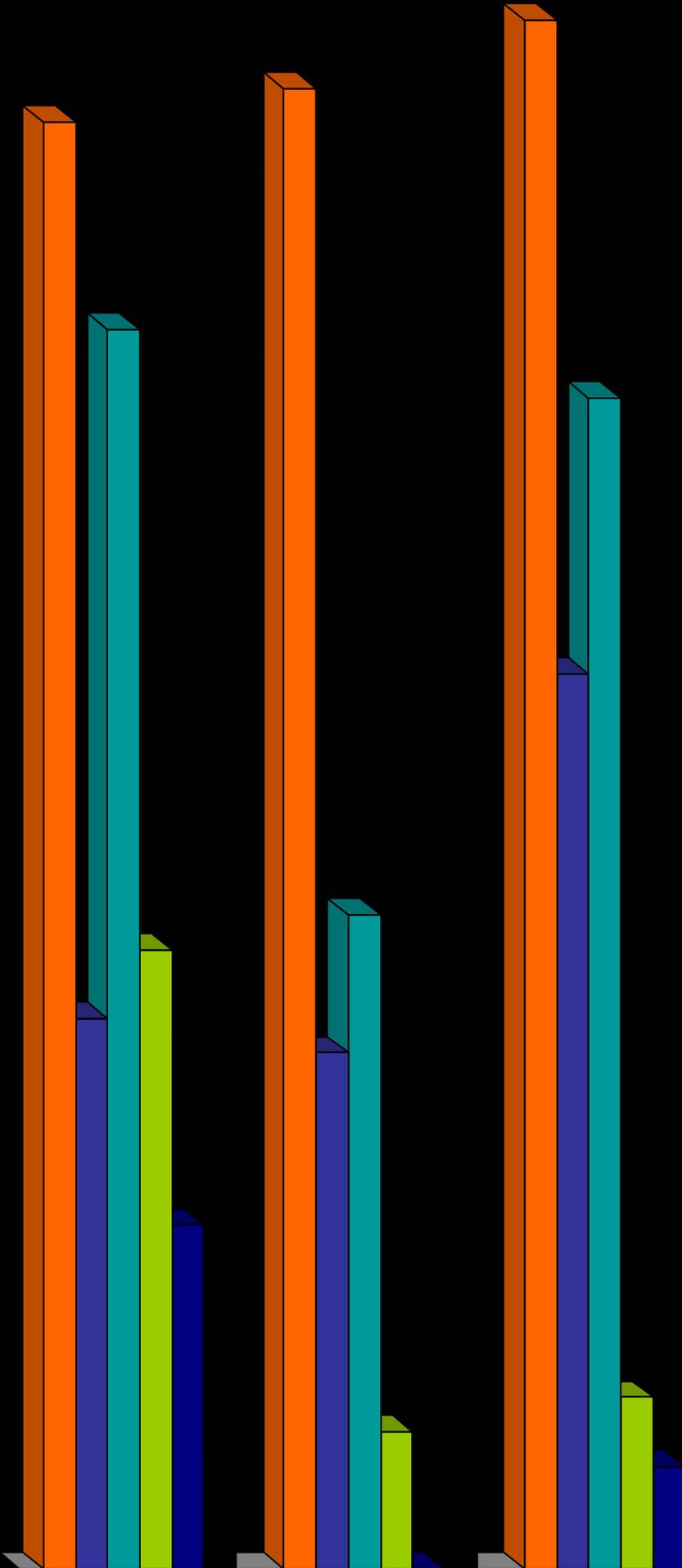# Refugees and Employment: The effect of visible difference on discrimination

Final Report

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Every effort has been made to represent information accurately throughout the report. The authors apologise for any errors or omissions.

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This is the final report of the sociological research project *Refugees and employment: the effect of visible difference on discrimination* funded by the Australian Research Council's Discovery Project scheme. Although this scheme predominantly funds 'fundamental', theoretically-oriented research, the current project lends itself to policy applications; hence this report seeks not only to communicate the findings, but to address a number of policy implications in the areas of refugee resettlement, qualification and skills recognition, employment assistance for culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and especially refugees, and equal opportunity and anti-discrimination. We are keen to communicate the findings to policymakers and service providers through this report, rather than solely addressing academic audiences. We would appreciate feedback on this report and are enthusiastic to establish research and other links with government and non-governmental agencies in the area of migrant settlement and employment, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination.

The project was based at Murdoch University and ran for three years (2004, 2005, 2006). The chief investigators were Dr Val Colic-Peisker and Dr Farida Tilbury from Murdoch University and Dr Nonja Peters from Curtin University.

Data collection

Primary data collection consisted of:
- A review of Australian and overseas academic literature and government reports, documents and statistics
- 150 questionnaire-based face-to-face interviews with refugees from three broadly conceived groups: ex-Yugoslavs, people from Middle Eastern backgrounds and Africans[1]
- 40 semi-structured interviews with employers (and three focus groups with other key informants)
- 9 follow-up in depth interviews

The main body of data was collected from July 2004 to November 2005.

Key findings

- High levels of unemployment among skilled refugees
- Massive loss of occupational status among skilled refugees
- Persistence of a segmented labour market, where racially and culturally visible migrants and refugees in particular, despite their skills levels, are allocated unattractive jobs
- Loss of human capital benefits to Australia and a waste of skills currently in short supply — for example, among respondents doctors and engineers reported driving taxis, and teachers cleaning offices

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[1] Due to cultural sensitivity, we have refrained from using the term 'Black' Africans.

- Refugees face structural disadvantage in the labour market (e.g. non-recognition or part recognition of qualifications; lack of accessible referees)
- Discrimination on the basis of race, religion and ethnic origin plays a role in creating unsatisfactory employment outcomes. Employers discriminate on the basis of 'soft skills' such as Australian cultural knowledge
- 'Everyday' street racism does not affect levels of life satisfaction as much as perceived discrimination in the labour market

Policy implications

Data confirms a degree of disadvantage of skilled refugees in the labour market. There is a possibility that as a result, 'new and emerging' African and Middle Eastern migrant communities may develop into marginalised minorities where social problems may crystallise over time, unless more decisive measures are introduced by policymakers, such as:
- Improvements to the national system of qualifications recognition in order to include greater regulation of professional organisations and registration boards
- Coordination between professional registration boards and employment agencies to ensure targeted professional training and work experience placements, especially in the areas of skill shortages
- Developing public awareness campaigns to make employers aware of the benefits of diversity for their work environments and productivity
- Educating employers about what constitutes 'discrimination' and the broader societal benefits of providing employment opportunities to minorities. In this respect, political leadership is also necessary to turn around the climate of hostility towards those who are 'different' – Muslims in particular
- Targeted employment seeking assistance for refugees and other 'at employment risk' categories of immigrants (especially CALD)
- Instituting measures to ensure that ethnic diversity statistics are kept in all companies with over one hundred employees, as in Canada, to raise awareness of diversity and target more equitable outcomes.
- Ensuring anti-discrimination agencies increase their public profile and are more proactive in encouraging people to report their grievances. Links between those providing settlement services to CALD migrants and HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) may result in more cases coming to light, and have a preventative effect

1. Introduction: Refugees, visibility and employment

This project explored the impact of 'visible difference' on employment outcomes of recently arrived refugees in Western Australia. We started from the assumption, accepted by host governments and migration researchers alike, that satisfactory employment is the crux of successful settlement for migrants generally, and refugees specifically. Refugees represent a potentially more disadvantaged part of the immigrant workforce. This is consistently shown in government settlement statistics and acknowledged through the additional employment and general settlement assistance that refugees receive.

Our refugee sample consisted of refugees who arrived in Australia on permanent residence visas during the 1990s and early 2000s. The project focused on three broadly conceived 'refugee communities' — ex-Yugoslavs, people from Middle Eastern backgrounds and Africans — who are 'visible' among the predominantly white, English-speaking and Western-clad Australian majority to different degrees and in different ways: by their 'foreign' accent, skin colour and physical features, and attire, often connotative of religious denomination. It was hypothesised that these three groups may encounter different degrees of disadvantage because of their visibility. This assumption arose from previous research and from refugee unemployment statistics, which show that their labour market integration is considerably slower and less successful than other migrant categories. For example, DIMIA (2005a) reported that 18 months after arrival the unemployment rate for humanitarian entrants is 43 per cent, compared to no unemployment among business entrants and seven per cent among 'independent' (skill-based) arrivals.

We define successful labour market integration as securing a job appropriate to one's qualifications, skills and experience. Employment outcomes of migrants can be unsatisfactory in at least three ways. A person can be: unemployed, that is, welfare-dependent but wanting to work; underemployed, that is, working fewer hours than desired and possibly being partly welfare dependent; or 'occupationally downgraded', that is, having a job of considerably lower status than before migration, or having a job not commensurate with one's skills and educational qualifications.

Researching discrimination in employment has special salience in the current moment of Australian and global history when intolerance of Islam has risen significantly. Similarly, Africans are currently the largest component of the Australian humanitarian intake and racist views about their 'unassimilability' have recently re-appeared in public (the problem may be compounded for black African Muslims). Despite the fact that the Australian population is increasingly ethnically diverse and the trend is likely to continue, the Anglo-Celtic foundations of modern Australia still define it as a 'white' and 'Anglo' nation, with the implication that a 'fair go' for 'Others' should be qualified (Hage 1998; Jupp 2002). The debate about the levels of racism that affect the immigrant 'Other' in Australia is ongoing and it is important to contribute research-based evidence to such debates in the changing social context. The federal government's recent emphasis on social cohesion and 'integration' and the shift away from multiculturalism adds a new element, potentially disadvantaging for racially and culturally different immigrants.

It is often emphasised that Australia has so far successfully avoided the excesses of ethnic conflict, but the 'lucky country' is not a zone of racial harmony either, as shown dramatically in the December 2005 'Cronulla riots' on Sydney's southern beaches where white Australians clashed with (mainly second generation) Lebanese Muslim Australians.

Australia has stringent anti-discrimination legislation, but its benefit to groups who may face prejudice and discrimination is questionable. This especially pertains to recent arrivals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially those who are 'visibly different'. The focus of Australian racism has recently shifted from Asians, who nowadays tend to arrive in Australia under the skilled or business migration categories, to immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, who tend to be refugees. Our research explores the challenges they face, and provides analysis relevant for the appraisal of Australia's refugee resettlement program and employment services for CALD migrants and refugees. It also provides evidence of the on-going discrimination such groups face.

The rest of this report is organised into sections that cover the specific issues we focused on during our research project. Section 2 of the report details the data collection process and describes the sample of survey respondents from the three refugee groups as well as the sample of Australian employers interviewed. Section 3 analyses the employment outcomes of respondents. The refugee experience of discrimination in the labour market and the process of their channelling into specific employment niches is also analysed in this section. Section 4 presents data collected through interviews with Australian employers and analyses their perceptions of diversity in the workplace as well as their experience in employing the 'visibly different', in the context of Australian anti-discrimination and equity policies. Section 5 focuses on refugee perceptions and experiences of using government-funded employment assistance, especially the 'Job Network'. We thank Silvia Torezani, our research assistant, for putting this section together. Section 6 analyses refugees' perceptions of their overall settlement success and its various components, in relation to their life satisfaction. The concluding section discusses the policy relevance of our findings and provides some policy recommendations. This is followed by a list of references used in this report, plus other relevant literature. A summary of the project outputs concludes the report.

2. Data collection and participants

2.1. Refugee sample

The refugee sample consisted of individuals from the three targeted regions of ex-Yugoslavia, Africa, and the Middle East, who had entered Australia on a permanent refugee or humanitarian visa acquired 'off-shore' through Australia's planned humanitarian intake. Bilingual assistants used snowball sampling to identify 50 respondents from each group who were of working age and either employed or looking for work, and with a completed high school, trade or professional education. This well-educated sample was selected to eliminate lack of human capital (poor English and/or lack of skills) as an explanation for poor employment outcomes. We acknowledge our sample may not be representative of their communities. However, these 'new and emerging' refugee communities do have relatively high education profiles (see below).

The questionnaire traced participants' demographics, education and employment histories, job-seeking practices, and their expectations and experiences within the Australian job market. The last section addressed respondents' overall satisfaction with their Australian settlement. Our respondents communicated their experiences through quantitative (multiple choice) and qualitative (open-ended) questions. After the initial data analysis, in-depth follow-up interviews with bi-lingual settlement workers of both genders, themselves refugees from the three groups, were conducted in order to further clarify the cross-cultural issues involved. The compounded, as well as highly subjective, nature of the issues did not warrant exclusive reliance on impersonal and highly abstract quantitative analysis. Hence, qualitative data (from follow-up interviews as well as written comments on questionnaires) were valuable in the interpretation of survey data.

Respondents came from a range of national and ethnic backgrounds. Among the ex-Yugoslavs the majority came from Bosnia, from all three 'ethnic' backgrounds: Muslim, Serb and Croat. For the Middle Eastern sample, the majority came from Iraq and some from Iran. The majority of the African sample were from Somalia (about half), followed by Ethiopia and Eritrea. The average length of residence in Australia of our total sample (N=150) was about seven years. More details on separate groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Length of residence

	Ex-Yugoslavs	Africans	Middle East	Total
Item	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Length of residence	7.78 (2.10)	7.24 (3.04)	6.54 (4.30)	7.19 (3.15)

Note: Medians in years: ex-Yugoslavs *Mdn* = 8.00, Africans *Mdn* = 7.00, Middle Easterners *Mdn* = 5.00

Figure 1 shows the age range of our respondents.

Figure 1: Age of refugee participants
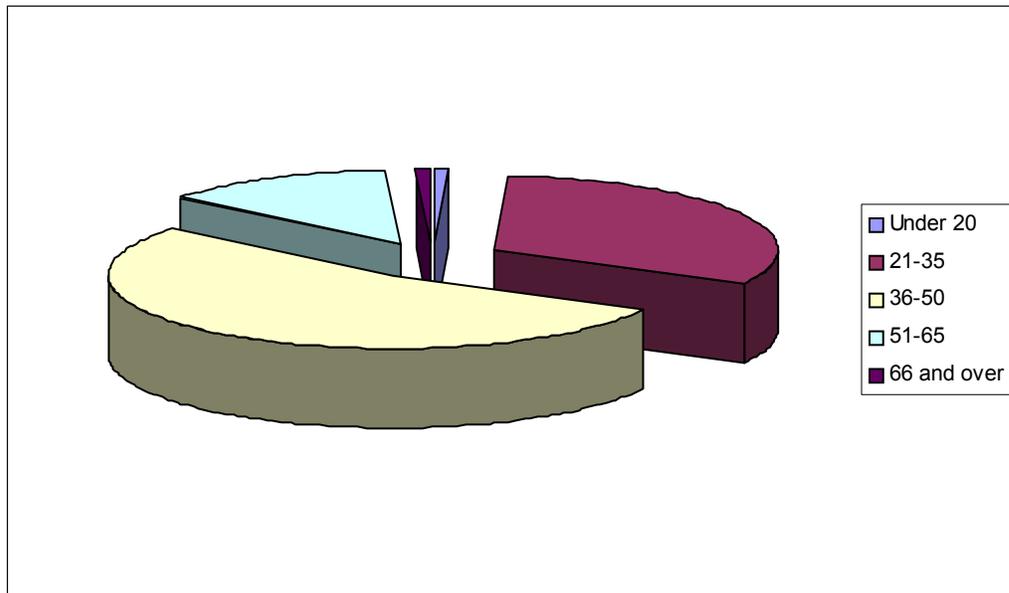
More than three-quarters of our respondents were of prime working age (21-50). The ex-Yugoslav sub-sample was somewhat older (on average ≈ 44 yo) than the African and Middle-Eastern sub-samples (≈ 37 and ≈ 38 yo respectively). The African and Middle-Eastern sub-samples were almost identical in terms of age and gender composition.

In terms of gender composition, the ex-Yugoslav sub-sample was predominantly female, while the African and Middle-Eastern sub-samples were predominantly male (see Figure 2). The latter may reflect the fact that the breadwinner's role is seen as primarily befitting men in these communities, and may also be related to the gender of the research assistants who undertook the snowball sampling.

Figure 2: Gender of refugee participants by regional origins
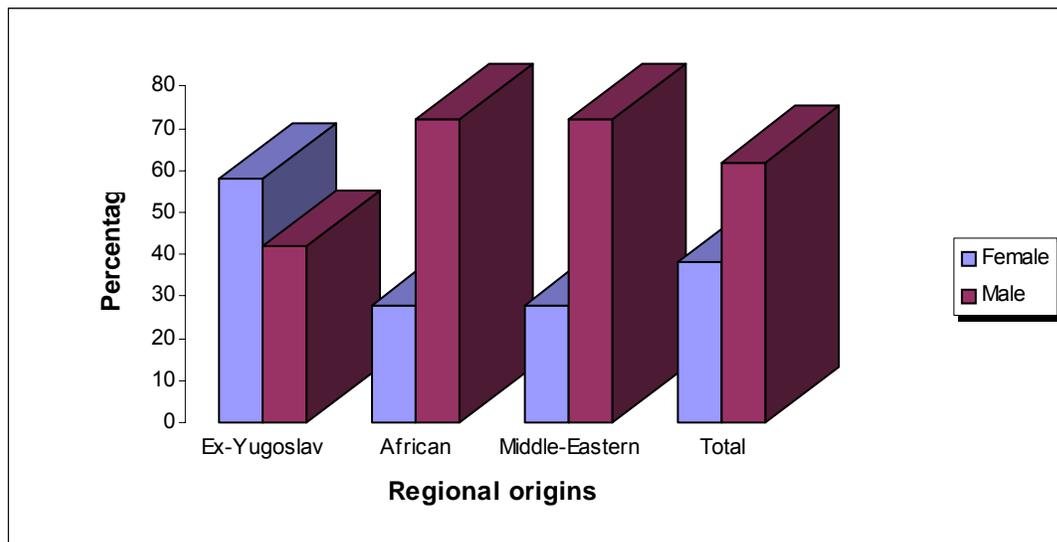
Contrary to the common perception that refugees arriving from economically and culturally 'distant' countries are poorly educated, recent refugees arriving in Australia are often well educated. Table 2 shows rates of higher educational qualifications ('post-school') in the 'new and emerging', predominantly refugee communities. In comparison, the rate of higher educational qualifications among the Australian-born is 18 per cent (ABS 2002).

Table 2. Higher educational qualifications in refugee communities

Country of origin	Higher qualifications (%)
Bosnia	17.0
Sudan	26.2
Ethiopia	22.4
Eritrea	21.7
Somalia	13.6
Iraq	19.8

Source: DIMIA 2005b: *Community Information Summary*

A large majority of Africans and Middle-Easterners in our sample had university or even postgraduate degrees (68 and 66 per cent respectively), while ex-Yugoslavs were somewhat less well-educated (32 per cent university-educated) (see Figure 3). Given that the difference between these two groups and ex-Yugoslavs does not reflect the educational profiles of their countries of origin, it may indicate a more selective process for granting humanitarian visas to people from these two regions i.e. the better educated Africans and Middle Easterners are given priority. Virtually all respondents had the sorts of skills required for white-collar work. However, it must be remembered that the sample selection process focussed on skilled individuals,

and was purposive rather than representative of either refugee communities in Australia or their respective countries of origin.

Figure 3: Highest education level
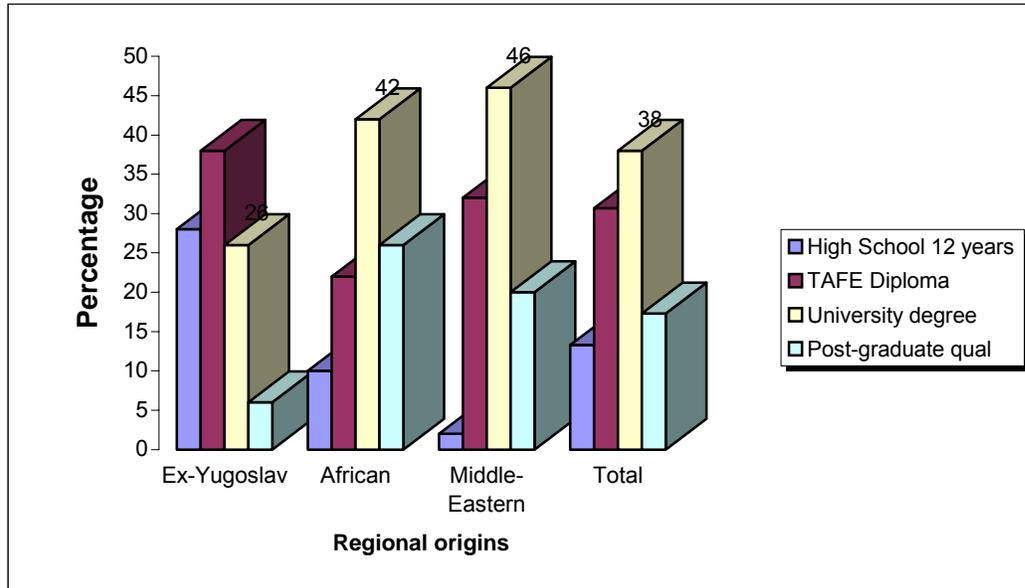
Figure 4 shows that the African and Middle-Eastern participants had, on average, better self-assessed English language skills than the ex-Yugoslavs. This difference in current language proficiency is not as large as it was with 'on arrival' language proficiency, reflecting the fact that many Africans spoke English as their second or even first language before migration, while English was not widely taught as a second language in the former Yugoslavia. Refugees from the Middle East assessed their current English proficiency very highly.

Figure 4: Current English language proficiency (self assessed)
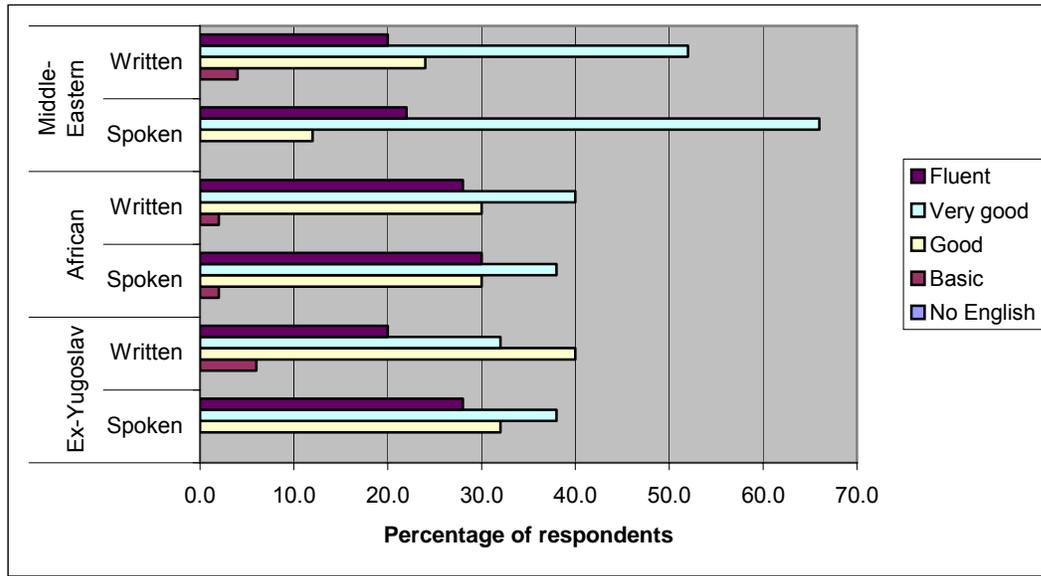
2.2. Employer sample

The sample of employers comprised a broad cross-section of industries, organisations, and managerial profiles, all of which had an office or operation in Perth, Western Australia. Of the 40 participating organisations, 21 were private businesses and comprised a mix of family-owned and operated companies and partnerships. Of the remaining 19 organisations, eleven were public companies, most with operations across Australia, four were government departments or government affiliates, and four were not-for-profit organisations mostly working in the home- and aged-care industries. Table 3 shows the industry profile of the employer sample.

Table 3. Participating organisations by industrial sector

Mining/construction/engineering	8
Recruitment	7
Catering/food processing	4
Government	4
Home and aged care services	3
Retail	3
Cleaning (Industrial)	2
Diversified industrial	2
Media	2
Education	2
Other	3
Total	40

The size of the participating organisations was classified according to employee numbers, including national or international operations. Other factors, such as market capital or fiscal turnover, were not taken into account. The three classifications used were small (less than 49 employees), medium (50 to 199 employees), and large (more than 200 employees). Based on this criterion, the participant profile comprised eight small, eight medium and 24 large companies. The employer sample is therefore weighted in favour of large organisations of 200 or more employees. The original research design targeted a greater cross-section of organization size. However, of the over 100 companies we approached to participate in this project, many of the smaller organisations declined, citing lack of time, their company size and lack of experience with migrant employees as reasons for non-participation.

People who represented employers in interviews were 25 women and 15 men, with an average age of 41. Of these, 22 were human resource managers who facilitated the recruitment and hiring process, many (but not all) in an advisory capacity and without the final hiring authority. They nevertheless were crucial to the outcomes of the recruitment process by virtue of their initial assessment of applicants and the extent to which they ensured compliance with organisational and legislative equal employment opportunity policies. Only three interviewees were from non-English speaking backgrounds (CALD), though more were migrants. Twenty interviewees had tertiary qualifications but only seven among them had formal training in human resource management.

3.   Refugee settlers: experiences of marginalisation in an era of prosperity

Over the past decade, Australia has experienced an extended period of economic prosperity with exceptionally low unemployment of under five per cent and shortages of skilled and unskilled labour. To address labour shortages, in 2004 the Australian Government introduced a temporary work visa. Nevertheless, Australian permanent residents who entered the country on humanitarian visas continued to experience high unemployment and loss of occupational status. Table 4 shows the unemployment rates in refugee communities as recorded in the 2001 Census.

Table 4. Unemployment rates in refugee communities

Country of origin	Unemployment rate (%)
Bosnia	16.8
Sudan	27.6
Ethiopia	18.9
Eritrea	28.5
Somalia	46.8
Iraq	34.2

Source: ABS, 2001 Census

Our sample tells a similar story – in spite of high education levels, each of the three refugee groups in our sample experienced unemployment levels significantly above the national average of approximately 5 per cent (Figure 5). Nevertheless, there is high variability in employment outcomes between the three regional groupings.

Figure 5: Employment status of three refugee sub-samples
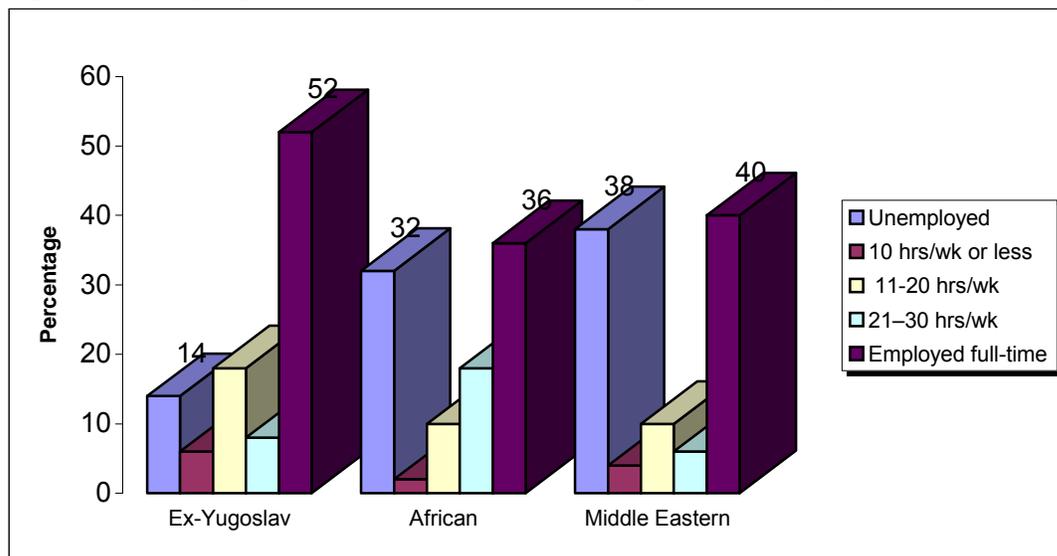
Figure 5 shows that, with an unemployment rate of 14 per cent, respondents from ex-Yugoslav backgrounds fared better than Africans and Middle Easterners, who had unemployment rates of 32 per cent and 38 per cent respectively. This is despite the fact that the African and Middle-Eastern groups had, on average, higher levels of educational achievement (Figure 3 above), and high self-assessed English language skills (Figure 4 above). The lower unemployment among ex-Yugoslavs may be due to a number of factors: the presence of well-established ethnic communities which may assist with securing a job; a slightly longer pattern of residence which provides network and acculturation benefits; cultural similarity from the outset which enables them to enter the workforce more easily; greater inclination to take up any job on offer, rather than wait for one in one's area of expertise (see below); and the possibility that 'white' European refugees experience less discrimination in the labour market, due to their being perceived as more 'similar' by employers, compared to the more visibly different people from the Middle East and Africa.

However, ex-Yugoslavs reported the highest rate of loss of occupational status (See Tables 5, 6 and 7 below). Table 5 indicates that almost half the total sample were working below their skill levels, and for ex-Yugoslavs this was as high as 80 per cent.

Table 5. Work by qualification (%)*

	Ex-Yugoslav	African	Mid-Eastern	Total
Appropriate	18.0	20.0	34.0	24.0
Above skill level	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Below skill level	80.0	44.0	24.0	49.3

*Totals do not sum to 100 due to different understandings of the question by respondents and bilingual assistants. All but 2% of ex-Yugoslavs responded to the question, yet 14% had reported being unemployed. It is assumed that many of these unemployed chose the 'working below qualification level' answer. On the other hand, 36% of Africans and 42% of Middle Easterners did not answer the question, reflecting more closely the numbers reporting being unemployed.

Tables 6 and 7 allow a comparison of employment status in home countries and in Australia, demonstrating a significant lowering of status as a result of migration.

Table 6. Employment status in home country (%)

	Unskilled	Semi-skilled/trade	Para-profess.	Profess.	No resp.
Ex-Yugos.	10	20	22	42	6
African	2	22	16	24	36
Midd-East	0	18	10	60	12

Table 7. Employment status in Australia (%)

	Unskilled	Semi-skilled/ trade	Para-profess.	Profess.	No resp.
Ex-Yugos	88	6	6	0	0
African	44	6	24	10	16
Midd-East	22	10	10	16	42
Highest level employment in Australia					
	Unskilled	Semi-skilled/trade	Para-profess.	Profess.	No resp.
Ex-Yugos	34	46	10	10	0
African	34	10	26	14	16
Midd-East	20	8	12	18	42

Table 7 shows that entry level occupations are heavily clustered in the unskilled category, which consists mainly of cleaning and factory work, especially among ex-Yugoslavs (88 per cent). Unskilled level entry into the Australian job market is also common among Africans (44 per cent) and Middle-Eastern respondents (22 per cent), yet in their countries of origin, no Africans and only 1 per cent of Middle Easterners, and 12 per cent of ex-Yugoslavs, in our sample worked in such jobs. For many, this became a long term outcome with 34 per cent each of Africans and ex-Yugoslavs and a fifth of Middle Eastern respondents reporting such jobs as their highest level of employment attained in Australia. Many highly qualified respondents spoke of difficulties in gaining access to employment commensurate with their education and work experience, and of therefore finding themselves in work, if they found work at all, of an unskilled nature.

3.1. Refugee occupational niches

Being driven in a taxi by a highly-skilled non-English-speaking-background immigrant is nowadays part of the Australian urban folklore. In the Perth metropolitan area, where recent refugee arrivals to Western Australia tend to settle, they are concentrated in low-skilled service 'niches' such as cleaning services, transport (especially taxi-driving), security and building industries, and increasingly, aged care. Industrial and domestic cleaning is the most significant labour market niche for ex-Yugoslavs who arrived in the 1990s. Information from employers also confirms a heavy presence of ex-Yugoslav and Middle Eastern refugees in industrial cleaning in Western Australia. Needless to say, these are poorly paid and insecure jobs.

Africans are concentrated in food processing, the security industry and aged care. Aged care is a booming industry, but not one that offers attractive jobs. This 'naturally' creates a labour market segment staffed by immigrants, especially those assigned a subordinate position in society on the basis of race, ethnicity and 'culture'. The security industry, where a number of Africans had also found jobs, was described as 'dangerous': *'We* [black Africans] *can have these jobs because Australians do not want them'*, commented an African man.

A focus group with employment officers from metropolitan Migrant Resource Centres also identified cleaning, aged care, security and taxi driving as current (non-

English-speaking background) migrant niches in the labour market. The only white-collar refugee niche seems to be in the area of settlement assistance services for refugees, where bilingual (and often multilingual) and bicultural people, themselves refugees and familiar with the settlement difficulties within their communities, are naturally sought after. In the role of settlement workers they mainly facilitate recent arrivals' access to various services provided to them by specialised, but also increasingly mainstream services, in the areas of housing, employment, health and mental heath, education and others.

Our findings on refugee employment niches contradict other Australian research which suggests that there are 'no separate labour market segments for CALD immigrants' (Adhikari 1999:203) and confirm 'high and sustained levels of occupational segregation, particularly amongst migrants from NES countries' (Wood 1990:2; Ho and Alcorso 2004; Collins 1991). Our data indicate that there is a segmented labour market, where racially and culturally visible migrants, especially those from refugee backgrounds, are allocated the lowest jobs regardless of their human capital (formal qualifications, skills and experience). Similar findings on labour market segmentation have been reported from overseas research into immigrant employment by Lamba (2003) and Bauder (2003) in Canada and Rydgren (2004) in Sweden.

Another mechanism that directs refugees towards low-skilled employment is the recent government initiative to direct refugees to regional areas where labour shortages have been identified (DIMIA 2005c). However, jobs on offer in country areas are overwhelmingly low-skilled and unattractive jobs that locals avoid, mainly in fruit picking and meat processing.

The perception among employers that refugees should be available for unattractive jobs where skills shortages are acute is confirmed by the fact that some employers direct their search for labour to DIMA offices and ask for available 'refugees'.

A factor which exacerbates this marginalisation is that many recently arrived refugees do not feel they are in a position to be 'choosy': they not only have their families to support, but often overseas relatives who are in precarious situations and expect help from those who have made it to Australia. As a result, they often take, and remain in, jobs much below their labour market potential. After several years in a low-skilled job, skills are likely to degenerate and the likelihood of reaching one's previous occupation level decreases. In addition, being trapped in a low-skilled job means that networking with peers, crucial for keeping one's professional skills up to date, as well as for learning about better job opportunities, is almost impossible.

Current developments in refugee employment are reminiscent of the late 1940-1950s policies around the reception of 'Displaced Persons' from Eastern Europe, where highly qualified professionals were registered as 'labourers' (men) and 'domestics' (women). These 'aliens' were seen as 'culturally inferior' and 'naturally' expected to fill low-skilled jobs. The demand for low skilled labour is not as high as it was back then, but the preparedness of the Australian-born to take the lowest jobs is lower still. Whether the impressive pool of skills among recent refugees will be wasted in the long term cannot be established, but once five or more years in the new country have passed, the likelihood of regaining pre-migration

occupational and social status for the first immigrant generation becomes remote (Wood 1990:6).

3.2. Barriers to employment

We have provided evidence that skilled refugees experience high rates of unemployment, employment below their levels of expertise, and employment in niche markets at the lower levels of the secondary labour market. Refugees described the challenges they faced as both the result of general structural disadvantage, and of discrimination specifically. We deal first with structural disadvantage. Table 8 indicates the barriers refugees reported experiencing.

Table 8. Barriers in securing adequate employment* (%; N=150)

	Ex-Yugos.	African	Mid. East.	Total
Problems getting qualifications recognized	32.0	42.0	20.0	31.3
Requirement to have Australian work exp	68.0	58.0	60.0	62.0
Requirement to have referees in Australia	54.0	48.0	20.0	40.7
Lack of opportunities for work experience in refugee camps	18.0	4.0	8.0	10.0
Breaks in working life	18.0	16.0	8.0	14.0
Difficulties getting promoted	30.0	2.0	8.0	13.3
Necessity of having a car	34.0	26.0	8.0	22.7
Other	10.0	2.0	10.0	7.3

* Respondents could select more than one answer.

For all groups, the lack of Australian work experience and the related inability to provide Australian references were significant issues. Even for those whose formal qualifications were recognized, this did not seem to be of much worth without local experience and local references. Almost all respondents who provided written comments mentioned this problem. A minority saw this as understandable and justified, while a significant majority described this as a 'Catch 22' situation and therefore unfair. Many respondents saw the lack of recognition of overseas experience as a case of 'structural discrimination', an 'excuse' to deny them employment, while perceiving the real reasons as lying in non-work-essential characteristics such as name, appearance, and the religious, cultural and ethnic differences they imply.

The following comments were typical for all three groups:

A Croatian respondent:

> *The biggest problem is that our/my work experience was not taken into consideration by employers at all. The fact that I had offered documents of qualification that are recognised did not mean anything to them. Interviewers told me, 'We are not interested in what you were doing before; we want to know about your work experience in Australia'.*

An Ethiopian respondent:

> *Employment procedure, criteria and standard is too inflexible to allow new arrivals to enter job market. The disregard for overseas qualification and experience leads to the feeling of exclusion and in extreme cases the sense of racial discrimination.*

Lack of work opportunities and breaks in working life were identified as important barriers by less than 15 per cent of respondents, which is somewhat surprising. Issues to do with job promotion seemed more important for the older population of ex-Yugoslavs, who had identified themselves as working below their qualification level, and less important for the newer African and Middle Eastern arrivals, who were still having difficulty getting into the job market, let alone advancing through it. The more practical concerns such as the need for transport were most important to the African and ex-Yugoslav participants, and were significant enough to affect one fifth of the total sample.

Since issues around qualification recognition are known to be a major challenge for migrants and refugees, a question was asked specifically about this, to provide a finer level of detail.

Figure 6. Overseas qualifications recognised in Australia
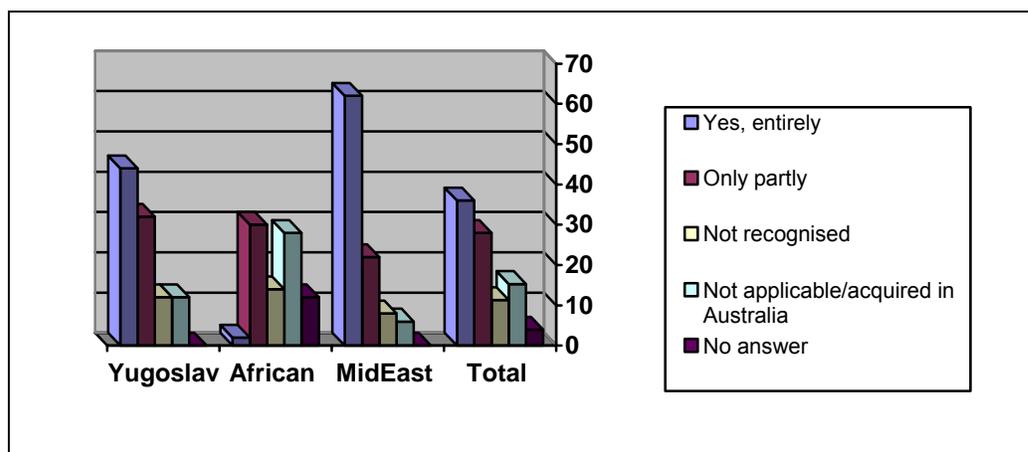
The pattern of responses is surprising and may be partly a result of different interpretations of the term 'recognised'. Much higher proportions of ex-Yugoslavs (62%) and Middle Easterners (44%) report their qualifications being wholly

recognised than Africans, perhaps indicating that African educational and training institutions are seen as being at a lower level by Australia's qualifications recognition bodies. About a third of ex-Yugoslavs and Africans found their qualifications only partly recognised, but overall only one in ten (11.3%) had their qualifications completely rejected. Lack or partial recognition means further training is required, and for refugees who usually need to be earning a living immediately, this means many are unable to upgrade their qualifications.

3.3.   Experience of discrimination in the labour market

We have seen that skilled refugees experience unemployment, loss of occupational status and secondary niche market placement in the employment market. Debate between scholars about whether negative outcomes are the result of the effects of market forces, or of structural and personal discrimination has raged for some decades (for both sides of this argument see Evans and Kelley 1991).

Some have argued negative outcomes are the result of social capital factors (also known as network effects, see Rydgren 2004) — refugees have fewer of the social network connections which are known to assist in positive employment outcomes (Putnam 1973; McSpadden 1987; Shih 2002). Thus, segregation in the labour market and workplace, in pre-labour market contexts such as education, in other contexts such as housing, and in the community in general, may reduce their social capital. Others have argued that unemployment, underemployment, and loss of status is the result of institutional or systemic discrimination — this includes recruitment practices which discriminate against minorities, including English language requirements, qualifications' assessment procedures, and 'soft skills' requirements such as having the right attitude, getting along well with co-workers, and having good communication with customers (Rydgren 2004; Essed 1991; Shih 2002). Some of these factors have been identified above by our respondents. Finally, it may be that individual prejudices of those making the hiring and pay decisions, a situation known as 'a taste for discrimination' (Becker 1957), produces these negative outcomes (Essed 1991). The section above indicates that some of these factors are seen to be at work. In this section we explore refugees' perceptions of the latter factor — individual discrimination — and in the following section we report the situation from the point of view of employers.

The presence of discrimination is notoriously difficult to assess. The perception of discrimination depends on culturally determined sensitivities and also expectations. Sometimes, there may be a perception of discrimination where other issues actually hamper getting a job. At other times, discriminatory behaviour by employers may not be perceived as such.

Our data indicates that discrimination in the labour market on the basis of racial and cultural visibility is quite common. Table 9 shows a significant proportion of each regional group reported that they had experienced discrimination in the Australian labour market.

Table 9: Experience of discrimination in the labour market (%)*

	Ex-Yugoslav	African	Middle Eastern	Total
No	50.0	52.0	42.0	48.0
Yes	48.0	40.0	52.0	46.7

* Totals do not sum to 100 % due to missing data.

Qualitative data indicate the types of experiences refugees had of prejudice or explicit discrimination during the job search process, job interview or in the workplace. Many spoke of their difficulties gaining interviews and of achieving success only after disguising their ethnicity in their written applications. Others found that potential employers, on speaking with or sighting the applicant, immediately rejected their applications, thereby suggesting discrimination based on accent or visible difference. One ex-Yugoslav man spoke of his feelings of frustration and disappointment after a three-year struggle to find employment, while a Sudanese man felt that his experience of hundreds of unsuccessful job applications could only be indicative of discrimination. Some examples are provided below to illustrate the types of experiences refugees reported.

A Middle Eastern man, a former mechanic, was denied an opportunity to apply for a vacancy while an Australian colleague was simultaneously granted an interview. He said of his job search:

> *Unfortunately discrimination was the 99 per cent reason for not getting job because wherever I called to apply for that job, the answer always 'the job has been taken', but when I asked one of my Australian work mates about the same job and at the same time they answered him to attend a job interview.*

A Somali man, a former GP and medical researcher, described a similar experience:

> *I went to an agency that was looking for someone with qualifications and experience like the ones I have. The receptionist had a hard time in accepting the fact that I was applying for that high position and, after asking me to wait while she talks to her superiors, she came back to tell me the position was already filled even though the deadline was not until two weeks later.*

A Sudanese man, with a university engineering degree from Kenya, who had to retrain in Australia, described his experience of harassment:

> *I was made uncomfortable in very subtle ways. I was shunned by colleagues, reported for small things and for tasks that I am not in any way responsible. I was even called names by colleagues.*

A Bosnian woman, a former accountant, described her experience in the workplace:

During my work experience in real estate industry I was verbally abused by my colleagues in front of the other staff. Even my juniors took liberty to make remarks about my accent. I was told I do not suit enough and was given wrong instructions intentionally to look like I under performed. I had to work twice harder than others and still was not equally treated as English-speaking staff. When I complained to my manager, he told me, 'I am giving you first warning'. It took me a long time to prove myself as a capable worker and earn their respect.

An ex-Yugoslav man, a former pilot, described his experience while working as a taxi-driver:

As a taxi driver I have been exposed to all kinds of racism. On one occasion a customer asked about my name and the spelling and I wrote it down on a piece of paper. I asked her why she [wanted to know] that. She said because she was looking for a name for her new dog [...].I found it shocking and offensive.

The basis of perceived discrimination indicates a wide variability among the three groups (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Bases of discrimination as nominated by refugee participants
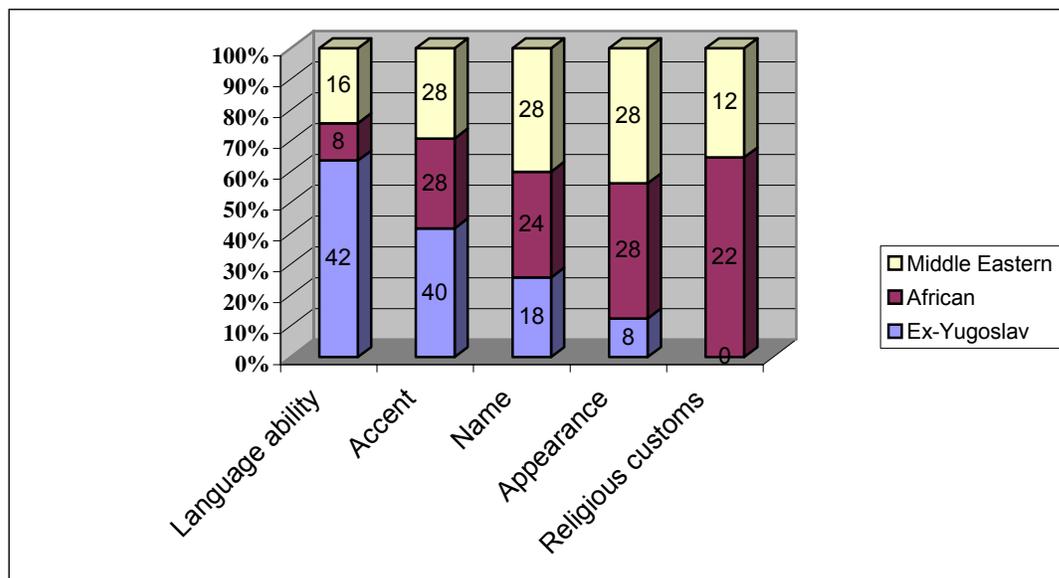
The only basis of job market disadvantage that pertains to a job-relevant characteristic — language ability — was most often quoted as the basis for discrimination by ex-Yugoslavs. This is consistent with their considerably lower self-assessed language proficiency compared with the other two groups.

Language ability was less important for Africans and Middle Easterners, which is not surprising given that these groups reported a high level of English language proficiency, but also because other issues, such as racial and cultural visibly, were more obvious dimensions of difference. Accent also seen as more important for ex-Yugoslavs, although for Africans, accent (what some refer to as 'African English') together with appearance, were the most likely perceived causes of discrimination. For Middle Easterners, accent, name and appearance fared equally. The 22 per cent of Africans who felt they had been discriminated against in the job market due to religious customs reflects the large proportion of Somali Muslims in our sample. The Middle Eastern and African Muslim respondents reported increased difficulty as a result of negative representations in the media following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. One man, a former electrician supervisor, currently unemployed, described his experience thus:

> *One employer admitted to me during interview that if he employed me he will lose clients due to the feeling* [about] *people from Middle Eastern appearance after September 11 events.*

Another Middle-Eastern man, former teacher and currently unemployed, describes the negative reaction to his name.

> *My name is Mohamed and it is obviously a Muslim name. Every time I put it in the cover letter with my CV to employers there is no response or feedback, but when I indicate to my name (just M), employers respond and in good manner*

Finally, a currently employed woman discusses how her African Muslim appearance has been the cause of ongoing difficulties.

> *Once I applied for a job in one of the factories in Northern suburbs and was turned down, because I was told my long Islamic dress (Hijab) was not appropriate for factory work…. When I was working in one factory I was continuously harassed and discriminated against by other workers because of my African appearance. When I complained to the supervisors they didn't do.*

The difficulties outlined suggest that discrimination based on visible difference, in the form of name, language ability, accent, appearance and religious customs, is a widespread problem in the Australian labour market and poses a major barrier to satisfactory employment outcomes for refugees.

The experience of discrimination not only has an adverse economic and social impact, but also leaves psychological scars. People who feel that they have been discriminated against, particularly if this takes place over an extended period of time, may experience a loss of self-esteem and decline in morale, and turn into 'discouraged job seekers' (Tan-Quigley 2004). Our data indicate that the perception of discrimination in the labour market lowers people's life satisfaction: those who

reported being discriminated against in the job market reported significantly lower life satisfaction when compared to those who did not have such experiences (statistical significance p=.006). On the other hand, difficulties in finding a job, where discrimination was not perceived as a reason, did not significantly affect life satisfaction. This means that discrimination in the labour market has a doubly negative effect on refugee settlers: it decreases their chances of finding an appropriate job and also makes them less satisfied with their lives in general. The latter 'subjective' effect may be mediated through the negative effects of unemployment and the loss of occupational status on family and community relationships, financial status and self-esteem, consequently decreasing overall wellbeing. Clearly, discrimination in the labour market in its various forms and effects such as unemployment, loss of occupational status or harassment in the workplace, has much potential to affect one's life. In addition, labour market location is the main element of one's class location; therefore, if a previous professional is reduced to menial work, the downwards mobility inevitably affects all spheres of life and not just their work life.

4. Employers' perceptions and experience of employing the 'visibly different'

In Australia, legislation introduced in the 1970s was designed to guard against racial discrimination in immigration policies, employment and other local practices. For example, the Australian Racial Discrimination Act (Commonwealth) 1975 entitled Australian residents to equality of access to facilities, housing, and provision of goods and services, as well as access to employment. It states that it is unlawful for employers to treat anyone less favourably by reason of their race, colour, national or ethnic origin. While this legislation goes some way to guiding employers in their employment judgements, it seems that it is only the most obvious cases of racial discrimination that it actually curtails.

Many of the employers in the current study had a degree of goodwill toward migrants and refugees and recognised that they must face barriers in the employment market. Very few employers kept statistics on the degree of cultural diversity of their workforce, which meant that most were unaware of the extent to which they employed migrants and refugees (this contrasts with Canada where EEO legislation requires companies that employ over 100 staff to keep ethnicity records and monitor diversity). While publicly owned organizations generally kept equity statistics, this was generally not the case with private firms. This enabled employers to assert equity without having to prove it. One employer explained this in terms of it not being important information, based on the assumption that to keep such information would itself be a form of discrimination, since ethnicity is irrelevant in making the hiring decision.

> *Q: Does the firm employ some overseas born people?*
> *Employer: Well, yes we do, but I must admit we don't track that kind of information. It's something that we don't really consider important to hiring somebody I suppose*

When we asked about diversity, employers often identified employees from Northwest of Europe or whites from South Africa or Zimbabwe, rather than visibly different groups. Overall, we were surprised at employers' lack of contact with and knowledge about employees from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Employer participants in this project almost universally denied the existence of discrimination in the Australian workplace. A general presumption was that outright racial discrimination is something that no longer occurs within the context of a modern multicultural nation. An illustrative example comes from a young recruitment agent, who premised her discussion on the fact that people were 'becoming more accepting' as a result of increased contact with people from different backgrounds.

> *In my experience I haven't come across* [racial discrimination] *for a very long time, you know* [when employers say], *'I don't want specifically X, Y, Z', say, black people. I haven't had that sort of racial, those sorts of comments come through at all.*

Most employers emphasised that the market 'naturally' works against discrimination. In other words, employers follow their business interests and employ the person best skilled for the position, regardless of the person's 'non-essential' characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age etc. The assumption is that the market is generally 'blind to ethnicity' and people who come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds are treated like everyone else (Evans and Kelley 1991).

An older man, manager of a cleaning firm, explained:

> *Ethnic variety to us is not a great issue simply because we're in an industry where we have so many different varieties* [sic] *every day come through the door that we're almost blind to the fact because they're* [just] *another cleaner to us, you know.*
> *… Regardless of their background, if they are able to work for us and they've met our criteria, I don't care where they're from. It's the best person for the position. At the end of the day, that is always what it's about – the best person for that position.*

On the other hand some were quite explicit about their preference for 'Australian' workers.

> *Q: Do you have a preference for immigrants or Australians working for you?*
> *Employer: I suppose I have to be wearing my company hat, umm, probably Australians, umm, possibly because of perceptions around the environment in which we work. The heat and dirt and actually looking at people with mining experience, we actually tend to look at people with Australian mining experience.*

The few who had experience with some of the ethnic groups we were interested in had had mixed experiences. The following recruiter was quite positive about Africans and ex-Yugoslavs, but more critical of those from the Middle East due to a particular negative experience.

> *I have had a number of Africans, I've put them into a lot labouring jobs and they've done fantastically well. I've also had a couple who are now permanent employees of…you know…with our clients and they've also assisted them with the process of applying with residency in Australia because they work so hard, even though they are doing external studies to actually get more professional positions.*

On the other hand, some were quite explicit about issues they had with particular groups, justifying what has been called 'statistical discrimination', i.e. discrimination based on group membership.

> *Yeah, so…the Middle Eastern people whether they are older or younger, we really have a problem with them telling the truth and proving to me that they were capable.*

Individual experiences seemed to strongly affect employers' outlooks towards particular communities and justifications for their actions and attitudes were generally framed with reference to such experiences — be they positive or negative.

Employers did recognize that new migrants and refugees might face difficulty finding work due to a lack of communication skills, local experience, cultural understandings of interview processes and interaction generally, and because their overseas qualifications and experience are not recognized, or are undocumented, as well as due to the individual prejudice of (other) employers. However, most tended to deny personal or company discrimination, and certainly did not take responsibility for migrants' negative employment outcomes.

Few employers had specific programs designed to 'train up' potential employees or employees with communication or other difficulties. One firm (a newspaper) was a positive exception. They told us how they trained a person who applied for a casual manual position, after they discovered she couldn't read or speak English. Although language proficiency was not a requirement for this simple job, it was crucial that she understood safety signs and procedures.

Overall, there is a significant discrepancy between the labour market experience of refugees, as described earlier, and the non-discriminatory environment described by the employers. It is important to acknowledge the sensitivity of any inquiry into the field of racial discrimination and this must be taken into account when assessing employer responses (see Tilbury and Colic-Peisker 2006 for discussion). Nevertheless, a close analysis of the employer interview transcripts indicates several strategies by which the question of potential discrimination is deflected. They argued that if discrimination occurred it was for the sake of their customers to whom they were ultimately responsible. For example, if customers did not like to see a receptionist in *hijab*, the firm could not employ such a person. Thus while employers generally accepted that injustices such as inequitable employment outcomes should be corrected (Wetherell and Potter 1992), their lack of action to correct inequities was justified by noting that their clients may be negatively affected by such actions.

Some suggested that the visibly and culturally different simply did not have job-relevant characteristics including communication abilities, or 'cultural knowledge', or that they would not 'fit in' with other staff (what Constable et al. 2004, call the 'tea-room mentality'). This was often framed within a discourse of cultural superiority — alternative skills and ways of interacting were represented as inferior, leaving employees from non-mainstream backgrounds obligated to learn 'our' ways of doing things.

We found a majority of employers could not see any specific benefits to having a diverse workforce, and felt that local experience and cultural knowledge were likely to be more beneficial for their business than diversity.

> *Q: Can you see any specific benefits for the firm employing an ethnically diverse workforce?*
> *Employer: Umm…maybe just the cultural thing, but other than that probably not for our industry, because we're looking more that someone's had experience sort of working in our industry in Australia, because it's very different working somewhere else. Not that we would discriminate, because we have had people that worked elsewhere, but often they don't have the local sort of knowledge and that and for our business - we need it.*

The third theme was one of egalitarianism — migrants would be treated equally in competition with other job seekers, but would be found wanting in comparison. The market was used to argue that effort is rewarded indiscriminately and, on principle, people should be treated equally. Private firms often stated they did not have the 'luxury' of using affirmative action or adhering to equity principles the way public companies did. Some employers transferred the discrimination to the market or to the 'wider community' by arguing that they recruited staff according to what the market or community demanded. Finally, some suggested that it was the migrants' fault that they could not get jobs, due to 'personality differences', 'bad attitudes' such as 'lack of gratitude' or being 'too proud' of their country of origin, being 'too enthusiastic' or not enthusiastic enough, exaggerating their abilities or 'not selling themselves enough', or simply because they lacked understanding of Australian work culture (including racist jokes). One employer, an older male recruiter for rural trade jobs, described the racial discrimination experienced by a black African employee as unimportant, and placed the burden of responsibility for the workplace problems firmly on the African man:

> *I had one African young bloke …black fella…yeah he left a bad taste too…. Big strong young bloke and I got him a job and he got on the grog or the drugs or something and beat a couple of people up. I spoke to him about people calling him 'blackfella' or 'hey blackie come over here'. I said that's what they do and you've gotta be ready for it get used to it and if you can't handle that then don't even think about going. They don't do it to be nasty…I said if they've had a few whiskeys, they will be looking for a fight…but you have to try and avoid that…*

While such formulations tend to reinforce unfavourable stereotypes of migrants most employers did seem sympathetic to the notion that refugees, like other disadvantaged groups (such as Indigenous peoples or people with disabilities), should be given training and employment opportunities. However none of the private firms felt in the position to provide this. Employers generally embedded their arguments within the theme of pragmatics — what can and can't be done within a

competitive market system. Most seemed to feel their actions were reasonable and did not breach their obligations under the current anti-discrimination legislation.

5. Refugees and employment services

The Australian government provides a number of different services to assist refugee settlement. While there is no refugee-specific job seeking service in Western Australia, refugees are encouraged to use mainstream services to help to bridge the transition to work. This section outlines their perceptions of those services: we found that refugees were relatively dissatisfied with the government-funded job seeking assistance and there was a mismatch between their perception of these services and that of the service providers.

Job seeking is mandatory for refugees after they have been in the country for six months. Since 1998, private and community agencies are contracted by the government to provide employment assistance to job seekers, collectively known as 'Job Network' (JN), which replaced the former government provision through the Commonwealth Employment Services (CES). There are no financial incentives in the new model for providing specialized services, for instance for non-English-background clients or refugees. On the contrary, outcome-based payments mean a greater focus on clients who are easier to place in permanent employment (Kyle et al. 2004).

We asked respondents about the methods they used to look for a job (Table 10) and, for those who had ever been employed in Australia, how they had found work (Table 11). The questions sought to identify the relationship between methods used, and their relative success. The answers varied among the three groups, reflecting cultural differences in approaches to resettlement.

Table 10. Methods used to look for a job (%)*

Methods	Yugoslav	African	MidEast	Total
Formal methods	84	86	90	86.7
Door knocking	32	30	52	38
Community networks	72	38	68	58.7
Other networks	36	8	10	18
Self-employed	20	0	6	8.7
Other	6	4	4	4

*Multiple answers possible.

A great majority of respondents had used formal job-search methods (newspaper advertisements, internet, shop window, Job Network and/or Centrelink) at some stage. Community networks were highly important for the former Yugoslavs and the Middle Easterners, but less so for Africans. The latter, officially termed 'new and emerging communities' did not have access to established ethnic communities upon arrival in Australia.

Table 11. Methods used to find a job (if employed) (%)*

Methods	Yugoslav	African	Mid. East	Total
Formal methods	46	60	64	56.7
Door knocking	16	24	36	25.3
Community networks	66	26	48	46.7
Other networks	20	6	8	11.3
Self-employed	14	2	2	6
Other	8	0	4	4

*Multiple answers possible.

When compared to the other methods listed, formal methods appeared most successful in finding employment (56.7%). However, the Job Network is just one of the formal methods used by refugees, and we cannot report on its specific success as participants were not asked to differentiate between the different types of formal methods.

We asked those who had used the JN services to evaluate their usefulness (Table 12).

Table 12. Evaluations of job seeking support services (%)*

	Yugoslav	African	MidEast	Total
Excellent	2.0	2.0	36.0	13.3
Good	6.0	8.0	16.0	10.0
Acceptable	10.0	12.0	8.0	10.0
Poor	32.0	20.0	8.0	20.0

*Number of responses per group: 26/50; 20/50 and 33/50 respectively.

A large proportion of former Yugoslavs and Africans were critical of these services. A Bosnian woman who held a TAFE Diploma commented.

> *My case manager was very nice and provided moral support. However they never found a job for me. I did it on my own. I believe these services are useless and government should consider changing the way they function. They should have individually tailored services as not everyone has the same needs.*

The appraisal of JN services by Middle Easterners was far more favourable. Given that the services they have received were the same, we concluded that this was a methodological artefact which reflects a particular stance towards the authority of the

government and a fear of negative consequences if criticism was expressed. This was confirmed by Iraqi respondents in follow-up interviews.

We also asked respondents if they found the JN services and job training useful in ways other than developing job seeking skills or finding a job (Table 13).

Table 13. Other uses of job seeking support services (%)*

	Yugoslav	African	MidEast	Total
To meet people	36.0	26.0	66.0	42.7
To meet other migrants	20.0	22.0	40.0	27.3
Overcoming isolation	22.0	10.0	50.0	27.3
Learning about Australia	30.0	18.0	46.0	31.3
Teachers and staff were helpful	40.0	20.0	24.0	28.0
Establishing employer contacts	30.0	14.0	20.0	21.3
Establishing contacts with Australians	34.0	16.0	14.0	21.3

*Multiple answers possible. Number of responses per group: 29/50, 13/50 and 43/50 respectively.

The services appear to have been most useful for meeting people. Overcoming isolation was particularly important for the Middle Eastern respondents. For the former Yugoslavs establishing contact with employers and Australians was perceived as of relatively higher importance than for the other groups. The results indicate that while employment service providers seemed less than effective as cultural mediators in the employment market, they do provide a necessary space for the development of refugees' social networks.

JN service providers, on the other hand, saw their role as that of 'expert' mediators between the unemployed and potential employers, providing training to the job seekers, and 'translating' skills for the employers. Service providers and employers stressed the need for the refugees to conform to the demands of the Australian job market, demands which include language and other technical skills, but also revolve around 'cultural skills', as shown in the previous section. The comparatively high unemployment rates among refugees reflect a lack of cultural awareness among both employers and job seeker service providers (Taylor 2004). In an evaluation of immigrant unemployment in Australia between 1980 and 1996, Miller and Neo (1997), noted the relative disadvantage of CALD migrants and the need for specialised services. Contrary to this need, outsourcing the government employment services has resulted in an increase in 'mainstreaming', resulting in a service skilled refugees are less than satisfied with.

6.   Settlement success and life satisfaction in three refugee groups

Given the difficulties refugees face in the course of their Australian settlement described above, and our previous research which indicated a perceived close link between employment issues and mental health among refugees (Tilbury forthcoming), we were interested to explore their general levels of life satisfaction. A considerable proportion of recent refugee arrivals in Australia and other Western countries are skilled people and many professionals among them experience downward mobility, as analysed above. This process is associated with their racial and/or cultural visibility, as recent (post-Cold War) refugees usually come from non-white and culturally distant backgrounds (DIMA 2006). The partial exceptions are white-European ex-Yugoslavs and it was therefore interesting to compare their experience with those of non-European refugees.

Exploring life satisfaction (or quality of life; well-being; happiness) is a burgeoning area of Western social science, mainly researched by psychologists and sociologists, but also economists, and usually dealing with large population samples. Cross-cultural life satisfaction has been explored mainly through cross-national comparisons, while ethnic minorities attracted less attention. Refugees only appeared as a target population in this type of research in the 1990s (Tran and Nguyen 1994; Werkuyten and Nekuee1999).

The refugee experience is a dramatic life event, bound to affect people's life satisfaction through upsetting what psychologists call 'well-being homeostasis' — a set point of subjective well-being that, it is argued, may be more significantly determined by personality and genes than by later life events and social context (Cummins 2000; Bradley and Corwyn 2004). Our sample, however, consisted of people who had been in Australia for at least two years when their life would have started to settle 'back to normal' and acquired a degree of stability.

The idea of successful settlement, which represents the basis for our exploration of refugee life satisfaction, has been variously defined by host governments and scholars of immigration. Governments look at settlement success through a lens of economic independence: once immigrants have jobs and are no longer welfare dependent they are included in government statistics of success (cf. Richardson 2004). Governments are usually less interested in the social indicators of settlement success and the life satisfaction of migrants.

Table 14 below shows how the three refugee groups self-assessed specific domains of life satisfaction: health status, employment status, job satisfaction, financial satisfaction, social support, Australian networks, acculturation and adaptation in the new environment, and the perception of everyday or 'street discrimination' (discrimination in the labour market is covered in Section 3 above).

Table 14. Life satisfaction domains

Domains of settlement success/life satisfaction	Range*	Ex-Yugos. Mean (SD)	Africans Mean (SD)	Mid. East Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
Health	1-4	3.36 (.72)	3.80 (.41)	3.59 (.64)	3.58 (.63)
Employment status	1-4	3.18 (1.15)	2.66 (1.29)	2.59 (1.37)	2.81 (1.27)
Job satisfaction	1-4	2.79 (1.07)	2.55 (.94)	2.79 (1.02)	2.72 (1.02)
Financial satisfaction	1-4	2.36 (1.02)	2.06 (.99)	1.88 (1.01)	2.10 (1.02)
Social support	1-4	3.02 (.94)	3.14 (.61)	2.90 (.68)	3.02 (.76)
Australian networks	1-4	2.52 (.95)	2.67 (.72)	3.00 (.61)	2.73 (.79)
Acculturation	1-4	2.98 (1.11)	3.44 (79)	3.27 (.93)	3.23 (.97)
Adaptation	1-4	3.18 (1.10)	3.35 (86)	3.59 (.61)	3.37 (.89)
'Street' discrim. (lack of)	1-4	3.02 (1.00)	2.55 (84)	2.63 (.91)	2.74 (.94)

* Questions on domains of life satisfaction were answered on a four-point scale, where 1 was 'not at all happy', and 4 was 'entirely happy'.

As Cummins (1996) argued, the choice of life satisfaction domains is always to a degree arbitrary. To the usual domains used by life satisfaction researchers (such as work, family and community support, finances etc.) we added four immigrant-specific domains: acculturation (a cognitive aspect of adaptation, 'understanding the Australian way of life), adaptation (a practical aspect of acculturation, adapting to 'the Australian way of life'), Australian networks and 'street discrimination' ('being treated in an unpleasant way as a refugee').

Our respondents from each of the three groups were most satisfied with their health, and least satisfied with their financial situation. All groups scored relatively highly on acculturation and adaptation. This may be due to the high education and English proficiency of the respondents, especially those from Africa and the Middle East, and to their younger age compared to the ex-Yugoslav sample (see Figure 1, Section 2 above).   The overall life satisfaction was measured by two items (also on a four-point scale): 'Are you generally satisfied with your life at the moment?' and 'Do you feel your life is "back to normal"?' Table 15 shows descriptive statistics for the two items, which were highly correlated (r=.681***). The reliability analysis found that the two variables formed a reliable scale (Cronbach alpha = .81), so they were combined into a single 'refugee life satisfaction score' (RLS score) for the purpose of further statistical analysis.

Table 15. Overall life satisfaction in three refugee groups

Item	Range	Ex-Yugoslavs Mean (SD)	Africans Mean (SD)	Middle East Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
General satisfaction	1-4	3.12 (.98)	2.92 (.73)	2.93 (.52)	2.99 (.77)
Life back to normal	1-4	3.06 (1.07)	2.80 (.68)	2.80 (.68)	2.89 (.87)
RLS score	1-4	3.09 (.97)	2.86 (.67)	2.87 (.53)	2.94 (.75)

Ex-Yugoslavs expressed the highest life satisfaction in both items and consequently had the highest RLS score among the three groups. The other two groups had almost identical means. Although the difference in RLS score means among the three groups is not statistically significant, Bosnians had a noticeably different pattern of responses to the two original questions: 46 per cent said they were 'entirely satisfied with their life at the moment' and 48 per cent felt their life was 'entirely back to normal', while only 10-12 per cent of other two groups felt that way. Gender and age differences in the sampling may once again partly account for the higher satisfaction of Bosnians, because large surveys show that women and older people tend to have higher life satisfaction (Cummins et al. 2005).

There are cross-cultural and other issues that need to be kept in mind when interpreting these data. Our relatively small and purposively chosen sample included many highly skilled people with functional English, who may have had high expectations of their Australian life, especially in terms of employment outcomes. For example, 44 per cent of our African respondents expected to 'quickly find a job in their area of expertise', but ended up having the worst employment outcomes among the three groups; the unfulfilled expectations may have lowered their general life satisfaction. On the other hand, key informants told us Iraqis were wary of expressing dissatisfaction as they see it as a criticism of the host country and government-provided settlement services.

Further statistical analysis (correlation and regression) explored what components of settlement success were the most significant for overall life satisfaction. Three components were statistically significant: job satisfaction, financial satisfaction and social support. Job satisfaction had the strongest effect on overall life satisfaction. Regression analysis for the separate refugee groups showed that job satisfaction was by far the strongest predictor for Bosnians (it has to be taken into account that job satisfaction was highly correlated with financial satisfaction). For Africans, social support turned out to be the main predictor of general satisfaction, while financial satisfaction was also significant. For Middle Easterners, only financial satisfaction was a significant predictor.

The three groups' different hierarchies of life satisfaction domains can be partly attributed to their pre-Australian experiences and cultural differences, which created certain expectations, and partly to the differential social inclusion of these minority groups in Australian society. The latter is affected by their length of residence, but even more by their demographic and human capital characteristics (age, education, English proficiency) and their racial and cultural visibility in the Australian milieu. As respondents often commented, racial and cultural visibility

seemed to have made them vulnerable to 'everyday' or 'street' discrimination as well as labor-market discrimination.

It is interesting to note that 'street discrimination', unlike discrimination in the labor market, did not significantly affect general life satisfaction. The mainly verbal street incidents people experienced because of their visibility (Muslim women in most cases) were treated pragmatically: they were unpleasant but largely inconsequential for their lives and rationalized. A large majority of our respondents considered Australians to be generally 'friendly and accepting', which no doubt balanced these negative experiences.

On average, the socio-economic status of our highly educated respondents was considerably lower than that of the general population. Unemployment was much higher (28 versus 5 per cent) and their life satisfaction was lower than the general Australian population: using Cummins' (1996; 2000) methodology it translates into 64.6 SM (scale maximum), about 10 percentage points lower than the life satisfaction of the general Australian population. When the life satisfaction score of 64.6 SM is broken down by group, Bosnians were the most satisfied, with a score of 69.6 SM, while Africans and Iraqis were very close to each other with 62 and 62.3 SM respectively.

This difference seems at least partly due to objective factors: ex-Yugoslavs' unemployment of 'only' 14 per cent compared to 32 and 38 per cent of the other two groups, and their considerably higher self-reported income combined with lower levels of experience of discrimination. As 'whites', they may have found their path to social inclusion less overgrown with mainstream prejudices (Colic-Peisker 2005).

Recently arrived refugees' satisfaction with life is influenced by the fact that their social comparison largely stays within their ethnic communities, and their (public) relationship to the host population is generally one of gratitude, as often reported in the media and by the respondents in our study. In the later stages of settlement, refugee settlers may start comparing their circumstances with members of the mainstream society, and consequently see themselves as more relatively deprived than before, even if their objective circumstances change for the better.

It is important to note that the idea of measuring life satisfaction has been dominated by Western thinking and middle-class standards, and the ways success is conceived and measured is Western in its essence. Therefore, measuring life satisfaction in a cross-cultural situation should be exercised and interpreted with caution (see also Tilbury 2006). However, refugees and other culturally different and 'visible' minorities are increasingly present in all Western societies and their perceptions and experiences need to be explored, heard and translated into a commonly accepted and understood framework, in order for policymakers to gain an insight into their settlement and the problems involved in it, as well as to increase mutual understanding between minority and majority populations.

7. Policy relevance, recommendations and conclusion

This report has identified a number of issues in relation to the settlement of 'visibly different' refugees, especially the issue of their labour market integration. Refugees overwhelmingly experience a loss of potential to use their human capital, finding themselves in jobs (where they have jobs) beneath their skills levels. They tend to be concentrated in certain unskilled or semi-skilled job market niches and find it difficult to be upwardly mobile from these. Refugees also perceive they are being discriminated against in the employment market. Employers, on the other hand, are unaware of some of these issues, and neither perceive discrimination nor accept responsibility for it. Yet, they seem to reproduce it through their own actions. Employment service providers seem unaware of the needs of refugee clients, and refugees feel they are not getting the help they need in this area.

In terms of policy, our findings have relevance in at least three areas: qualifications recognition, employment assistance and anti-racism. At the very start of their quest for an appropriate job, refugees face a systemic barrier: qualifications recognition. Their formal skills are often not recognised or only partly recognised. This structural constraint keeps refugees and other migrants from economically and culturally distant countries in underprivileged segments of the labour market, and in the longer term may relegate them to the status of a disadvantaged minority. Qualifications recognition has formal and informal aspects however. Sometimes overseas qualifications are formally recognised, but Australian employers do not consider them equivalent to local qualifications, which disadvantages immigrants, especially those from non-English speaking and developing countries.

There is a national system of qualifications recognition, comprising the Curriculum Council, Overseas Qualifications Unit and Trade Recognition Australia. A less regulated part of the system is run by professional organisations and various professional registration boards. Methods of accreditation used by professional organisations do not appear to provide a 'fair go' for overseas trained professionals (Constable et al. 2004). The same applies to government departments, such as the Education Department, which assess, test and accredit overseas trained teachers. This not only affects overseas trained professionals but also wastes available skills which may be in short supply in Australia (for example, teachers, nurses and doctors). Policy improvements in this area could include regular updating of the operations of professional associations and boards, and better coordination between them and employment agencies in organising professional training and work experience placements. While it is clear that a fair, up-to-date and transparent system of overseas qualifications recognition cannot guarantee equitable employment outcomes for migrants and refugees, it is necessary that good policy foundations are provided for the best potential outcomes.

Employment assistance service provision has in recent years been increasingly mainstreamed and privatised, which appears to have made it less focussed on and less sensitive to cross-cultural issues and generally less successful in helping CALD migrants and refugees. Our current as well as previous research projects show that most migrants do not find the Job Network services useful (Colic-Peisker and Waxman 2005). The Australian Productivity Commission (APC, 2003) report on the privatised Job Network is also critical. More specific and better focused employment

assistance for skilled and professional migrants from Non-English Speaking backgrounds (CALD) and refugees is clearly needed. Currently such assistance only exists in NSW in the form of a 'Skilled Migrant Placement Officer' but such an approach should be considered across Australia.

Our research also points to unresolved issues in the area of anti-discrimination. Recruitment procedures are usually not transparent, leaving applicants unclear as to why they have not been given the job (and therefore assuming 'racism'), and enabling employers to apply personal prejudices and informal discriminatory practices. Education of employers about what constitutes discrimination, the value of a diverse workforce, the broader societal benefits of providing employment opportunities to minorities, and encouraging a broader application of the Australian motto of 'a fair go', would go a long way to improving outcomes for 'visibly different' migrants and refugees. In this respect, political leadership is necessary to turn around the climate of hostility towards those who are different — Muslims in particular.

As reported by our respondents, people affected by the current upsurge of xenophobia and open racial abuse and discrimination are reluctant to seek redress through anti-discrimination agencies or regular legal avenues. They feel that attempting to set the slow wheels of anti-racist and anti-discrimination bureaucracies in motion is not likely to improve their work or life situation. Despite Australia's stringent anti-discrimination legislation, if people who suffer from discrimination do not lodge complaints and those who discriminate can do it through non-transparent processes, the legislation remains impotent. One way to improve the situation would be to create a more direct link between regular migrant settlement service providers (for example Migrant Resource Centres) and Job Network providers, and HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission).

In conclusion, the current research project indicates a number of concerns for refugees in the Australian labour market. Many of those who come to Australia through humanitarian immigration are highly skilled, proficient in English and educated. However they are unable to find appropriate work, and many are unemployed or working below their capacity. This serious loss of occupational status disadvantages the refugees, but also the market itself, with wasted human capital impacting both on individuals and the wider society. Refugees attribute some of this disadvantage to systemic barriers, and some to discrimination based on language ability, name, accent, appearance, religion and 'cultural compatibility'. Some employers appear to hold stereotypical and prejudiced views about 'visibly different' migrants and refugees, and engage in discriminatory practices. Employers generally appear to be unaware of the specific challenges faced by refugees, assuming that the market, as ultimate arbiter of human capital distribution, will ensure equitable outcomes. While some are sympathetic to the notion that refugees, like other disadvantaged groups, should be given special training and employment opportunities, most felt unable to ensure such practices themselves, due to economic imperatives. Negative employment outcomes affect the lives of refugees, particularly their well-being, and this effect is likely to be compounded over time. There is a clear place for policy in trying to improve employment outcomes for refugees, including service provision and educating employers about the barriers

that the visibly different face in the Australian labour market, as well as about the benefits of a diverse workforce.

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9. Project outputs

9.1. Publications

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9.2. Conferences papers and submissions to government

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9.3. Other research outputs

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9.4. 'Social inclusion of refugees' workshop

In June 2006, the research team convened, together with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, a one day workshop entitled 'Social Inclusion of Refugees'. The purpose of the workshop was to provide a forum for presenting current research and an opportunity for discussion about the social inclusion/exclusion of refugees and related issues. We invited interested individuals, groups and agencies (university academics and researchers; local, state and federal government officers; Migrant Resource Centres' staff; settlement workers; police; teachers; health and social workers; community members to participate. As a result, participation in the workshop was broad and varied, with the presentation of seventeen papers and a total attendance of over 50 people. An edited volume comprising some of the papers, from community members, service providers and researchers, is currently under production and will be published and distributed in early 2007.