

Exploring the challenges that women seeking asylum face in gaining employment in Australia

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Executive Summary

People seeking asylum are considered some of the most vulnerable demographics in the world (Citizens for Public Justice 2019, p. 2). As populations that are forced out of their origin country due to crisis, discrimination, conflict or disaster, people seeking asylum often turn to foreign states for security (Fleay et al. 2016, p. 65). Despite gaining momentary reprieve on international soil, many seeking humanitarian protection continue to face a multitude of risks to their safety and well-being in the evaluation of their application for refuge (Citizens for Public Justice 2019, p. 2).

Women seeking asylum are known to face more barriers than their male counterparts in beginning a new life in their host country (Due et al. 2021, p.2). One specific challenge they face is in entering the workforce; a critical factor in sustaining a good-quality livelihood for themselves, as well as ensuring their financial independence and security (Jayasinghe 2019, p. 1). While there are various modes of support available to women seeking asylum, research and statistics – or the lack thereof – suggest a severe underrepresentation of their demographic in the workforce (Due et al. 2021). While this is reflective of the general gendered struggle women face in entering the workforce (Triggs 2013), intersectionality, a recent development in feminist theory, stresses a deeper analysis of the dynamics and policies that inhibit an effective and sustainable pathway for women seeking asylum to obtain employment (Steinmetz 2020; UN Women 2020).

This report analyses the current employment support available to women seeking asylum in Australia, and identifies how intersectional theory may be applied to strengthen such support. By reflecting upon the Victorian Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's (ASRC) support services and resources for women seeking asylum, this report highlights how intersectional frameworks have and could continue to strengthen successful and sustainable pathways to employment. The analysis in the Report is presented through the discussion of three challenges women seeking asylum face in gaining employment: (I) the implication of their entry pathway into Australia and

subsequent residency status on their employability; (II) the lack of accommodation of their multifaceted identity in the delivery of employment services; and (III) institutional discrimination and cultural prejudice in potential workplaces.

The conclusion reached in this Report is that women seeking asylum are a severely untapped resource to host countries' economies, and that the appropriate representation of their potential and contribution to host countries' societies have immeasurable value to further their development and improve global humanitarianism.

Introduction



1. Women Seeking Asylum: An Overview

There are two stages in the application of international humanitarian protection. In the first, applicants are considered 'asylum seekers' as they await the jurisdiction of their appeal for international protection. In the success of said evaluation, the second stage confirms applicants' 'refugee' status, where in accordance with the United Nations Refugee Convention they may enter and settle within a host country as an honorary citizen (Hathaway 2001). This Report will use the collective term 'seeking asylum' in reference to the women discussed, so as to ensure an in-depth, holistic analysis of the challenges they face even upon arrival on foreign soil.

Women seeking asylum are often subjected to settle in poor environments where they are at risk of violence, sexual assault, abuse and harassment, unsanitary conditions and poor livelihoods because they are not as independent, financially secure and well-resourced as their male counterparts (Valji et al. 2003, p. 62). Finding employment, therefore, is a way out of this predicament and towards financial independence, empowerment and protection. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and Refugee Charter identify employment as a gateway to securing other basic and necessary human rights (Triggs 2013). While women face a gendered struggle to gain employment already, the chances of women seeking asylum in entering their host country's workforce are further restricted by their background and refugee status (Heaven 2019; Triggs 2013, quoting the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission). This makes them one of the most vulnerable populations in the world (Valji et al. 2004, p. 61).

Harmony Alliance, Australia's national migrant and refugee coalition, assert the value people seeking asylum could bring to the Australian workforce are unique knowledge, perspectives and connections, various skills and abilities (2019, p. 6). The inclusion of and support towards women seeking asylum in employment has proven to be not just empowering to the demographic in focus, but extremely beneficial to Australian employers and wider society (Hunt 2008, p. 287). Employment is considered one of the key

factors in the integration of women seeking asylum into their host country's society (Due et al. 2021, pp. 1- 2), and has been marked as a significant objective in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of gender equality and decent work for all, as well as refugee self-reliance in the Global Compact on Refugees (Jayasinghe 2019, p. 1).

Employment represents value and worth of skill in society (Heaven 2019), and to insinuate that women seeking asylum are not capable of meeting said standards is a severe loss to any host country's economy and holistic development (Triggs 2013). The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report attributed the development and progression of countries' economies and society to how effectively it educates and utilises its women (2012) – this paper begs the question, why are women who seek asylum rarely included in this consideration?

The lack of equitable opportunity for women seeking asylum to gain employment is representative of systemic discrimination; an issue deeply entrenched into Australian society (Triggs 2013). The experience of women seeking asylum is an incredibly under-researched and underdeveloped area of study (Due et al. 2021, p. 1) but it is imperative to acknowledge and address the unique, complex effect of disadvantages this demographic faces, and to develop targeted policies to respond to their struggle (Triggs 2013). In doing so, it is vital to explore the relations between factors within the systemic discrimination they face – and one key strategy to effectively carry this agenda out is by putting intersectional theory to practice in the analysis and evaluation of the experience of women seeking asylum (Chen 2017b).



2. The Need for Intersectionality in Relevant Policy

Just as identity cannot be bound to a one characteristic, the identities of women seeking asylum cannot be represented only in their gender and residency status. There are a variety of factors and characteristics of oneself and the roles they play in life that must be considered in a holistic assessment of one's identity (Coleman 2019). Intersectional theory is built upon this foundation, and considers the relations between factors that encompass a context or person (Chen 2017b).

This Report has used the intersectional theory in the consideration of how different layers of discrimination means that there can be no single group of women to which all gender equality policies can be applied. This Report stresses that understanding the differences between women's experiences of discrimination is crucial to the development of targeted, effective and sustainable responses to the inequity they face.

Intersectional feminism is a term that was created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Defined as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (Crenshaw quoted in Steinmetz 2020; UN Women 2020), intersectional feminism is recognised to be a lens through which factors, stakeholders and events may be understood in relation to one another, thereby establishing a foundation for holistic evaluation and solution-creation towards a more equitable outcome for all involved (MacKinnon 2013, p. 1020; UN Women 2020).

As Crenshaw iterates in most of her literature in intersectional feminism, people can be subjected to not just one, but a variety – if not all – forms of inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, race or immigrant status (Steinmetz 2020; UN Women 2020). Intersectional feminism amplifies the voices of demographics experiencing overlapping and contemporaneous forms of oppression; and by this definition, women seeking asylum – as most often than not, women of colour, of low economic standing and questionable residency status – could be considered an epicentre of intersectionality (Coleman 2019; MacKinnon 2012, p. 1020). The biggest challenges that women seeking asylum face in integrating into their host country's society are discourses and policies shaped by the solitary identities they are assumed to have; either accommodative of only their gender or residency status; rarely both, and almost never encompassing of their other identities and roles in life (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1246; MacKinnon 2013, p. 1020). Refusing to address the complexity of the intersections of overlapping systems of oppression fails to acknowledge reality (Coleman 2019, referencing *Feminist Freedom Warriors: Genealogies, Justice, Politics and Hope* 2018).

Intersectionality and its frameworks facilitates the holistic analysis of multiple experiences, and recognises and celebrates the various and fluidity of identities women hold in life (Hearn & Louvrier 2015, p. 70). It has been routinely used to identify systemic discrimination in refugee and migration policies, as this Report will later demonstrate, but also address how such policies and systems could be improved (Taha 2019, pp. 6 – 7; Vervliet et al. 2013). Similarly applied in the context of employment support, services and resources made available to women seeking asylum must reflect the diversity of experiences and identities they have, and actively fight against the perpetuation of a singular, universal, blanket approach to all within this demographic (Citizens for Public Justice 2019, p. 2; Taha 2019).

Challenges

According to a study done in 2009, in Australia, migrant women were 7% less likely to be employed than women born in Australia (Syed & Murray, p. 416). Women seeking asylum, as part of this umbrella category, are significantly less likely than the afore statistic to gain employment in Australia due to the uncertainty and prejudice that accompanies their residency status, gender and background. These bases for discrimination are a part of Australia's history of racism and sexism in economic participation (Allotey et al. 2004, quoted in Keating et al. 2016, p. 6). They are similarly reflected in the country's social attitudes and structures, as well as policies and systems, on immigration and citizenship (Juss 2012; Keating et al. 2016, p. 6). Such foundations of discrimination will be discussed within the following challenges women seeking asylum face in entering the Australian workforce.

1. Implication of Entry Pathway & Residency Status on Employability

Phase two of the 'Advancing Women in STEM Strategy' targets 'Supporting Women in STEM careers'. This action area focuses on supporting the active recruitment and retention of women in STEM roles at all levels (Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources 2021). The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources have stated that "understanding women's participation in STEM-qualified occupations and the STEM research workforce is critical to building an inclusive and diverse workforce that is positioned to take full advantage of the jobs of the future" (Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources 2021), which they see as increasingly important as STEM skills are now regarded as widely valued and applicable across multiple occupations and industries. As of 2019, only 14% of women were in STEM-qualified occupations, in comparison to 50% in non-STEM occupations (Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources 2021). While the percentage of women participating in STEM-qualified occupations has increased by 3% between 2009 and 2019, this is still a proportionally low figure for the country's technologically driven economy

In Australia, humanitarian migrants are granted permanent protection visas and are considered honorary citizens, wherein they receive most of the same civil and political rights of Australian citizens, including access to healthcare, education and employment (Due et al. 2021, p. 3). These migrants are also eligible for government support for employment, education, housing, health, financial literacy and language services through the Department of Home Affairs' Refugee and Humanitarian Programme (2019). While this is an admirable program on behalf of the Australian government, it is extremely difficult to gain eligibility for (Due et al. 2021, p.3). The punitive approach that the Australian government has adopted as of the 2010s include multiple changes to visas provided to people seeking asylum in Australia (Triggs 2013). An example of this is seen through the largest programme for people seeking asylum in Australia: its offshore programme. In this programme, migrants apply for humanitarian-based protection and resettlement in Australia through consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Due et al. 2021; UNHCR 1993). From 2009 to 2014, an estimated 30,000 asylum seekers were granted temporary protection in Australia through this programme (Due et al. 2021, pp. 2 – 3). Settlement and integration support provided in this program includes some of the benefits provided to humanitarian migrants, but not all (Due et al. 2021, p. 3). These discrepancies in support given to different classifications of people seeking asylum in Australia create more inequalities between those in this demographic, and thus reasserts the call for intersectional frameworks in support services to accommodate these differences in their solutions and strategies for people seeking asylum.

Within the mode of one's arrival to Australia, there are various factors that specifically disadvantage women seeking asylum.

One such factor is the question of whom women seeking asylum arrive with. Asylum applications are often made by families or groups in which women are not the primary applicant (UNHCR 1993). Instead, women are often considered add-ons, or "appendages" to men in said applications, and as such are not included or prioritised in hearings and assessments that would decide the outcome of their plea for asylum (UNHCR Guidelines 1995,

quoted in UNHCR 2016; Valji 2003, p. 67). This means that women's plea for refuge is completely dependent on the case her male representative makes for himself. This is extremely unethical and unreliable, as in accordance with international human rights law and the Global Charter for Refugees, each person seeking asylum in foreign territory must be given equitable opportunity to be granted protection and refuge (UNHCR 2016). UNHCR guidelines claim that it is possible – and a humanitarian obligation – to inform women seeking asylum in conjunction with others that she may make an independent application for asylum at any stage in the process (1995). However, while such clauses exist in the aforementioned internationally-verified documents, current legislation fails to uphold such standards to protect or promote the rights of women seeking asylum. This can be likened to the sexist agenda entrenched into political structures and general discourse (Valji 2003), though not only sequestered to that of migration, humanitarian protection and refugee determination, and gender bias in matters of power and leadership within groups (McKay 2003). In addition to the obvious stigmatisation of people seeking asylum arriving in Australia unlawfully, the complexities that accompany women arriving as dependents are another layer of discrepancy in support provided by the state and other parties to assist with the resettlement of this demographic under the protection of the Australian government (McKay 2003). Nonetheless, in accordance with its international obligations to the ratification of humanitarian protection and refugee-acceptance, Australia is inclined to address its shortcomings in the lack of support given to women seeking asylum upon its shores (McKay 2003).

Another such factor is the means by which women seeking asylum arrive. As iterated in the beginning of this section, the representation of people seeking asylum in public and political discourse are the biggest factor in swaying influence over public attitudes to their resettlement under humanitarian protection (Fleay et al. 2016). A demonstration of this is in the rhetoric established around asylum seekers arriving by boat to Australia, and the consequential deepening of barriers to support the government has instilled to challenge their settlement in Australia (Fleay et al. 2016, p. 63; Rowe & O'Brien

2014, p. 172). Examples of such barriers are the mandatory detention of this demographic upon arrival, as well as the refusal to delegate legal right to work in the limbo period of their asylum application evaluation (Fleay et al. 2016, p. 77). Such barriers, on top of the lack of transparency in information given to women, intersect with each other to present an incredibly complex web of inequalities that women seeking asylum face upon arrival in Australia.

Both these factors, amongst others, influence the information women seeking asylum receive and the visas she might be eligible for. These discrepancies in support and information, as iterated earlier in this section, must be fought against and accommodated in the provision of further settlement support to women seeking asylum in Australia. The ASRC acknowledges this, and has incorporated respective strategies to compensate for and combat such inequalities in the provision of their legal resettlement services to those seeking asylum in Australia.

Following the basics of intersectional theory, it can be understood how the ASRC identify and consider the multiplicity of factors that influence people seeking asylum's employability. In the consideration of the implication of their entry pathway and residency status on employability, the ASRC's Human Rights Law Program (2017) runs legal and gender clinics to support holistic legal support during all stages of the refugee determination process. The latter specifically addresses the disadvantages women seeking asylum face in the process of their application for refuge, and attempts to close the information and transparency gap discussed earlier in this section (McKay 2003; Valji 2003). By acknowledging the overlap of bases for discrimination in the entry and residency status of women seeking asylum in Australia, the ASRC addresses the intersection of politics, law and gender in the evaluation of the context at hand. Doing this ensures a transparent and efficient assessment of the issue at hand, and establishes a foundation upon which effective and sustainable solutions may be developed (Coleman 2019). By carrying out a holistic overview of the various factors that contribute to this specific challenge faced by women seeking asylum, the ASRC has successfully created targeted, long-term solutions that provide appropriate support for this demographic where needed.

STEM workforce are day-to-day issues, and that entrenched systemic biases must be eliminated if working conditions for

women are to improve (Professionals Australia 2015). Only when an equitable environment can be assured for women entering the workforce will the industry see a difference in rates of participation, engagement and retention.

Multiple academic sources have similarly postulated that women are less likely to pursue a career in STEM knowing that they will have to work in a male-dominated unsupportive workplace culture whilst experiencing persistent earning disadvantages (Xu 2017, p. 6). Xu (2017) insists that it is STEM workplace cultures, structures and practices that continue to impose masculinised expectations of female graduates, ultimately leading to attrition (p. 6). Despite evidence suggesting that women are well-prepared throughout their higher education to enter a male dominated workforce, isolation and marginalisation impedes job satisfaction and progression (Xu 2017, p. 14). Thus, Xu (2017) suggests that employers need to play an increasingly prominent role in the effort to prevent women's attrition in the STEM industry at the point of higher education completion and employment transition. Government policy should aim to inform employers about the "long-term benefits of increasing women's presence in STEM fields as well as in the overall STEM labour supply" (p. 17). As roughly one out of five women with a STEM degree (22.4%) work in an industry not related to their undergraduate course, the current workforce is not reflective of the supply that is currently available throughout Australia (Xu 2017, p. 16). Failure to effectively utilise and fully engage this sector of the STEM workforce could be detrimental to multiple industries and equitable technological advancements.

Lastly, Pearson (2019) poignantly recognises that it is not that women prefer other fields of study or occupation, but rather, that they will not feel welcome in STEM fields. As the STEM industry is already 'top-heavy' with men, the masculine culture that accompanies this makes STEM careers unappealing to women at every stage of the pathway.



2. Lack of Accommodation of Multifaceted Identities in Support Services

Research on migrants within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental economic organisation founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress, states that the growth in employment rates of migrant women is mainly focused in low-skilled occupations, and that a gap continues to grow between their accessibility to the workforce than women who were born in their country of residence (Syed & Murray 2009, p. 415). It has been proven in studies before, that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are less likely to gain employment; and if they *do* gain employment, it is of lower pay and status as opposed to their Australian-born counterparts (Syed & Murray 2009, p. 416).

The aforesaid outcomes are attributed to the multitude of barriers people seeking asylum face in Australia – including the exacerbated circumstances of simultaneously being a woman whilst doing so (Heron 2005, p. 4). Considering the challenges women in work, or women who hope to obtain work, face – education levels, motherhood and accessibility to childcare, tax disincentives and cultural attitudes to women as equals or superiors in the workplace (Heron 2005, p. 4), as well as the challenges

women seeking asylum face as non-citizens – language skills, foreign qualifications, local work experience, lack of local networks, and localised discrimination (Heron 2005, p. 5) – the cumulative barriers to women seeking asylum entering the workforce of their host country seems insurmountable to overcome. However, in the close analysis of these conditions, it is possible to identify the multifaceted identities that women hold in society, realise the lack of its accommodation in the general workplace.

According to a study carried out by the State Government of Victoria, the experience of gender inequality cannot be surveyed individual to other compounding factors that influence one’s experience with oppression (2020). In the same report, the Victorian Government denotes the intersectionality of gender-based discrimination with other forms of diversity such as indigeneity, migrant status, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and cultural diversity (2020). The roles and identities of women seeking asylum similarly intersect with these other factors and more; and thus must be considered in the development of support services and resources to aid their settlement and integration in Australian society.

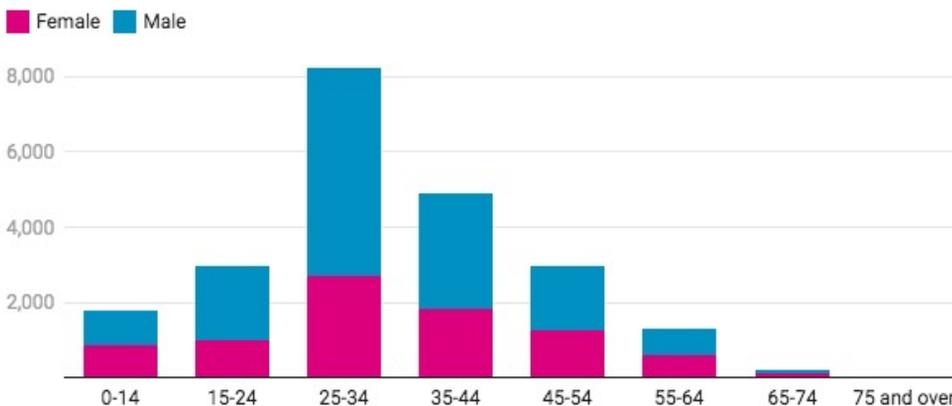
One of the biggest factors that must be considered in the adoption of an intersectional framework to support services is the possibility of women seeking asylum also being young mothers (Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2023). In 2019, the UNHCR documented an estimated 40% of the 79.5 million people displaced at the

time to be under eighteen years old and ‘unaccompanied refugee minors’ (UNHCR 2019). In this case, the immediate identity- classifications administered to such women seeking asylum are: (1) refugee, (2) unaccompanied, (3) adolescent, and (4) mother (Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2023). Already, the struggle of women seeking employment, who are also mothers, is apparent on a global scale (Citizens for Public Justice 2019). The focus of mothers entering the workforce has gained much traction in socio-political academia and economics, and while contemporary theory roots frameworks to study this area in intersectional feminist theory, the narrow, patriarchal discourse of women in work is a stronghold in meeting and stifling this movement wherever possible (Coleman 2019). Given the compounding nature of the exacerbated struggle women seeking asylum face in settling into their host country, it can be assumed that said struggle is monumentally augmented by pre-existing barriers to women in this agenda (Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2024).

The argument for intersectionality in this context is fuelled by the one-tracked, top-down provision of support to women seeking asylum. Narratives constructed by service providers paint a woeful picture of refugee women who are mothers – prioritising their refugee status – while if consulted individually, women seeking asylums with accompanying children prioritise their roles as mothers over their identity as a potential refugee (Vervliet et al. 2013, pp. 2023 – 2024). This reveals the communication gap between mothers and migration policies, and explains the

Lodgments by age group

Total from 31 November 2019 to 28 February 2021



Figures less than 5 are not included in the totals. For privacy reasons, the Department does not identify figures less than 5. The Department records indeterminate sex, but so far this has been zero.

FIGURE 1: A CHART BY THE REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA (2021) WITH DATA COMPILED BY THE AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS 2021. THIS CHART BREAKS DOWN THE LODGEMENT OF REFUGEE APPLICATIONS BY APPLICANTS’ AGE.

migration policies, and explains the inefficacies in most support services for women seeking asylum (Heron 2005; Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2026).

The ASRC in Victoria has two empowerment programs that partially meet intersectional needs of women seeking asylum who are young mothers. The ASRC's Empowering Youth and Empowering Women are two programs specifically targeted towards the provision of support to young people under the age of 30 and whom identify as women respectively (ASRC 2019a). While the Empowering Youth program could assist young women seeking employment in Victoria, it does not explicitly provide supportive resources or services tailored for mothers; for example, considerations of accessibility to and availability of affordable childcare and maternal (ASRC 2019a; Bursain 2013; Heron 2005, p. 4). Parallel to this, the Empowering Women program mainly supports entrepreneurial female members; typically older women with professional work experience and qualifications from their country of origin (ASRC 2017b). While both are great programs in and of themselves, there is little to no overlap for women seeking employment whose identity overlaps that of 'Young' and 'Women' (ASRC 2019a), leaving them unable to fully benefit from either program (Keating et al. 2016, p. 7).

This returns us to the foundation of intersectionality, and its necessary adoption into support towards women seeking asylum in their settlement into their host country. By adopting a more critical intersectional lens in the evaluation of current support programs, service providers such as the ASRC have

the potential to create more effective strategies to better support the demographic at hand (Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2026). By listening to and amplifying the voices and experiences of women seeking asylum and letting that information guide the development of appropriate and useful support services, service providers and policy-makers are more likely to identify the crux of the issue at hand (Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2036). In the reliance of direct information from the demographic in focus instead of the assumption of what they may need, transparency in research and analysis is perpetuated, which inherently feeds into the cycle of solution-provision that is tailored specifically to effectively and sustainably support those in need (Heron 2005; Vervliet et al. 2013, p. 2036).



3. Institutional Discrimination and Cultural Bias in the Workplace

The challenges women seeking asylum face in gaining employment do not stop once they have been given the opportunity to be employed. The very act of being employed insinuates *staying* employed – an occurrence that is a challenge faced by women seeking asylum in Australia due to institutional discrimination and cultural bias in the workplace (Keating et al. 2016, p. 7). As informed by intersectional theory, multiple identity markers and their intersection with each other must be considered in the evaluation of women's experiences in gaining employment

(Mahadevan et al. 2019, p. 1). Additionally, considerations must be made regarding these markers' interaction with external valuations of said markers, wherein the perception of others may influence the experience one has for themselves (Datts et al. 2020; Keating et al. 2016, p. 7).

As iterated previously in this Report, migrant woman from diverse and/or foreign cultural and linguistic backgrounds face more discrimination in entering the workforce (Syed & Murray 2009, p. 416). In a study carried out by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), it was found that this is spurred by pre-existing discrimination on the basis of their gender and race, and continues to be actively perpetuated in the workplace (FECCA 2013, p 30).

One way in which many service providers attempt to support people seeking asylum in entering the workforce is by bolstering their skills in the local language of their host country. The idea behind doing this is based upon the notion that people seeking asylum, despite their foreign cultural and linguistic background, are not so different from citizens of their host country. This notion is supported by international institutions such as the OECD, wherein a 2014 study confirmed that fluency in the local language of a host country is imperative to enter its workforce and to integrate into its society (Heron 2005, p. 6; OECD 2014). The ASRC is an example of one such service providers. Under their Education and Training programs, the ASRC support people seeking asylum with a Pathways to Employment program (PTE) and English

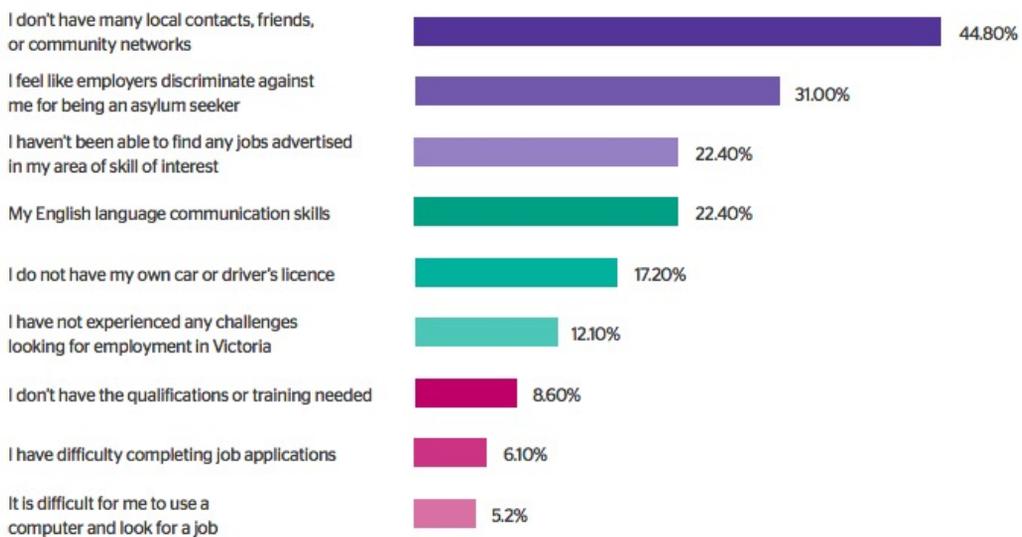


FIGURE 2: CHART COLLATED BY THE ASRC ON CHALLENGES THAT ASYLUM SEEKERS FACE IN SEARCHING FOR EMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA (2019, p.22)



For Work classes to strengthen their skills in the English language and incorporation of common workplace jargon (2019b). Such programs have developed into great success stories regarding the assistance and empowerment they give people seeking asylum as they enter the Australian workforce (Victorian Government 2020). However, recent research findings suggest that while this aids initial entry into the workforce, it does not support sustained employment (Heron 2005, p. 6).

This is misconception is due to the lack of intersectional theory applied to the assessment of discrimination and bias in the workplace. The Victorian Government themselves released a report in 2020 that acknowledges the racist and sexist discourse entrenched into Australia's workplace culture, and called for the active dissemination of anti-racist and anti-sexist education and training so as not to perpetuate a culture that privileges one culture – that of the host country – over others (Victorian Government 2020). FECCA found that a significant number of women seeking asylum who engaged with such programs found it necessary to “silence” their cultural and ethnic identities due to pressure to integrate into Australian society (2013, p. 30). This is an example of how integration support can evolve into harmful assimilation practices and ideology if not assessed regularly with an intersectional lens (Keating et al. 2016).

Such action must disseminate past localised workplace culture and into society so as to encourage critical analysis of commentary made by policy and policy makers that may unfairly taint the understanding of humanitarian protection programs (Bagalini 2020; Fleay 2016, p. 64), as discussed in Part A of this Report. The perpetuation of this critical philosophy will embolden the host societies of women seeking asylum to understand and celebrate the differences and diversity the latter bring, instead of encouraging unnecessary prejudice and unconscious bias (Harmony Alliance 2019, p. 9; Keating et al. 2016, p. 11). This in turn will foster healthy and safe workplace environments that are likely to retain migrant employees and ultimately benefit further because of it (Bagalini 2020). As discussed in section (II) of this paper, the knowledge, experience and skills that women seeking asylum bring to their host countries are invaluable (Hearn & Louvrier 2014, p. 62), and should be encouraged further instead of stemmed in fear of difference (Bagalini 2020; Mahadevan et al. 2019, p. 1).

FIGURE 2: CHART COLLATED BY THE ASRC ON CHALLENGES THAT ASYLUM SEEKERS FACE IN SEARCHING FOR EMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA (2019, p.22)

A decorative background featuring a network diagram of interconnected nodes and lines, primarily in shades of blue and grey, set against a white background.

Limitations & Moving Forwards

Women seeking asylum are the recipients of the services this report has explored, and are therefore the best and most reliable source of the information and data needed for their improvement. Quite often, analyses and providers of employment services work in a top-down method stemming from the notion of putting theory into practice. This inhibits the transparent and effective extraction and collation of information from the demographics affected by the issue at hand. This report, due to time and resource constraints, similarly falls short of an affirmed, accurate representation of the challenges that women seeking asylum face in entering the Australian workforce as its findings have been based off of the conclusions made by secondary and tertiary sources.

The direct collaboration with a variety of women seeking asylum in the exploration of their experiences in resettlement in Australia and gaining employment would have strengthened this report's argument significantly. Nonetheless, this report hopes to provide a basis upon which others can direct their research directly from refugee women and their representatives, so that we may learn from their experiences and identify areas that they claim must be addressed in the provision of employment aid. Additionally, in moving forwards and building upon existing literature on this focus area, this report urges a cross-analysis of the variation of experiences women seeking asylum have across the states and territories of Australia. Doing so would allow for critical comparison between different support service providers, and would identify successful policies that could be implemented through a shared national agenda. These recommendations would ensure more effective, sustainable solutions to successfully aid women seeking asylum's integration into Australia.



Conclusion

This Report has dealt with the three of the main challenges that women seeking asylum face in gaining employment, and has identified ways in which intersectional theory may be utilised to address said challenges.

As noted in this Report, it is widely accepted that the understanding of intersectional approaches as methods to acknowledge, address and target the multiple forms of discrimination that women seeking asylum face in their settlement into their host country is imperative to sustainable and effective policy development and advocacy efforts that truly champion the rights of this demographic (Citizens for Justice 2019, p. 2; MacKinnon 2013, p. 1019).

Injustices must not go unnamed or unchallenged (UN Women 2020). This report has outlined ways in which service providers, such as the ASRC, attempt to address such inequalities. Whilst there is still a long road ahead in achieving true equity in opportunity and support for women seeking asylum and the many challenges they face, as suggested in this report, with an intersectional framework, such struggles could be more effectively and sustainably addressed.



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