continue with Certificate IV in Disability.... I am almost finished the course of one year, waiting the certificate. I enjoyed studying and working with disabled people and I am planning to continue and develop my career in this field. After [that], I was able to find a work placement, then I secured a casual job in the same centre and started it two weeks back. Also, I sometimes teach Arabic language to some non-Arabic speakers.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 36)

*I did courses in business and how to run a business in Australia, safety in workplaces, improving skills, writing a resume - I found these courses exceptional helpful. In Lebanon I mainly did work in construction industry, especially form work and building carpentry.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 25)

*I am enrolled part time in level 3 English language course, also studying Legal practice at RMIT. I am a volunteer for AMES. I worked as a primary teacher for ten years teaching English, Computer literacy, Arabic, History Geography and Science.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 34)

*I am planning to continue with level 3 and 4 in English, however, I am going to do chef cook course at level 2-3, as I am very ambitious to build a firm basis for my future career.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*Next year – 2018 – I'll do a course in building. We still fairly new to this country, but I am doing voluntary work. The work it's for long hours, I am doing voluntary work at the moment for no pay. I work form 7.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., as a start. They might employ me in the future. It's a design and decoration company. I apply for three jobs as a cabinet maker. My brother helped, and searching the internet.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 39)

*I finished English language (500hours) then took OET [Occupational English Training] course then Doula course, as well as HSR [Health and Safety Representative] course (training) and first aid course. I did some volunteer work since I came – Birth for Humankind, Shifra, Vinnies and ACS... I have a Master Degree in Pediatric Dentistry... I had my own clinic [for 13 years].*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 33)

*I did volunteering work with Neighbourhood Learning Centre. First, I was offered a tutoring course and then volunteering role as a teacher-assistant where my duty is to help the student from the Arabic background in interpreting and explaining when need. It also included translating when there are visitor speakers like police, Vicroads, firefighters...*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 51)

*I finished level 3 in language at Kangan Institute. Now I am having security course. I am looking for a job. I was an English Teacher in Primary school for five years.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 31)

*I am still studying English language and currently I am at level 3. Also I am doing a course in teaching to work as a Teacher Aid, which I started a month ago. I don't have any work experience; I need to improve my language. [From back home] I have a Diploma of Teaching English Language.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 46)

Most of the adult refugees who we met during this research project found the transition to life in Australia more difficult because of one key issue: while in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan the men in particular worked hard and enjoyed their jobs, while many of the women fulfilled traditional roles as wives and mothers. But in Australia, when they are not at TAFE learning English these men spend most of their time at home. One young father of five in regional Vic suffered terribly from injury, but would not give up his determination to be back in work:

*I have been exempted from attending the Jobactive follow up because of my health issues which are the result of an industrial accident happened in 2015 in Lebanon where I fell down while working on a high under-construction building from a level of the third floor and sustained many fractures in an arm and a leg leaving my knee unstable and the elbow in disabling limitations. I was referred to a multidisciplinary medical committee and seen by many specialists. I am still under different types of management but unable to be involved in work, till now. I hope to return to work in construction industry again soon after I restore my physical capability. I have been offered by the committee to be exempt permanently from work and to have early full pension but I completely refuse the idea and insist on that I will never accept to live as a disabled person from this age [35] and I will work anything to keep feeling alive, otherwise I could fall in severe depression. I hope that suitable jobs for partially disabled people can be created or preserved for those people.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 35)



For their first year or so of settlement in Australia many refugee couples are spending long hours at home together, a situation that is foreign to them. The issue of boredom is real: there is a need for perhaps more out-of-the-home activities for these refugees, particularly the males. This also puts stress on relationships between husbands and wives.

### **The Catch 22: Australian work experience and Recognition of Prior Learning**

Most of the adult refugees interviewed raised a Catch 22 that they faced when trying to get a job in Australia: when they applied for a job they were asked if they had prior Australian employment experience. Because they did not, they were not successful in getting a job. The policy implication here is that it is critical that all newly arrived refugees get access to temporary Australian work experience after they complete English language training. There are a range of initiatives from the corporate, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), public and social enterprise sectors including successful pilot attempts in Australia and other countries to address this issue (Collins, 2017a; Szkudlarek, 2019).

Some of the voices of informants in Victoria follow:

*I tried to find long term jobs of any kind or in construction in [this area], but they require of me to have Australian training and certifications which I do not have at the moment. As a result, I decided to join my father and brother who has established good basis and network in construction industry in Sydney... In Sydney I can also find suitable part-time courses in construction and hopefully I will be able to work and study at the same time... In Lebanon I mainly did work in construction industry, especially form work and building carpentry.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 25)

*I am currently studying English language and raising up my little child – two years old. The language is a big barrier as well as the local experience. And to be honest I am not sure I can find a proper job later. I have Diploma in Finance and four and a half years as safe supervisor at Carrefour Mall*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 32)

*I am still studying English language and currently I am at level 1. I don't have any work experience, I need to improve my language. I was a high school Art Teacher at Mosul High School.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 39)

The refugee informants were very insistent that if given the opportunity to demonstrate their level of employment and skill capability to Australian employers they would be hired. The frustration was that since they did not get a foot in the employment door – rejected because of their lack of Australian employment experience – they could not get an opportunity to

demonstrate their ability. One informant – a hairdresser who was famous in his home country – lied to his employer about having prior Australian employment. He was given the opportunity to work for one day and was hired – permanently and full-time – before the day was over after his skills as a hairdresser had been demonstrated. This suggests that refugees with existing employment skills need opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities to potential employees and/or to have their prior skills recognised formally in Australia. Highly qualified professionals – engineers, pharmacists, medical professionals, dentists, architects – were particularly frustrated with the lack of progress and prospects for using their qualifications and work experience and for their achievements being recognised in Australia.

One metropolitan Victorian informant has a degree in Agricultural Engineering and with extensive pre-migration experience had reached the rank of Associate Manager in her field of agricultural engineering counselling and distribution and pricing of fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals. She spoke about her frustration in this regard:

*I did volunteering work in [a] neighbourhood learning centre, helping the new students of Arabic background, for three months. I also did work placement for 100 hours in [a] Catholic school and now [volunteer there]. Also, I am now following a course called 'Training Volunteer Tutor' [to] help in allowing me to teach the newcomers either in schools or in their homes. I attended an interview for job at an English school as a teacher supporter to help the new student from the Arabic background as they want a bilingual student supporter, but my interview was not successful. My capability in English did not help me to show full confidence. If I was given the opportunity to start with a period of unpaid work, like volunteering work, where I can show my real strength and become more convincing to the employer, than just a small opportunity during an interview...*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

Another refugee informant in Victoria pointed out the worth of the unique experience in farming, brought by the newcomers from Syria:

*I hope the government will consider the valuable experience especially in agriculture and farming, which has come with these large numbers of refugee from Syria. It will be really useful in making agriculture different. In addition of me being living in Craigieburn where many farms are very near, I visited many farms, and I believe that I and many others can work in different way which could be better, just they need to have the chance to work. I worked as a primary school teacher in public schools for 30 years [but also] I am an agricultural expert. I have firm experience in farming and agriculture for life-long time, as I grew up and was entirely a part of a very deep-rooted agricultural and rural culture. This includes practical experience in agricultural machines and motors. Working in agriculture is seasonal which is always adapted to correlate with primary school holidays, especially summer holiday in Syria from 15 May till 15 September.*

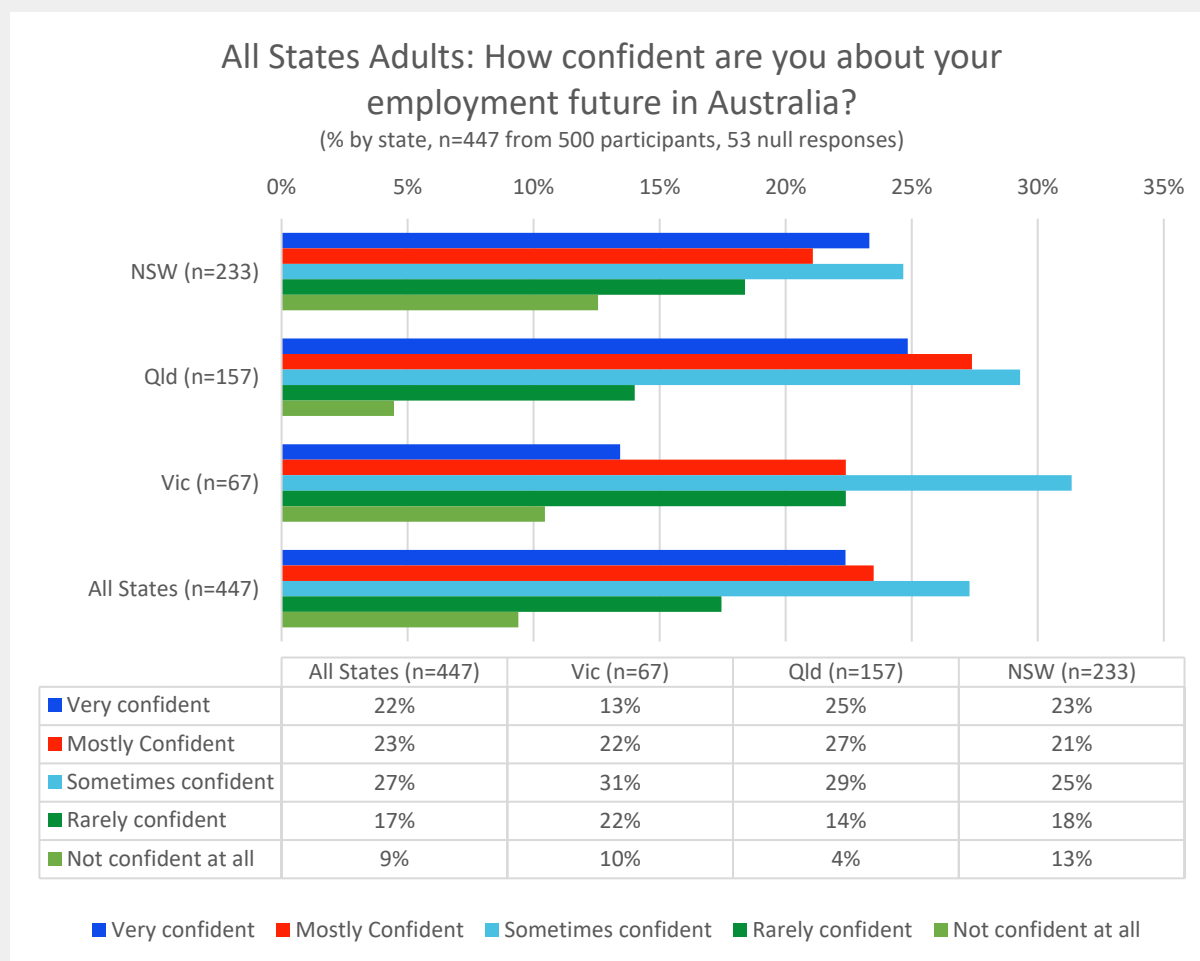
(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

The key policy initiative required in this regard is a guarantee that all newly arrived refugees of working age get access to 4-8 weeks of work experience after their English is at a suitable level. There is a need for a new Federal government scheme to be developed to provide access to work experience to those refugees who cannot gain access to other schemes provided by the corporate, SME, public and social enterprise sectors.

### **Future employment prospects**

All the research in Australia and other countries agrees that finding employment is a key to the successful settlement of refugee families in countries like Australia and states like Victoria. The data presented in the Figures above shows that very few of the recently arrived refugees have found employment in Australia. As our research has found, this is a matter of great frustration to most of the refugee informants. Nevertheless, more than one third (35%) of the newly arrived refugees in Victoria are optimistic ('very confident' or 'mostly confident'; see Figure 6.2.4) about their employment future, and almost another third (31%) are 'sometimes confident'. **Clearly, finding employment for the Syrian-conflict refugee intake and other refugees who arrive in the annual humanitarian intake is perhaps the most important issue impacting on the settlement outcomes of these newly arrived refugee families.**

**Figure 6.2.4: Percentage of adults: how confident are you about your employment future in Australia?**



### 6.2.2. Settlement - adults

While finding employment is central to successful settlement outcomes of refugees, there are many other aspects of life in Australia that impact on successful settlement experiences. Refugees need to find accommodation in Victoria, and once they resolve the immediate housing issue they begin life in their new neighbourhood. A key settlement factor then becomes the extent to which the refugees and their families are accepted into their local community by their multicultural neighbours. Some refugee families on 202 Visas arrive in Victoria with existing family networks while others who enter on other humanitarian visas arrive knowing no-one. In Victoria, some of the refugees we interviewed had settled in a metropolitan area, whereas others were placed in a regional area. In this section we explore the social aspects of refugee settlement for Syrians and Iraqis in metropolitan and regional Victoria.

#### Housing

Several of those who came to metropolitan Vic had travelled as sponsored families – on a 202 Visa – having been sponsored by a relative living in Australia. Generally, these families

had little trouble finding housing since relatives were able to give assistance and they could find real estate agents who speak Arabic. Here are the words of some who had family help:

*My aunt sponsored me and gave me all the information. I am unhappy with the place and am planning to move. I don't associate with my neighbours. All my friends are here in Australia and my sister is in Sydney. I am happy with my life because all my family is in Australia.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 23)

*I have two brothers living in [Melbourne] Victoria. One brother – he has been in Australia for 13 years – he is a priest – and one for three years. We visit each other. My brothers help me to settle and I looked on the internet in real estate website to see what the suburbs look like in Australia. I got to know more from my brothers.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 39)

*My sister-in-law helped us settle, by providing us with housing in [this suburb]. I specifically chose this suburb because of how many members of my husband's family lived here. I enjoy living in this suburb due to the variety of facilities available nearby.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 38)

*My family applied to humanitarian visas to Australia, as I have a brother who lives with his family in Australia. We settled in [this suburb] where we have a large community of relatives from the same village in Syria, who thoroughly helped us finding a house and other settlement needs.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*My sister-in-law helped us settle in this location. Search on the internet rent website was no help. Living here is very good. It's a clean suburb, safe. The best thing about living here is finding a good house. I have a very good network of friends and family in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 58)

*We applied for a visa to Australia as refugees by the help of my brother who is living in Australia. Here, with the help of AMES and my brother, we obtained our home and started our life. I am happy and I arrange with the others of the family to continue developing, aiming to establish good future in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 56)

Although many in metropolitan Vic moved into their housing with relative ease, others had difficulties, such as finding suitable housing for large families, and learning about unfamiliar locations and procedures. The following is a sample of families who had difficulties:

*Finding our first property was hard, due to the language barrier and the competition, as there was a lot of applicants for the same property, also we had no idea about the procedure in renting a house in Australia. AMES didn't help us much. It was much easier after, with our second property [where we live now], also with the help of our relatives here. We didn't have any idea about the suburbs in Australia, but it was much easier with the help of relatives and friends that arrived here first.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*I like living in my suburb, just when it get dark we feel a bit unsafe as there is not enough street light. We didn't have any idea about this suburb and other suburbs in Australia, it was hard to find suitable house. Our neighbours are okay, just the one in front of us – they are fighting all the time. But nothing to do with us, no communication with them.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*I like living in my suburb, it's quiet and safe. We didn't have any idea about the suburbs in Australia. It was hard to find a suitable house because the size of our family. Our neighbours are ok but no communication with them.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 32)

*When we first came to Australia, we stayed nearly two months at my brother house until we found our own. Finding our first property was the hardest one in here due to the language barrier, no idea about the procedures to rent a house in Australia, and the transports. AMES helped us with that and with all paperwork regards it. Then it was much easier after, with our second property [where we live now], also with the help of our relatives here.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 46)

Moreover, the expensive rental prices in metropolitan Vic were also a problem for some:

*I wish I had known about houses rents. It is very expensive – \$1500 I pay for rent.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 43)

*I am happy regarding our house - it looks new, neat and tidy, and there are good infrastructural services, but I worry regarding the expensive rental rate. [There needs to be] suitable solutions for the expensive home rental prices and other life-expense, especially for retired and single persons.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

*My sister-in-law helped us to come here and settle in [this suburb]. I like the area – it is beautiful, peaceful and all the services are available around us, but the houses rent is very expensive. I am very happy to live in Australia. All my concern is to find other house to be suitable for my daughter as you know she needs special equipment and a well-equipped house.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*We are living in this house with help from my sister but no, we will not be here in five years' time – it is very expensive – \$1700 per month. It is very hard to search – all very expensive. We had not much information before we came – only through my sister and Immigration.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 42)

*Before we came here to Australia and when we spoke to our relatives, they always mentioned the positive things here in Australia and they never mentioned the negative things like the high rental rates and the huge money amount of gas and electricity bills, but in spite of that if anybody asks me where you would like to live I will never hesitate and I will say Australia.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, ages 60 and 56)

Newly arrived refugee families have a steep learning curve to navigate the landscape of their new lives. As well as coping with false information circulating about rent and house prices, there is a need for financial literacy to enable borrowing from banks for families who want to buy their own house.

Unlike other countries in Europe where Syrian-conflict refugees are settled into a town or city and their welfare and other rights depend on them remaining in that place, in Australia refugee families are free to move from their initial settlement location at will. There are no internal passports in Australia. Geographic mobility is thus one important dimension of refugee family settlement in Australia. One family in metropolitan Vic had originally been placed in Brisbane; another metropolitan family were considering moving to a regional area:

*Our daughter migrated to Australia twenty years ago and she is married and living with her family in Melbourne metro area and we were in contact since then, so we had prior knowledge to arrival about Melbourne and Australia in general. I feel very safe in the community at the local suburb, however I am thinking to move to the countryside in Victoria to open a small Syrian restaurant, with my oldest son – Melbourne already has lots of Middle Eastern restaurants. But we are not in a financial position to relocate to the countryside. At the countryside I have more opportunity to learn English a lot quicker because there is less Arabs in those areas. I'm so happy – I'm safe and I have electricity and lights 24 hours a day!*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 66)

*Our family left, first, to Lebanon where we stayed for more than one year living in a rental property before being granted a Humanitarian Visa, subclass 200, to come to Australia. During that period in Lebanon, I was able only to do some very limited paid works of mosaic iconography. The family, first, came to Brisbane where we stayed for about one month. Then we moved to Melbourne, firstly, because of the very humid climate in Brisbane, which we could hardly tolerate, and also because we know some people and have some relatives in Melbourne who we expect to help in finding jobs in future. In Melbourne, with the help of church and friends, we stayed first in Campbellfield, then moved to [where we are now].*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 51)

Regional settlement or re-settlement of refugee families has become increasingly important in Australia in recent years following the Syrian-conflict intake. Accordingly, in NSW, Qld and Victoria we have included refugee families living in both metropolitan and regional areas. Some refugee families who were settled in regional Vic had expected to be settled in metropolitan Vic:

*Our family were surprised immediately after arriving in Australia that we are going to be settled in [regional Victoria] not Melbourne as we were told before. We spent at least two days, after arrival, feeling as lost as we could not understand what to do and how we, at least, can contact our families who were still in Lebanon... Otherwise, I was fascinated by the beautiful and clean town, safety and with all other services like, always available electricity and clean water through the tap – all those were missed due to war circumstance in our home country and in Lebanon.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)



Despite the popular impression that housing supply is easier to find and cheaper in regional than in metropolitan areas, some refugee families in [this area] reported that they had trouble finding suitable and affordable accommodation:

*One important problem I hope to be resolved is regarding the difficulty in finding a suitable house for renting.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*We and many other families in [this area] do suffer from finding homes for renting, because the landlords do not prefer to give their premises to tenants who have many children, big families, and on Centrelink payment. So, most of those families still stay in small houses which do not fit their families.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

*I hope that renting suitable houses becomes easier, as our house is too small – only two rooms and a living room for our family which consists of nine members. All similar families find very tough difficulties in finding suitable houses as the landlords hardly agree to give their premises to large family, especially who are on Centrelink payment.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

Since many Syrian and Iraqi refugee families lived in large cities prior to displacement, being placed in regional Australia was a cultural shock for some of them, but they generally grew to like the location and were much happier:

*Both me and my wife like [this area] very much. It is peaceful and simple like us, quiet, beautiful nature, and its people are friendly; although I used to live and work in large and busy cities like Aleppo, and many friends advised me to start my job in Melbourne where I may grasp much more worthwhile opportunities as a skilful food-maker. But we feel quite peaceful in [this area].*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*In the beginning, I felt isolated, the place is too quiet as I used to live in busy city near noisy streets. Then I adapted and become to like the quiet places.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 38)

*In the beginning, we felt distressed due to wide changes in most of our life elements – the weather, time between day and night, the language, missing our relatives and friends. Later, we started to adapt with our new life and became more and more happier.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 35)

Most refugee families in Victoria, like those in NSW and Qld, who settled in regional cities and towns, enjoyed living in them and wanted to stay, provided that they could find a job there. Nevertheless, some indicated that they intended to move to a city, mostly for more employment opportunities:

*In the beginning, I faced a lot of difficulties as I found myself and my family isolated in [a small town], while the others were taken to [a large town nearby]. It took some time to understand the geography, then things improved – especially after having a car and becoming more familiar with the suburb. Before coming, we had no relatives or friends in Australia. However, me and my family arrived in combination with other relatives including my father-in-law family and a brother-in-law family, which the wives are sisters. But all the other families have recently left to live in Melbourne in hope to find job there. I expect myself to leave for Melbourne one time for finding a work as I will have much higher chance in finding a work with an Arabic speaker employer where I can minimise the need for English as I expect.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

*We have no idea about this area. We did not choose it. It's a nice and quiet area. But we might change it and move to Melbourne because we don't have opportunity to find work here. Also, we heard that the school in Melbourne are better than the ones here.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 43)

*After arriving, I found Australia very beautiful country and I am very happy to be here. As I have descended from a rural culture in my homeland, I found [this town] very charming and attractive, it is quiet, full of green, farms biodiversity and fresh air. Unfortunately, now the work requirements look like leading me to Sydney, which is a very crowded, busy and noisy city.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

*We had no idea about the area. We came here through UN, and AMES put us here. We are not sure we will continue here because the opportunity to find a job here is very limited. So we are intending to move to Melbourne. I like the area though – it's quiet and good to raise up my kids. Also, we have many families from my culture.*

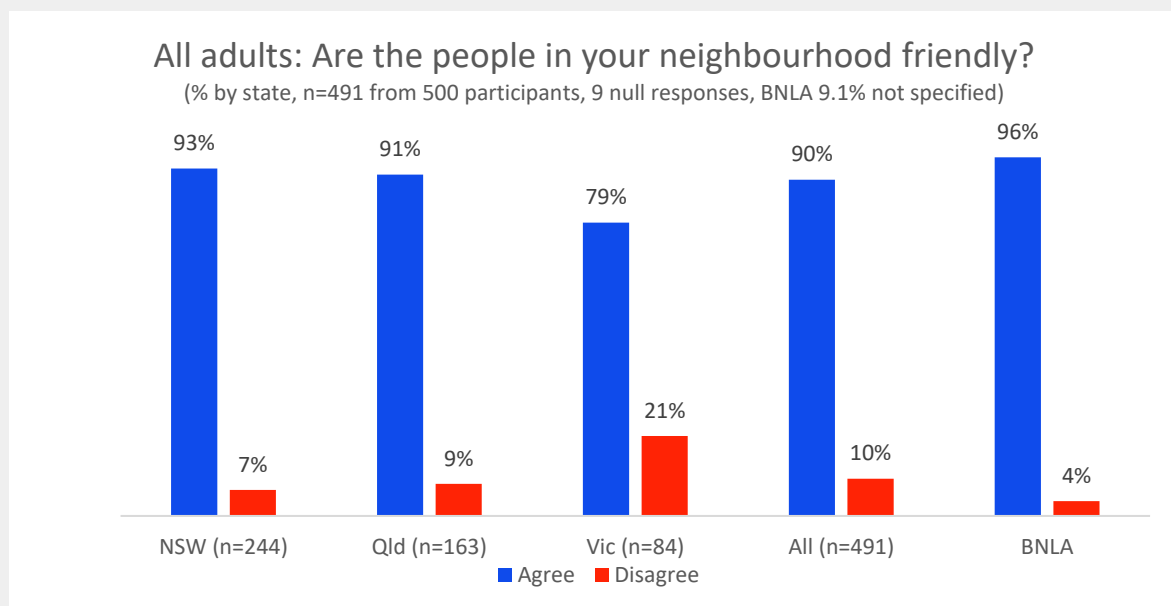
(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 38)

### Warmth of the Welcome:

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 neighbours. We refer to this as the *warmth of the welcome*. Here issues related to the warmth of the welcome by – and the social interaction of refugees with – locals and 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. Moreover, refugee settlement has been a highly politicised issue in Australia, particularly since the Children Overboard issue that was prominent in the 2001 Federal election (Marr and Wilkinson 2003, Nakhoul 2011). At the same time post 9/11 there has been a strong anti-Muslim or Islamophobic discourse in the political and public arena (Inner ed. 2017, 2019). Despite this our research has found that most refugee families feel welcome in Australia.

**Figure 6.2.5: Adults in all states: are the people in your neighbourhood friendly?**

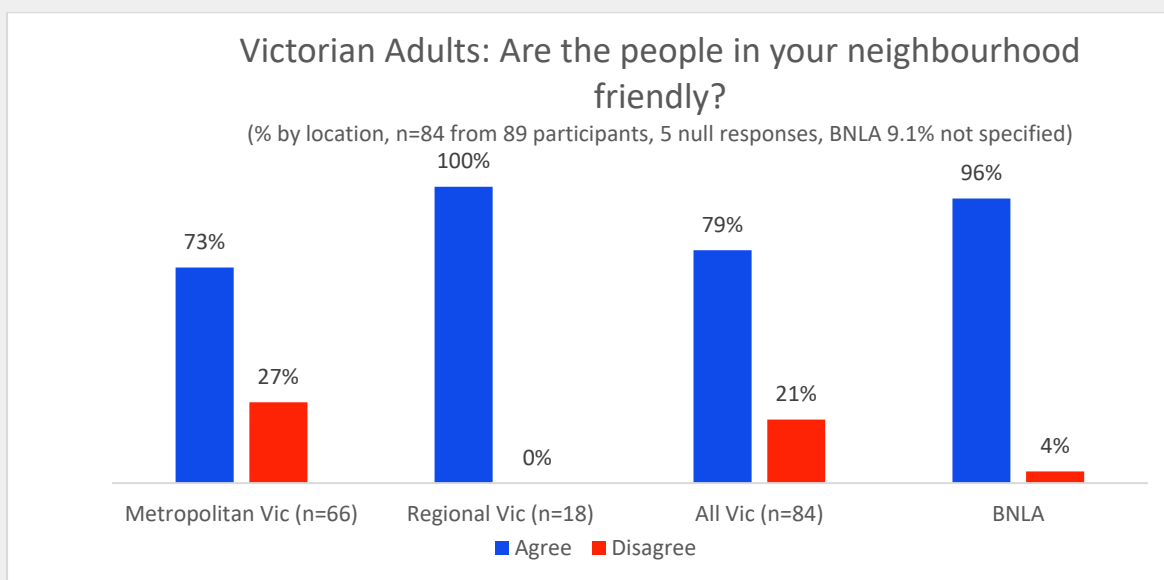


As Figure 6.2.5 shows, the overwhelming majority of the newly arrived refugees have a warm welcome from their neighbours. According to the indicators describing the survey population, NSW informants reported the highest level of friendliness (92.3%), followed closely by Qld (90.3%). These settlement outcomes compare favourably to those found in the BnLA where 87.3 per cent of refugees felt that the people in their neighbourhood were friendly. The friendliness level reported in Victoria was a little less, but still almost four in five informants (79%) reported friendly neighbours. This is a very strong and positive indicator about the capacity and willingness of Victorians to take in humanitarian immigrants and provide them and their families the opportunity for a new life and future. It should be noted

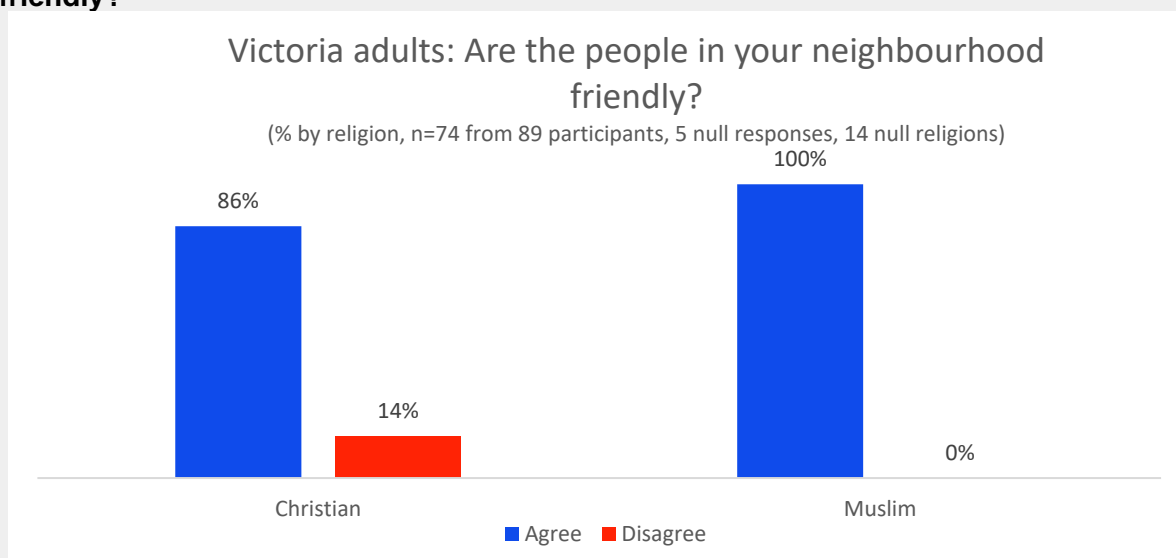
that the number of informants who participated in the fieldwork in Victoria (84) was substantially lower than in either NSW (244 informants) or Qld (163 informants).

Looking at the survey results in Victoria more closely (Figures 6.2.6 and 6.2.7), the only informants (all of whom were Christian) who disagreed that people in their neighbourhood were friendly (27%) were located in metropolitan areas of Vic. Nevertheless, these numbers were relatively small. As mentioned above, most adults – almost four in five – felt welcomed by their neighbours, while all Muslim refugee families we interviewed in Victoria reported friendly neighbours (Figure 6.2.7). All of those refugees in regional Vic thought that their neighbours were friendly. This supports NSW and Queensland findings that regional Australia is particularly welcoming to new refugee families.

**Figure 6.2.6: Victoria adults, by location: are the people in your neighbourhood friendly?**



**Figure 6.2.7: Victoria adults, by religion: 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 Victoria from the interviews that we conducted with them. To quote some of our refugee informants in this regard:

*From my first day in [this area], I felt myself as quite welcome from the neighbours. The neighbours were very polite and kind with me and my family. On the first day, one Australian neighbour knocked on our door and welcome us and offered us to help whenever we need. I am satisfied and quite happy regarding my neighbours.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 35)

*My relations with the neighbours, who are all locals, are very good. The nearest one visited us soon after we arrived and her husband helped us with some gardening works. Now I and my family stay [in an area outside town] sharing with the others in [town] the different social activities, especially those with the Uniting Church.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

*I felt welcome from the neighbours from different backgrounds and I was able to develop good relations which helped me later in establishing my small business.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*I was very lucky as my parental family and my sister family came with me to the same place. I find the neighbours are kind, polite and friendly, and I feel very happy to be [near the town]. However, now my parent's family and my sister family moved to Melbourne. We also have now the other Syrian families who came with us to [this area].*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 38)

*We have met some neighbours – nice people from Iraq. My sister lives in Melbourne and my cousin in Perth. My husband's family lives back home.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 42)

*We have no idea about the area. We just know that Australia is helping Syria and it's a good and safe place to live. We are lucky to live in this area and have such friendly neighbours. All my family is in Syria. We contact them through social media. Sometimes I feel down and sometimes I feel happy to see my family is safe and my children are happy.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 33)

*I like this suburb – houses are nice, especially now Christmas time – they put Christmas decorations which we didn't used to have in Syria. Life is okay – there are no problems, very friendly people. The best thing is feeling safe, for my kids.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 39)

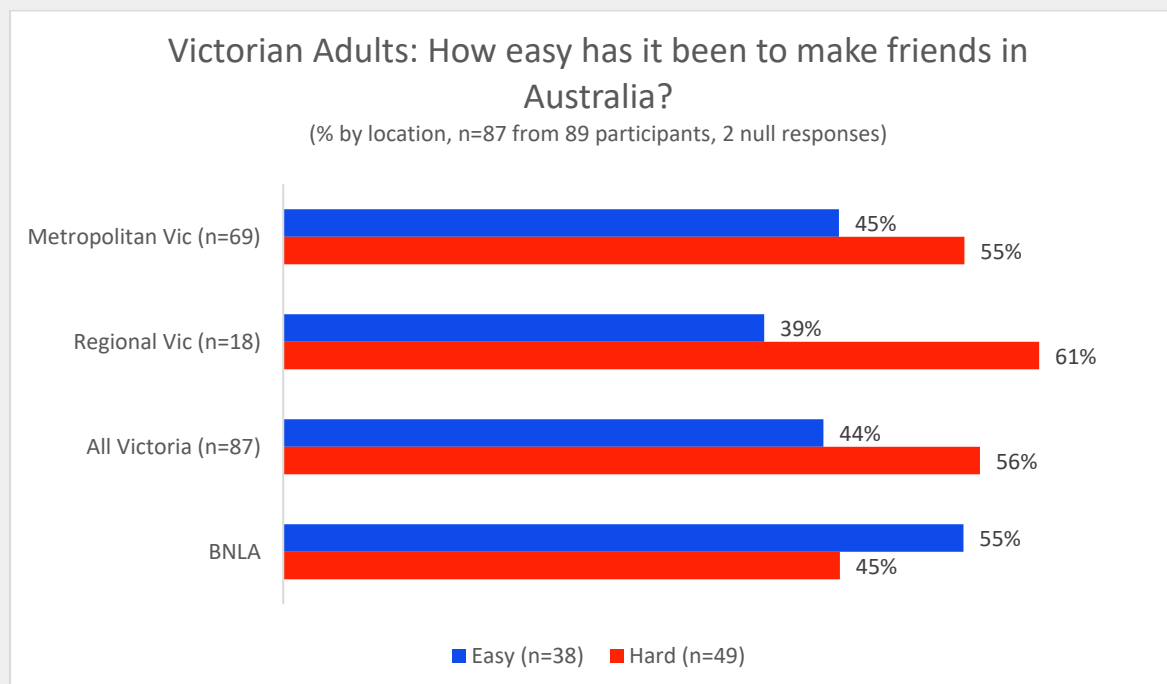
*We don't have a lot of friends in Australia. I have one friend who was my neighbour in Lebanon. My brothers and cousin are in Sydney.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 43)

Given that the refugee issue has been so controversial in Australian politics for the past two decades the finding that almost four in five informants in the city and every informant in the more remote region felt that their neighbours were friendly speaks to the openness of the Australian people to refugees from the Middle East. Moreover, the strength of the welcome to refugees in regional Vic puts to rest the notion that the Australian bush is red neck and racist to people from minority linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds. It is a strong finding about the way that people in Victoria and other parts of Australia can transcend political differences in their daily lives.

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. Making friends takes time – BNLA data suggests that half of refugees who had been in Australia for three years still find it difficult to make friends (Figure 6.2.8). Adult refugees surveyed in Victoria reported having similar difficulties making friends. On the other hand, almost half of our informants did find it easy to make friends.

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



Comments from the informants in Victoria show that some made friends easily, and extended their social networks, often through their local Church. Others found social life in Australia different to back home – the elderly, in particular, found it difficult to socialise outside the home. These are just a sample of their comments:

*We are very happy and feeling safe in [this town]. We find it a beautiful and quiet town. We are happy in our neighbourhood, our neighbours are very kind and polite. But relations with them are limited to greeting words and some friendly limited conversations. We have never faced any racist or offensive behaviour. But we generally feel that we are welcome and we appreciate these good attitudes from the local inhabitants. Sometimes I do some volunteering work, gardening, to a nearby church where I have one friend there. We share in some community activities especially those organised by Uniting Church, like lectures and trips.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 37)

*Our relationship with the neighbours is good, no problem in the neighbourhood. I attend most of the community activities and also with Uniting Church, especially those focusing on women affairs. However I strongly agree with my husband, that he feels sometimes as if he is being treated according to what come in the TV news... And he is very sorry about some people who commit assaults and harm the reputation of the others who are from the same background.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)

*I feel happy and optimistic for future. I know what I did, and always plan carefully for every step I do in my life. I like the place where I live and I have developed a group of friends – most of them are from different cultures. Beside the other family members, I have an uncle, and many friends who I meet after coming to Australia.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 36)

*We have a large community of family and friends living in the same suburb. We feel no loneliness at all. We do not have relatives anywhere other than Syria and Australia. We were also able to build up a lot of new friends from different backgrounds.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*I am generally happy, but I suffer from social isolation. In Australia, he have an uncle and I started developing some friends, from those who I meet in different churches. I have extended family in Canada and Holland.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 38)

*I feel very safe in his suburb and will continue living in the same area, however I wish to have more interactions with the neighbours. I am living with my wife and 8 months daughter. My parents and a younger sister are in Melbourne. I go to a church, speaking Arabic, and I made lots of friends through church from different Arabic countries. Life in Australia is a lot harder than what I thought pre arrival.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 37)

*Generally, I am happy in the place where I have settled... I consider myself and my family members as very social and positive-responding people... However, I and my family find it very difficult to make friends from different background in the neighbourhood... We have some already-known friends beside some limited relatives in Australia. But, I was able to make a lot of friends through the church where I am very active, and sharing in most activities, and also doing some volunteering work to the church.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 51)

*Although I am happy living in this suburb, I am still missing my old friends and the rich social life in my homeland. Otherwise, I enjoy sport playing grounds in my new life, which is much more than Syria, especially I enjoy gymnastic game which is common here in Australia. Here, in Australia, I have a good group of friends, most of them from different backgrounds – communicating in English. We go in different activities together like trips, and playing sport, but it still cannot satisfy the same strong and long-lasting friendship I left behind in Syria, and I believe it almost looks too hard to have the same deep friendship like before. Now I have a girlfriend from the same background who - we both decided to build our own life together.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 23)

*People here – they not visiting each other as much, there is no social life, we feel we are isolated; me and my wife stay home most of the times or depending on my daughter or son, which they are working, to take us somewhere.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 76)

*It's safe multi cultured suburb. I am not going out much as I am old, but my daughter-in-law take me out sometimes on my wheelchair. People seem friendly and caring.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 91)

*It's a safe multi cultured suburb, close to everything. But social life is different here in Australia, not much communication with neighbours. I am a single mum (divorced) and I have my daughter, 7 years.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 31)



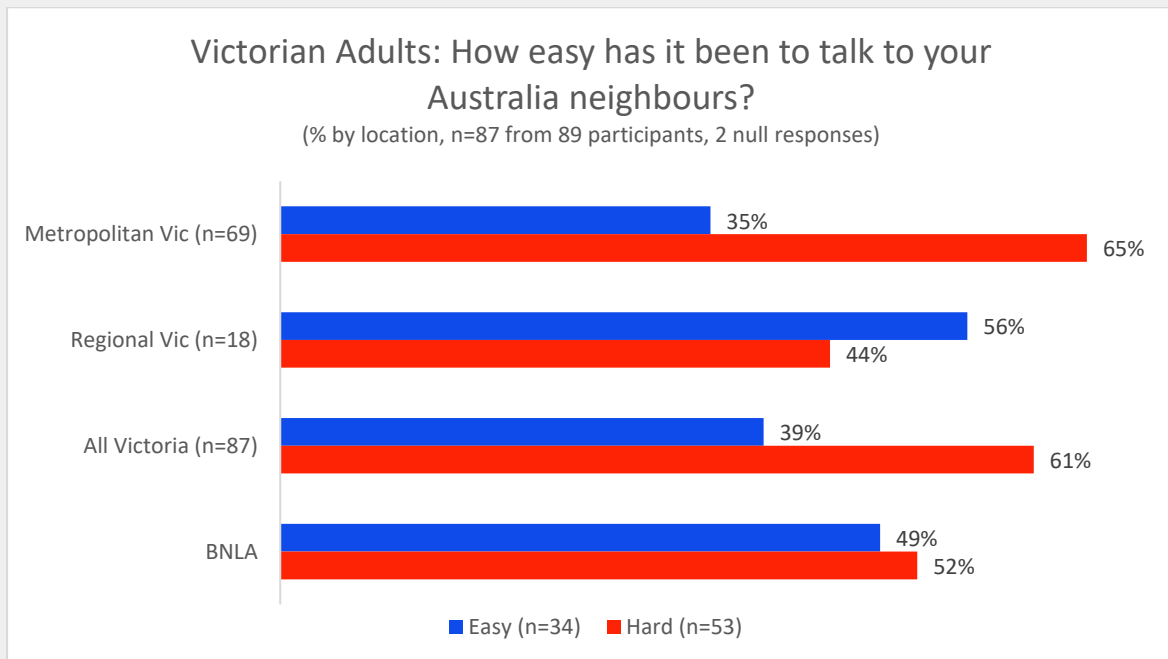
*Socially, I suffer from isolation and the very poor social relationship with my neighbours, as, although they look kind and very safe, there is no socialisation more than saying “Hi”. There is no Arabic speakers around us and no local community programs to help in breaking my isolation. We need some cultural-oriented community and social activities to help in breaking social isolation.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

*I am happy generally, but still consider the socialisation with the neighbours as a “zero”. I feel continuous improving in my general social relationship and in my general approach to the Australian communities.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 56)

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



Another way of looking at the social integration of refugees in Victoria relates to how easy it is for them to talk to their Australian neighbours. As Figure 6.2.9 shows, refugees found this more difficult: the indicators for the survey population in Victoria show that only 39% of refugees on average found it ‘easy’. By comparison, the national BNLA survey 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 again be 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 Victoria 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 or non-immigrants in this regard.

Some informants living in the metropolitan area, most being of working age, said that they try to talk to their neighbours but their neighbours are too busy. This could be a reflection of the fast pace of life in the metropolis, compared to the quieter life in regional Vic. Moreover, informants in metropolitan Vic often socialised with nearby family, or friends who they had met on their journey. Here are the views of some living in both metropolitan and regional areas:

*In our suburb there's no communication with neighbors – everyone busy with his life.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 44)

*I prefer living in Syria as there they communicate, visit each other, but here every one is busy.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 43)

*My family came and settled in the area. I do not like the suburb I live in and do not want to continue living here. Because I am a refugee, I do not feel any sense of belonging. The majority of my family are back in Syria and I have friends in Sydney and Queensland. I am not very happy about my life here and am always feeling stressed. I thought it was going to be more advanced, however, I blame that on the fact that 90% of the people who live in Hume area are of Syrian or Iraqi background and they have formed their own communities instead of expanding out.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 34)

*Coming to Australia was a dream came true. I never thought my life will change to better. Living in this suburb very nice. I think we have all our needs and I'm more than happy to be here. I have big group of friend from the city that I came from and I know all of them, so it's make me so happy. And I have my cousin too.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 26)

*We have lots of friends in Melbourne and we are in contact all the time. 800 people from our hometown are living in Melbourne. We are happy at our current place and we feel safe 100%. We will continue living at the same suburb because all our needs are met and we have a good social network, however we don't communicate with our neighbours due to our limited English language skills.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, ages 67 and 65)

*The only thing that I don't like about this area – there are too many people from the Middle East living at the northern suburbs, and it limits my interaction with the wider community. I feel safe at my current area and we are well connected with the local community and have lots of friends – we attend the local church. I have a younger sister, an older brother, and our mother living in Melbourne.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 45)

*We settled here because of my and my wife's relatives. Excellent living conditions, but we never communicate with neighbors. I am close to retiring.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 60)

*The worst thing is not knowing the neighbours, but we know some neighbours from Iraq. I have a big family – my sister-in-law and friends – in Australia.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 54)

*My sister was here in Australia first. Also I have my mum, dad and two sisters and two brothers here in Australia – all are living in [this suburb]. I like the suburb – it's safe. We have family and friends inside and outside Australia, we are still in contact with them via Viber and Skype. Neighbours are okay but we have no communication with them.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 38)

*Our relations with the neighbours are very good and we become more than just "saying-hello relationship". This could mainly be due to one female Australian neighbour who had knocked on our door and did the same with the other Syrian families in the neighbourhood and invited the women to come to her house to teach them English, as a volunteer, for one hour a week. We are still on for five months. I am very happy to get an Australian driving license, and started driving the car alone.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*The neighbours are polite and kind. My family and I have very good relationship with neighbours from different backgrounds, not only "hi" or "good morning" but also, sometimes, prolonged conversations. We also share in many events and trips organised by Uniting [Church].*

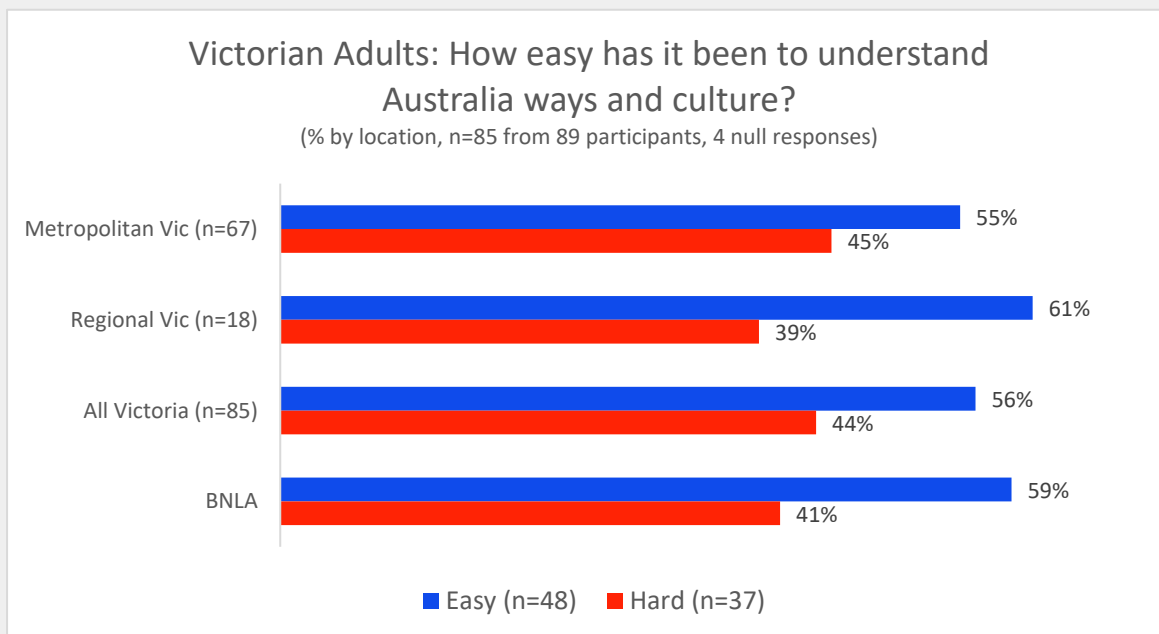
(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

*I am very happy regarding my neighbours who look nice and kind – but no real socialising. Only "hello, good morning".*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 36)

A further dimension of social integration and successful settlement of refugees relates to how easy it is for them to understand Australian ways. Australia is a foreign land to newly-arrived refugees. Like any country, Australia has its cultural idiosyncrasies that newcomers find different and sometimes difficult to understand and to adjust to. Many knew little about Australia – let alone Australian social mores – 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 Victoria average for the adult refugees that we surveyed is very close to this (56%).

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



Here is what informants in Victoria said about understanding Australian ways:

*In the first instance, soon after arriving, we felt fear, uncertain, and very concerned as strangers. We sustained a heavy psychological stress for several days. Later, we started digesting the situation and gradually we have adapted and felt much more comfortable by going to schools, shopping, picnics... We found the associated social services, especially those offered by the Uniting, are very helpful.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*I am very happy with my neighbours although the relationship would not exceed saying 'hello' or a few words, but I still feel welcome. Sometimes I may meet them in a community or public event where they show me friendliness. My family and I also share in all community activities, which look very helpful in making friends and understand the local culture.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 25)

*My sister-in-law migrated to Australia 16 years ago and we were sponsored by her to come to Australia. We are in contact with her and we have basic understanding about the lifestyle in Melbourne. Our settlement service provider case manager saw us only twice during the first year and I felt unsupported... I found the orientation sessions provided by AMES Australia very useful as I came from a country which has different rule and policies. I wish the service providers focus more on Australian laws especially for those who came from war zones where the law is absent. Furthermore, I found the job ready program very beneficial for me and I learnt a lot about the job market in Australia.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 37)

*We were happy to hear that we had been chosen to go to Australia as we heard a lot about the advantages of living in Australia. After arriving in Australia, we found the life is completely different from we used to have in our home country, but we were able to adapt relatively quickly. So, generally, I found Australia even much better than my expectations, but I severely miss my parental family, work and social lives we left behind... We do not really have any relatives or real friends in Australia before coming here, only some people who know us long time ago or sharing same friends or relatives in Syria, but we were able to make good friends later.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

*I am very happy here as a suburb and a quarter, and all the family are fascinated by the life in Australia. I especially admire the health care, social security, equity, the secular style of living, education and many other things.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*Like my other family members, I am happy in this suburb and really enjoying living in Australia. We are all fascinated by the Australian life-style and are able to adapt well between our own culture and the new life.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 21)

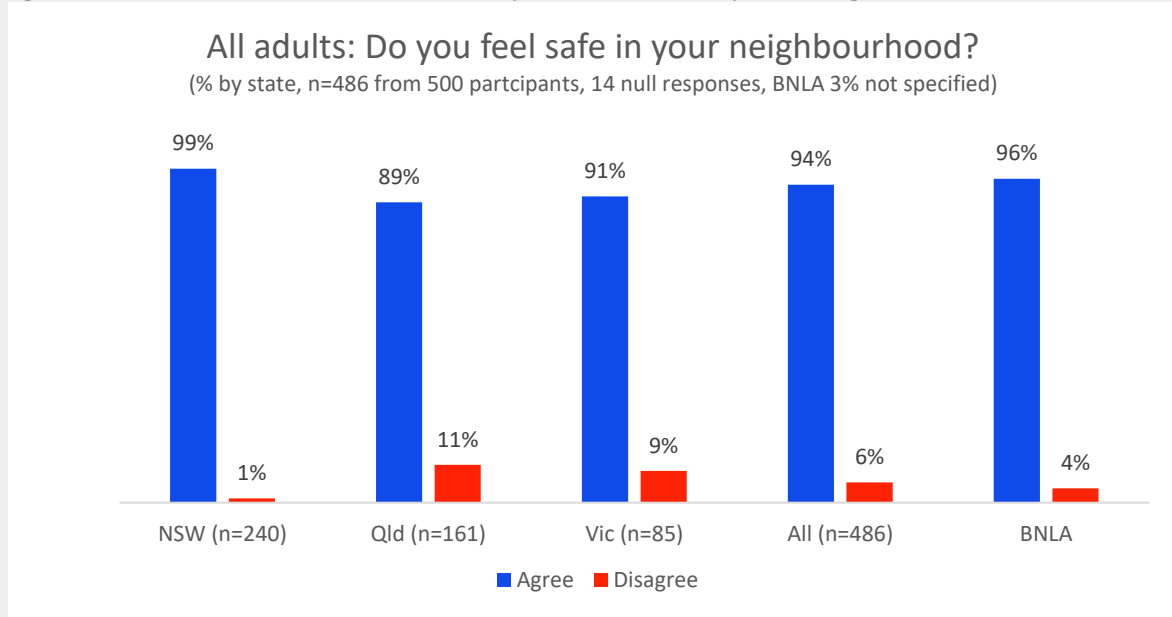
*We have many relatives and friends in Australia, as well as my wife's uncle who lives in Melbourne and recommended Australia as a good place to live in. My family still in Syria. The area is not great but has many relatives who might support us. Here I am not very happy. It's totally different life here. And I am struggling to find a job and learning English. I am looking for any job.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 33)

## Safety

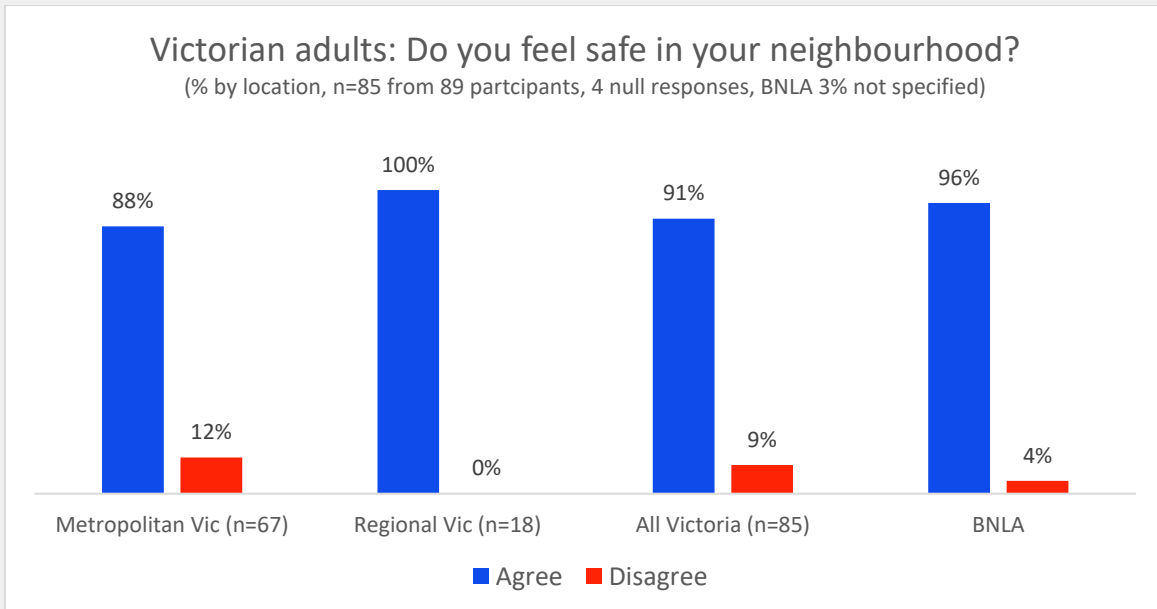
All the Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugee families had experienced great trauma before and after their displacement from their homeland, though our fieldwork did not probe these experiences because we did not want them to revisit this trauma and were interested in what has happened to them after they have settled in Australia. 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. While many refugee families knew little about Australia when they decided to come here, they hoped that it would be a safe haven where they would be freed from the persecution and fear of daily life that they experienced in their homeland. Figure 6.2.11 compares the extent to which refugees who have settled in Victoria felt safe compared to refugees in other states. The results are strong, with all states showing similar results - **nine out of ten refugee adults feel safe where they live**. The average response, where 94 per cent of adult refugees in the three Eastern States felt safe, was only slightly lower than the result in the national BNLA survey (96%).

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



Within Victoria, one in ten refugees living in metropolitan Vic did not feel safe in their neighbourhood (Figures 6.2.12 and 6.2.13). On the other hand, all of those living in regional Vic – all being Muslim – felt safe. Where people had moved to a house in a different location, the perception of safety was a factor.

**Figure 6.2.12: Victoria adults, by location: 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:

*I have been fascinated by [this area], as there are a lot of farms in it, and I feel it is the best and safest place for me and to raise up my family. I like the people here and find them rather kind and friendly. I have not been exposed to any kind of racism or offensive behaviour against me, as a veiled lady, or my family members.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*My parents and sisters are in Syria. My brothers are in Lebanon. I do not have any relatives here. We just have some friends who we met here. I am happy because it's a safe place for my family.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 38)

*AMES helped us find the property we live in as a few of our applications for houses have been rejected. I feel safe in Australia. I just want my children to come here because they are very unsafe in Iraq. The suburb is nice but I barely leave the house as I am new to the area. I find living here safe and a better life for the future. It is ideal for my husband, as he is retiring.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 75)

*This is a beautiful suburb, safe and close to everything – the shopping centres. Our church is a bit far, as it's difficult for me to drive because of my age.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 76)

*We feel very safe in our suburb and will continue living in the same area, but we wish to have more interactions with the neighbours. We go to church and we have lots of friends.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, ages 67 and 65)

*We are very happy here in Australia, we can feel safe, freedom and bright future for our children.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 56)

*I like the suburb, it's safe... Neighbours are okay, but we have no communication with them.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 33)

*I am very happy to live here, at least it is safe here and I have my family around me.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 44)



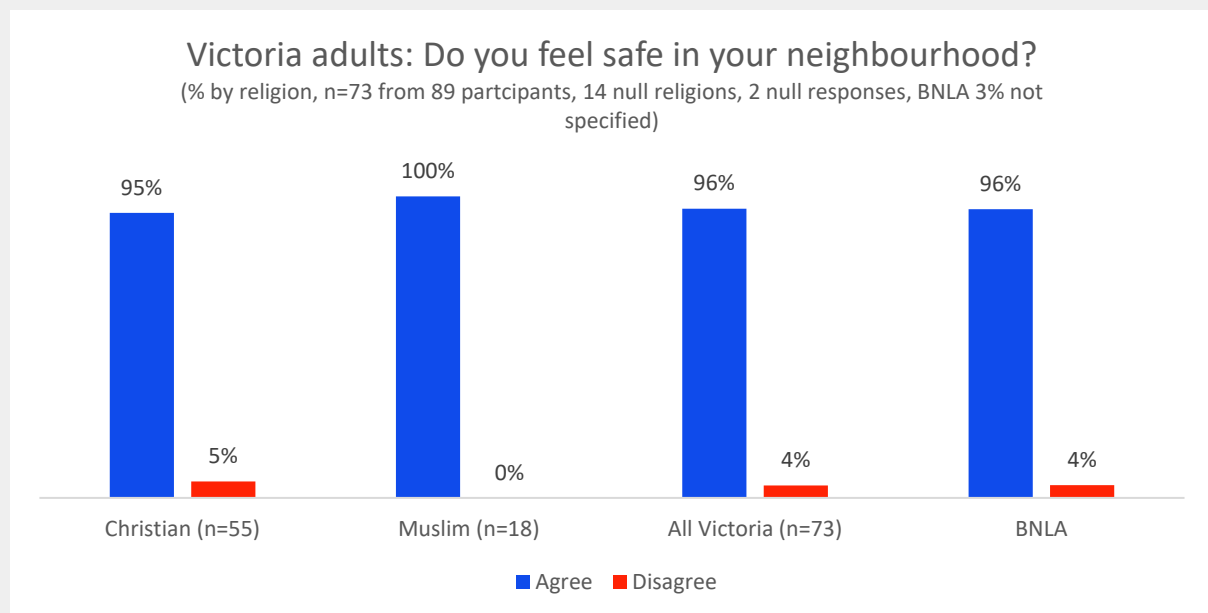
*We moved here only because of war with ISIS. It is safe in Australia. I have my mum here, my daughter and one friend. I am semi-satisfied with my life here.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 54)

*After we came here 2014, my parents were the reason I lived in this suburb, despite how insecure I felt. I don't like the area. I wish one day move from here. I don't communicate with anyone in this area – it is not safe and secure. Imagine that my dad used to take me to the station and pick me up... Sometimes I feel happy and sometimes not.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 24)

**Figure 6.2.13: Victoria adults, by religion: do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?**



As Figure 6.2.13 shows, being of the Islamic faith was not a significant factor impacting on the extent to which refugee adults in Victoria 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 Berry 2007). How do we reconcile these apparent contradictions? The answer is that both acceptance and hostility towards Muslim Australians occur: those who feel accepted also report racist experiences. This cosmopolitan contradiction is evident in the experiences of one Muslim female refugee we interviewed in regional Vic:

*Generally, we are happy regarding the place where we have settled in, but I feel strange and cannot overcome these feelings. I was exposed twice to racist actions as I am a veiled Muslim woman: first time, while shopping, somebody swore at me, and the next one, some people raised a signboard where they wrote “No Muslims in this country”... I really want to ... become a useful person in this community who generously helped my family.*

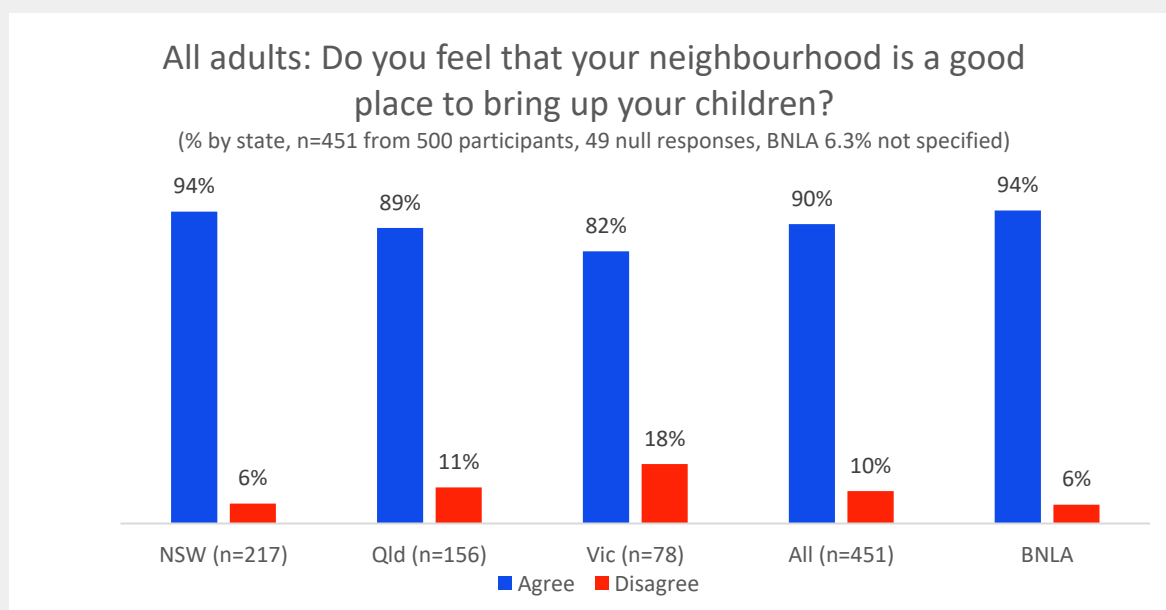
(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 32)

## 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 one motivation to come to Australia as wanting to provide a safe environment to bring up their children. One of their main concerns was that their children have a successful and fulfilling life in Australia. 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 6.2.14 shows, an overwhelming majority of the adult survey population – nine out of ten – agreed that their neighbourhood 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. The slightly smaller number in Victoria – four out of five adults who agreed – could reflect the smaller sample size in that state (78).

**Figure 6.2.14: Adults in all states: is your neighbourhood a good place to bring up your children?**



Within Victoria, again it appears that all of the parents who disagreed about their neighbourhood being a good place for their children lived in metropolitan areas (Figure 6.2.15). It became clear in the metropolitan locations that parents fear losing their children, as they become Australian and give up conservative traditions. The politics of reputation impacts on young women; and there is potential for violence since parents cannot control their children, especially boys. One woman expressed her relief at being placed away from city life:

*When we were registered with the UN as refugees, we were nominated by the Australian Embassy in Lebanon to be settled in Australia. I was very worried and officially refused this nomination because many relatives and friends there advise me against, arguing that I will lose my control on my children early and that could be devastating for my children later. But later my family were offered humanitarian visas and we shifted to Australia where we settled in [this area]. After arriving, I feel better and find the town and the community are very nice, but I still worry regarding my children to be lost in this western culture.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

One woman living in metropolitan Vic was clearly not happy with the area where she lived, but her disappointment in regard to her children was expressed mostly in terms of their inability to find employment:

*After we came here we searched many houses randomly. It was very hard to find a house. At the end we chose this house. We don't want to continue at this house because I didn't like the area. I have only one neighbour – she is Indian. I would like to find other house to live peacefully and find all the services around me easily. Sometimes I felt unhappy and disappointed because I became sick – I have severe pain in my back. My son is not happy – he doesn't find any work because he wants to build his future and marry. My daughter was studying dentistry in her second year, now everything changed – the university didn't accept her, she should start from the beginning. I have it hard to her to see all her dreams destroyed. I tried to encourage her but she needs seven years to study and to find job.*

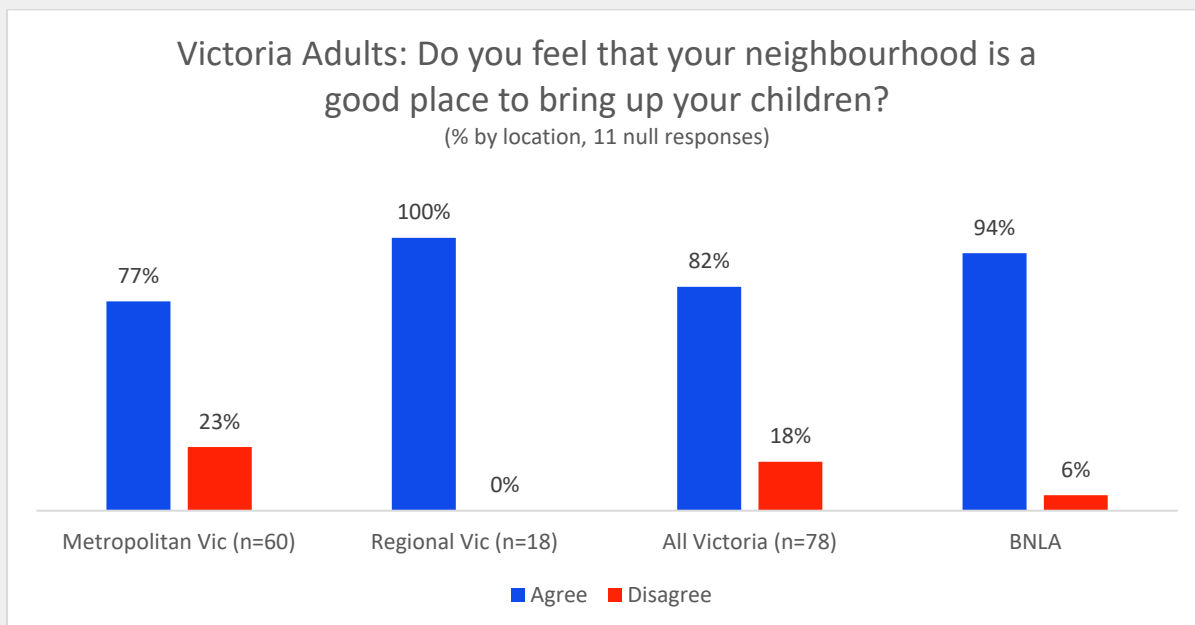
(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 61)

Nevertheless, the majority of those in metropolitan Vic were happy to bring up their children there:

*It is nice [here], especially this time – Christmas. People around us seem friendly, it's a quiet suburb and seems safe for our kids. That's why we fled from our country, this is the main reason: safe life and future for the kids.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 35)

**Figure 6.2.15: Victoria adults, by location: 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 6.2.16: Adults in all states: does your neighbourhood have good schools?**

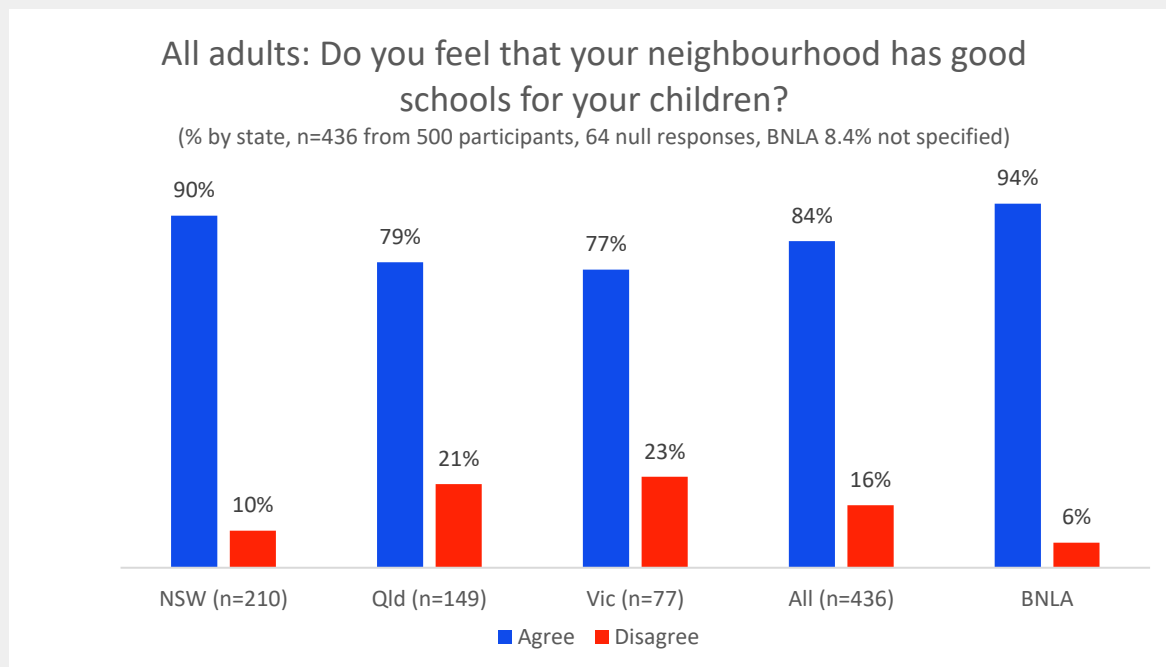
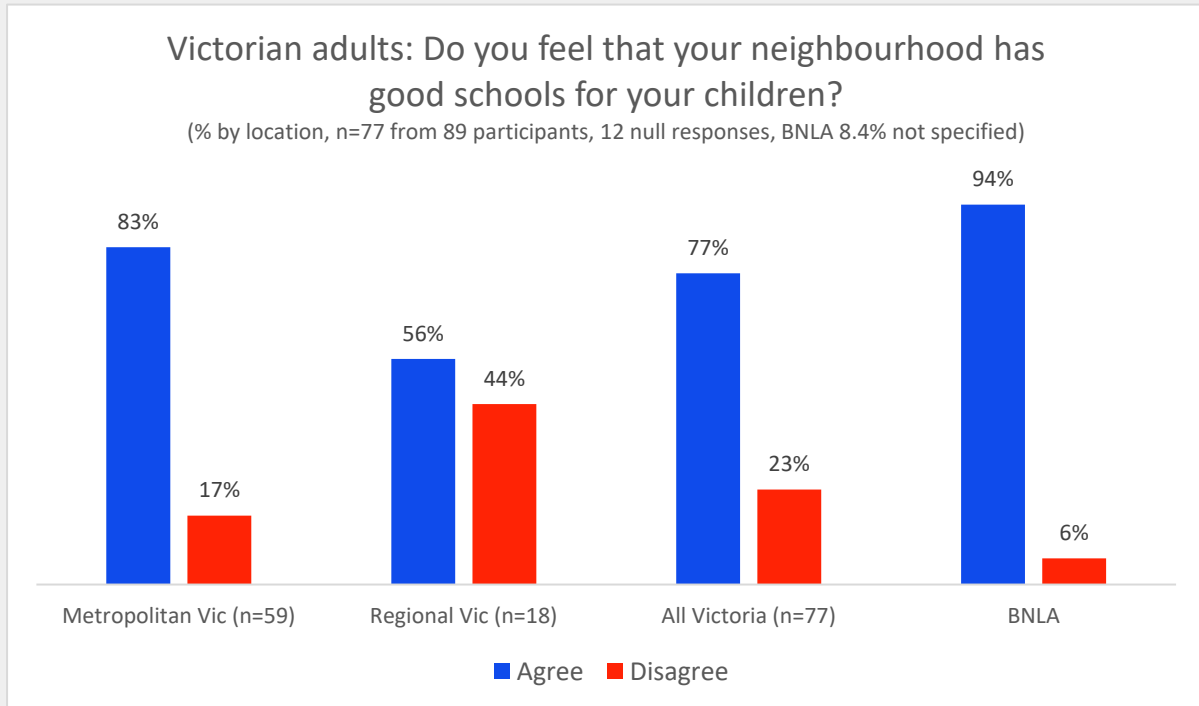


Figure 6.2.16 shows that four out of five parents surveyed were happy with schools in their neighbourhood (84%), less than the number surveyed in the BNLA study (94%). Adults in Victoria and Queensland had similar results to one another. When locations of settlement within Victoria are considered (Figure 6.2.17), it appears that regional Vic was less strong

than metropolitan Vic in providing school education, according to the adult refugee informants. In regional Vic six out of ten parents (56%) were happy with the standard of education in local schools, compared to four in five metropolitan Vic parents (83%). However, results from regional Vic may be skewed due to the small number of informants responding to this question there (18).

**Figure 6.2.17: Victoria adults: does your neighbourhood have good schools?**



One perceived deficiency in regional Vic was the lack of a university in the area. This is consistent with other research that suggests that a key factor in the retention of immigrants to regional Australia is the lack of tertiary education opportunities there: when the children get to university age, many families plan to move to metropolitan areas (Collins et al 2016). Moreover, the problems finding suitable rental accommodation (mentioned above) meant that schools could be distant:

*I heard that there is a plan to establish a university in [this area], I hope this university will be ready before my children reach the tertiary education in order to study in [this area]... [The shortage of housing causes] families to stay in their homes which are [sometimes] far from their children's schools.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

On the other hand, most parents in regional Vic were happy with their children's school. One woman described her experience with the local school and other facilities:

*We have especially been impressed by the sincere help and the courtesy we met in many hospitals and similar facilities we referred, as I have delivered a baby here, and also attended with my husband. That was even much more than what I would have in my own country or between my family. Also, I appreciate the very good treatment I had from other facilities like TAFE, children’s schools, Centrelink and the others.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 34)

Some parents in metropolitan Vic mentioned the proximity of schools to their homes:

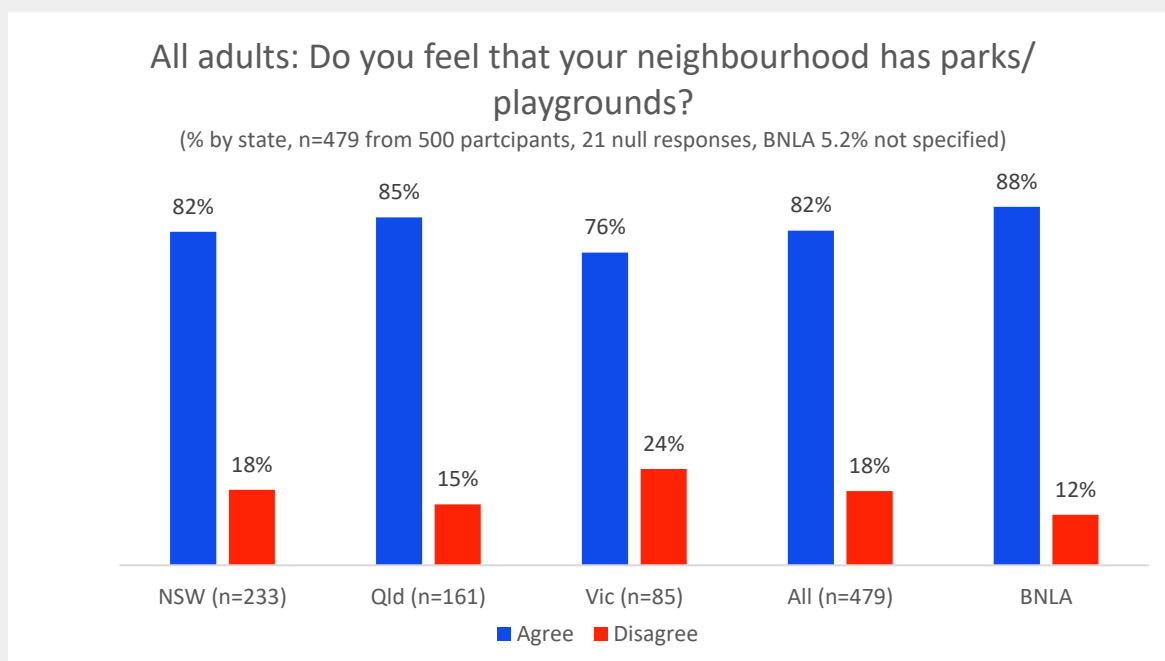
*[This suburb] it’s a nice suburb and where we living, it’s quiet and safe, close to the shopping centre and the other facilities and to the kids’ school. At the moment I like to stay here. But, no communication with neighbours because of the English barrier.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 46)

*Where we are living is quiet and safe, close to school for the children. We like to stay here.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

**Figure 6.2.18: Adults in all states: does your neighbourhood have parks or playgrounds?**



Another aspect of the satisfaction of refugees with their neighbourhood in Victoria related to the provision of parks or playgrounds for their children to access outside of school times, to play sport and enjoy other outdoor social activities with family and friends. Figure 6.2.18 shows that parents settling in all Australian eastern states reported that their local area did have these facilities.

Informants from both the metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas enjoyed parks:

*First, at arriving, we were in fear from feeling very strange. However, very soon, I met an Afghani food shop and another Arabic one very near of my home. I also met many Syrian families, most of them came at the same time where we started meeting each other regularly and created many activities together like soccer teams for all, women and men, trips for nearby parks... Soon, we found we become very happy and enjoyed living here. I also share in many social activities through the local community especially with the Uniting Church. This including educational sessions, picnics, parties...*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*It is very good living in this suburb, I like it. Very happy. The best thing is the parks for my kids. There is nothing bad.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 42)

*It's a safe multicultural suburb, close to everything: public transport, parks and shopping centres.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 46)

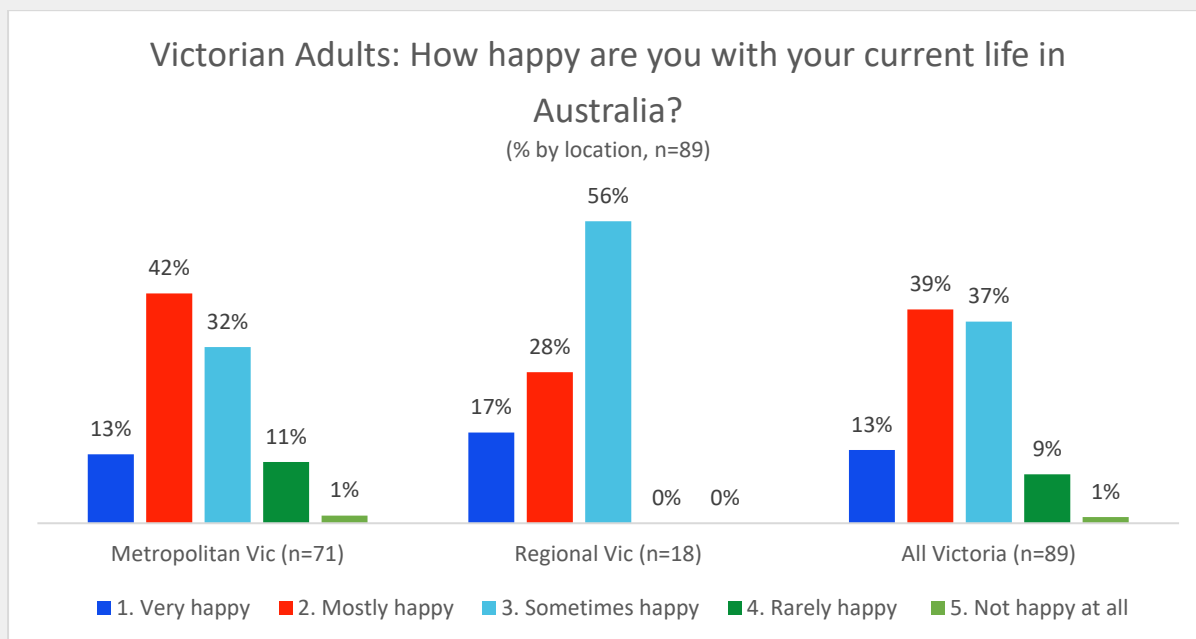
*We've settled in and we are looking to continue living here in future. It is fun to live here, cool and quiet, well serviced and full of parks. Neighbours are friendly and helpful.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 42)

### **Overall satisfaction of life in Australia**

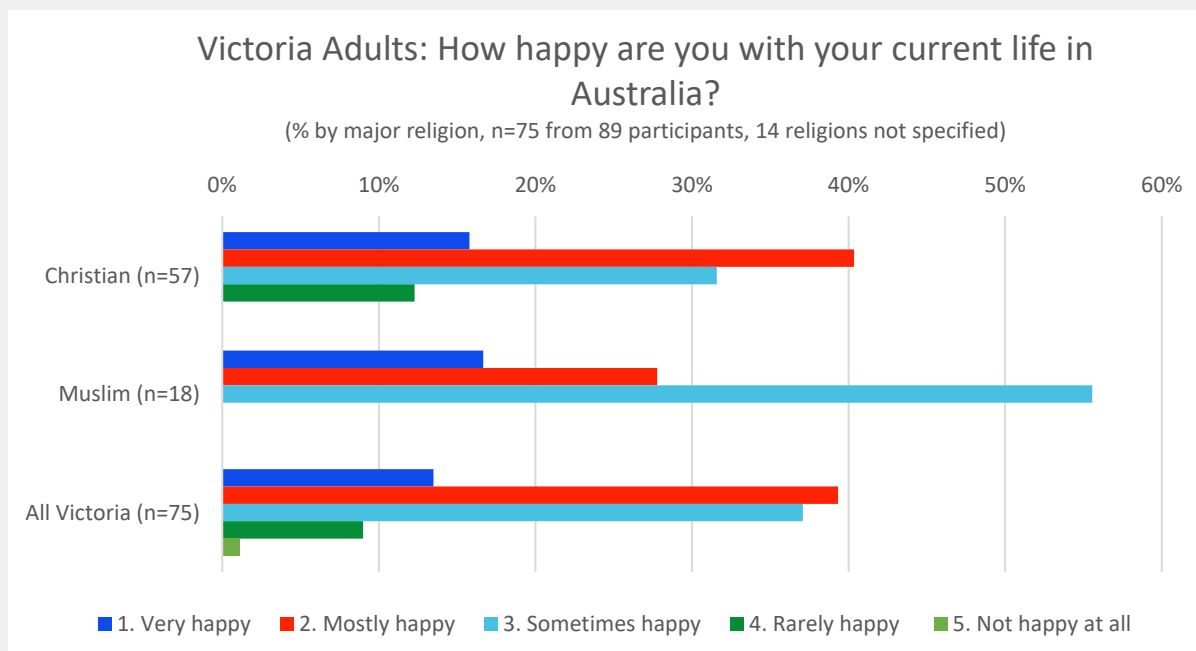
In the previous section we reported on many aspects of settlement outcomes for refugee families (adults and children) who we interviewed and surveyed for this research project. To see how these different aspects of settlement balance out in the minds of the refugees themselves we asked a final question: 'how happy are you with your current life in Australia?' As Figure 6.2.19 shows, of the survey population in Victoria, almost nine in ten (89%) of refugees were 'sometimes', 'mostly' or 'very happy' living in Victoria. This is a strong indication that despite the great suffering and trauma that these refugees have experienced in their family life, refugee settlement in their new home in Victoria is judged to be a success from the eyes of the refugees themselves.

**Figure 6.2.19: Victoria adults, by location: how happy are you with your current life?**

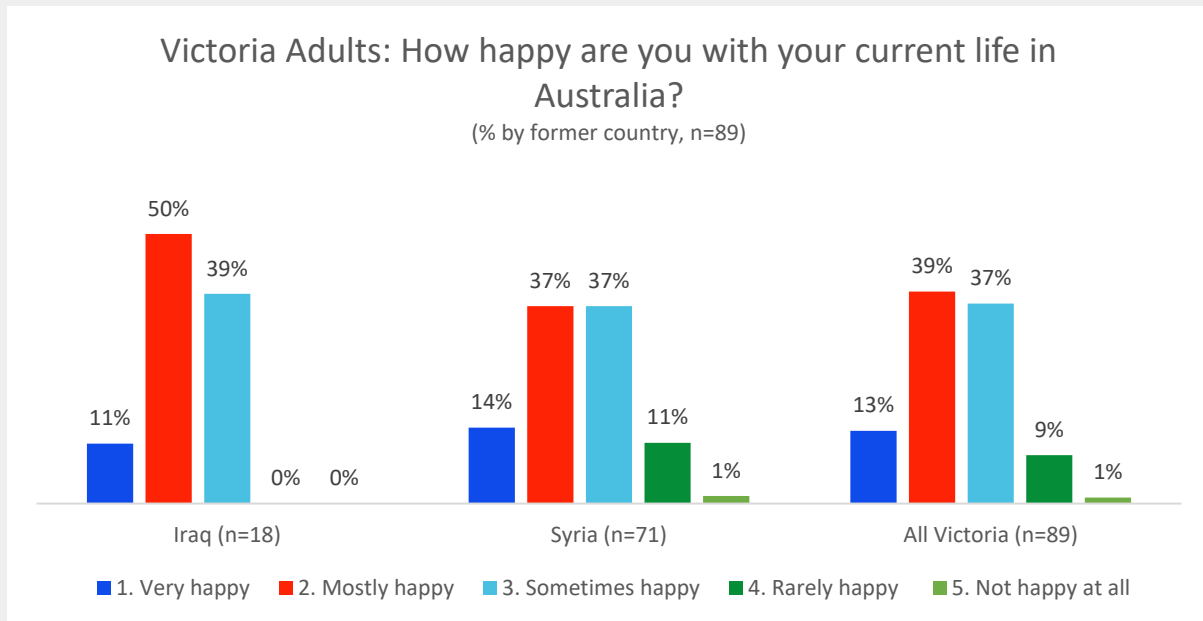


It is interesting that no Muslim refugee reported that they are ‘rarely happy’ or ‘not happy at all’ with their life in Victoria, as Figure 6.2.20 shows. Similarly, no Iraqi refugee reported being generally unhappy with their life in Victoria (Figure 6.2.21). However, these results may be skewed due to the low number of Muslim and Iraqi informants completing the survey compared to NSW and Queensland.

**Figure 6.2.20: Victoria adults, by religion: how happy are you with your current life?**





**Figure 6.2.21: Victoria adults, by former country: how happy are you with your current life?**

Our informants in Victoria spoke about the reasons for their happiness or unhappiness. Some were simply relieved to have escaped their previous war-torn existence, some needed more time to adjust, and some were suffering loneliness, dissatisfaction or hardship. Some mentioned a few instances of racism but otherwise experiencing an overwhelming sense of respect and human rights. Overall most informants did not see Australia or Victoria as a racist society. Some saw a bright future, especially for their children. Here are some representative comments:

*Living in Australia offered me a lot of relief after the great deal of suffer my family and I sustained during the war years in both of Syria and Lebanon.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 35)

*We have many relatives in Australia, in Melbourne and Adelaide, a lot of relatives and friends from Syria, and we are enjoying the life and peace in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 63)

*Our friends recommended Australia as a good place to live and work. I like the area where we live as it's quiet and close to the city. We are quite happy here.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 32)

*It is good, we are happy. It is quiet, near transport and shops, there is a park.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2017, age 54)

*Before the war start I was a farmer for more than 30 years, looking after my farm. Then when the war start we had to flee the country to Lebanon. We stayed for four years then my sister brought us to Australia to settle here for the rest of our life, and to have a better life. I never had any information about Australia, and I never thought I would come to this country; I was confused and scared because I was thinking how I can start a new life in a strange country. When I started the interview with the immigration they gave us information about settling in Australia. I found a better life in Australia but I still miss my home Syria. Living in [this suburb] is quite nice, a very quiet area and we just moved recently, so I don't know much about my neighbours. I have siblings in Melbourne and cousins in Sydney and I have still a brother In Lebanon. I think I'm happy but it will take time to cope with the environment and it will take time to engage with the community here. My wife disabled – she can't talk, but I think she thinks the same way as I do.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 68)

*I am not very happy here and I feel lonely.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2018, age 43)

*We were expecting to be supported by some friends or the church in finding jobs especially in iconography, or any other job, but we are very disappointed as no body helped us and now we are only depending on ourselves.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 51)

*I thought life in Australia would be easy but I was shocked at my concerns towards language and profession seeking. I didn't realise how hard it will be for me to adapt to the change, and the struggle with language.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 38)

*Regarding the social life in the university, [I am not satisfied]. Everyone prefers to be with a similar background person. The general population in RMIT is very multicultural with many who came from different country just to study here, so mostly everybody will go to his/her own. The professional contact between students is also too limited to develop strong friendship. However, I completely deny the presence of any racism. The atmosphere generally is friendly. I also praise the values of the university especially the equitable treating, and the fascinating facilities which are provided to the students.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 21)

*I am struggling to find a job and I hate depending on the government for financial aspects.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 43)

*I surprised when I came here. I thought life in Australia is the same as Syria, but life here is very hard – every things are expensive, no one help or support, you should do everything by yourself. The social life here is difficult – communication is very hard due to the language. The most expensive thing is the dentist.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 61)

*I wish I knew more about retirement policies and health benefits for the incapable as I am suffering from health problems.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 60)

*Before we came, I wish I had more information regarding to my mum's health and what kind of service they can provide for her.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 26)

*I do not feel comfortable living in the area. I am dissatisfied about my life here and do not feel any sense of belonging.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 25)

*I cannot say I am happy here as my husband still struggling to settle and find a job.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 26)

*I am deeply impressed by the values and the characters of the Australian society, especially politeness, respectfulness, respecting individual rights and dignity without any sort of discrimination. That is in addition to the clean environment, beautiful nature and the great services which are provided by the government and the community. Apart from some inappropriate behaviours I faced from some young people against me when I walk around with my "veiled" wife from time to time, my family and I have never experienced any racism or discrimination of any kind. On the contrary, we are impressed by the welcoming behaviour and the special politeness we are treated with, wherever we go, which represents the general feature and values of the local community.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 51)

*I have experienced two annoying incidents since I arrived in [this area], the first one was while I was referring my doctor when a woman started bothering me by humiliating words because I am veiled; and the second one when I was in Coles with my daughters – a man started shouting on us asking us to leave the country and go back from where we come and this country will never to be our country. But, in contrary, many others, in different situations and places, have welcomed us and offer us to do any help we need. I noticed that most of the local people, especially in TAFE, are keen to help and teach us to enable us to adapt as quickly as possible.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 34)

*After arriving, I found Australia very beautiful country and I am very happy to be here... Australia met 80% of my expectations – I feel sometimes as if I am being treated according to what come in the TV news. I feel sometimes that I am paying a price for mistakes and maybe crimes I did not commit but somebody else, who may be from a similar background, did. I am very sorry about some people who commit assaults and harm the reputation of the others who are from the same background. My wife also strongly agrees about this point. In addition, there is some difficulties in finding jobs beside the language difficulties. All that can contribute to my 20% of disappointing feelings.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 25)

*I find Australia a very beautiful country because of the high-standard services, medical care and services, treating well and respectfully. Good behaviour, fair and politeness. Always feels that the one's rights are preserved.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 42)

*I heard previously about Australia that the people there respect the others and that what made me so happy and what later I touched and felt, so that what makes me happy.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 36)

*Both myself and my husband have admiration and gratefulness to the Australian people – they are very kind and polite and there is no racism.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 56)

*I am happy in Australia because of two reasons; firstly, the future of my children and secondly is the security. I think everything is good and available here in Australia. I hope - more jobs opportunities.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 37)

*Initially we have good impression on Australia, as we heard that it is a developed country, advanced in health and education and can secured a good future for children. We have some relatives in the same suburb who also came a little bit before, also as refugees, and get many good and new friends from different backgrounds. I am very happy with my new life in Australia.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019 age 46)

### **6.2.3 Hopes for the future - adults**

Most of the hopes for the future surrounded family. Adults interviewed in Victoria hoped to be in paid employment in the future (see above), but other than that their hopes were to be reunited with loved ones scattered around the world, and for their children to flourish in their

new home, Australia. All our informants come from Diasporic families that are scattered across the globe. They contact their families in other countries frequently – often daily – so their virtual families are a constant presence in their lives in Victoria even as their real absence from daily life is a constant worry for them. This is particularly the case for refugee families in Victoria who have elderly parents back in Syria and Iraq. They worry constantly about them, their ability to live from day to day, their exposure to COVID-19, their safety. Most have applied at least once to have them join them in Victoria, but because their parents are not out of their country – not displaced – they have little hope of success even once refugee intakes – which have been halted during COVID-19 – resume:

*I have my son in Greece, a sister here in Australia, two sisters in Syria, and a brother in Sweden. I'm still in contact with them.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 61)

*We have three adult children still in Iraq. Our youngest daughter lives in Baghdad and she works as a teacher in one of the catholic schools in Baghdad. Our two sons are still living in Iraq, managing the family business. They are both married – one has two children and the other one has one child.*

(Male and female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, ages 67 and 65)

*I mainly have one brother-in-law here in Australia, a brother in Lebanon and a sister in the United States. The other extended family are mainly in Canada and some in Holland, and I still have two sisters in Syria – one is single, living with my other married sister.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 69)

*My parents are in Syria – I have two sisters in Syria as well. And my brothers – one in Lebanon and one in Jordan.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2018, age 33)

*We still have a lot of family and friends back in Syria, two brothers and one sister in Sydney, and two brothers and one sister in Syria. We are still in contact with them using Viber and Skype. I am still thinking about my country and the loss of my home.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*One of my sisters is in Belgium; brothers and a sister in Syria. I communicate with them through phone calls and internet.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 60)

*I have five sisters and one brother in Germany. My mother passed away, and my father, one sister and brother are in Syria. I am worried about them. I communicate with my family through the social media, but unfortunately do no money transferring for help.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 44)

*I have my family here. My dad passed away. I have my mother, two sisters and two brothers in Australia. I have one sister in Sweden, one in Canada, and one in Aleppo. I have my mother's relatives in Istanbul. Usually we communicate by the social media.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 49)

*Previously, I had no friends or relatives in Australia. I have one brother who went as a refugee to Germany and settled there. The rest of the family have been settled in Canada.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 24)

*My brother and two sisters are in Germany. My other sister is in Jordan. I am happy because my children are.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 38)

*None of my family live here with me, my parents are residents in America. The only way for me to communicate to my parents is through the use of social media. I feel guilty at my inability to send incomes to help aid them because the money I receive barely fits my family.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 38)

Many fervently hoped for family reunification, including parents wanting their children to come to join them here in Australia:

*I first left Syria to Lebanon alone, because of the war... After I became able to rent a home there, I called both my small and extended families to join me there... My small family were granted humanitarian visas, while my parents were not included with me. Later, my father died there after I had left for Australia, for which I feel heartbroken. I still have family in Lebanon, suffering a lot and craving to follow us. I am quite concerned about my parental family especially my mother and one singular sister – both are sick and need my care as I was the main supporter of them before coming here. These family are still stuck in Lebanon and I wish somebody to help them to come here and join me again.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 40)

*We are very worried about our extended families who are still waiting in Lebanon and some of them are still stuck in Syria. Some of them sustain very difficult situation, especially one of them where the parents died, and the children were distributed between many families, some in Lebanon and the others in Syria.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*I am still thoroughly concerned about my extended family who are still in Syria and Lebanon and hope to find their ways to join me in Australia... They are in concerning condition and willing to come to Australia ... Hopefully giving them appropriate visas [can be] facilitated. We tried to apply for them, but we failed. We believe that has happened because we cannot afford to appoint a lawyer to help us.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 33)

*I hope my relatives, mine and my extended families, to have the opportunity to join us here in Australia as that will support our settlement and make us feel more connected to our new homeland.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 40)

*One of my sons who fled Syria lives here in Australia, and now I live with him. But I am not happy because I continually think of my son who I left behind. This helped me develop depression and uncomfortable senses. Here I have my son and his family, and one of my daughters and my daughter's family. All my other children are overseas in different countries... I like the suburb I am living in, but I can't stop overthinking and am concerned about my son. I wish I would have known more about the immigration laws to help bring my children here.*

(Female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 77)

*I have my son in Greece – he is there for 14 years now – and two brothers still living in Syria, a brother in Norway with his family, and a brother in Lebanon. I thought It's going be easy when I arrive to Australia to sponsor my son and bring him here from Greece – I miss him so much and I wish if I can see him soon.*

(Male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 76)

*I still have a sister with her family staying in Lebanon, suffering a lot, and all the family here in Australia, especially my mother, are worried about her and hope to have her and her family with us here. We applied for her last year, but she was rejected without a significant reason.*

(Male, regional Vic, 2019, age 25)

*Generally we are happy regarding the place where we have settled in. We had no friends or relatives in Australia. My parental family are still waiting, in a miserable status, in Turkey. One very important thing is to help my parents and brothers with their families to come here, as my main problem is the extreme worry about them. That also can support me with my complicated life.*

(Female, regional Vic, 2019, age 32)

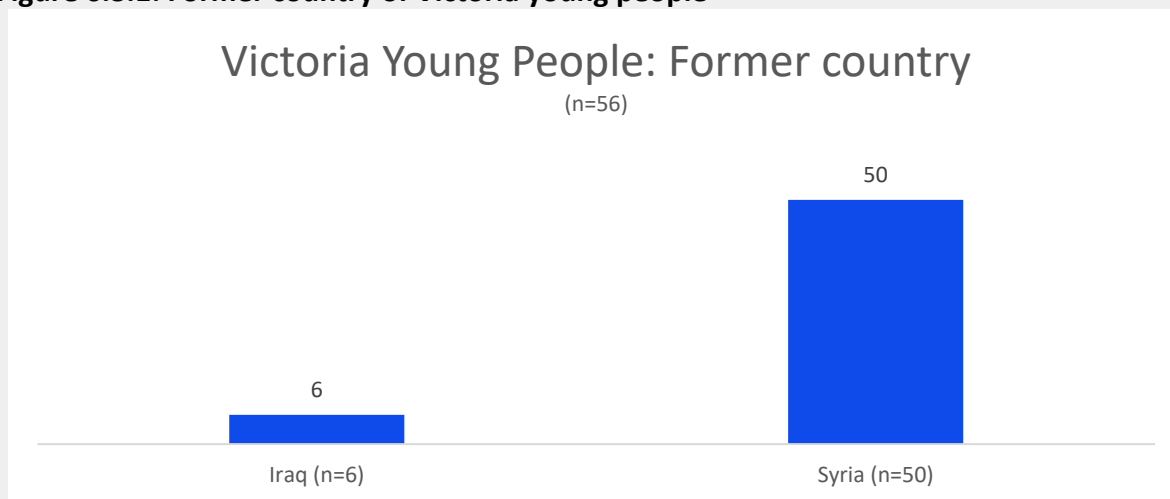
### 6.3 Stories from young refugees

What makes this study significant is the inclusion of the whole family unit, including young people (YP) 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.

56 young people were interviewed and surveyed, with theirs and their parents' permission; those over 16 gave permission themselves. Of the two different former countries, a substantially larger proportion of these young people came from Syria (Figure 6.3.1).

**Figure 6.3.1: Former country of Victoria young people**



Regarding ethnicity, families of these young people identified mainly as Syrian or Iraqi, with a small proportion of Syrians identifying as Arabian, Assyrian or Syriac (see Table 6.3.1). Roughly even numbers of Young Syrian refugees were distributed between metropolitan and regional Vic (Table 6.3.2).



**Table 6.3.1: Victoria Young People: Ethnicity by former country.**

Victoria Young People Ethnicity by former country			
	Iraq (n=6)	Syria (n=50)	All Victoria (n=56)
Arabian	0	4	4
Assyrian	0	1	1
Iraqi	3	0	3
Syriac	0	1	1
Syrian	0	43	43
Not specified	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>

**Table 6.3.2: Victoria Young People: Ethnicity by location**

Victoria Young People: Ethnicity by location			
	metropolitan (n=29)	regional (n=27)	All Victoria (n=56)
Arabian	0	4	4
Assyrian	1	0	1
Iraqi	3	0	3
Syriac	1	0	1
Syrian	20	23	43
Not specified	4	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>56</b>

Most of the young people were of Primary to Middle-school age (Table 6.3.3). There were similar total numbers of males and females.

**Table 6.3.3: Victoria Young People: age, location and gender**

Victoria Young People: age, location and gender (n=54 from 56 informants, 1 age and 1 gender not specified)						
	metropolitan (n=28)		regional (n=26)		All Victoria (n=54)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>5-10</b>	6	8	5	6	11	14
<b>11-14</b>	3	7	4	4	7	11
<b>15-18</b>	1	1	4	1	5	2
<b>Over 18</b>	2	0	1	1	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>

### 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. 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. The following young Syrian woman expressed her frustration, and eventual appreciation, about her situation:

*I find the schools and curriculum in Australia is very good, interesting and much easier and pleasant than what I have already experienced in Syria. In Australia there is no stress and the atmosphere in the class is very helpful to be relax and happy and the relationship with teachers and administration team is very friendship, while in Syria the relationship is quite strict, and students feel a lot of pressure in comparison to here. When I left Syria, I was at the beginning of Year 12, preparing for that difficult year by doing many courses in Math, Physics and Chemistry. After arriving in Australia, I was sent to English school first, for two terms, then I was introduced to the school on Year 10 where I spent one semester, as it would not be accepted to go to Year 12 without enough preparations. At the beginning that was so frustrating, especially as I found the level of studying is so much below my level. I was obviously outstanding the others, however I needed not to wait too long like that. After three weeks of starting the school I was chosen by the Skyline Foundation upon my school suggestion and granted a scholarship, Crimson Monash, for studying Medicine, which includes financial support for Year 11 and 12. In addition it involves three-day workshop attendance and camping in University of Melbourne for developing personality and preparations to attending the university interview and other needed skills. I really appreciate that and feel that I was fairly treated. I am interested in all academic subjects, especially science.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 19)

For some YP disruptions to education have been accompanied by the trauma of war, to which schools must now respond and where a duty of care becomes critical:

*I study at Epping polytechnic TAFE. Life is very easy here in Australia; I have a lot of friend from different country. It's very hard to compare it with Syria - I really have bad memory – I don't want to talk about it.*

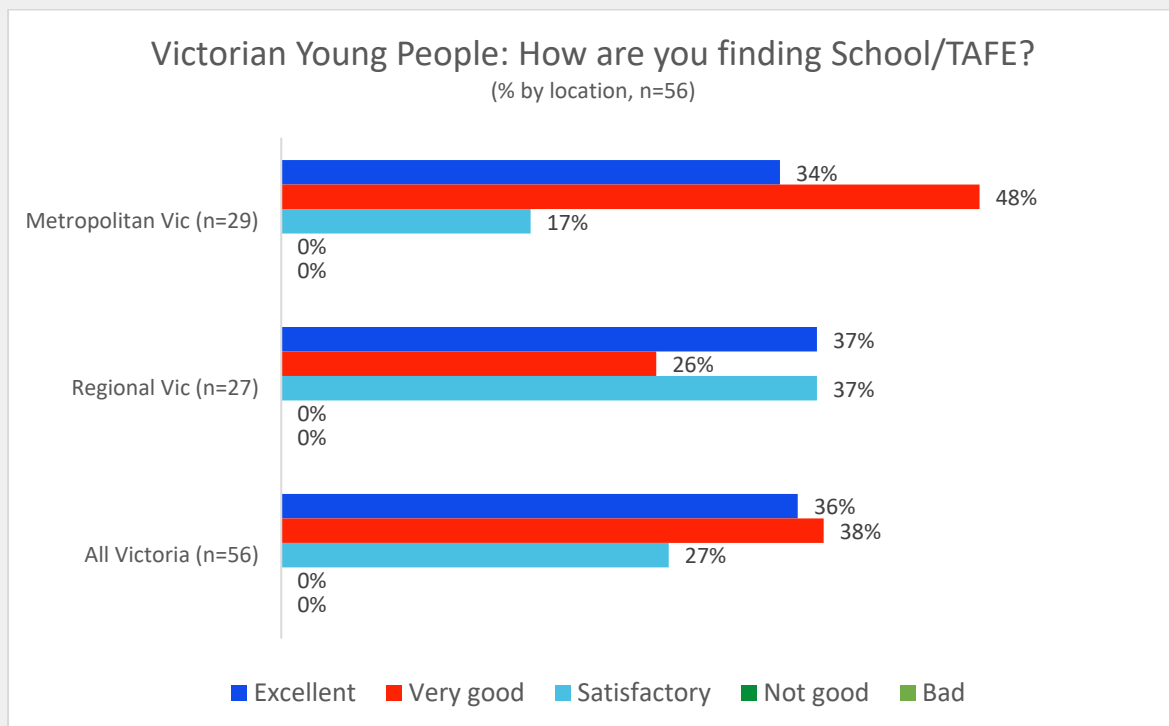
(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 18)

*About the relationship with my teachers, although it is generally good and I like my teachers, who all show me and the other students who are also from a refugee background more compassion and consideration of their previous suffer... About the relationship with my classmates, it is very good – I have many friends from different backgrounds. I also notice especial compassion and acceptance from my classmates when they know my story with the war and my suffer as a refugee.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

Despite these provisos it is clear when examining Figure 6.3.2 that most YP are finding their educational experiences productive. Across Victoria, no YP rated their educational experiences as ‘not good’ or ‘poor’. One in three rated their schooling as ‘excellent’ with another 48 per cent of YP living in metropolitan Vic (and 26 per cent of YP living in regional Vic) rating their schooling as ‘very good’.

**Figure 6.3.2: Victoria young people and education**



### 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 Victoria often spoke of the caring approach of their teachers:

*I am very happy at school – I especially like the teachers as they are very nice, kind and taking care, and make me enjoy studying. I am happy also with my friends in the school. Most of them are from different background and I only speak English with them. I like Mathematics and sport games like soccer, football, baseball and cricket. I also enjoy other games and playing with my peers. I like the excursions very much.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 8)

*I like school a lot, I have lots of friends. I love my teacher, she is very nice and kind. I like drawing, sport and dancing.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 7)

*I am in Year 8, secondary education. I believe that the school I am in is fantastic and very good because they give good care to the student and explain quite good, so they make the student understand well. I am happy about my progress in school. The relation between the teachers and students is based on mutual respect. My relationship with the other students is as classmates more than real friends, but still quite good. There is no racist or offensive behaviour against me and I speak with them in English. I like sport the most, especially soccer and handball.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

Almost three in four young people living in Victoria (74%) thought that their school or TAFE was 'excellent' or 'very good' (Figure 6.3.2). Young people were enjoying school and interested in learning, and acknowledged their teachers in this regard:

*I am now in Year 8. I enjoy school life and believe that schools in Australia are distinguished by their methods in teaching, friendship relationships, a lot of sport activities, excursions, encouraging hobbies, and offering computer for every student. No discriminations, no bullying, no disliked thing. I was able to build a lot of friends from all other backgrounds. I like Sport, especially soccer.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I am now in Grade 9 – secondary school. I find the school is good. I am happy in my school because I believe that the teachers do their best and always succeed in making the student to understand the subject. My relations with my teachers and colleagues are quite good. I have friends from many different cultures, but generally, the friendship is limited to inside the school. I have experienced no discrimination or offences based on racial or religious basis.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 16)

*I am happy at school, I like my teachers, and enjoy school activity. I have a lot of friends – I speak English with them. I like Sport and games especially basketball.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 6)

*I like school a lot, I have lots of friends, teachers are really nice and helpful. I like Maths, drawing and craft.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 7)

*I am happy at school. I like my teachers because they help me when needed and I also like my friends and enjoy playing with them. I like going to school more than staying at home. I like Gymnastic and soccer.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 8)

*I like my school and am very happy in it because they are teaching well, and I can study well, and the students do not commit any offence or troubles. All teachers are very nice, and I have computer at the school. I also have good friends there – they always help me, no bullying. Most of my friends at school are from non-Arabic speakers and we speak English with each other. The most thing I like in the school is that the teacher keep explaining to me till they make sure that I understand the lesson. I like drawing competitions which send to some expert out of the school and the winner will be rewarded. I like Sport, especially soccer, T-ball and tennis.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 11)

*I am in Year 10, secondary education. I am very happy about the school I am in here and especially impressed by my teachers who are always keen to make sure that their student have quite understood the educational material. My relations with the teachers are very good and based on respect to the others. I am quite satisfied with the level of education I have at school. I am also studying Business and Legal Affairs at school. I have no special interest in practicing Sports, Arts, Music or entertainments, but I'm still interested and follow up soccer and football.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 16)

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:

*I like the school here in Australia, as here teachers are kinder and do not hit the student. I enjoy various activities. I still remember when I was hit by a teacher in Lebanon when I came little bit late, even it was not my fault but my parent fault. I like all subjects.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 9)

*I am in Grade 8, secondary education. I am happy in my school and believe that the schools here are much better than Lebanon and Syria because of the method of how the administration and teachers treat the students. I also believe that the level of studying is very good, and I am doing well with my studying – my level is 4/5. The relations with my classmates are good, however, the most of students I play with in the breaks are from my same background because I believe that the other students are different. I have not been exposed to any bothering action or racism or any annoying behaviour or bullying from anybody in the school. I like drawing and cooking.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I am in Grade 6, primary school. I like my school very much, simply because when I face any difficulty I go to the teacher and the teacher will keep explaining and repeating until I quite understand. The teacher always encourages the student to come to him immediately and ask if they do not understand anything. I have no friends in the classroom as no one speak Arabic, but I have two friends from other classroom and from a similar background who I play with them in the break and speaking Arabic with them. I like Mathematics, Sport, especially running, and drawing.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 12)

*I am in Grade 7 – secondary education. In comparison with schools in Lebanon, where a student may be hit and punished for any small fault, school in Australia show respect for students and teachers are very friendly and caring. My relations with teachers are very good. My relationship with my classmates are very good – there are no students from the Arabic backgrounds in my class, all are from English speaker backgrounds who I have very good relationship with them. This situation also helps me in getting advanced in English.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 13)

*I am in Year 11, secondary education. I studied Year 10 and 11 in Australia while I had studied until Year 11 in Syria. The main difference I experienced is the mixed school, girls and boys, in the secondary education in Australia, which I completely found it weird at the beginning, but later I have well adapted. The teachers in Australia are keener to explain and make sure that the student has understood the lesson and they are always ready to repeat many times and give the student a lot of examples in order to make her understand the lesson. And the relations with the teachers are friendly and respectful. I was able to make many female friends from different backgrounds where I only speak English with them. I have never experienced any offensive, inappropriate or racist behaviour against me at school.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 21)

*Classes are different from Syria, much better here – more discipline and my teacher is lovely here.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2018, age 15)

*I am now in Year 11, secondary school. I am concerned regarding the next year, Year 12, as I have been told that it would be difficult due to difficult subjects. In comparison with schools in Lebanon and Syria, the schools here are much better as they treat the student in a better way, depending on counselling more than punishments, helping the student much more by explaining again and again rather than shouting or humiliating her, sharing with the student the responsibility of getting advance. The student feels much respectful here in Australian schools. The relationship with the teachers are good and friendly. I've never faced any racist or cultural-based offences, especially as a veiled girl. My relationship with colleagues is very good and I have friends from many different backgrounds, but generally, the friendship is limited inside the school.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 18)

Another aspect of care is the support the YP were given for language acquisition, a key tenet of multicultural education in Australia for decades.

### **The importance of language**

YP often spoke at least two languages: the language of their parents and homeland, and the new English language, critical to their new lives. Some had difficulties transitioning to a new language while others embraced it with few problems:

*Usually I do not like the school, and I liked my previous school in Lebanon more because they taught Arabic and English in Lebanon but here they teach only English. Also, my friends in Lebanon were better because they always play with me, while here, sometimes they do and other times they do not. I have friends from different backgrounds and also from same backgrounds. English is going okay, I usually use both Arabic and English at same time. But in School I speak English. I like Maths because it is easy.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 8)

*I am okay in English, but I face considerable difficulty in understanding my classmates and the teachers.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 12)

*It was not very easy for me to learn English language here, but I am good now.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2018, age 15)

*I am in Grade 8. I am happy in the school and believe that it is very good. I am studying well. I enjoy school life. My relations with teachers and peers are very good. I have friends from different backgrounds, and speak with them in English. I like Maths and English because I believe they are essential for my studying in future, while I believe other subjects, especially Arts, are time wasting. I try to use the time of the later to use it for Maths and language.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I am happy and like my school because they give me the opportunity to express my opinion and respect my choice. There are also a lot of interesting activities including sports and picnics which I like very much. I am happy with teachers and have many friends – most of them are from Arabic backgrounds and many other from non-Arabic backgrounds. However, the only language I speak in the school is English even with the student from Arabic speaker background. There has been no offensive behaviour against me. I especially like soccer. I also enjoy drawing and Music.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 12)

*I love English classes.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 11)

*My English is ok, but I'm not the same confident like maths. I can manage with English. I can write personal opinion, reading is ok, I understand explanation.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I am happy with my English - not excellent but good. Generally my English quite satisfies my educational needs.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 16)

*I speak English very good with my friends at school or at the neighbouring quarter, all my school friends speak only English and I can communicate well with them and with my teacher as well.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 8)

*I am good in English and can speak very good with my peers and teachers. I can also understand the teachers very well.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 8)

*I am very good in English, quite confident and significantly distinguished in English among my sisters – all the family depend on me in English and consider me the interpreter of the family. My evaluation at school is very good.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 10)



As we found in other States, specialised English classes (in Victoria, English as an Additional Language – EAL) provide concentrated support in learning English, and students really appreciate this start in a new country:

*I am in Grade 8. I believe that my school here, which is public, is fantastic and much better even than those in Syria, from all aspects including teaching, caring, system... I especially appreciate the intensive support in English I am having, EAL, which has the chief role in keeping me up with my classmates.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*English is going good, I'm learning fast because there is a lot of help.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 13)

*I am in Grade 4. I like my school because they teach me English and no body there speak Arabic and that help me in improving quickly in English. I am also happy that I have now friends more than I had in Lebanon. I like mathematics and games.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 10)

*Basically, I had already studied English as a foreign language when I was in Syria, and found that was useful and made obvious difference in comparison with those who studied different languages. After arriving in Australia, I was enrolled to study English with TAFE for one year before joining Year 10. I am still on EAL program for studying English. I believe that I am okay in English and can understand the explanation and discussing of any educational material well in English. Speaking with my friends in English has the crucial role in improving my language. I am also happy about my writing skills and reading comprehensive exercises.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 21)

As is evident in some of the quotations above, one of the most important aspects to integration and getting on in a new country is connection to YP their own age.

### **Social capital**

School or educational institutions turn out to be the main source of connection with refugee YP to the wider society. It is here that new social networks are developed and new social capital accumulated. Generally, the YP in Victoria are very enthusiastic about their schools and friendship networks:

*I like the classes here. I like my friends. I prefer school here. I like Art and Maths. I don't like Religion.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 6)

*School is good, I have a lot of friends already. My hobbies are writing stories and basketball.*

(Young female, Craigieburn 2018, age 9)

*I want to go to school every day and have no holidays at all.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 10)

*I find my classes very fun. I enjoy carrying out experiments. I like the fact there is transport in here as in Lebanon there were no buses. I have four or five friends.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018 age 10)

*I like my school and my friends. My interest is basketball. In my old school, I did not hang out with my friends much and the class was so crowded with people. I like performing arts because you get to act and dance. I like drawing, basketball, dancing and acting. I dislike Humanities because the tests are hard when you study, but you get good grades at the end.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 13)

*At my school I am learning interesting information, and I have a lot of fun hanging out and learning with my friends at school. I enjoy the Art, Science and Maths curriculum at the school. I find less enjoyment in learning about analysing and recording games of famous players in PE [Physical Education] Specialist.*

(Young male metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 15)

*School is very good. I like Maths and Science because I find them interesting.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 17)

*Now I am in Year 11, secondary school, and doing Certificate 2 in Mechanics at TAFE at the same time. I already have experience in mechanics as I worked on it while I was in Lebanon. I am happy in both courses and find them good and useful. I also enjoy the school life and have a good relationship with teachers and students. I like Mechanics.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 19)

One of the important benefits of education in Australia is the diversity of backgrounds of other children. For YP, being together in classrooms with non-refugee children leads to **diverse social groups**:

*I like Australia very much and am happy to be here. I have a lot of friends in school and in the neighbourhood. I have many friends who speak other than my mother tongue.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 9)

*I like my school, but still like to stay at home at holidays more than school time. I like to speak both Arabic and English. I like my teacher because she is very kind with me. I have a lot of friends, many of them from an Arabic speaking background and many others are non-Arabic speakers who I speak English with. The best I like are sport especially soccer and games.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 7)

*I am in Grade 3. I am happy and like the school. I enjoy studying and various activities. I like my teachers, especially my English teacher. And I like my peers – I have a lot from different backgrounds and I like speaking English with them. I especially like studying English, then Maths. Also, I like sport and games like 'rainbow'.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 9)

*I like school. I like writing English, and Sports. I have a little bit of friends from mixed backgrounds.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 12)

*I have many friends from different backgrounds in the neighbourhood. We go playing together in the playground.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 13)

*I am happy in Australia, more than either Lebanon or Syria, because there are more advanced services, more job opportunities, and feels more secure. I practice sport and have a lot of friends from many different backgrounds.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 19)

### **6.3.2 Settlement – young people**

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 and Iraq who we interviewed and surveyed in Victoria.

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 in their first year:

*You know, when we came here, I thought it was just a trip then we will go back home after, I didn't know we left for good.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 11)

*I wish I knew if I was allowed to bring my friends and grandparents from Syria.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 11)

*I miss my extended family, especially grandpa and grandma.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 8)

*I wish if I knew what the life and education system is before I came here.*

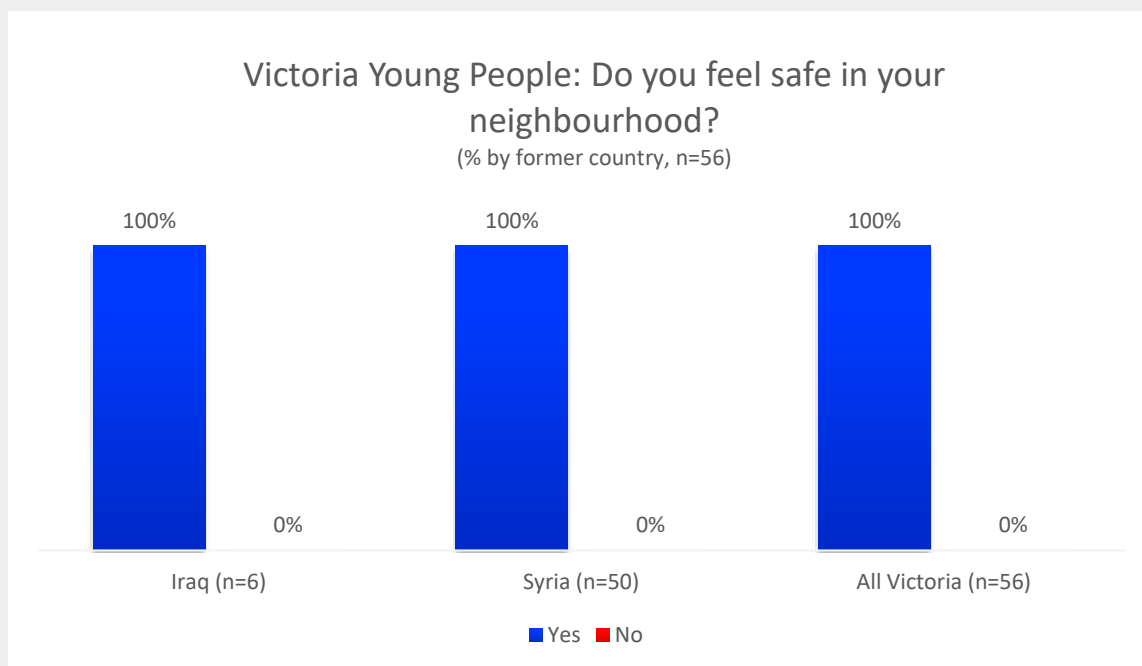
(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 17)

*I hope that my extended family will have the opportunity to come to Australia.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 19)

One key aspect of successful settlement for refugee children and young people is safety. As Figure 6.3.3 shows, **all** of the refugee children and young people from Syria and Iraq, who we interviewed and surveyed, felt safe living in their new neighbourhoods in Victoria. This is a remarkable result; and is true in both the urban and regional Victoria locations where fieldwork was undertaken.

**Figure 6.3.3: Victoria young people by former country: do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?**



Feelings of safety allow the kinds of relaxed pastimes pursued by YP after the school day, which provide a good counterpoint to school work – once homework is completed. Young people took part in similar kinds of activities regardless of age, gender, or location. These included playing with toys, watching TV, playing sport, eating, and using the computer or

social media. Some young people nearing completion of their schooling mentioned seeking work experience or part time jobs. Here are some details given by YP:

*After school I sometimes dance or sing or play.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 5)

*I have lunch, do homework, then play with my dolls and doll house.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 7)

*I play and watch TV, I like playing guitar.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 8)

*Back home after school I do homework, have dinner, play outside with my bike, then play with iPad.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 9)

*After school I eat, do homework, play gymnastics and watch television.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 11)

*I go to the garden and play soccer in the playing ground. I play with my cousins. I watch TV – I follow both Arabic and English children programs. I go to Arabic school on Saturday.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 11)

*Outside school I go to the lake park with the family, picnics, swimming pool, shopping, entertainments. I watch TV, especially programs about police. I like footy, I like Richmond Tigers. I'm a team fan, I went twice to Melbourne especially to attend their football matches.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 13)

*After school I work in home, doing search online for materials which I still feel not quite understood. I watch TV – 9Go!.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I like playing and social media communication.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 14)

*After school I play sport in the fields around. I'm thinking about working part time in the coming holiday, but the priority is for studying rather than working, at this age.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 16)

*After school I like going to the Gym.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 18)

*On holidays I go out to parks with the family or stay at home. I did a paid work experience in Coles, but now I prefer to concentrate on studying first and postpone looking for jobs.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 18)

*I tried to work part time outside school but nothing was suitable for my background. I also attend language school for additional language on Saturday. I participate in church activities on Sunday. I am attending some community activities like summer camping with 'Spectrum'.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 19)

It is clear from these comments that the local area is crucial to successful settlement and church, sport, language schools and extended family networks are all central to feeling like they belong.

An important social dimension of successful settlement relates to the extent to which refugee children and young people can make new friends in Victoria, particularly when those friends are from different backgrounds. As Table 6.3.4 shows, many have between two and five friends from different backgrounds, but most have more than five.

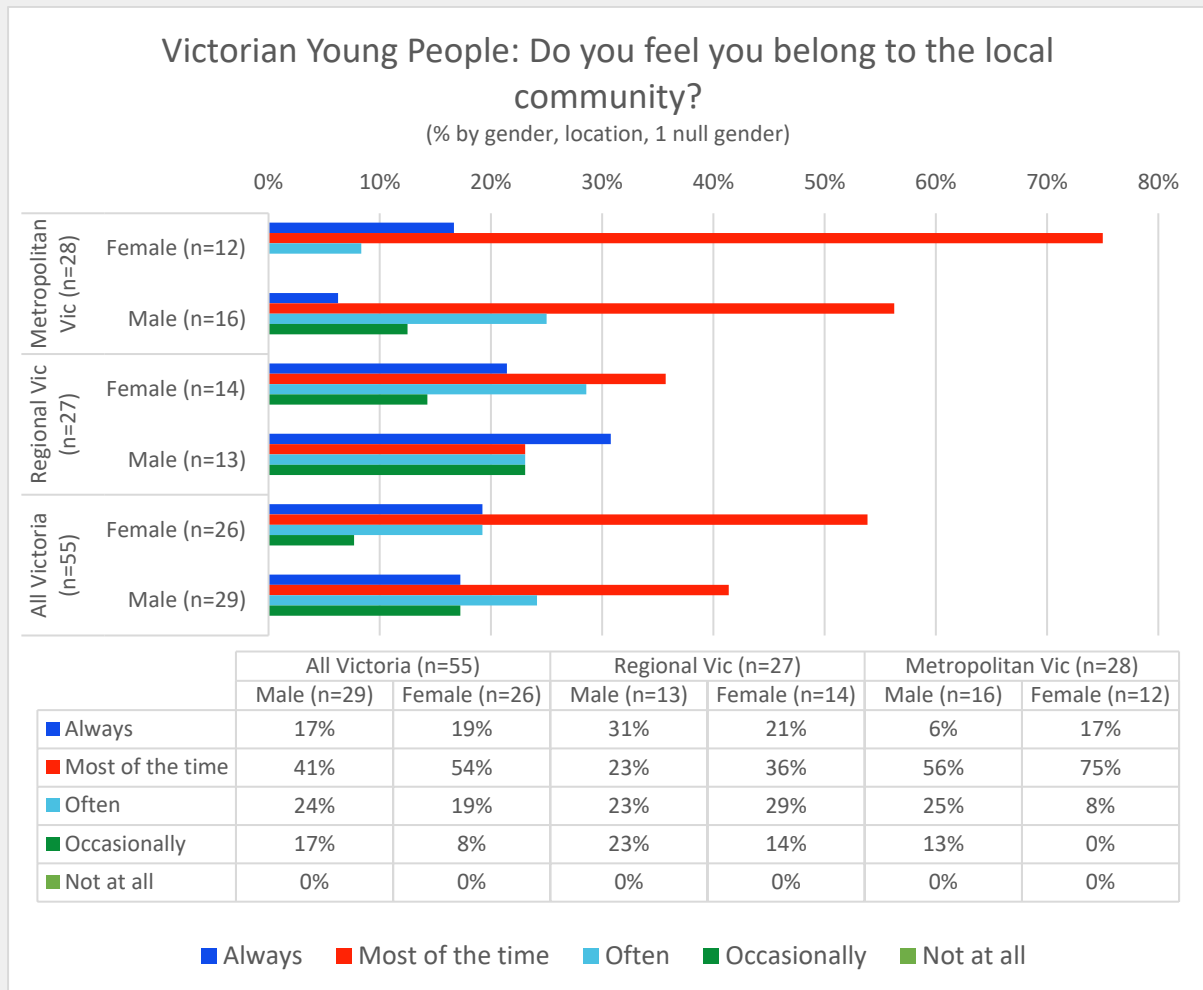
**Table 6.3.4: Victoria young people: how many of your friends are from different backgrounds to you?**

Victoria Young People: How many of your friends are from different backgrounds to you?						
	metropolitan (n=28)		regional (n=27)		all Victoria (n=55, 1 null gender)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>None</b>	1	0	1	0	2	0
<b>1</b>	1	1	0	0	1	1
<b>2 to 5</b>	2	9	8	3	10	12
<b>5 or more</b>	3	2	4	5	7	7
<b>10 or more</b>	5	4	1	5	6	9
<b>Totals</b>	12	16	14	13	26	29

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 Victoria. This is of course subjective, but a personal sense of what place means 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 Figure 6.3.4 shows, across all Victoria fieldwork sites 58 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 Victoria neighbourhood. No young person in Victoria reported that they did ‘not at all’ feel that they belonged.

**Figure 6.3.4: Victoria young people and belonging to the community**



Nearly three in four (73%) of the female refugee YP surveyed in Victoria felt that they belonged to the local community ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’, as did nearly six out of ten (58%) of the male YP. All of the young females in metropolitan Victoria felt that they belonged to the local community ‘often’, ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’. But there were some females in regional areas, and some males in both metropolitan and regional areas who felt that they belonged only ‘occasionally’ (Figure 6.3.4). Some young people, particularly those in regional locations, indicated that they had not developed networks in the neighbourhood. In particular, five females and two males in regional Victoria mentioned during interview that they had no friends in their neighbourhood, mainly giving the reason that there were no YP of the same age living in their area; these YP were aged between 12 and 21. Five YP in metropolitan Victoria mentioned during interview that they did not participate in any activities in the local neighbourhood; these were of a younger age group, aged between 6 and 11. Here are some comments by YP about their neighbourhood:

*I have a lot of friends, usually school mates... In the neighbourhood there is no boys from the same age group.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*Although I have good relations with the others of different backgrounds, my best friends are still from the same background. I have no friends in the neighbourhood, because of no same-age-group people around.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 16)

*I am not active in the neighbourhood.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 18)

*I have no significant hobbies or social activities. I have no significant relationship with neighbours around, as no same-age-group girls live around.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 21)

*I go only with family.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 6)

*I do not participate in any local activities offered by the neighbourhood.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 11)

It is important to note that in metropolitan areas the church was significant in the lives of young people and facilitated access to the wider community outside of school. Given that all of the young people in regional Vic were from Muslim families this broadening of social networks may not have been so easy. Understanding what helps in metropolitan areas might provide insights into what needs to be done in regional areas.

On the other hand, many in both regional and metropolitan Victoria spoke about the kinds of activities offered in their neighbourhood, and how they spent their time outside school, both at home and with friends in nearby areas. Children in regional Victoria, aged under 12, said that they play with friends at the playground; some play soccer, football, tennis, go swimming or do Taekwondo. YP there aged 12 and over also mentioned these activities. Children in metropolitan Victoria, aged under 12, mentioned similar activities to their regional counterparts, as well as boxing and going to parks and the library, along with activities organised by the Church and Saturday Arabic school. YP there aged 12 and over listed the same activities, one adding bowling. Here are some of their comments:

*I like playing with my friends in the neighbourhood, especially soccer and football.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 8)



*I have friends in the neighbourhood, I play with them.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 9)

*I go to Taekwondo, swimming and tennis. I go tennis.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2018, age 12)

*In the neighbourhood all my friends are from the same background.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 12)

*I have no friends in the neighbourhood, but I share sometimes in the activities for children ran by the community, like playing tennis, which I like.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*We have a park closer to our home, some time I go with my brothers to play there. Yes, I have friends.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 7)

*Usually I do not have friends in the very near neighbourhood, and do not play in near fields, but I play at school and share in most church activities which is suitable for my age especially Christmas and Easter festivals.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 8)

*Activities in my neighbourhood are the library, soccer, swimming and boxing. I play soccer and Ninja warrior.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 11)

*I go to gyms, swimming pools, tennis club and parks.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 13)

*Yes, I have friends, and play soccer and sport at the park closer to our home.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 13)

*I like reading and writing stories.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 14)

*Yes, I have friends, there is a park next to my house where me and my friends can do some activities.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 17)

*It is a very quiet area, nice people.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 18)

### 6.3.3 Hopes for the future – young people

The community spirit of the young newcomers interviewed in Victoria is evident in their dreams for the future, in the occupations they are thinking to pursue (Table 6.3.5). Many of the young people nominated professions which involve helping others. The occupation named most frequently, by a large margin, was ‘doctor’, followed by ‘dentist’, then ‘police officer’ and ‘engineer’. The number of females wanting to be a doctor was twice that of males. All those who thought of being a police officer lived in regional Victoria.

**Table 6.3.5: Victoria young people: hopes for the future**

Occupation	Metropolitan		Regional		Total*
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
actor		2			2
architect	1				1
artist	1				1
astronaut	2				2
computer engineering	1				1
dentist	1	1	1	2	5
doctor	3	7	2	4	16
engineer	3			1	4
gymnast		1			1
interpreter/translator			1		1
journalist		1			1
lawyer	1		1	1	3
mechanic			1		1
nurse				2	2
ophthalmologist				1	1
police officer			3	1	4
scientist	1				2
soccer player	3				3
sport commentator				2	2
teacher		1		1	2
veterinarian	1				1

\*Some young people chose multiple occupations

Here are some of the young people’s thoughts about their future careers:

I want to be a doctor, I would like to do needle injections.

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 5)

I hope to be a soccer player and also, like my father, I want to be a mosaic crafting artist and engineering.

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 8)

I hope to become a doctor like my father, and a soccer player.

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 11)

I hope to become a lawyer and help my dad's and mum's family to come here.

(Young male, regional Vic, 2018, age 11)

I would like to be in the army, especially engineering in the army. I am also told, in such case, the army will pay for my studying.

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I like manual works, more than professions which need higher education. Another thing I would like to be is a professional soccer player.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I like sport very much especially basketball. I would like to study medicine. My second choice is police.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I am not quite sure about my future career, but I would like to have a job involving the scientific part of life.*

(Young male metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 15)

*I am planning the same as my older sister to go to study nursing, as it is easily available. Or, the other choice, if it becomes available, is policewoman.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 16)

*I want to study medicine and would like to be a doctor and have my own job.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 17)

*I am now doing paid work-experience in mechanics.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 19)

*I would like to work in a clinical laboratory.*

(Young female, regional Vic, 2019, age 21)

Some young people were able to reflect, at the end of their interview, about what they wish they had known before coming to Australia, or how their situation in Australia might be improved. Younger children thought in terms of wanting general knowledge about a new country and its people, but one adolescent reflected on the difficulties of the settlement process itself, and one young woman was focused on the difficulties of transition to a foreign education/training system, for older students:

*I wanted to know how to communicate with people here.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2018 age 8)

*I wanted to know the map of Australia.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 9)

*I would have loved to know about the dangers of living here, like spiders and fire.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018 age 10)

*I do not remember coming from Syria.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 12)

*I wish I knew how to rent a house in Australia, seeing mum and dad and the stress that they went through to rent our home.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2018, age 12)

*One problem could be sometimes very serious, it is regarding most secondary schools do not accept to enroll the newcomers who have exceeded the age of 18 years, for some refugees who come at this age or even little bit below it, will go over it after attending the English school, then will face a problem that most schools will not accept them.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 19)

The reflections of young people in regional Victoria were focused on the community and the availability of suitable activities; one teenager expressed a sense of isolation, but other young people were content:

*I hope to have a playground in our quarter, near our home.*

(Young male, regional Vic, 2019, age 12)

*I hope that the community of [this town] to arrange some useful activities which can collect the youth together in some useful activities or competitions, in order to strengthen the relationship between them and make them better know each other. The new arrangements for the secondary schools in [this town] make people upset and distribute the students in an unfavorable way... This separation is difficult for the students and parents. Hopefully to correct this issue.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 14)

*I hope for gymnastics and swimming to become available free or with generous discount, like concession, for school students, especially teenagers, as it is very expensive, costly and not available.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 16)

*I have everything.*

(Young male, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 11)

*I am happy in Australia especially about education and believe that here is better than Lebanon and Syria.*

(Young female, metropolitan Vic, 2019, age 14)



**Conclusion**



## 7. Conclusion

This research project, funded by the Australian Research Council, aims to investigate the settlement outcomes of the refugees who settled in Australia 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. 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 Victoria in 2018-19, the first year of a three-year longitudinal study.<sup>3</sup> Nationally 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 Victoria we interviewed and surveyed 40 refugee families – 33 Syrian and 7 Iraqi families – living in metropolitan and in regional Vic (none of the Afghan ‘control group’ lived in Victoria).<sup>4</sup> Our Victorian Industry Partner AMES assisted in recruiting informants and interviewing them. Sometimes the interviews with refugee families took place in their homes, others at the premises of service providers and others by telephone. Refugee research assistants were employed to assist with linguistic and cultural translation for 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 – of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Victoria. Ultimately, the aim of reporting on the outcomes of the research is to present evidence for policy makers in order to improve the policies and services that will improve the settlement experience of recent refugee arrivals. Put another way, we hope that this research can enhance the social well-being, employability prospects, economic security and educational opportunities of recently arrived refugees in Victoria. We also want to spark a conversation about, and to contribute to, an understanding of the contribution that refugees make to Victoria society. There are many negative stereotypes about refugees in Australia today and political opportunism in the debate of refugee policy. We hope that this research provides evidence to counteract the racist stereotypes and inform Victorians, and all Australians, about the successes of refugee settlement in Australia and the important contributions that refugees make to Australian life.

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

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<sup>3</sup> For the analysis of findings in Queensland in 2018, see Collins et al. 2019. For the analysis of findings in NSW in 2018, see Collins et al. 2020.

<sup>4</sup> 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>.

two countries. The refugees from Syria and Iraq arrived with impressive education achievements and employment histories and achievements prior to displacement. Most refugees from Syria and Iraq were Christians, though the Syrian refugees we interviewed in regional Vic 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 their country because of conflict, and during their uncertain 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 Melbourne international airport by staff from their service providers, AMES. 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 had not yet entered the labour market – they were still learning English – but finding a job was their major 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 Victoria 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 eight out of every ten adult refugees (79%) surveyed in Victoria found that the people in their new neighbourhood of settlement were friendly, while about half that number reported that it was easy to talk to their new neighbours, slightly less than the national BNLA study (49%) but similar to results for NSW and Queensland. 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. Adult refugees are unanimous that Victoria is a safe place to live and bring up their families no matter whether they live in metropolitan or regional Vic. All adult refugees who settled in regional Vic found it a safe place to live while 88 per cent of the adult refugees who live in metropolitan Vic reported that it was a safe place for them and their children.

Refugees were also driven by the need to secure a better future for their children. Education opportunity is an important component of this. 77 per cent of refugee adults who settled in Victoria were happy with the schools in their neighbourhood, like the Queensland result (79%) though behind the NSW result (90%). In this instance, refugees who settled in metropolitan Vic perceived better schooling (83%) than those who settled in regional Vic (56%). Young refugees (YP) agreed that they are receiving good education opportunities in Victorian schools: one in three rated their schooling as 'excellent' with another 48 per cent of YP living in metropolitan Vic (and 26 per cent of YP living in regional Vic) rating their schooling as 'very good'.



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: 82 per cent of the refugees surveyed thought that their Victorian neighbourhood was a good place to bring up their children. This was slightly less than the BNLA national result and the results for NSW and Qld.

The young people involved in our research were overwhelmingly impressive in their achievements given the short time they had been in Australia. They were optimistic about the future, and really enjoyed their schools. They picked-up English much faster than their parents, while they all felt safe living in their metropolitan or regional neighbourhood in Victoria. A key dimension of the settlement experiences of refugee young people relates to their friendship networks. We found that most have five or more friends of different backgrounds to themselves. Another very subjective but important dimension of the settlement experiences of refugee young people relates to their feelings of belonging in the local community: three in four of the young females in Victoria felt that they belonged to the community 'most of the time' or 'always', as did two in three of young males in Victoria.

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. 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. 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? One in two refugee adults were either 'very happy' (13%) or 'mostly happy' (39%) living in Victoria. While refugees who settled in regional Vic were more likely (17%) than those who lived in metropolitan Vic (13%) to respond that they were very happy with life in Australia, 42 per cent of those living in the metropolitan location said that they were 'mostly happy' compared to 28 per cent of those in the regional location. This is a strong indication that despite the great suffering and trauma that these refugees have experienced in the family life – and despite the difficulties that they have faced in starting up a new life in a strange country – refugee settlement in Victoria is judged to be a success in the eyes of the refugees themselves.

In conclusion, most of the refugees were positive about their future life in Victoria. Most 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 2019-20, the second year of the longitudinal study. Our third and final year visit to these refugee families was delayed because of the COVID-19 crisis, but will be completed in the first half of 2021. 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 at the end of 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<br><input type="checkbox"/> Costs too much<br><input type="checkbox"/> Language difficulties<br><input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of suitable sized housing (e.g. too small/ too big)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of affordable housing in the area I want to live<br><input type="checkbox"/> Aspects of the process (e.g. didn't understand the rules, documents, forms)<br><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)	2 (weak)	3 (okay)	4 (very good)	5 (excellent)
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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## Contact UTS

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