



Hiya Harinandini

Master of Development Studies

Underemployment among Migrant Women of
Colour in Australia

This report has been written for The Future of Work Lab by

Hiya Harinandini

Master of Development Studies
hiyaharinandini47@gmail.com



ABOUT THE INTERNSHIP

The Future of Work Lab hosts talented Master's student interns who lead projects across a range of future of work issues. The interns produce policy reports covering pressing and timely topics in this area. Our interns are trained in advanced analytical, research and report-writing skills as well as collaboration, teamwork and interpersonal skills.

Hiya Harinandini is an intern at the Future of Work Lab. Hiya is currently completing her Masters in Development Studies from the University of Melbourne, and is interested in the areas of gender justice, systemic inequality and multicultural community development. As part of the internship with FoWL, Hiya is currently working on an independent research project that seeks to understand the experiences of migrant women of colour with occupational mobility in the Australian labour market, as well as to determine how systems of access and support available to migrant communities can have a more intersectional focus.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	7
Scope and Key Definitions	8
Section 1 - The Australian Migration Trajectory: A Controversial Success Story	9
- Women of Colour and the 'Migration Penalty'	
Section 2 - A Regime Designed to Fail Migrant Women of Colour	10
- Non-Recognition of Overseas Qualifications and Experience	
- Not 'fitting' the 'culture'	
- Entry Status	
- A Segregated Market	
- Inadequate Networks of Support	
Section 3 - Moving Forward: Policy Recommendations	16
- Building a Sound Evidence Base	
- Turning the Lens to Temporary Migrant Women of Colour	
- Gendering the CEDA-proposed Skills Matching Platform	
- Reducing the Newly Arrived Residents' Waiting Period	
- Coordinated, Intersectional Support	
- Education to Employment Pathways	
Conclusion	18
Appendix and Notes	20
References	22

ABBREVIATIONS

WoC: Women of Colour

CALD: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

NESB: Non-English Speaking Background

ESB: English Speaking Background

CEDA: Committee for Economic Development of Australia

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

IOM: International Organization for Migration

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

CSAM: Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants

ABW: Australia-Born Women

WGEA: Workplace Gender Equality Agency

GPG: Gender Pay Gap

ANZSCO: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation Codes

ROQE: Recognition of Overseas Qualifications and Experience

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning

LSIA: Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Australia

VET: Vocational Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the skill underutilization and resulting underemployment of migrant women of colour (WoC) in the Australian labour market. In recent times, skilled overseas migration has been mobilized to not only address skill shortages in key sectors of the domestic labour market but also to bolster Australia's image as a multicultural economy where migrants avail quick and steady returns on their migratory investments. The high rate of migrants' participation in the labour force – 72% as compared to 68% for Australia-born people, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data published in 2020 – and their overall higher qualifications than the native workforce has served to perpetuate the narrative of their 'success' –one that, more often than not, reduces their multifaceted experiences to a narrow regime of truth (ABS 2020). Multiple studies have challenged this marketable 'success story', highlighting the structural and systemic barriers to occupational mobility that migrants from non-OECD countries, non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities face in western labour markets. Migrant women are significantly more underemployed than their male counterparts and experience more prolonged and intense periods of downward occupational mobility post-migration. Considering that majority of migrants received by Australia today are from the Global South, the poor labour market outcomes of migrant WoC can also be traced to intersecting axes of their gender and racial-ethnic identities that are systemically disadvantaged in the recruitment landscape of western countries. COVID-19 has greatly reinforced these existing inequalities, either leaving migrant WoC trapped in low-wage, high-stress occupations or depriving them of employment altogether.

This report draws on the 2021 Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) report which found nearly one in four permanent skilled migrants in Australia to be working jobs beneath their skill level (CEDA 2021). While the CEDA report is restricted to the study of permanent skilled migrants and does not provide disaggregated data on the basis of gender, this report used its insights to extend (and disrupt) its evaluation of skills mismatch to the migrant WoC community residing in Australia as both temporary and permanent migrants. The focus gap in literature and policy on temporary migrant women's – and more generally temporary migrants' – experiences relating to underemployment is concerning as entry status has been found to be a major determinant for the underemployment of migrant women (IOM 2013). Analysing other relevant literature and media articles, this report also focuses on the importance of addressing the problem of underemployment of migrant WoC beyond the conventional areas of 'work' to materialize in coordinated, culturally responsive and intersectional networks of support and care.

The report found five key barriers to migrant WoC's appropriate skill utilization:

- The non-recognition of overseas qualifications and experience
- Migrant WoC not fitting the organizational 'culture'
- The mode of entry (visa category) that assumes hierarchical value in the Australian labour market and advantages some migrant outcomes over others

- Occupational segregation in the labour market that relegate women to 'feminised' sectors or low wage occupations
- Inadequate networks of support and assistance to facilitate a smooth transition to the labour market post-migration

The main recommendations made by this report are as follows:

- Building a sound evidence base for migrant WoC's skill-based underemployment through disaggregated data
- Conducting and funding more research on temporary migrants WoC's experiences with underemployment
- Integrating gender and culture-responsive safeguards into the CEDA-proposed skills matching platform
- Reducing the Newly Arrived Resident's waiting period for welfare benefits to six months from four years
- Adopting an intersectional and coordinated approach to support services for migrant communities
- Introducing pathways from education to appropriate employment for temporary migrant WoC and safeguards against exploitative employment

INTRODUCTION

Migration, through the avenues of temporary as well as permanent residency, has been touted as Australia's 'de facto population policy' (Productivity Commission 2016). Over the past decade, overseas migration has accounted for 60% of Australian population growth and at the end of June 2020, over 7.6 million people comprised the migrant population in the country, inclusive of temporary as well as permanent residents (ABS 2021). Even though migration is the central component of Australia's population growth strategy given its native ageing population, migration policy since the mid-1990s has been more oriented towards skills growth rather than population – targeting countries with full-bodied tertiary education sectors (that guarantee young, high-qualifying and skilled migrants) but underdeveloped graduate labour markets (that incentivise their immigration) (Webb 2015b). Migrants enter Australia through both the permanent and temporary channels, and today, the majority of them are from non-European countries (ABS 2021).

The transition of the Australian migration program from the blatantly racist and exclusionary White Australia Policy – in effect till 1973 and actively restricting non-European migration to the country (Thomson 2014) – to a current landscape dominated by arrivals from non-English speaking countries has been revelatory on two fronts – first, it points to the increasing trend worldwide of formerly exclusive and guarded OECD economies remodelling their migration policies to fill domestic skill shortages and second, it draws critical attention to the carefree assumption of

employment being the logical precursor to migrant well-being in developed economies.

Studies conducted on the labour market outcomes of skilled migrants in Australia have found patterns of skill mismatch and underutilization to be more common than is usually reflected in the national refrain of the 'migrant success story' (Ho 2006). The CEDA report covering the systemic barriers to appropriate employment faced by skilled and family migrants found, based on the data from the Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants (CSAM), that about 23 per cent of surveyed permanent skilled migrants were working in a job not commensurate with their skill level 18 months after arrival (CEDA 2021). While offering incredible insights on the setbacks of the points-based skilled migration system, the report restricts its focus to permanent skilled migrants and moreover, treats them as a homogeneous group that experiences the effects of skill mismatch and underutilization in the same way. This can be a misleading proposition that does not take into account how different dimensions of migrant identity interact with existing structures of inequality to reproduce different degrees of marginalisation.

Research around the skill underutilization and deskilling of migrant WoC has recognised the complex identity politics that contribute to their multi-pronged disadvantage in the Australian labour market (Ho and Alcorso 2004; Ho 2006; Webb 2015ab; Cai and Liu 2014). However, these experiences fail to be included in consolidated accounts of the problem in the form of disaggregated data – case in point being the CEDA report. While the results of the Labour Force Survey published by ABS highlight migrant women's lower rates of labour

force participation and employment than Australian-born women (ABW) as well as migrant men (ABS 2022), skills-based underemployment suffered by migrant WoC remains an area that is conspicuously left out of policy focus. Furthermore, most literature on migrant skill underutilization is focused on permanent migrants, ignoring the bulky cohort of temporary migrants who experience deskilling and professional insecurity alongside the added vulnerability of restrictive visa conditions.

This report, by exploring the key reasons for the skill underutilization of temporary and permanent migrant WoC in Australia, argues for the need of a more coordinated and systematic network of response to the issue that brings together a range of stakeholders across immigration, employment and welfare. The report also notes the crucial need for these services to have an intersectional focus that actively work to not reproduce the institutional disadvantages accorded to migrant WoC on the basis of their identities. The report acknowledges that skill underutilization among temporary migrants being an underexplored area, warrants further attention in the areas of research and policy. Drawing on media articles that provide anecdotal accounts and reports pertaining to temporary migrant experiences of employment, it uses existing analyses of skill underutilization in the context of permanent skilled migrants to examine their validity in the case of temporary migrant WoC.

Section 1 offers a brief overview of the current Australian migration system, its gendered trajectory and trends that have shaped the labour force participation and outcomes of migrant WoC within it, over the years. This is

followed by Section 2 which focuses on the key explanations for the high incidence of skill mismatch and underutilization among migrant WoC. Section 3 makes some policy recommendations.

SCOPE AND KEY DEFINITIONS

This report aims to study the experiences of migrant WoC who reside in Australia as both permanent and temporary migrants. Since the aim is to explore skill underutilization among migrant minority groups, the report will only cover migrant women from CALD backgrounds arriving from non-English speaking countries. ABS defines the CALD population mainly by country of birth, language spoken at home, English proficiency, or other characteristics (including year of arrival in Australia), parents' country of birth and religious affiliation (ABS 1999). While recognising that the experiences of humanitarian migrant WoC with skill underutilization may significantly overlap with that of permanent skilled and temporary migrant WoC, specific analysis of the former is beyond the scope of this report due to the specific legal and welfare frameworks that inform processes of their assimilation in Australia.

The report also focuses on temporary migrant WoC's experiences with skill mismatch – an issue that manifests in research and policy dialogue as a glaring gap. Given the paucity of published insight into this area however, the report's stance on it is mostly restricted to experiences of international students whose stories have featured as narrative accounts in media articles and studies, especially in the context of the precarity unleashed on this population by COVID-19 (Berg and Farbenblum

2020; Farbenblum and Berg 2020; Monash Lens 2021b).

In line with existing literature, the terms ‘deskilling’, ‘downward occupational mobility’, ‘skills mismatch’, ‘skill underutilization’ and ‘brain waste’ will be used interchangeably through the course of the report to refer to the multifaceted loss incurred by migrants when their skills, qualifications and professional experience are not effectively recognized or tapped in the host country (IOM 2013). ‘Underemployment’ will be used to refer to the consequence of such processes – resulting in migrants’ occupation of jobs that, by virtue of being incommensurate with their skill level, may erode their professional capacities over time and stagnate career development (Dean and Wilson 2009). Flatau et al (1995) also introduces the idea of ‘mismatched underemployment’ as occurring when workers’ “skills, knowledge and capacities could be better utilized in an occupation other than that in which they are employed” and locates it within the larger framework of ‘invisible underemployment’. This ‘invisibility’ is ironically prominent in the case of migrant WoC, given the lack of disaggregated data about their underemployment that takes into account the interaction of market mechanisms with social dimensions of disadvantage.

SECTION 1 - THE AUSTRALIAN MIGRATION TRAJECTORY: A CONTROVERSIAL SUCCESS STORY

The permanent migration program currently has three streams that act as pathways to permanent residence – Skill, Family and Child, and Special Eligibility. The program is capped, with the specific admittance number for each stream being decided by the Federal

government’s budget process that is supposedly informed by “broad consultations with stakeholders, including business and community groups from all states and territories” (Department of Home Affairs 2022). Over the years, the scale and impact of the skilled migration program have overtaken that of the other streams, being mobilized on a priority basis to meet key skill shortages in the domestic labour market. International students, working holiday makers and temporary skilled workers constitute the major categories of entry for temporary migrants. While disaggregated data is missing on the distribution of migrant women by country of birth or citizenship, it is reasonable to assume that a majority of them arrive from non-OECD countries, given the top sending regions for Australia (Figure 1).

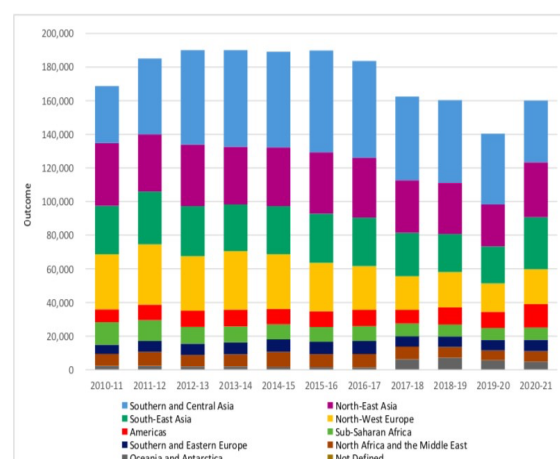


Figure 1: Migration Program Outcome 2010-11 and 2020-21 by region. Source: 2020-21 Migration Program Report, Department of Home Affairs.

As of November 2019, 59% of recent migrants¹ were female (ABS 2020).

WoC AND THE ‘MIGRATION PENALTY’

Ballarino and Panichella (2018) use the term ‘migration penalty’ to refer to occupational disadvantage faced by migrant women in western labour markets. This penalty is activated by a range of institutional factors and

in the case of most regulated labour markets, manifests more in job quality than employment itself (Ballarino and Panichella 2018). In the Australian context, women have been historically overrepresented in the secondary applicant category for skilled migration, arriving in Australia as accompanying spouses or family members (ABS 2009). However, the results of the 2016 census showed that this disparity is gradually reducing, with the proportion of permanent skilled migrant women inching closer to that of men (47.2% vs 52.8%). Such ‘progress’ on the gender front is supported by other uplifting but oversimplistic national statistics such as the workforce participation of women exceeding men’s and majorly driving economic growth in 2015-2016, and the recent decrease in the gender pay gap² from 14.2% in 2020 to 13.8% in 2022 (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017; WGEA 2022). It is interesting to note that migrant women as a category are altogether missing from this landscape of success – possibly leading one to presume that their absence is a result of their default inclusion in these narratives of progress. Studies of downward occupational mobility and deskilling among migrant WoC remain confined to academic discourse and fail to be assimilated into the national evidence base in the form of disaggregated data. While ABS data measures labour force participation and employment rates for migrant women, it falls short of surveying job satisfaction and mobility pre and post migration.

The following section will examine the key barriers to skill utilization and appropriate employment faced by migrant WoC in the Australian labour market. Contrary to the CEDA report (2021) that focuses on explanations for

skill mismatch as gender- and culture-neutral territories (Figure 2), this report aims to render the dimensions of migrant WoC disadvantage more complex and intersectional.

SECTION 2 - A REGIME DESIGNED TO FAIL **MIGRANT WoC: KEY BARRIERS TO SKILL** **UTILISATION**

Challenging the traditional human capital approach that assumes a straight correlation between migrants’ skills and qualifications, language proficiency and visa status, and their postmigration trajectory is integral to the process of understanding the key barriers to skill underutilization of migrant WoC. OECD defines human capital as “productive wealth embodied in labour, skills and knowledge”. Since the prospect of skilled migration driving economic growth is the most popular component of most western countries’ migration policies including Australia’s, it is commonly assumed that conditions which qualify migrants to be eligible for entry into the country also predetermine their (successful) labour outcomes in it (Khoo 1994; Richardson et al 2004). The following disadvantages faced by migrant WoC aim to debunk this theory by adopting a Bourdieun perspective of capital (Ho and Alcorso 2004; Ho 2006; Webb et al 2013; Webb 2015b) as not neutral resources but ones that are representative of systemic power in how they are exercised to perpetuate inequality. Bourdieu (1986) describes human capital as composed of social, cultural, economic and symbolic factors that are more reflective of institutional power than individual capability. This typology is crucial to reframing the conversation around migrant WoC’s occupational mobility from one that emphasizes individual inadequacies to one that holds

surrounding institutions accountable (Tani 2012).

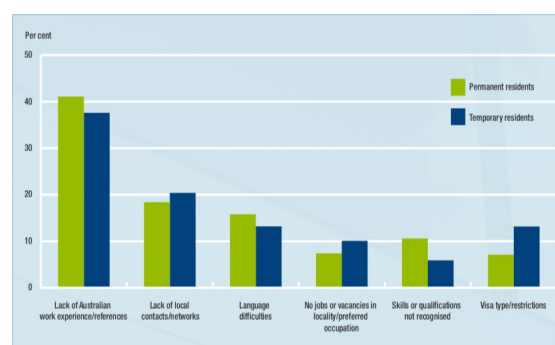


Figure 2: Difficulties in finding first job in Australia. Source: CEDA Report 2021, *A Good Match: Optimising Australia's Permanent Skilled Migration*

NON-RECOGNITION OF OVERSEAS QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE (ROQE)

The key explanation that periodically resurfaces for skill underutilization or mismatch among migrants is the non-recognition of their international credentials and experience. The Productivity Commission report (2016) also identified domestic skill recognition systems as a key barrier to employment outcomes of migrants. The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation Codes (ANZSCO) provide the list of occupations with skill shortage alongside detailed information about required qualifications (ABS 2006). The CEDA report finds that occupations defined by the ANSCO were outdated and had not been updated since 2013, failing to capture recent occupations in demand or reversely, exclude occupations that no longer have a skill shortage problem (CEDA 2021). While this is a valid factor contributing to skills mismatch, migrants' difficulties with finding a job commensurate with their skill level are also often related to socio-cultural biases in the labour market pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and politics.

Even though skilled migrants are assessed for required qualifications prior to migration, a transferability gap persists in relation to their acknowledgement in the host country (Chiswick and Miller 2009). Webb (2015b) refers to state-regulated occupation lists and skill requirements as a 'policy knowledge construct' that holds colonial frameworks of English language proficiency and professional backgrounds in western economies at a higher advantage. Moreover, it excludes gatekeeping mechanisms practiced by employers and regulatory bodies from scrutiny. Studies of skilled migrant women residing in regional Australia (both primary and secondary applicants) show that women arriving with education and work experience from western countries found their transition to appropriate employment to be smoother than those who arrived from non-English speaking countries (Webb 2015a). This is consistent with another study done by Misko (2012) in Australia that found employers and recruiters to be more inclined towards migrants from Anglophone countries like the UK, New Zealand, Canada, USA and Ireland.

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process whereby migrants can apply to have their overseas qualifications and experience accredited by professional bodies in Australia (Cameron et al 2019). However, it continues to reinforce the devaluation of international experience carried by migrants from non-western contexts and moreover, entails further assessments that are not financially viable for all migrant WoC. A study conducted by Deloitte Access Economics (2018) found that across Australia, there were an estimated 34,700 migrants and refugees who were potentially

underutilised but only 15,300 applied to have their post school qualifications recognised. Reskilling programs are also an expensive affair that don't guarantee professional outcomes for migrant WoC but require substantial time and financial investment. The rate of overeducation³ for migrants goes up to 30% as compared to 7% among Australian-born workers (CEDA 2021). This data, while not being gender disaggregated, can be related to existing literature that found migrant NESB women to be more overeducated than their male counterparts (Kler 2006).

English language proficiency is usually examined as a separate factor contributing to skill mismatch for migrants but is very intimately related to other regulatory processes of exclusion such as ROQE. NESB migrant women are subject to a double-disadvantage in terms of occupational mobility, being subject to racial discrimination within the workplace, career stagnation or concentration within low wage, under-skilled occupations (Haque and Haque 2020). Language, within migration policy, is used as a political tool of exclusion that interacts with other variables of migrant WoC identity such as their marital status, race and ethnicity to reproduce institutional disadvantage. While the unemployment rate of NESB migrant women has decreased over the years, it still continues to be significantly lower than Australia-born women (ABW) – 53.8% vs 64.4% in 2016. A study by Haque and Haque (2020) found that NESB migrant women with a degree were 16.5% less likely to secure primary sector employment (PSE) than ABW. Moreover, NESB migrant women were 27.5% less likely to secure PSE than ABW when they had a child. Biased notions of these women's

social and cultural behaviour is integral to their discrimination in the labour market, intersecting with inadequate provisions such as accessible childcare (Haque and Haque 2022).

MIGRANT WoC NOT 'FITTING' THE 'CULTURE': THE 'WHO YOU KNOW, NOT WHAT YOU KNOW' PERSPECTIVE

Webb (2015a) and Webb et al (2013) found that women who arrived through employer sponsored visas or were able to maintain professional networks experienced lesser difficulty in their migration transition that women who, for instance, arrived as secondary applicants (despite being skilled migrants). Social and cultural capital in this context refer to the ways in which migrants adhere to the dominant cultural codes of the host country that accord them professional mobility. Webb (2015b), in her discussion of skill misrecognition among migrant women, posits how employers exercise a "broader understanding of skill than codified in the skilled occupation list". This includes familiarity with local cultural expectations, lifestyle and mannerisms – an area where migrant WoC don't quite 'fit'. Diez et al (2015) points out recruitment bias can also be directed towards highly qualified migrants due to the greater emphasis on 'fit' than skills. This is consistent with the response of a secondary migrant WoC who confessed to altering her resume to look 'under-qualified' for a role just so she would be considered (Webb 2015b).

Migrant WoC's opportunities for upward career mobility are thwarted by pervasive stereotypes about their cultures and communities. Kamenou and Fearfull (2006), in their analysis of ethnic minority women's absence from human resource strategies, refer to 'bicultural

stress' as the result of these women having to compartmentalize their individual cultural identities as distinct from their organisational conduct. This is extremely relevant in the case of migrant WoC who, estranged not only from former professional but also support networks, are forced to invisibilize their racial/ethnic identities in order to achieve due career growth. A workplace survey by Women of Colour Australia (2021) found that 60% of WoC experienced discrimination within the workplace. The implication of this on migrant identity is significant as 60% of the survey takers were reported as being born overseas. The report echoed the silence of social inclusion dialogue on racism, as also pointed out by Boese and Phillips (2011), and pointed to how intersectionality and diversity are often conflated in conversations around organisational reform.

At the same time however, it is important to not homogenise the migrant WoC community and recognize factors like social class that can sometimes compensate for the disadvantage that migrant WoC's 'visibility' afflict on them. Webb (2015b) uses the example of a migrant WoC whose career trajectory was positively defined by the cultural capital that she gained by enrolling in a high-ranked university and forming powerful networks within that community.

Ho (2006) discusses skilled Chinese migrant women's return to the domestic sphere post migration as a result of significant downward occupational mobility. She accounts this to the gendered construction of women as caregivers and homemakers whose roles are deemed crucial to rebuild life post migration – an expectation that drives women into precarious

parttime and casual employment and eventually, out of the workforce altogether. Returning to the state-propagated narrative of migrant success, Butler and Ferrier (2006) note how the entry of large numbers of married migrant WoC and students into the casual workforce has served to romanticise ideas about the flexibility accorded by this sector, ignoring its precarity and extremely limited scope for upward mobility.

ENTRY STATUS

Visa category is treated as a proxy for migrants' potential productivity in the Australian context. Ho and Alcorso (2004) point out several major drawbacks of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) that was used to nationally survey migrants about their experiences of settlement in the first few years since migration. The LSIA was focused on closely relating migrants' labour market outcomes with their visa categories, while offering no comparisons with the Australian-born population. It also didn't include country of birth, ethnicity or occupational mobility as valid areas of consideration.

According to an analysis of the CSAM in 2010, even though the number of women who are primary visa holders under skilled migrant categories is growing quickly, the majority of skilled women migrants still enter Australia as secondary applicants (ABS 2009). In their analysis of the experiences of skilled migrant women with vocational education and training (VET) systems in regional Australia, Webb (2015a) and Webb et al (2013) found that systemic services of resettlement were lacking for migrant women who arrived as secondary applicants or without a job. The lack of targeted initiatives, including but not limited to financial

assistance for VET and CALD-responsive employment assistance programs, prolonged migrant WoC's career development.

Temporary visa holders are faced with an advanced degree of precarity regarding skill utilization, given their visa restrictions and the lack of well-developed support mechanisms.

This report identifies an inadequacy of research concerning temporary migrants' experiences with occupational mobility. This is concerning, given that temporary visas have become the most dominant pathway to permanent migration since 2013-2014 and research indicates that temporary skilled migrants have better labour market outcomes than other migrants (CEDA

2019). A study of temporary skilled migrants' well-being in Australia found that most of their spouses face immense difficulty transferring their skills and expertise to gain employment in

Australia, leading to underemployment and subsequent decline in psychosocial health (Bahn 2015). While not specifically focusing on migrant WoC, this study also found that temporary migrants paid the highest rate of taxation while not being eligible for any rebates like local workers. The high cost of living, lack of relocation support and the uncertainty of future career trajectories – all combine to produce major stressors for temporary migrants and their families.

It is important, in this context, to examine temporary migrant women's status as both accompanying spouses or primary visa holders.

International students make up the majority of temporary migrants in Australia but experience major skill underutilization as a result of their entry conditions as well as lack of local

experience. Disaggregated data about this population is largely missing from studies of underemployment, and needs further research. An article by the South Asian Today (2021) shared the findings of a study that sought to explore the employability of South Asian students and graduates during the COVID-19 crisis. It found that a major proportion of international students expressed difficulties landing a job related to their field of study, with some drawing loans to pay for their education. The article also highlights the general uphill battle international students have to wage to find relevant internship/employment opportunities as a result of their overseas experience not being recognised or their visa status effectively excluding them from consideration.

A SEGREGATED MARKET

The IOM report found a telling correlation between high-income OECD countries' propensity towards skilled migration and an increased need for domestic care workers in these countries

(IOM 2013). The 'gender contract' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Twigg 2000) normalizes the idea of women dominating the care industry by virtue of it being an extension of their default gender role. A study conducted by KPMG and the Diversity Council of Australia (2019) found occupational segregation to be the second most driver of the gender pay gap. It finds that women are mostly overrepresented in lower paid roles, positions and sectors such as such as healthcare, social work, aged care, childcare, cleaning, and food production. NESB migrant WoC, according to LSIA data, were more likely to be concentrated in low wage jobs

as compared to ESB migrants (Ho and Alcorso 2004).

The Monash University Lens (2021a) reported how prolonged periods of employment in jobs incommensurate with skill level can lead to a 'scarring effect' on migrant women that leads to a gradual depreciation of their skillset and knowledge. Its study of Nepali migrants (2021b) – the fastest growing migrant community between 2006-2016 – during the COVID19 employment crisis found that majority of them faced rampant economic insecurity as a result of losing their contract/casual jobs. Temporary visa holders are overrepresented in the casual employment sector and experience wage theft on a common basis, while not being eligible for state benefits (Farbenblum and Berg 2018; Farbenblum and Berg 2020). A survey conducted of international students' experiences with underpayment and other work violations found that a half were paid under the basic statutory minimum wage and over three quarters were paid below the minimum casual hourly wage. They also experienced other forms of violations such as failure of record-keeping, non-payment of wages, dismissal after complaint, overwork and sexual harassment (Farbenblum and Berg 2020). Migrant WoC's vulnerabilities may not be adequately captured in these studies, given patterns of underreporting abuse and discomfort sharing information (Boucher 2019).

INADEQUATE NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

Migrant WoC are not regarded as a target community for resettlement services, whether they are skilled migrants arriving as primary or secondary applicants. Webb et al (2013) note how assimilation for migrant WoC becomes a culturally differentiated and segmented process

in the absence of initiatives that actively tackle employer bias while trying to integrate migrants into the local community. This has important implications for career mobility among migrant WoC who are undergoing the penalty that is migration itself – a costly process that is taxing on several fronts. The lack of migrant WoC-responsive support services is a reflection of what Webb (2015b) calls a 'time lag between arrival and recognition that the policy narrative is misleading', leading migrants to believe pre-migration that their skills are adequate to ensure labour market outcomes and eventually, blaming their individual productivity and characteristics when it doesn't work out. This absolves surrounding institutions of their responsibility to create a more informed and inclusive landscape of resettlement for migrants.

The Australian government's strategy to reduce the gender participation gap by 25% by 2025 identifies CALD women as one of the six population groups who face unique barriers in labour market participation. To address this problem, the government pledges its commitment to the three Es – English language proficiency, education and employment (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017). This approach is modelled on a narrow framework of human capital that does not acknowledge the complexity of transition processes post-migration for CALD women. These commitments also appear counterproductive in light of the waiting period for Newly Arrived Residents to access welfare payments being extended over time, finally increased to four years in 2019 (CEDA 2021). This can affect the employability experiences of migrant WoC in multiple ways. In the case of

women who arrive as secondary applicants, it can relegate them to the domestic sphere as men's earning roles are prioritized within the household for maximum outcome (Webb 2015b). At the same time, it can also compel skilled migrant WoC to compromise on job quality in order to earn living wages.

Temporary migrants are systemically excluded from state welfare benefits. This inequality was made more glaring during the 2020 Covid-19 crisis, when they were excluded from Jobseeker and Jobkeeper payments. Temporary migrants are also excluded from the Sickness Allowance (other than Skilled Work Regional and Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional visa holder) which means that they have to continue working despite declines in health in order to not lose income (Berg and Farbenblum 2020). This does not just manifest in poor physical and mental health outcomes for migrant WoC but also stagnates their career growth due to being trapped in occupations that are time-consuming and exploitative.

SECTION 3 – MOVING FORWARD: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The barriers to occupational mobility faced by migrant WoC are intersectional and as such, warrant solutions that are premised on coordination and good practice across a range of stakeholders, from immigration to employment to welfare. This report makes some policy recommendations to this end.

BUILDING A SOUND EVIDENCE BASE FOR MIGRANT WOC'S SKILL-BASED UNDEREMPLOYMENT THROUGH DISAGGREGATED DATA

To begin with, there is a urgent need for the evidence base of skill underutilization and

mismatch among migrants to be expanded to include CALD women. Currently, ABS published underemployment data does not account for migrants and moreover, considers underemployment to be occurring either because they worked less than their usual hours for economic reasons or because they would prefer (and are available) to work more hours than they usually work (ABS 2021). This does not include skills as a relevant factor of assessment in underemployment.

CONDUCTING AND FUNDING MORE RESEARCH ON TEMPORARY MIGRANTS WOC'S EXPERIENCES WITH UNDEREMPLOYMENT

While entry status predetermines migrants' labour market outcomes to a great extent, there is a paucity of research and policy dialogue around the struggles that migrant WoC on temporary visas face in relating to occupying jobs commensurate with their skill level. The CEDA report restricts its focus to permanent skilled migrants – a pattern evident in most literature and research around the issue. While the experiences of spouses of temporary skilled migrants in relation to resettlement have been studied (Bahn 2015), there is a need for disaggregated evidence that does not relegate women to the definition of 'trailing spouses' and highlights skill underutilization among temporary migrant WoC who arrive as international students or under the temporary skilled scheme. COVID-19 has exposed glaring inequalities created by the institutional regime between the welfare of permanent and temporary migrant communities in Australia. This should serve as an opportune moment to explore how temporary migrant

WoC – with the added precarity of visa conditions – experience career mobility as a result of ‘exclusionary narratives’ of skills, experience and discrimination (Wagner and Childs 2006).

INCLUDING GENDER AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SAFEGUARDS IN THE CEDA-PROPOSED SKILLS MATCHING PLATFORM

The CEDA report (2021) recognises the need for a more integrated approach to the issue of skills mismatch that enhances proximity between the expectations of potential skilled migrants and their future employers’ needs. To this end, it proposes a government-built and regulated skills matching platform which would take a demand-driven approach, allowing employers to receive applications from, negotiate with, and offer employment to skilled migrants before they enter the country. This would allow migrants insight into employer practices and possibly help the integration process. This report recognizes the potential benefits of this system for better migrant outcomes but strongly recommends the inclusion of social and cultural safeguards in it that allow for non-discriminatory and respectful decision-making. Extending this platform to secondary applicants of the permanent skilled visa (majority of whom are women and experience estrangement from professional networks) can also accelerate the process of them finding jobs aligning with their skill levels.

REDUCING THE NEWLY ARRIVED RESIDENT’S WAITING PERIOD FOR WELFARE BENEFITS

This report agrees with the CEDA report’s (2021) recommendation of lowering the Newly

Arrived Resident’s waiting period for welfare benefits to six months from four years. This is integral to maintaining the holistic security of migrant WoC by offering them more breathing ground to find a job that actually aligns with their skill level rather than occupying exploitative, deskilled roles for the sole purpose of maintaining their cost of living. Having access to welfare benefits would also put migrant WoC within heterosexual families in a better position to pursue career growth as opposed to being trapped in the domestic sphere.

ADOPTING AN INTERSECTIONAL AND COORDINATED APPROACH TO SUPPORT SERVICES

This report has shown how the labour market outcomes of migrant WoC are determined within gendered and racialised regimes of migration policy, recruitment practices and support systems. As such, addressing their skill underutilization would require taking collaborative approach to support that engages a range of stakeholders across education, employment and resettlement. Dantas et al (2020) refer to the need for a ‘non-hierarchical, collaborative and cross-cultural’ model of assistance that recognises the interconnectedness between migrant WoC’s personal well-being and professional capacity-building. Webb (2015a) and Webb et al (2013) highlight the exclusion of migrant women from VET programs by not offering them the opportunity to claim back funds invested in it. Dantas et al (2017) also point out employers’ lack of knowledge about policies and processes required to facilitate skilled migrants’ integration into relevant sectors. For migrant WoC who struggle with the transferability of their skills and expertise, reskilling is often an inaccessible

option owing to high fees and substantial time investment. In this scenario, it is important for VET, skill development and reskilling programs to adopt a more intersectional approach to inclusion not just in terms of training material and approaches but also financial resources that enhance accessibility. The issue of institutional racism and socio-cultural discrimination is also one that should be given equal attention alongside the more marketable Diversity policies.

The Productivity Commission Report (2016) highlighted the need to facilitate efficient processes of recognition of overseas qualifications and experience. There is a need to move away from racially legitimized systems of acceptance in this regard that value qualifications and experience from ESB countries over NESB contexts. A strategy that is common among migrant WoC whose qualifications and experience are not recognised due to lack of Australian references, is to engage in the community volunteering sector to create cultural and career capital (Webb et al 2013). This, while pointing to the resilience of migrant women, does not take away from the injustice of having to do unpaid labour for an extended period of time just to prove credibility in a different cultural context.

INTRODUCING PATHWAYS FROM EDUCATION TO APPROPRIATE EMPLOYMENT FOR TEMPORARY MIGRANT WOC AND SAFEGUARDS AGAINST EXPLOITATIVE EMPLOYMENT

Given that over half of permanent visas are given out to temporary resident already onshore, it is important to ensure that their career mobility is facilitated through access to systemic pathways from education (CEDA

2019). This report recommends the need for well-developed programs of placements, including sponsorships and funding across tertiary and vocational education institutions targeted specifically at migrant WoC who reside in Australia as international students and contribute significantly to the economy by participation in essential industries and occupations.

A study conducted on the safety and security of migrant and refugee women found that the most common reason for women not being satisfied with their jobs was due to them not using their skills or experience. It also reported that temporary visa holders experienced the highest rates of hardship in Australia which increased by a further 6% during COVID-19 (Segrave et al 2021). Given most temporary migrant WoC are concentrated in casual/contract employment in low-wage sectors, it is important to improve their access to support against exploitation or discrimination.

CONCLUSION

The term 'gendered geographies of power' is used to denote migration as not a linear trajectory but one that involves multiple disruptions of imagined futures (Pessar and Mahler 2003). The issue of deskilling for migrant WoC – by virtue of its intersectional nature – is one that requires addressal at various levels along the migration and career trajectory. This report has tried to highlight the absence of a uniform and inclusive research and policy standpoint on the issue of migrant WoC's skill underutilization. The sizeable gap in considering the experiences of temporary migrants' experiences points to systemic neglect that renders this community 'precariats' – trapped in volatile, insecure work that offers

no opportunity for upward mobility (Standing 2016).

The Intergenerational Report (2021) takes into account the 'demographic shock' inflicted by COVID-19 on the Australian economy and points to net overseas migration as the key driver of future population and productivity growth. This degree of reliance on migrants' capabilities needs to be consistent with services that facilitate their smooth and holistic

transition into the labour market. North et al's (2010) distinction between social exclusion as a *process* and disadvantage as a *state* is relevant to understanding the barriers to career mobility for migrant WoC as a series of exclusionary processes of power inequality which eventually lead to a state of disadvantage. Efforts to address this issue need to be systematic, coordinated and culturally responsive, as recommended in this report.

APPENDIX

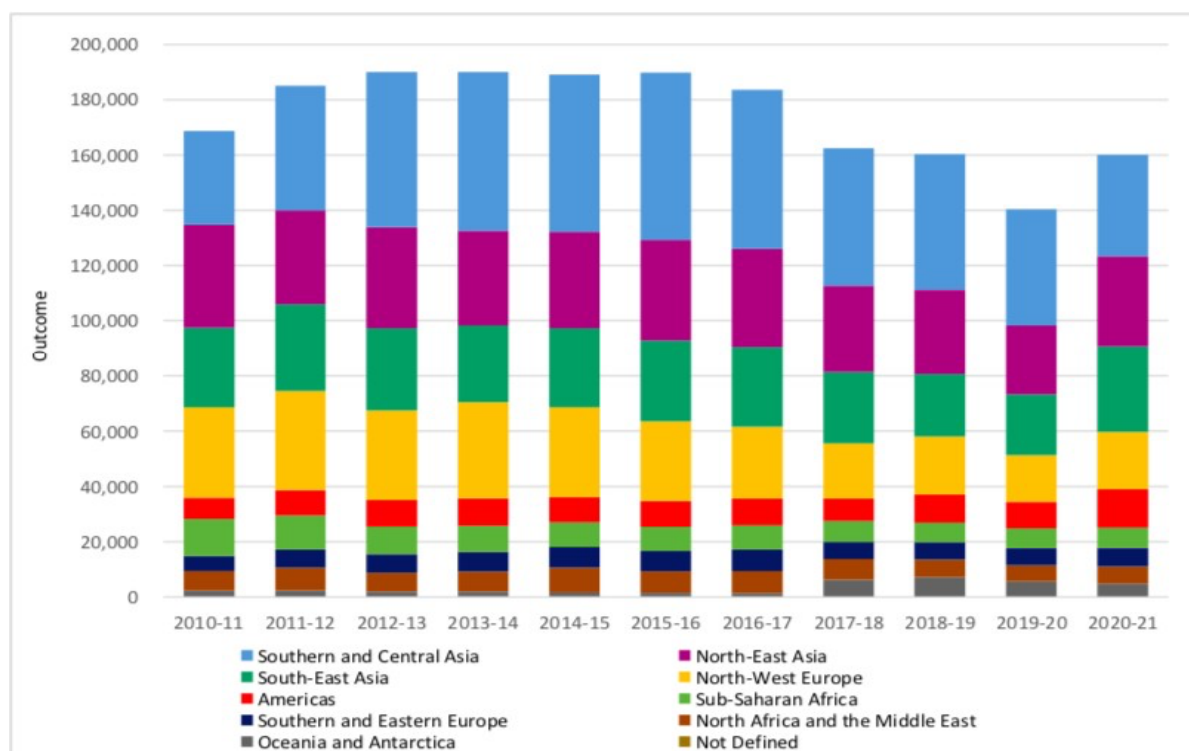


Figure 1: Migration Program outcome 2010-11 and 2020-21 by region.

Source: 2020-2021 Migration Program Report, Department of Home Affairs

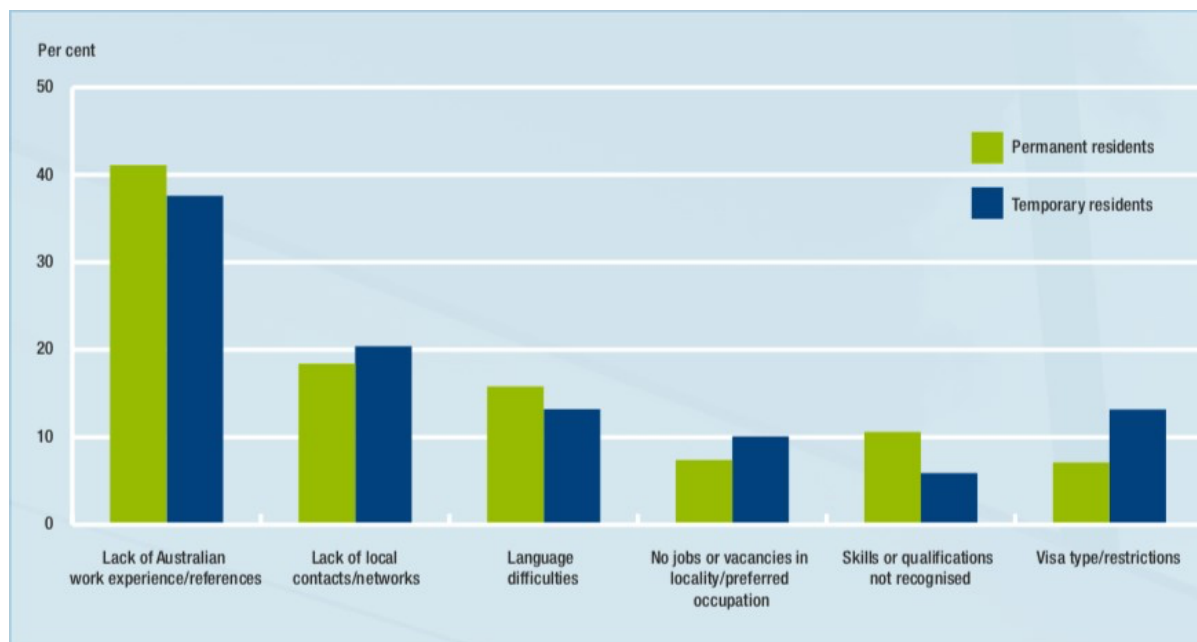


Figure 2: Difficulties in finding first job in Australia.

Source: CEDA Report 2021, *A Good Match: Optimising Australia's Permanent Skilled Migration*

NOTES

¹ Recent migrants' refer to people who have come to Australia in the last 10 years and were on a permanent visa or had become Australian citizens since arrival (ABS 2020)

² The gender pay gap (GPG) is the difference between women's and men's average weekly full-time equivalent earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings. It is a measure of women's overall position in the paid workforce and does not compare like roles (WGEA 2022)

³ Overeducation occurs when an individual has 'excess qualification' than required to do the job they occupy (Green et al 2002).

REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1999a. *Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity*, 1999, Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1289.0> [Accessed]
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. ANZSCO - *Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, First Edition, 2006* [Online]. Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/2D29A76056237046CA2571E200835604?opendocument> [Accessed].
- Australian Bureau of Statistics Statistics. 2009. *Perspectives on Migrants*, 2009 In: STATISTICS, A. B. O. (ed.). Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/3416.0main+features22009> [Accessed]
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2020. *Characteristics of recent migrants* [Online]. Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/characteristicshttps://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/characteristics-recent-migrants/latest-release - labour-market-outcomesrecent-migrants/latest-release#labour-market-outcomes> [Accessed].
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2021. *Migration, Australia* [Online]. Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/migrationhttps://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/migration-australia/latest-release - net-overseas-migrationaustralia/latest-release#net-overseas-migration> [Accessed].
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2022a. *Labour Force, Australia* [Online]. Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-andhttps://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-releaseunemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release> [Accessed].
- Australian Bureau of Statistics Statistics. 2022b. *National, state and territory population* [Online]. Australian Bureau of Statistics Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territoryhttps://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2021population/sep-2021> [Accessed].
- Bahn, S. 2015. Managing the well-being of temporary skilled migrants. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26, 2102-2120.
- Ballarino, G. & Panichella, N. 2018. The occupational integration of migrant women in Western European labour markets. *Acta Sociologica*, 61, 126-142.
- Berg, L. & Farbenblum, B. 2020. As if we weren't humans: the abandonment of temporary migrants in Australia during COVID-19. Available at SSRN 3709527.
- Boese, M. & Phillips, M. 2011. Multiculturalism and social inclusion in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 32, 189-197.
- Boucher, A. 2019. Measuring migrant worker rights violations in practice: The example of temporary skilled visas in Australia. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 61, 277-301.
- Bourdieu, P. 2011. The forms of capital.(1986). *Cultural theory: An anthology*, 1, 81-93.
- Butler, E. & Ferrier, F. 2006. Asking difficult (feminist) questions: the case of 'disappearing' women and policy problematics in Australian VET. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 58, 577-601.
- Cai, L. & Liu, A. Y. 2015. Wage differentials between immigrants and the native-born in Australia. *International Journal of Manpower*.
- Cameron, R., Farivar, F. & Dantas, J. 2019. The unanticipated road to skills wastage for skilled migrants: the non-recognition of overseas qualifications and experience (ROQE). *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work*, 29, 80-97.
- Chiswick, B. R. & Miller, P. W. 2009. The international transferability of immigrants' human capital. *Economics of Education Review*, 28, 162-169.
- Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). 2019. Effects of Temporary Migration: Shaping Australia's Society and Economy. Committee for Economic Development of Australia Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). 2021. A good match: optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration.
- Dantas, J., Cameron, R., Farivar, F. & Strauss, P. 2017. Minimising skills wastage: Maximising the health of skilled migrant groups.

- Dantas, J. A., Strauss, P., Cameron, R. & Rogers, C. 2020. Women migrants in Western Australia: Case studies of resilience and empowerment. *Social Change*, 50, 77-94.
- Dean, J. A. & Wilson, K. 2009. 'Education? It is irrelevant to my job now. It makes me very depressed...': exploring the health impacts of under/unemployment among highly skilled recent immigrants in Canada. *Ethnicity & health*, 14, 185-204.
- Dietz, J., Joshi, C., Esses, V. M., Hamilton, L. K. & Gabarrot, F. 2015. The skill paradox: Explaining and reducing employment discrimination against skilled immigrants. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26, 1318-1334.
- Deloitte Access Economics. 2018. Seizing the opportunity: Making the most of the skills and experience of migrants and refugees.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2021. 2020 – 21 Migration Program Report Program year to 30 June 2021. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Department of Home Affairs. *Country profiles* [Online]. Department of Home Affairs Available: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/country-profiles/permanent-migration-profiles/permanent-migration> [Accessed].
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2017. Towards 2025: an Australian Government strategy to boost women's workforce participation.
- Ehrenreich, B., Hochschild, A. R. & Kay, S. 2003. *Global woman: Nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy*, Macmillan.
- Farbenblum, B. & Berg, L. 2018. Wage Theft in Silence: Why migrant workers do not recover their unpaid wages in Australia. *UNSW Law Research Paper*.
- Farbenblum, B. & Berg, L. 2020. International students and wage theft in Australia. *Available at SSRN 3663837*.
- Flatau, P., Petridis, R. & Wood, G. 1995. *Immigrants and Invisible Underemployment*, Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Green, F., McIntosh, S. & Vignoles, A. 2002. The utilization of education and skills: evidence from Britain. *The Manchester School*, 70, 792-811.
- Haque, T. H. & Haque, M. O. 2020. Double disadvantage? The slow progress of non English-speaking migrant women in accessing good jobs in Australia. *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work*, 30, 256-282.
- Haque, T. H. & Haque, M. O. 2022. The Unemployment Imbalance Between Non-English Speaking Migrant Women and Australian Born Women. *Journal of Quantitative Economics*, 1-20.
- Ho, C. 2006. Migration as feminisation? Chinese women's experiences of work and family in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32, 497-514.
- Ho, C. & Alcorso, C. 2004. Migrants and employment: Challenging the success story. *Journal of sociology*, 40, 237-259. IOM. 2013. *Crushed hopes: Underemployment and deskilling among skilled migrant women*, United Nations Publications.
- Kamenou, N. & Fearfull, A. 2006. Ethnic minority women: A lost voice in HRM. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16, 154-172.
- Khoo, S.-E. 1994. Correlates of welfare dependency among immigrants in Australia. *International migration review*, 28, 68-92.
- Kler, P. 2006. Graduate overeducation and its effects among recently arrived immigrants to Australia: A longitudinal survey. *International Migration*, 44, 93-128.
- KPMG 2019. *She's Price (d) less: The Economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, Workplace Gender Equality Agency.
- Misko, J. 2012. *The Role of Qualifications in Foreign Labour Mobility in Australia. Research Report*, ERIC.
- Monash Lens. 2021a. Billion-dollar hit: The barriers skilled migrants face in finding jobs at their full capacity, and the economic cost. Available: <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/05/20/1383170/billion-dollar-hit-the-barriers-skilled-migrants-face-in-finding-jobs-at-their-full-capacity-and-the-economic-cost>
- Monash Lens. 2021b. Tracing the impacts of the COVID pandemic on Australia's fastest growing migrant group. Available: <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/04/12/1383007/tracing-the-impacts-of-the-covid-pandemic-on-australias-fastest-growing-migrant-group>

[pandemic-onhttps://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/04/12/1383007/tracing-the-impacts-of-the-covid-pandemic-on-australias-fastest-growing-migrant-group](https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/04/12/1383007/tracing-the-impacts-of-the-covid-pandemic-on-australias-fastest-growing-migrant-group)

North, S., Ferrier, F. & Long, M. 2010. Equitable and inclusive VET. *Canberra: National VET Equity Advisory Council*.

OECD. *Glossary of Statistical Terms* [Online]. OECD: OECD. Available: <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/> [Accessed].

Pessar, P. R. & Mahler, S. J. 2003. Transnational migration: Bringing gender in. *International migration review*, 37, 812-846.

Productivity Commission. 2016. Migrant intake into Australia: Inquiry Report.

Richardson, S., Stack, S., Lester, L., Healy, J., Ilsley, D. & Horrocks, J. 2004. The changing labour force experience of new migrants. *Inter-wave comparisons for cohort*, 1.

Segrave, M., Wickes, R. & Keel, C. 2021. Migrant and refugee women in Australia: The safety and security study.

South Asian Today. 2021. International South Asian student and graduate employability during the COVID-19 crisis: Stories and lived experiences. Available: <https://www.southasiantoday.com.au/article-9139-international-south-asian-student-and-graduate-employability-during-the-covid-19-crisis-stories-and-lived-experiences-details.aspx> and <https://www.southasiantoday.com.au/article-9139-international-south-asian-student-and-graduate-employability-during-the-covid-19-crisis-stories-and-lived-experiences> <https://www.southasiantoday.com.au/article-9139-international-south-asian-student-and-graduate-employability-during-the-covid-19-crisis-stories-and-lived-experiences-details.aspx>

Standing, G. 2016. *The Precariat : the New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury Academic.

Tani, M. 2012. Does immigration policy affect the education-occupation mismatch? Evidence from Australia. *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 38, 111-141.

Thomson, L. 2014. Migrant employment patterns in Australia: post Second World War to the present. *AMES Research and Policy Unit*, October.

Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia. 2021. 2021 Intergenerational Report: Australia over the next 40 years.

Twigg, J. 2000. Care work as a form of bodywork. *Ageing & Society*, 20, 389-411.

Wagner, R. & Childs, M. 2006. Exclusionary narratives as barriers to the recognition of qualifications, skills and experience—a case of skilled migrants in Australia. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 28, 49-62.

Webb, S. 2015a. The feminisation of migration and the migrants VET policy neglects: the case of skilled women secondary migrants in Australia. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 67, 26-46.

Webb, S. 2015b. 'It's who you know not what': migrants' encounters with regimes of skills as misrecognition. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 37, 267-285.

Webb, S., Beale, D. & Faine, M. 2013. *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

WGEA. 2022. *Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics* [Online]. WGEA: WGEA. Available: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-pay-gap-statistics> [Accessed].

Women of Colour Australia. 2021. Workplace Survey Report 2021.