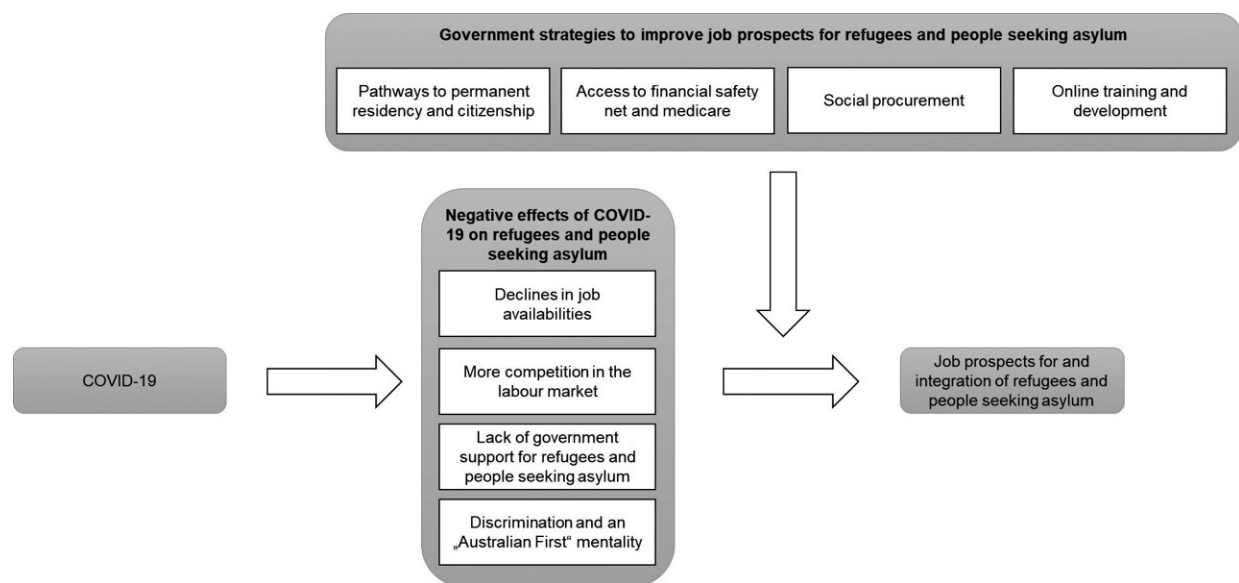


Pandemic sees refugees and people seeking asylum disproportionately affected in job market

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A model of the COVID-19 impact on the job prospects of refugees and people seeking asylum. Credit: DOI: 10.1002/ajs4.177

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia suffering disproportionately and being shut out of and marginalized in the labor market.

New research led by Monash University's Monash Business School and

the University of Melbourne found there had been declines in the number of jobs, a loss of jobs overall, increased competition and discrimination towards these groups, with employers opting for an "Australian first" mentality.

Researchers compiled their findings in the paper, "Exploring the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis for the [employment](#) prospects of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia," published today in the *Australian Journal of Social Issues*.

The findings were based on 20 interviews with refugees and people seeking asylum as well as 35 interviews with managers from Australian organizations who employ, supervise, or assist them.

Lead author Diarmuid Cooney-O'Donoghue from Monash Business School said refugees and people seeking asylum already faced difficulties to find employment, educational disadvantages, mental health issues, and are often at risk of being underpaid because their home country qualifications and education are not recognized by their host country and they lack strong bargaining power in the labor market.

"Sustainable employment is an important pathway for refugees and people seeking asylum to integrate into their new communities, and of course become self-reliant," he said.

"The pandemic and its impact on the Australian economy has reduced job prospects for these neglected minority groups, who are highly exposed because they are often employed in precarious jobs and industries that have been particularly hit by COVID-19—such as hospitality, taxi driving, retail and construction."

Of the interviews with refugees and people seeking asylum, 15 percent were unemployed, and a further 40 percent were in casual or short-term

employment.

Those on temporary protection visas or bridging visas were not eligible for JobSeeker or JobKeeper payments.

The majority of managers interviewed noted the increased competition in the labor market, with COVID-19 contributing to fewer jobs advertised, and many job seekers willing to take on less attractive jobs.

"Where there's a really high degree of competition for [jobs](#) and lots of more capable, recently unemployed job seekers, the [refugee](#) candidate is going to end up going to the bottom of the pile," one told researchers.

Some managers also spoke to bias when it came to employment opportunities, irrespective of their experience and qualifications, with postcode and name discrimination barriers to employment.

The research team suggested four strategies to improve employment prospects:

- Pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for people seeking asylum;
- Access to healthcare and a financial safety net;
- Online training and education; and
- Social procurement.

"By providing more pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for asylum seekers on temporary protection visas, this would greatly increase their opportunities for employment," Mr Cooney-O'Donoghue said.

"At the same time, this may help Australian businesses to compensate for the loss of migrant workers due to COVID-19."

Researchers also suggested temporary visa holders should also be able to access Medicare to protect their physical and mental wellbeing and have opportunities to undergo reskilling processes to improve their employability.

The most common policy response referred to by managers was social procurement, which would see employment opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized groups set aside specifically within governments or other organizations.

For example, the Victorian Level Crossing Removal Agency provides opportunities for work experience in the infrastructure sector and upskilling for refugees who have previous skills and experience in Engineering in their country of origin within the EPIC Program.

"The Australian Government—and indeed state governments—have spent billions of dollars to prevent the collapse of the labor market over the past 18 months," Mr Cooney-O'Donoghue said.

"It is governments' responsibility to ensure significant support is provided to the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

"Refugees and people seeking [asylum](#) are a potentially untapped asset for the Australian economy. By better integrating them into the labor market, we could benefit from their incoming work knowledge, skills and experience."

More information: Diarmuid Cooney-O'Donoghue et al, Exploring the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis for the employment prospects of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia, *Australian Journal of Social Issues* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/ajs4.177](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.177)

Provided by Monash University

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