

Addressing employment barriers for humanitarian migrants: Perspectives from settlement services

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Abstract

This research seeks to understand the challenges faced by settlement service providers (SSPs) in assisting humanitarian migrants to secure appropriate employment. In-depth interviews with 26 SSPs identified that current impediments to facilitating humanitarian migrants' employment related to employment support programmes; settlement service partnerships; cultural appropriateness of services; employment readiness, experience, skills and knowledge; social support and networks; and limitations of funding and service agreements. While employment is recognised as key to effective settlement, the findings of this study show that employment services are not currently a focus of settlement services, that is, most employment services delivered by settlement services were coordinated as part of job preparedness or readiness programmes. The paper argues for government to ensure financial and human resources to enable SSPs to deliver services that can formally recognise and overcome barriers to humanitarian migrants' employment.

KEYWORDS

employment barriers, employment services, humanitarian migrants, settlement services, socioecological model

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Globally, humanitarian crises, conflicts and persecutions persist in driving people to search for a safe place to call home. As of June 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were 89.3 million displaced people across the globe, including 27.1 million refugees and 4.6 million asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022a), which is double the number of displaced people in 2010 (41 million). In 2021, 39,266 refugees out of the 63,190 resettlement submissions made by UNHCR (62.1%) were successfully resettled in 20 countries (UNHCR, 2022b). That year, UNHCR's resettlement submissions only represented 4.37 per cent of overall global resettlement needs ($n=1,445,383$), and only 2.72 per cent of the global resettlement needs in 2021 were met. These data illustrate that global resettlement is occurring at a much slower rate than needed to respond to the growing number of refugees and people in a refugee-like situation. Thus, the increased needs for resettlement will remain a key issue for many host country governments for years to come.

There are potential socioeconomic, cultural and demographic gains to Australia from an increased humanitarian migrant intake when they can effectively resettle and participate in Australian society. Migration is often regarded as beneficial for the economies of receiving countries regardless of the migration stream people have migrated through (Committee for Economic Development of Australia [CEDA], 2016; Deloitte Access Economics, 2018; Wright et al., 2016). For example, using the baseline of 18,750 humanitarian entrants in 2019–2020, Gardener and Costello (2019) estimated that an increase in the humanitarian intake to 44,000 by 2022–2023 would increase the size of the Australian economy by \$AUD 37.7 billion over the next 50 years, create and sustain an additional 35,000 full-time equivalent jobs every year, and grow the demand for Australian goods and services by \$18.2 billion. Similarly, Gerber et al. (2017) found that resettling refugees in Southeast Michigan over the 10-year period of 2007–2016 stimulated the economy and created new jobs. The study found that in 2016 alone, refugees added up to USD 295.3 million to the Southeast Michigan's economy through new spending by refugee households, refugee-owned businesses and refugee service organisations, and created between 1798 and 2311 jobs.

However, maximising the socioeconomic impact of refugees in host countries remains an unrealised objective because of the small and limited quotas of refugees that most OECD countries agree to resettle every year (UNHCR, 2022b). In addition, many humanitarian entrants have undertaken extensive education and training in their home countries, which is not generally recognised in Australia and other host countries (Bloch, 1999). The diverse educational and employment backgrounds of humanitarian migrants can create additional complexity for host country governments depending on individual needs and the different types and levels of support required.

Settlement service interventions may vary across OECD countries. In Australia, the federal government has two main settlement programmes targeting humanitarian migrants—the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) and the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS; Department of Home Affairs, 2022). The HSP offers support to humanitarian migrants in terms of immediate settlement needs, such as airport reception, short-term and long-term accommodation, connection to community groups, referrals to mainstream and specialist support services, and English language, employment readiness and education assistance. HSP support is available for those on refugee and global special humanitarian visas to help with initial settlement, most of whom exit the programme after 6–18 months. The SETS programme equips and empowers humanitarian entrants, and other eligible permanent migrants to address their settlement needs. It has two separate streams: client services (e.g. focusing on the three Es' of English, education skills and employment readiness) and community capacity building (e.g. to build humanitarian entrants' capacity to enable their economic and

social participation). SETS support was limited to the first 5 years of settlement at the time this research was undertaken (2017–2021). However, this 5-year limit was removed in the 2023–2024 Federal Budget, to provide continued support for humanitarian migrants who have unresolved settlement-related needs (Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA], 2023).

In Australia, the delivery of settlement programmes is contracted to community organisations, non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations. In addition to federal government funding, these organisations can obtain financial assistance through grants, philanthropic donations and funding from state and local governments. Helping humanitarian migrants find employment remains one of the top priorities of resettlement services in Australia (Settlement Council of Australia [SCOA], 2017). However, there is significant diversity among employment services offered to humanitarian migrants, and service providers can receive funding from individual or multiple funders to deliver one or a variety of programmes. Mainstream employment services such as the Australian Government's flagship Workforce Australia also work with humanitarian migrants. However, mainstream employment services have been criticised for not being culturally competent and for having a compliance approach that fails to effectively assist some humanitarian migrants to find appropriate jobs, often pushing them into work unsuited to their skills or desires (Tahiri, 2017; Wali et al., 2018).

The Australian Government currently spends around \$AUD 700 million annually on humanitarian migrant settlement services (RCOA, 2023). The extent to which these resources are used to support humanitarian migrants' employment in Australia is unknown. There is currently little research investigating the role that settlement service providers (SSPs) play in supporting humanitarian migrants to obtain employment. This research sought to respond to this evidence gap by exploring SSP offerings for humanitarian migrants to assist them in finding suitable employment. It has also explored SSPs' perceptions of employment needs and experiences of humanitarian migrants, which influences the design of their corresponding support programmes. The aim of this study is threefold: (1) outline the services and supports to assist humanitarian migrants in gaining employment that is available through Australian SSPs; (2) identify the key barriers to employment for humanitarian migrants from the perspective of SSPs; and (3) explore the capacity of SSPs to respond to the employment challenges that humanitarian migrants face.

1.1 | Theoretical foundation

Employment has been recognised as central to the successful settlement of humanitarian migrants (Cain et al., 2021). Yet, there is a scarcity of theory-informed studies focused on the socioecological effects of humanitarian migrant unemployment and how SSPs seek to address them. High rates of unemployment among humanitarian migrants are commonly linked to socioeconomic and structural factors such as limited language skills; lack of qualification recognition; lack of social capital; limited knowledge of workplace culture; limited understanding of job searching and hiring processes; and potential discrimination in hiring and recruiting (Delaporte & Piracha, 2018; Hugo, 2011; Lee et al., 2020; RCOA, 2010; Senthana et al., 2021). Employment service landscapes are complex, with many SSPs competing for funding while also delivering joint or complementary services. For example, the Joint Partnership Working Group (JPWG) on refugee resettlement (Holbrook, 2020) and the New South Wales (NSW) Settlement Partnership (Chen, 2020) work together on some activities while competing on others.

The socioecological model (SEM) provides a framework to articulate challenges that humanitarian migrants face when seeking employment by linking ecological factors that characterise social systems and how they influence relationships between resource distribution, and competition for resources (Golden et al., 2015). Originally developed by Bronfenbrenner

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979) the SEM takes into account interlinked factors in the individual (e.g. knowledge and skills, and self-esteem or resilience), interpersonal (e.g. relationships with other people and the support network), organisational (e.g. institutional settings), community (e.g. pooling of cross-organisation resources for a shared goal) and public policy (e.g. legal instruments, and economic and funding systems) levels (Golden et al., 2015). Such interlinked analyses shed light on the interdependence of the systems that govern humanitarian migrant employment activities, their adaptations to better meet employment needs, and their parameters that govern the distribution of resources. The SEM captures the complexity of the interactions of individuals and the system they engage with. It was therefore determined as relevant for this study to understand the complexity of interconnected factors impacting humanitarian entrants' employment from a SSPs' perspective.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Setting and participant recruitment

This study was carried out in areas of two Australian cities of Greater Sydney, NSW and Greater Melbourne, Victoria—chosen because 61.7 per cent of all migrants including humanitarian entrants have settled in these two states and predominantly in urban areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Purposive sampling, informed by the theoretical framework (Gibbs et al., 2007), was used to recruit participants from key SSPs in both locations.

This purposive sample represented workers in a range of roles and organisations funded by the Australian Government to deliver HSP and SETS programmes. Mainstream employment services utilised by the wider population and some humanitarian migrants were excluded given their lack of migrant-focused programmes. Eligible SSPs were identified via the published list of HSP and SETS providers on the Department of Home Affairs Website and via an internet search. Key informant interviews took place at their workplaces and involved individuals across a range of roles, including case workers, team leaders and senior managers (see Table A1 in the Appendix A).

A total of 26 participants from 19 SSPs took part in the research. There were 14 participants in Victoria (53.8%) and 12 participants in NSW (46.2%), and overall 69% (18/26) were female participants (Appendix A). There was a balanced cross-section of roles, including client services (34.6%, nine participants), programme managers (34.6%, nine participants) and senior managers (30.7%, eight participants). There were organisations that provided a range of migrant-specific services (65.1%, 16 participants), programmes targeted at community members experiencing vulnerability, including migrants (30.8%, eight participants), and those focused on community members with special needs including migrants (7.7%, two participants).

2.2 | Data collection

The 26 face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted between October 2019 and January 2020. These interviews were used to probe relevant issues so that the service providers could discuss the broader environment, and felt safe about confidentially discussing competitors (Fujii, 2017). The interview protocol was developed from previous literature and from the researchers' existing knowledge of the policy landscape around settlement services (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Given the interlinked nature of factors to be considered as per the SEM model, an exploratory approach was applied to guide data collection and analysis. That is, the process undertaken was similar to a grounded theory approach (Aframian et al., 2017; Lawrence

& Tar, 2013). This study drew on the experiences of SSPs and their interactions with their clients (Caperon et al., 2022). Data collection and the initial analysis occurred simultaneously, and helped to reshape and refine subsequent interviews (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). This process allowed for an iterative approach of ongoing data collection and analysis to exhaust thoughts and observations emerging from data collection and ascertain a level of data saturation.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide and were undertaken by two researchers—one in Victoria and one in NSW. Based on the level of participant engagement, each interview took between 45 and 120 min. The interview guide was used to understand the SSP's activities and approaches to facilitating humanitarian entrants' employment integration. It involved a probing into the range of services they provided, including any activities that were employment-related. The interview protocol then explored drivers and impediments for migrant participation, as well as drivers and impediments in terms of the effectiveness of associated services. All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed to ensure quality and adherence to participant comments and expressions. Ethics approval (*Western Sydney University Human Ethics Committee: H13063*) was obtained prior to the commencement of the research, and participants signed consent forms before interviews were initiated.

2.3 | Data analysis

Data were analysed with the assistance of NVivo 12 software. An iterative process was used to identify themes. In the first round, codes were identified by two researchers (KW & AR) by reading a selection of interview transcriptions. Each coder adhered to the following immersive process as outlined by Green et al. (2007): immersion; coding; creating categories; and identification of themes. The transcripts were first read to generate ideas of what possibilities the data presented for analysis, with potential codes consequently developed (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Following the initial reading and code development, the transcripts were coded, with new codes added as necessary while some were collated or omitted as coding progressed. Lastly, the codes were grouped together to develop broad themes (Elliott, 2018).

The wider research team then discussed and validated the codes and their higher-order themes. This validation process ensured that codes were not redundant and that the higher-order themes were discrete. After collecting and coding the data, the research team agreed that the SEM was most appropriate to interpret the results. Application of the SEM framework helped to illustrate the ways that SSPs understood how humanitarian migrant access to employment was constrained, how SSPs had been helping to overcome these constraints, and the interdependencies and competition between different levels of settlement service delivery.

3 | RESULTS

The analysis identified the following six main themes that related to employment barriers: employment support programmes; settlement service partnerships; cultural appropriateness of services; employment readiness, experience, skills and knowledge; social support and networks; and limitations of funding and service agreements. These themes focused on what SSPs do to assist humanitarian migrants in finding employment, and how they navigate the relevant employment barriers.

3.1 | Employment support and programmes

SSPs deliver a wide range of employment services and programmes, including skills development such as help writing cover letters and CVs, preparing for interviews, and assistance with online job searching. As one SSP aptly explained: “Every man and his dog ... is running employment programs; employment programs specifically for newly arrived” (VIC4). Most employment services were coordinated as part of job preparedness or readiness programmes, delivered via case management or mentor programmes. Some SSPs also aimed to develop humanitarian migrant literacy in the context of the Australian employment landscape, such as via information sessions on employment pathways, helping humanitarian migrants understand the job market, and by facilitating on-site industry tours.

I was working with TAFE [technical and further education institutes] recently and we did an industry tour. So, we hired a bus and we put a bunch of students on the bus and we took them to a construction site, because we know there's jobs in construction. We took them to a nursing home because we know there's jobs in aged care. We looked at the gaps.

(VIC1)

... so this program will help the SETS clients sort of get some job readiness support. For example, to give them a session about [the] job market, how is the job market in Australia, how to be prepared, how to submit your application, how to prepare your resume.

(VIC10)

Some SSPs established social enterprises to provide avenues for humanitarian migrants to develop human capital. They cited a range of social enterprises where young people could gain work experience, such as administration, warehousing and candle-making, or gain guidance in developing business skills and knowledge in cooking or hospitality businesses (e.g. OH&S and budgeting). Participants also cited the need for an interpreter collective that assists humanitarian migrants to attain work as bilingual workers and interpreters.

We have the economic participation team and they're working hard on social enterprises. So [the] cooking collective is one example of that, where we have a group of mainly women who have those skills and [are] generally terrific cooks, but they want to seek employment in maybe hospitality or cafes or, you know, maybe the tuck shop at the school.

(VIC7)

There is a youth pathways and preparedness program, YPPP, which works to provide youth employment support, and also engage them through our social enterprise, to provide them with work experience, through some of the initiatives that we have, whether it be in administration in warehousing, in candle-making, things like that.

(NSW7)

SSPs partnered with other employment-focused service providers such as mainstream employment services, community organisations, philanthropic entities, registered training organisations and other settlement service agencies to provide free training (e.g. hospitality, disability and community support), and to deliver in-house training and employment programmes (e.g. aged care, gardening and horticulture). They also supported humanitarian migrants in obtaining certifications and accreditations required for various jobs.

...if we have a group of people [who] would like to learn about carpentry for example or about plumbing or things, so we try to organise a special course for them, like a compact course or short period of time. So we are working with TAFE now to do a course about food handling and hospitality. So those are some of the support[s] we provide to the clients or that just push them towards finding work.

(NSW1)

And also, we cover some short prerequisites of the requirements or fees like white card costing in order to attend a course or to be eligible for that employment.

(VIC10)

3.2 | Settlement service partnerships

SSPs assisted humanitarian migrants in learning how to navigate the culture, systems and services within Australia, so they “can participate both socially and economically, [and] politically as well” (VIC8). Some SSPs identified partnerships as essential for ensuring effective services and programmes for humanitarian migrants, given the complexity of their needs. One participant highlighted that they “can't do [their] work without partnerships and are open to any and all partnerships” (VIC4).

3.3 | Cultural appropriateness of services

SSPs felt proud of the cultural appropriateness of their employment support programmes. This contrasted with their common perception that mainstream employment services could not provide culturally appropriate support to humanitarian migrants.

Job providers ... the majority of them they are, let's say, not polite. They don't provide interpreters for their clients, they didn't respect the client's demands, or the client's circumstances and other things

(NSW1)

SSPs highlighted the importance of employing staff from the migrant communities they served, or from refugee backgrounds, to provide insights into different cultural perspectives. This can help to identify service access issues experienced by different communities and provide greater bilingual support to clients. Moreover, some SSPs work with migrant communities to co-design programmes.

What we're really good at is our team come from the communities, so they really understand what's going on.

(VIC1)

3.4 | Employment readiness, experience, skills and knowledge

SSPs outlined several individual barriers to employment including limited English skills, barriers to upgrade or obtain new qualifications, and lack of recognition of existing skills and qualifications. As a result, most humanitarian migrants engage in jobs below their qualification and skills level to “put food on the table.” SSPs acknowledged that strategies to assist

humanitarian migrants to build local networks (e.g. job references) and cultivate social interactions is critical to improving their employment.

Some of them, they may have a very good overseas education, work experience, and when they come here they see that that sort of experience is very hard to be applied because they may have [a] different sort of work structure in Australia or they may have other barriers. For example, English language, and also how to apply [for jobs] and how to find a relevant job.

(VIC10)

Employment opportunities for adult migrants is challenging to be honest with you because of language barriers, not having local experience, [and] overseas qualifications not being realised [sic].

(NSW4)

Some SSPs also acknowledged that pre-migration life experiences of humanitarian migrants impacted their settlement outcomes differently.

It depends on the clients, the background of the clients, like cities or the villages, or [whether] they are well-educated or not well-educated.

(NSW1)

SSPs reported that some humanitarian migrants often face more cultural difficulties and challenges in understanding the Australian employment landscape and workplace culture than others. One participant highlighted how some young migrants had a “real lightbulb moment” (VIC11) when they discovered it was beneficial to ask questions of the employer, in contrast to their home country where it might be perceived as inappropriate.

Language is a huge barrier to getting a job, but it's not just language, it's cultural. Things that we appreciate in Australia in terms of workplace culture, being proactive is one thing, teamwork, approaching your boss when you see there's an issue. You see overseas, a lot of people, it's very autocratic, so the boss is the boss, and you don't challenge the boss, you just go, you do your work. You don't challenge the boss. When I say challenge, it could be something as simple as a question, you know what I mean? You just do what's expected.

(VIC1)

A lack of local work experience was considered a significant barrier for humanitarian migrants to obtaining work. This was often compounded by poor English language skills, as well as work-related social and cultural dissimilarities, such as volunteering to gain work experience, obtaining job references and using transferable skills.

Work history, no work history in Australia, people want the local experience. How do you get the local experience without getting a shot, you know? It's a catch 22.

(VIC4)

But also, a key question that is always asked by all jobs is experience. And so, if you ask a refugee or a newly arrived migrant about experience, they will tell you their experience back home. How credible that would be to an employer would be

like, you don't have local experience in the Australian context. But there's no one that's giving them that local experience anyway.

(NSW7)

SSPs suggested that many humanitarian migrants were unfamiliar with job application processes. This included having limited practical job searching skills and a lack of knowledge about local recruitment practices including what to do in an interview, how to use online resources and how to write an appropriate CV. One participant reflected on how an employment mentor had helped a humanitarian migrant develop their CV by identifying and showcasing their unique skills, such as being multilingual.

Or maybe they don't have any referees, because in the CV they have to put some referee names, and they may not have that kind of referee who can recommend them. They may not have local experience, like working experience in Australia. They may have experience in their country. We have, while we are doing these activities, like employment activities, we work with TAFE college to run the job preparedness courses, like how to write CV, how to write cover letter, and how to do [an] interview. And we do mock interviews as well.

(NSW4)

... in a [employment] program he got given a mentor and the mentor was talking with him and asking him about himself, and the mentor said, "so you haven't got anything on your CV about languages. What do you ... do you speak any other languages?" And yeah, he speaks five languages other than English, but he hadn't thought to put that down. He wants a career in banking but hadn't thought to put that down, didn't think that was a skill. And then the person said, "Okay, there's a bit of a gap between when you've left school and when I've met you, like what was going on there?" And he said, "Well, I had these two internet businesses, but in the end, they failed so I didn't want to put them down because that would look dodgy." And the mentor's going, "Well, but it shows entrepreneurship and ingenuity and, you know, self-sustaining, and all these skills, and internet skills."

(VIC11)

SSPs highlighted concerns around humanitarian migrants' employment expectations in terms of matching skills with jobs. SSPs recognised that it is often difficult for humanitarian migrants to find employment that utilises their home country qualifications or skills. They noted that many humanitarian migrants were reluctant to take on lower skilled work than they were qualified for. However, many humanitarian migrants were forced to accept working in low-skilled jobs they are not passionate about in order to survive.

SSPs viewed volunteering as an ideal way for humanitarian migrants to gain local experience and engage in the labour market. One participant argued that some humanitarian migrants develop human and social capital through skills development and the building of networks, despite migrants' belief that it does not help them: "[they] just don't see the value [in volunteering], they say 'why would I work for nothing? I should be paid'" (VIC1).

I said to him go and volunteer at the council and see if they'll take you and then you'll get some work experience and see what happens. It's a big organisation, you never know. He did that, [and] now he's employed by council as an engineer full-time.

(VIC6)

3.5 | Limited social support and networks

SSPs reported a lack of social capital as limiting many humanitarian migrants' employment opportunities. As one participant explained: “[if] 75% of jobs are never going to be in the newspaper, then you're never going to access 75% of opportunities” (VIC2). In line with this, another claimed that Australia was “a country of nepotism,” and that you had to be known to access employment.

SSPs helped build social networks for humanitarian migrants by fostering community groups and activities, and by connecting them to employers. SSPs often partnered with local employers to identify internship employment opportunities. SSPs also worked with recruitment agencies and helped to establish profession-specific networks where humanitarian migrants can collaboratively identify challenges and opportunities for getting jobs in their desired industry. Such social partnership activities are avenues for building both skills and social networks for humanitarian migrants.

Participants acknowledged that established migrant communities often helped those within their community to obtain jobs: “Their own community giving their own people a hand up who are desperate” (VIC7). This is particularly beneficial when newer migrant community members faced intrapersonal barriers to employment such as limited English language skills.

I mean, some people come with the understanding that my niece is going to get me a job, my uncle is going to get me a job. While that is not technically what is happening in Australia, it is what is happening. You get a job from people you know. Who you know gets you into a job ... So that's really number one. Finding employment or even a sustainable education pathway is one challenge because of the links that they don't have.

(NSW7)

3.6 | Limitations of funding and service agreements

SSPs acknowledged that while they have been directed not to duplicate services funded elsewhere, the Australian Government is now “actually wanting [SSPs] to help people with employment” (VIC6). Many believed employment support was beyond the scope of their settlement services, and that there was inadequate funding specifically for employment services within the HSP and SETS. This is despite the reality that all SSPs that were interviewed provided some type of employment support.

It was highlighted by one participant that settlement programmes “don't push [humanitarian migrants] into employment as there is an employment service provider that will do that,” but rather run “pre-employment programs and wash [our] hands from there” (NSW7). Many participants argued that more consideration should be given to integrating employment services into settlement services. As one participant clarified: “For settlement, it's not our job ... to find them a job” (NSW9). It was highlighted by some SSPs that humanitarian migrants' expectations of what SSPs do were unrealistic, indicating they needed a better understanding of the scope of support the system delivers. For instance, some of humanitarian migrants expected that the SSPs would get them a job, rather than only assisting them in finding employment.

In the context of providing employment support services, SSPs lamented that their compliance obligations and the focus on short-term outcomes conflicts with the ability to provide an appropriate level of service for humanitarian migrants. They believed that flexibility in terms of service provision funding obligations was needed, rather than having “a one-size-fits-all service” (VIC5). The focus on short-term outcomes was seen to devalue useful social networking or capital-building events, such as social gatherings. However, it was noted that

“the department is looking at innovative ways of how to improve settlement services” (VIC8), such as looking at flexible models around employment pathways.

Furthermore, some settlement programmes were seen to be limited by the funding structure. For instance, the HSP was described as a “unit cost model” (VIC2).

When you pay providers to deliver in service units, they'll deliver service units, and they'll maximise the delivery of service units. So, if you get paid every time you take someone to the doctor, you'll take people to the doctor a lot more ... than spending more time on how you build the capability of that family or individual to negotiate that by themselves.

(VIC2)

HSP model guidelines limit how much settlement support humanitarian migrants can receive, particularly in the first 12–18 months. In line with this, the 5-year limit for SETS funding was highlighted by SSPs as insufficient for providing long-term settlement support for some humanitarian migrants. Moreover, competition for funding between SSPs and the government's tendency to favour larger SSPs meant the smaller-sized organisations were often at-risk of losing funding. This was couched as a battle between a corporate settlement service model versus a grassroots delivery model. Some SSPs believed that smaller organisations were more in touch with the “grassroots” of the humanitarian migrant communities they served and could consequently better identify specific needs and offer appropriate services.

4 | DISCUSSION

These findings highlight employment barriers for humanitarian migrants, which are inter-linked across the different levels of the SEM framework. For example, individual skills or capacities were found to be essential for the development of interpersonal and societal factors. Policy factors impact societal factors such as labour market dynamics, organisational funding and capacity to service humanitarian migrants, as well as individual factors such as accessibility of education and training opportunities.

Employment readiness, workplace literacy, local experience, job application processes, social support and networks, and skills and qualifications have been linked to human and social capital (Becker, 1993). In line with this, a humanitarian migrant's ability to gain employment encompasses English language skills, past work experience, job training and qualifications, and job searching skills (Cheng et al., 2021). It has also been found that humanitarian migrants with higher levels of human capital are more likely to obtain work (Cheng et al., 2021). Yet, this study found that humanitarian migrants lack human capital, that is the skills and knowledge required to obtain employment. Although human capital alone does not explain a lack of access to employment among migrants, as such barriers can also be due to the “migrant penalty” (Demireva, 2011; Muñoz-Comet & Steinmetz, 2020). That is, several factors are intrinsically connected to broader societal, organisational and interpersonal factors, such as access to employment, barriers to upgrading skills and qualification recognition. Thus, while developing human capital may be an essential foundation for employment and settlement success, attaining a job is more than a skills and language problem (Torezani et al., 2008).

Social capital refers to the “social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993). Social capital provides a vertical bridge, allowing networks of people from diverse backgrounds to access new resources (Ryan, 2011) and is often key to helping refugees find employment (Gericke et al., 2018). In this study, SSPs recognised that new humanitarian migrants lacked vertical bridging capital, which arises from social systems involving friends, social workers, volunteers,

co-workers and supervisors (Gericke et al., 2018). Local networks are integral to accessing employment, as they provide local referees and experiences. However, limiting social ties of migrants to others from a similar ethnic background might impede effective integration into host societies (Allen, 2009; Gericke et al., 2018; Leschke & Weiss, 2020).

In addition to social factors, organisational factors can impact on employment opportunities and outcomes for humanitarian migrants, including the nature of service provision, cultural appropriateness, availability and complexity within the organisation. Such organisational factors are closely tied to policy factors, in that policy mediates SSP capacities by funding particular services. The Australian Government prioritises getting humanitarian migrants into paid work, and the main programme it funds to help all jobseekers (including humanitarian migrants) gain employment is Workforce Australia (SCOA, 2017). Yet, there has been debate in the literature about the cultural appropriateness of employment services for humanitarian migrants delivered via mainstream providers (Cyril et al., 2017; Renzaho, 2008). Ensuring employment readiness is a priority in the national settlement services outcome framework (SCOA, 2015), and this is what SSPs are funded to do. SSPs offer a range of employment support programmes for humanitarian migrants, as highlighted in this study. Although some feel they are not responsible for helping humanitarian migrants find jobs, as that is what Workforce Australia does. Yet in this study, there appeared to be a somewhat arbitrary boundary between “getting” someone a job and supporting humanitarian migrants to be job-ready.

In addition to funded support services, broader societal factors often influence the ability of humanitarian migrants to seek employment. Such factors that may mitigate their ability to obtain work include the type of jobs available (Bevelander, 1999), cultural specificities of work (Liu-Farrer & Shire, 2020) and discrimination (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). New humanitarian migrants may face greater barriers to employment where language skills and culturally specific social competencies are important, and where there are fewer low-skilled jobs available (Bevelander, 1999). This is why humanitarian migrants with low-level English are over-represented in the so-called 3D (dirty, demeaning and dangerous) sector jobs such as cleaning, aged care, meat processing, taxi driving, security and building (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; O'dwyer & Mulder, 2015). This extends to humanitarian migrants that have skills and qualifications obtained prior to migration (Smart et al., 2017).

In line with this, Smart et al. (2017) found that 31.9 per cent of humanitarian migrants worked in professional or management jobs prior to migration, whereas within 15–18 months post-arrival only 10 per cent were employed in these areas. While 41.8 per cent employed humanitarian migrants worked as labourers, only 15.9 per cent were labourers prior to migration (Smart et al., 2017). Bauder (2003) has referred to this phenomenon as “brain abuse,” whereby migrants are systematically excluded from upper segments of labour markets due to a lack of cultural capital and non-recognition of foreign credentials and experience. Discrimination was not often raised by the SSPs in our study, despite it being recognised as a common barrier to obtaining employment within the literature (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012; Ahmad, 2020). The fact that discrimination did not arise may be due to a limitation of the interview questions or that participants were unaware of this issue. Yet, former research has shown that humanitarian migrants in Australia have often faced discrimination in obtaining work (Cain et al., 2021). Correa-Velez et al. (2015) contended that discrimination may mitigate any advantages of obtaining tertiary education in Australia among new humanitarian migrants (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). Thus, the power of discrimination to mitigate individual human capital demonstrates the interrelation between factors within the SEM and reveals how broader societal forces can override human capital when it comes to finding work.

As identified in our study, even though SSPs have limited ability to alter the employment landscape, they effectively collaborate with industry, business, training, local government and other service organisations to develop capital that could help to overcome employment barriers for humanitarian migrants. Policy directives can also alter the employment landscape to

provide more opportunities for humanitarian migrants, even though they can limit the capacity of SSPs to support human and social capital development. In this study, several SSPs did not feel that employment support was their responsibility, mostly because government funding models did not support such activities. Yet, they questioned the ability of mainstream employment services to support humanitarian migrants. This is significant in terms of SSPs believing so despite the array of employment-related support and programmes they provided. This study's participants felt their organisations were better placed to service humanitarian migrants than mainstream services, which is a perception supported by former research that has highlighted the limited ability of mainstream services to help humanitarian migrants settle in and find jobs in Australia (Australian Education and Employment References Committee, 2018; Tahiri, 2017; Wali et al., 2018).

Government policies that guide services and funding influence the ability of SSPs to support humanitarian migrants (Kandasamy & Soldatic, 2018). For instance, settlement service funding can be outcome-driven and short-term focused, prioritising getting refugees into employment quickly, irrespective of the suitability of the job (Nardon et al., 2020). In this study, funding limitations were seen as a key barrier to providing effective employment support. Thus, the policy landscape mediates SSPs' capacity to help humanitarian migrants develop the skills, knowledge and networks they require to get into suitable paid work.

Even though no tangible examples were obtained in this study, it has been argued that community organisations can influence funding for settlement services via consultative programme design practices (Shergold, 2018). The 2019 Shergold review into settlement services makes a case for centralising and simplifying employment and settlement services (Shergold et al., 2019). The authors recommended that the relevant employment services be settlement service-based and client-centred and acknowledge the important role of developing social and human capital in finding employment. Essential to this approach is the integration of employment into settlement services to provide a more streamlined journey to employment that is tailored to the needs of humanitarian migrants, and their families and communities.

4.1 | Limitations and future research

This research has some limitations. Most, but not all, SSPs in this study's two targeted cities participated in the research, leading to the omission of some viewpoints. Similarly, it was not always clear whether particular supports and services were delivered using SETS and HSP funds or funds obtained from other sources such as grants. Data for this study are from a larger dataset that examined the broader role of settlement services in supporting humanitarian migrant resettlement in Australia. Thus, employment support and service themes were only one component of the data collected.

This study highlights the need for additional research to contribute to the evidence base on how employment services are delivered to humanitarian migrants. The findings highlight how factors within the socioecological framework are interconnected and interdependent, and essential to supporting humanitarian migrants to access employment. To this end, future research might investigate the connection between employment outcomes among humanitarian migrants and other services or actors such as businesses, local councils and education providers. Furthermore, this research indicates that employment services—particularly mainstream—need to be more responsive to the needs of humanitarian migrants if they were co-designed with migrants themselves. The extent that co-design happens and the implications for humanitarian migrant settlement and employment outcomes requires further investigation. Lastly, the views of humanitarian migrants have not been captured in this study, and their perspectives would likely provide an alternative perspective of how effective SSPs are in helping them gain employment.

5 | CONCLUSION

This study illuminates how SSPs have implemented a wide range of activities and supports to help humanitarian migrants in Australia obtain employment. As passionate advocates for humanitarian migrants, and despite societal and policy challenges, these SSPs are often able to accumulate a range of resources to help humanitarian migrants settle in and feel job-ready. Most SSPs strived for migrant employment readiness, focused on their individual skills and sometimes their interpersonal networks. Yet, these findings also suggest that SSPs have limited scope to influence the broader societal context and policy settings critical for helping humanitarian migrants obtain employment. Such limitations are likely due to prescriptions in funding and service agreements, which means SSPs do not have leverage in shaping settlement service policy. Increasing the ability of SSPs to influence the broader context where employment services are provided could improve employment and other settlement outcomes for humanitarian migrants in Australia.

As further validated in this study, settlement and employment services are often complex and subject to change based on the shifting nature of migration, and the corresponding priorities and ideologies of governments. The role of government in shaping policy and organisational settings is central to facilitating employment opportunities for humanitarian migrants. Equally important is the role that organisations and businesses can play in ensuring culturally competent services, such as working to resolve issues around the recognition of qualifications and to eliminate discrimination.

Ultimately, the Australian Government frames settlement policy direction for humanitarian migrants and can directly influence the establishment of a more coordinated and integrated approach to corresponding employment services. Developing a more interconnected settlement service system that encompasses the various components of the SEM, while ensuring SSPs have input into settlement service design, would ultimately improve the effectiveness of the service system and the overall settlement outcomes for humanitarian migrants.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Andre M. N. Renzaho: Conceptualization; investigation; funding acquisition; methodology; validation; visualization; writing – review and editing; supervision; resources; project administration. **Kerry Woodward:** Writing – original draft; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; writing – review and editing; project administration. **Michael Polonsky:** Conceptualization; investigation; funding acquisition; methodology; validation; visualization; writing – review and editing; supervision; resources; project administration. **Julianne Abood:** Writing – review and editing; investigation; project administration. **Julie Green:** Conceptualization; investigation; funding acquisition; writing – review and editing; visualization; validation; methodology; supervision; resources; project administration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Participant characteristics.

Participant	Position	Gender	Type of not-for-profit organisation	Services provided in addition to settlement services
VIC1	Client services	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Education and training, aged care, disability, youth
VIC2	Senior manager	M	Community-based organisation, universal service provider	Youth, emergency relief, financial, community services
VIC3	Programme manager	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Migration, aged care, disability, family, youth
VIC4	Client services	M	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Migration, aged care, disability, family, youth
VIC5	Programme manager	F	Community-based organisation, universal service provider	Education and training, employment, community services
VIC5b	Senior manager	M	Community-based organisation, universal service provider	Education and training, employment, community services
VIC6	Programme manager	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Housing, youth, migration, aged care, family violence, families, housing
VIC7	Client services	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Education, employment, aged care, youth, disability, family and children
VIC8	Senior manager	F	Universal service provider	Aged care
VIC9	Client services	F	Faith-based, universal service provider	Legal and justice, education, employment, mental health and well-being
VIC10	Programme manager	M	Faith-based, universal service provider	Youth, family, emergency relief, counselling, community services
VIC11	Programme manager	F	Migrant-specific	Education, employment, community services, sport
VIC11b	Programme manager	F	Migrant-specific	Education, employment, community services, sport
VIC12	Senior manager	F	Migrant-specific	Youth, education, employment, counselling, family, senior support
NSW1	Client services	M	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Youth, community services
NSW2	Senior manager	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Aged care
NSW3	Senior manager	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Aged care, youth, community services
NSW4	Senior manager	F	Community-based organisation, universal service provider	Aged care, disability, children and youth, community services
NSW5	Senior manager	M	Community-based organisation and social business, migrant-specific	Community services, arts, family violence, employment

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Participant	Position	Gender	Type of not-for-profit organisation	Services provided in addition to settlement services
NSW6	Programme manager	M	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Aged care, disability, women and family, youth, housing
NSW7	Programme manager	M	Community-based organisation and social business, migrant-specific	Community services, arts, family violence, employment
NSW8	Client services	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Aged care, disability, women and family, youth, housing
NSW8b	Client services	F	Community-based organisation, migrant-specific	Aged care, disability, women and family, youth, housing
NSW9	Client services	F	Community-based organisation	Aged care, community services, disability
NSW10	Programme manager	F	Community-based organisation, service groups with special needs	Aged, family, disability, emergency relief, financial, legal assistance
NSW10b	Client services	F	Community-based organisation, service groups with special needs	Aged, family, disability, emergency relief, financial, legal assistance

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Michael Polonsky is an Alfred Deakin Professor and the Head of the Department of Marketing in the Faculty of Business and Law, at Deakin University. He is a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Marketing and focuses his research on understanding the management and marketing of social and environmental issues.

Julianne Abood is currently the research officer with Translational Health Research Institute, Western Sydney University. Julianne holds a Bachelor of Arts (anthropology/comparative sociology), Masters (international relations), and a PhD. Julianne Abood has over 30 years of experience working in the Greater Western Sydney family and community service sector in a diverse range of project work, associated research and publications. Julianne's main areas of interest are working to promote issues of social justice, gender equity and human rights.

Julie Green has extensive clinical, research and policy experience in the Australian child and family health sector, and a deep understanding of the continuum from primary prevention to tertiary healthcare. Julie has served on numerous senior committees in the areas of parenting, child safety, child mental health and well-being, research and ethics, and digital technologies, and is a board director of several child health and early parenting organisations.