

Migrants wanting to call Australia home still face significant challenges

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Labor and skills shortages have prompted the Australian government to raise the permanent migration cap, leading to a boom in new immigrants.

But will they receive a warm welcome? And what obstacles will they face settling into Australian life?

Edith Cowan University (ECU) Ph.D. candidate Omid Rezaei conducted a [systematic review](#) of 56 journal articles published between 1975 and 2021 to understand the challenges immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) experienced integrating into Australian society. The paper, "Integration Challenges of Immigrants from Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds in Australia," was published in the journal *Diaspora Studies*.

Mr. Rezaei said the findings showed that despite improvements in multicultural support services within Australian society, critical integration processes, such as securing employment and accommodation, have not progressed well for large numbers of immigrants.

"The most significant finding of this review is that in almost 50 years, from 1975 to 2021, there has been little improvement in removing some of the barriers that immigrants encounter in the integration process," he said.

Almost 30% of Australia's population were born overseas

Mr. Rezaei said NESB immigrants have played a crucial role in shaping Australian society since 1975 when the "White Australia" policy was dismantled, and Australia welcomed millions of immigrants from all over the world.

"There have been many advances in recognition and support of migrants entering Australia in the past 50 years," he said.

"They have been making great contributions to Australian society at all levels: increasing the population, creating jobs, and culturally enhancing the diversity of our communities."

However, Mr. Rezaei said NESB immigrants were still presented with many serious challenges.

"The literature showed that racism and discrimination remain at the heart of Australian society, particularly leveled at African and Muslim immigrants," he said.

Five main obstacles to integration

Mr. Rezaei said the literature showed that NESB immigrants experienced five clusters of challenges in their integration process:

1. Employment

Unemployment was the biggest obstacle for NESB immigrants in their integration process.

Several factors contributed to unemployment, including lack of English proficiency, discrimination, pre- and post-migration trauma, refutation of previous qualifications, lack of local work experience, lack of the existence or access to specialist employment services, lack of transport, [family responsibilities](#), lack of access to childcare and pressure from the dominant cultural norms in Australian society.

The literature also indicated a significant inequality between the earnings and income of migrants compared with the rest of the population.

2. Language barrier

The lack of language proficiency was particularly difficult for some immigrants, especially those who were not able to access education in their home country, making it harder for them to adapt to an unfamiliar

education context in Australia and to learn a new language.

Women were also disadvantaged because of the factors that limit their time available to learn English, for example caring for others or domestic responsibilities.

3. Racism and discrimination

The literature showed that racism and discrimination are prevalent Australian society and highlighted that some NESB immigrants appear more vulnerable than others, particularly African and Muslim immigrants.

Muslim immigrants reported an increase in racial tensions following the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001 which impacted employment, health, safety, and isolation.

4. Housing and accommodation

Immigrants face several challenges in securing a place to live, including proof of employment, providing reference guarantors, lack of support from real estate agents and discrimination in competitive process in the housing market.

Factors such as proficiency in English, ethnicity and [family size](#) led to preference being given to local applicants, rather than immigrants in renting out accommodation.

5. Social connections

Social bonds can be problematic in immigrants' families where parents' values are different from those of their children because of different

socialization for the second-generation of immigrants.

Mr. Rezaei said the findings from this [literature](#) review highlight the need for a re-evaluation of existing policies and development of relevant policies with support resources to accelerate the integration process of immigrants in Australian society.

The review builds on Mr. Rezaei's previous study exploring the integration experiences of former Afghan refugees who have settled in Australia.

More information: Omid Rezaei, Hossein Adibi and Vicki Banham, Integration Challenges of Immigrants from Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds in Australia, *Diaspora Studies*. (2023). DOI: [10.1163/09763457-bja10024](https://doi.org/10.1163/09763457-bja10024). brill.com/view/journals/bdia/16/1/article-p1_1.xml

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