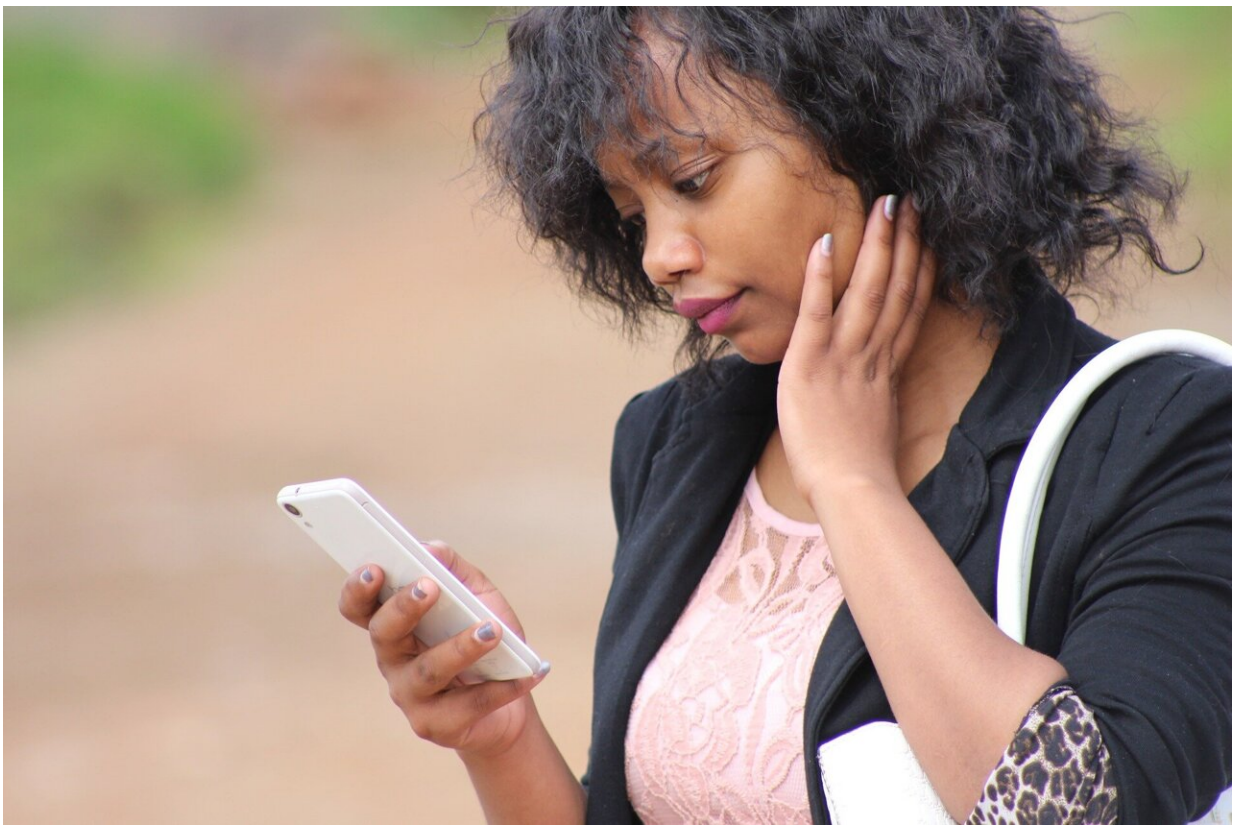


# The 'right' white people can make or break employment opportunities for African migrants

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African migrants often find themselves locked out of meaningful employment.  
Credit: Pixabay/Antonyjoro

Racial hierarchies and a lack of the 'right sort' of social connections are

hindering African-born migrants from securing meaningful employment in South Australia, according to new research by the University of South Australia.

Conducted in partnership with the University of Technology Sydney, researchers found that knowing the 'right' (white) people was vital to securing a job; without this, African migrants often found themselves locked out of the employment market.

African migrants represent a small but growing population in Australia, with [388,179 recoded in the latest Census](#) (about 1.7 percent of the total population). In South Australia, there are 20,238 African migrants, 33 percent of whom were born in South Africa and the remainder coming from 45 different countries.

Lead researcher UniSA's Dr. Melanie Baak says that this research provides important insights into the racial struggles suffered by African-born migrants in finding employment.

"A big reason African-born migrants struggle secure a meaningful job is that they lack the 'right sort' of [social ties](#) to even get a foot in the door," Dr. Baak says.

"Most of the people in this study have been in Australia for more than 10 years, speak English and have attained Australian qualifications. But despite their obvious skills and desire for employment, it's very much 'who you know, not what you know'.

"Getting a meaningful job is heavily dependent on having a 'vertical bridging tie' – that is, someone who has the knowledge, reputation and connections to the job and who can help them get past employment gatekeepers.

"Typically, these people signal a proximity to whiteness and as such act as a sort of referee or guarantor to show that the job seeker has the right kind of social-cultural skills to fit into the [work environment](#).

"Without such connections, a migrant job seeker is often stuck and obliged to take whatever mediocre job is available. These jobs frequently don't reflect their level of qualifications and can trap them within the cycle of low-paid, low-quality work.

Working alongside members of the African Communities Council of South Australia, Australian Migrant Resource Center, and the African Students Council of South Australia, the mixed-methods study collected data from five focus groups and an [online survey](#).

The top five most influential factors for securing meaningful employment were: *a knowledge of Australian culture; the strength of personal social networks; race; employers' perceptions of Africans in Australia; and country of birth.*

Dr. Baak says it's disturbing that such blatant discrimination and racism exists in [modern society](#).

"Systemic discrimination has no place in Australia, yet time and time again we find non-Anglo populations facing racially-driven bias in this country," Dr. Baak says.

"If migrant-receiving countries like Australia really want to address the migrant employment gap, much more needs to be done not only to help new [migrants](#) build social networks, but also to incorporate anti-racism work as an integral strategy for migrant labor market integration.

"Everyone deserves to be treated fairly and with respect, and in Australia where we pride ourselves on being multi-cultural, we all need to step up

and practice what we preach."

**More information:** Louise Olliff et al, "We will start building from that": Social capital, social networks and African migrants' job-seeking experiences in Australia, *Australian Journal of Social Issues* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/ajs4.205](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.205)

Provided by University of South Australia

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