



16 March 2023

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The role of displaced talent in Australia’s migration framework: Submission to the Migration, Pathway to Nation Building Inquiry

Dear Secretary

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s Inquiry into Migration, Pathway to Nation Building (“the Committee”).

Summary of recommendations

This submission draws on TBB’s experience delivering this employer-led, international displaced worker recruitment program for Australia. It sets out how lessons from this pilot should inform future migration settings, so that Australia’s economy and businesses can benefit from the talent in refugee communities around the world. The Skilled Refugee pilot is an example of an innovative solution not only to filling critical skills shortages but also demonstrating that migration, with the right legislative and policy framework, can be used to unlock huge potential of opportunities in building our nation. This submission is also accompanied by a video submission which includes examples of refugee candidates who are currently living and working in Australia having migrated through the Skilled Refugee pilot program¹.

TBB proposes the following recommendations in response to parts 1-4 of the Terms of Reference for this inquiry, “Migration, Pathway to Nation Building”. TBB recommends:

¹ https://youtu.be/oV82kp_Px8E

- 1. Australia should put in place skilled migration settings that are inclusive and designed to attract diverse talent from around the world, including from within refugee and displaced communities**
- 2. Australia should modify and extend the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot program for another year, while the government considers the design of a more permanent Displaced Talent Visa program**
- 3. Australia should transition from the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot to an employer-led permanent Displaced Talent Visa program to increase the attraction of talented and skilled refugees at scale. The program should build on the lessons from the Skilled Refugee Pilot and address the constraints skilled refugees and other displaced workers face in meeting visa requirements.**
- 4. Displaced Talent visa programs or schemes should be proactively promoted by the Australian government through the Department of Home Affairs via prominent and easily sourced information on departmental websites, dissemination to Australian Embassies and other agencies around the world and active community engagement programs, such as roadshows, to raise awareness amongst employers and the broader community.**

About Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB)

TBB is driving a new migration-solution to fill skills gaps and drive economic growth, whilst delivering a profound humanitarian benefit to refugees and stateless people. The solution is a labour mobility pathway for displaced people: based on skills, and enabled by private enterprise, technology and data. This employer-led approach offers great potential to contribute to meeting Australia's labour force needs, including in regional Australia.

TBB links with employers and governments around the world to facilitate talented refugees being able to fill skills gaps. By doing this, TBB is opening a new pathway for refugees to find self-reliance through international employment and contribute skills to the global workforce. So far we have successfully assisted refugee candidates to move into high skill roles in Australia, Canada, the UK and Germany, and we are currently expanding into the USA, Portugal, Belgium and Ireland.

TBB has developed a program to enable businesses around the world to connect with this talent. Working together with the Department of Home Affairs, TBB is implementing a world-first Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, launched on 1 July 2021, to give Australian employers the opportunity to recruit from this talent pool. Early results of the pilot have shown this model works to deliver highly competent skilled workers to diverse Australian businesses, whilst also delivering profound humanitarian benefits to those impacted by displacement.

The role of migration in the attraction and retention of diverse sources of talent

Migration has always played a central role in Australia's prosperity. Australia's economy is turbo-charged by migration, and Australia's creativity, dynamism, interconnectedness and stability are largely a product of its modern migration and multiculturalism policies. The evolution of Australia's migration legislative and policy framework has often been in response to global happenings both economic and humanitarian in nature. The resulting framework, however, has become inflexibly cemented in a way that results in migrants from diverse backgrounds being locked out of accessing a variety of migration pathways to Australia as the policy and legislative framework is not designed with them in mind.

For example, skilled refugees and other displaced workers abroad are an untapped source of talent that can help address Australia's skills shortages. However, whilst we know that skilled migration plays a critical role in filling skills shortages, the requirements of the program are not designed in a way that is inclusive of skilled migrants from non-traditional sources of talent which Australia could immensely benefit from given the critical skills shortages.

There are over 100 million forcibly displaced people in the world today² - almost half are working age. Yet refugees and other displaced people in most countries around the world are primarily shut out of the formal economy - denied work rights where they are, and subject to barriers which limit their ability to compete in the international market for jobs.

² UNHCR announced on 23 May 2022

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/5/628a389e4/unhcr-ukraine-other-conflicts-push-forcibly-displaced-total-100-million.html>

Displaced people are highly motivated to relocate for work and the chance of a safer future - and yet their mobility is largely restricted.

The result is an unacceptable waste of human potential, and perhaps the largest hidden talent pool in the world today. Employers in Australia stand to benefit enormously from this talent pool if they can get access to it - and that's what TBB seeks to achieve.

Australia is competing with countries in Europe, Canada, USA and NZ for the same pools of talent at a time when the global fight for talent has reached unprecedented levels. In 2022, 75% of high-income countries globally reported difficulty in filling vacant roles - up from 30% in 2010.³ Consequently, Australian employers are vying for talent in countries that are already experiencing skills shortages, and their employers in turn are actively trying to recruit Australian talent.

TBB runs an online Talent Catalog of skilled refugees around the world, on which more than 58,000 displaced people have registered. Registrants on the Talent Catalog are mainly Syrian, Afghan and Palestinian refugees as well as stateless people and a range of other displaced nationalities. The Talent Catalog is a rare datasource which captures the range of skills currently in refugee communities which are in high demand across the world and in Australia - from healthcare professionals to IT workers, skilled tradespeople and engineers.

³ Manpower Group Employment Outlook Survey, Q3, 2022, available from: https://go.manpowergroup.com/hubfs/MEOS/2022_Q3/Q3%20MEOS%20Global%20Report.pdf, p17.

TALENT CATALOG SNAPSHOT

58,686 registered professionals
170+ occupations
86% have English language skills
43% have completed post-secondary education

4,916 IT PROFESSIONALS
Including:

- 1,695 IT professionals & consultants
- 1417 Software developers
- 249 Cloud engineers
- 204 Machine learning professionals
- 114 AI specialists
- 200 Data scientists
- 142 Network engineers
- 93 DevOps professionals
- 108 Cybersecurity professionals

7,460 MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS
Including:

- 2,804 Nurses & personal carers
- 783 Pharmaceutical professionals
- 819 Medical doctors
- 593 Dentists
- 209 Physical therapists
- 188 Vets
- 203 Hospice healthcare professional
- 1,051 Other healthcare professionals

15,897 PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
Including:

- 3,401 Administrative assistants
- 2,845 Accountants
- 2,564 Management professionals
- 2,292 Sales professionals
- 1,166 Marketing professionals
- 772 Legal professionals

5,119 ENGINEERS
Including:

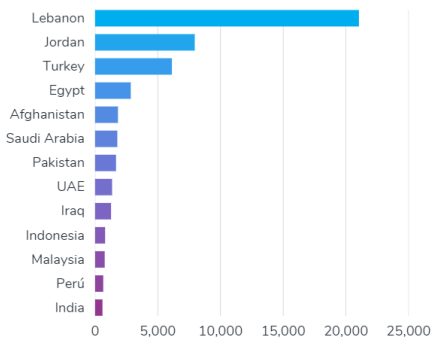
- 1,281 Civil engineers
- 963 Mechanical engineers
- 734 Electrical engineers
- 469 Electronic engineers
- 146 Petroleum engineers
- 956 Other engineers

24,270 TRADE & SKILLED WORKERS
Including:

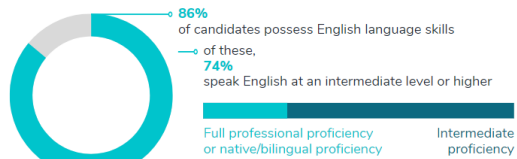
- 2,560 Chefs, cooks, bakers
- 2,827 Motor vehicle drivers
- 1,775 Tailors
- 1,658 Electricians
- 1,354 Bakers
- 1,149 Assemblers
- 1,125 Carpenters
- 986 Blacksmiths
- 1,043 Mechanics
- 585 Woodworkers
- 565 Plumbers, pipe fitters
- 465 Welders
- 394 Machine operators
- 367 Butchers
- 1,073 Other craftsmen

Data from the Talent Catalog
Last updated January 2023
talentbeyondboundaries.org
[Note: The sum of some occupations is greater than the umbrella occupation because candidates can have experience in more than one role i.e. a software developer may also have skills as a data scientist.]

CANDIDATES BY LOCATION



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITIES



TOP NATIONALITIES

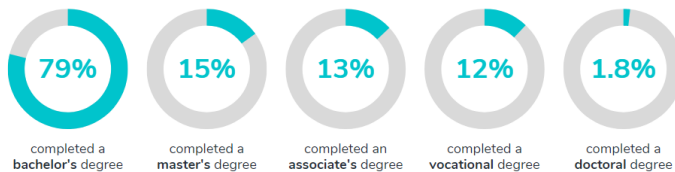
1. Syrian
2. Afghan
3. Palestinian
4. Sudanese
5. Yemeni
6. Iraqi
7. Venezuelan
8. Iranian
9. Moroccan
10. Somalian

SPOKEN LANGUAGES

1. Arabic
2. Pashto
3. Dari
4. Turkish
5. French
6. Urdu
7. Farsi
8. German
9. Hindi
10. Spanish

EDUCATION LEVELS

42% of candidates report completing a tertiary degree. Of these:



33 AVERAGE AGE

CANDIDATES BY GENDER



The data collected through the Talent Catalog indicates both depth and volume of talent amongst refugee and displaced populations. With the right migration settings Australia has a unique opportunity to unlock this talent pool to strategically fill critical skill shortages immediately and plan for the future.

The Skilled Refugee Pilot

On 1 July 2021, the Department of Home Affairs, in collaboration with TBB, launched the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement pilot program to enable Australian employers to recruit and sponsor skilled refugees on employer-sponsored visa pathways. The pilot has allocated 200 primary access visa places to displaced people who are hired and nominated for a visa by an Australian employer, in addition to their families.

The pilot removes many of the barriers that refugees and other forcibly displaced people often face when trying to access employer-sponsored skilled migration pathways. It makes it easier for employers in Australia to hire from this often overlooked talent pool of skilled professionals and tradespeople who have been displaced from their homes and are living in Lebanon, Jordan and other refugee hosting countries.

a. Progress so far

Through the Skilled Refugee Pilot, Australian businesses have hired 93 displaced workers to relocate with their families to Australia so far.⁴ TBB has successfully convinced employers to sponsor all of these workers on the Subclass 186 (Employer nomination scheme) visa, which provides the security of permanent residence on arrival and more comprehensive access to essential services. TBB is currently actively recruiting for another 20+ companies, in addition to re-recruiting for several companies (demonstrating the positive experience they have had with the skilled workers they have already recruited through the pilot).

The occupations into which the displaced workers have been hired are all on current occupation shortage lists or subject of an existing industry labour agreement in the standard skilled migration program, including Software Engineers, Civil and Mechanical Engineers, Dairy Cattle Farmers, Environmental Consultants, Management Consultants, Skilled meat workers and Dental Technicians. The average salary offered to candidates through this program for over 2021-2023 was AU\$71,694.

⁴ See TBB video showing impact of the program here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLOv59A1BFY&t=8s>

Progress with the Skilled Refugee Pilot so far proves that Australian businesses will turn to diverse sources of talent including those who happen to be refugees or displaced if they can find the right talent. Given this, TBB recommends that the Skilled Refugee pilot be expanded with some immediate modifications to the pilot framework to enable businesses to access this talent source in a more streamlined manner.

b. Expanding through improved Skilled Refugee Pilot design

TBB would welcome the opportunity to extend and expand the Skilled Refugee pilot for another year, with the government's support, although in the long-term we recommend transitioning to a permanent visa program. In order to extend the current pilot with expanded visa places, we recommend adjustments to the current Pilot design which would inform the design of a future permanent program.. This includes:

- **Increasing age requirements** - the current age requirement under the Skilled Refugee pilot is less than 50 years. However, we are seeing really highly skilled people in the displaced population just miss out due to this age cut-off. Displaced workers often are forced to delay their career progression due to their displaced situation and one of the impacts is an increase in their age. TBB recommends that increasing the age to 55 years will increase the depth of talent that Australia can access through this pathway.
- **Exempting dependents from the second visa application charge and providing free access for them to the Adult Migration English Program (AMEP)** - the current visa fee structure, is prohibitive for refugees who have often exhausted all their savings in displacement. The costs are also prohibitive for small to medium businesses particularly in regional Australia. For example, the second visa application charge to access the Adult Migration English Program as a skilled visa holder is currently \$4,890 per member of a family unit 18 years and over if they don't have functional English demonstrated by approved English language testing. The costs quickly add up for displaced families with spouse and children who turn 18 years during years of displacement meaning they are more likely subject to higher costs in relation to the second VAC. More importantly, given humanitarian migrants have free access to the AMEP program TBB believes that this same access can be provided to displaced families migrating through the pilot. Given the limited financial resources available to displaced families, the payment of the second VAC falls into the overall costs of sponsoring the displaced worker for employers. TBB

recommends that the dependents of applicants migrating through the pilot are exempt from the second visa application charge.

- **Applying the legal definition of “member of family unit” applicable to humanitarian applicants to the pilot** - skilled visas generally don't allow the inclusion of dependents other than spouse/children. This means a displaced worker would not be able to bring a parent or sibling with them even if they were totally dependent and would be left in a vulnerable refugee situation on their own if not included on the visa application. TBB recommends that the definition of a member of family unit that applies to the humanitarian program be applied.
- **Applying the health criteria applicable to humanitarian applicants to the pilot** - Many refugees may require medical assessment and treatment or counselling services as a result of having lived through a crisis. This may result in them failing to meet the health requirement of a normal skilled visa. Under the current pilot framework, there is no provision for the health criteria to be waived as in the humanitarian program. TBB recommends the same health criteria that applies to the humanitarian applicants to the pilot.
- **Government funding for a lighter-touch version of the Humanitarian Settlement Program case management services** - visa holders migrating through the pilot currently do not have access to settlement support given the eligibility criteria for the Humanitarian Settlement Program. This means that whilst they have similar needs to migrants through the humanitarian programme they are left to navigate settlement and integration, particularly relevant to their spouses and children, without support. TBB has been working with the existing HSP providers to offer settlement support on a paid for service basis with employers engaging with them directly for their candidates on a case by case basis. However, given the already high costs of sponsoring overseas workers, the additional costs to support settlement through the HSP providers has been prohibitive for employers to hire at scale through this pathway. Displaced workers generally need a lighter touch version of the HSP framework given they migrate with a job from day one. The main area of settlement support that is necessary is for their families given that the displaced worker (being the primary breadwinner and strongest English speaker) commences employment shortly after arrival in Australia. TBB recommends that the government funds a lighter-touch version of the Humanitarian Support Program in consultation with existing HSP providers and other community based organisations (e.g. Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia) who have been supporting the pilot.

Government funding for settlement would mean that there would be more certainty and consistency in the type of support available regardless of where the displaced worker relocates to Australia.

The role of displaced talent in nation building: The case for a Displaced Talent visa program

Migrants are a crucial part of Australia's nation building story, and they have helped to develop and build our country. Refugees and other displaced workers have been crucial in major infrastructure projects like the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, and attracting displaced talent should be a priority as Australia embarks upon major transitions to a greener economy and ambitious infrastructure development.

TBB proposes a scaled up program to empower employers, supported by industry groups and government, to recruit skilled and talented people displaced people to fill skill gaps in the economy today, as well as gaps we predict for the future. The results of the Skilled Refugee Pilot so far prove that there is a depth of talent in displaced populations globally and Australian businesses are ready and willing to recruit from this talent source if the right migration settings are in place. However, the Skilled Refugee Pilot is not a permanent solution. It rests on a labour agreement which retrofits skilled visas to try to accommodate some of the barriers facing refugees, but cannot address all barriers. The current bifurcation of the skilled migration program from the humanitarian program means that neither on their own are fit for purpose to include displaced talent - and trying to navigate both programs has required high touch case handling which does not scale.

The Skilled Refugee pilot has provided valuable lessons as to the opportunities and challenges facing both displaced workers and the sponsor. These lessons could be applied in establishing a permanent employer-led Displaced Talent visa program within the skilled migration category. In order to scale this solution to its full potential, displaced workers need certainty of an established Displaced talent programme that addresses the barriers they face in accessing skilled pathways. Similarly, employers need the certainty of an established visa program to confidently rely on displaced workers as a talent source workforce planning. A permanent Displaced Talent program could:

- be a permanent program within the skilled migration category given its primary purpose is to fill critical skills gaps
- include flexible policy settings for those eligible to access the program so that emerging talent sources can be accommodated in the future (e.g. those displaced by climate change)
- include flexible documentary requirements to address the typical barriers displaced people face in accessing skilled pathways
- Include criteria that is more aligned to the humanitarian program (e.g. member of family unit, health criteria) ensuring displaced persons are not subject to more stringent than their humanitarian migrant counterparts criteria when migrating on the basis of their skills
- Include a fee structure that is more affordable for displaced workers and employers alike, including concessions for regional businesses
- ensure access to a government-funded settlement model which can be a lighter touch version of the Humanitarian Support Program to ensure equity of access to support for migrants regardless of their visa status

In addition to these changes to migration settings, a Displaced Talent Visa program should be designed in collaboration with employers and industry bodies and the relevant government stakeholders to target sectors that need a major scale up of skilled talent for the future - including in green jobs, infrastructure development and aged and disability care. TBB proposes working with these sectors to define the capabilities that are needed, and provide additional training and preparation to displaced talent so they are ready to take up these opportunities and visa places at significantly increased scale and speed. TBB is already in discussion with training providers in a number of countries who would be interested in supporting such an initiative as a way of helping more displaced people to find secure homes where they can use their skills and rebuild their careers.

TBB welcomes the opportunity to co-design a permanent industry and employer-led Displaced Talent Visa program which draws on the learnings of the Skilled Refugee pilot program with the Australian Government.

Attracting displaced talent to Australia and promoting displaced talent schemes

The establishment of any displaced talent schemes should be accompanied by proactive and widespread promotion by the Australian government both internationally and domestically. Since the Skilled Refugee Pilot was established in July 2021, business and displaced workers alike were often unaware of the pathway. TBB and other partner organisations engaged in active outreach to inform businesses and displaced workers but were often questioned as to the validity of the pathway given the limited public information about the pilot. A research report published by the Durable Solutions Platform in May 2022 revealed that only 37% of the surveyed Syrian refugees based in Jordan and Lebanon were aware of the Skilled Refugee pilot as compared to 78% of them being aware of the Canadian counterpart Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) program. The report states “...the distinctly wider scope of the EMPP in Canada in terms of pledged visas and publicity, in contrast to any other pilot, may be a strong contributing factor to higher awareness of Canadian pathways.”⁵

TBB recommends that a strategic marketing and communications plan should be implemented which would turbo charge the take up of a permanent pathway by employers, and help to build trust among refugee communities abroad that Australia is a welcoming place that genuinely wants them to come and work.

Conclusion

Refugees and other displaced workers can be an incredible asset to Australia. Turning to diverse talent sources such as refugees and other displaced workers is an example of an innovative talent attraction strategy through flexible migration policy and program settings. In summary, our recommendations are:

1. Australia should put in place skilled migration settings that are inclusive and designed to attract diverse talent from around the world, including from within refugee and displaced communities

⁵ Durable Solutions Platform, Talent Beyond Boundaries, Action Against Hunger, Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam and Save the Children (2022). Identifying Barriers and Opportunities to Labor Mobility Pathways for Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Research Report, page 16

2. Australia should modify and extend the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot program for another year, while the government considers the design of a more permanent Displaced Talent Visa program
3. Australia should establish an employer-led permanent Displaced Talent Visa program to increase the attraction of talented and skilled refugees at scale. The program should build on the lessons from the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, address the constraints skilled refugees and other displaced workers face in meeting visa requirements, and be designed with industry and employers to ensure it meets the needs of priority sectors such as infrastructure development, aged and disability care and green economy jobs
4. Displaced Talent visa programs or schemes should be proactively promoted by the Australian government through the Department of Home Affairs via prominent and easily sourced information on departmental websites, dissemination to Australian Embassies and other agencies around the world and active community engagement programs, such as roadshows, to raise awareness amongst employers and the broader community.

Yours sincerely



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