



## **Australian Migrant Resource Centre: Submission on the proposed licensing system for the New Employment Service Model: Discussion Paper, October 2020**

### **Introduction**

AMRC has over 4 decades of experience in providing settlement and allied services to new migrants and refugees and in building the capacity of their new and establishing and regionally isolated communities. It has done this through its close collaboration and partnerships with relevant local stakeholders and its active participation in service development and innovation within South Australia and nationally. It is a recipient of the Service Excellence Certificate and Award (as Leader in the sector), and through the MRC WORKS RTO, coordinates an Employment Hub developing models of engagement and pathways to employment for new settlers, especially targeting women and young people. We comply with relevant codes of ethics, service standards and requirements in providing a model of delivery based on action research, encouraging consultation, capacity building and intersection. Our grassroots access to the community is of significant value as is a multicultural and multilingual workforce and volunteers, who combined, speak over 100 languages and dialects.

AMRC has been involved in Job Readiness and Employment Pathways Programs assisting refugees and migrants over the last decade. We are working with local and regional employers such as JBS in Bordertown, TEYS in Naracoorte, Thomas Foods in Murray Bridge and Lobethal as well as working closely with training institutions, Human services, construction and hospitality industries and councils in Adelaide, the Limestone Coast and Whyalla. Our work is based on working in partnership with education providers such as AMEP, TAFE SA, Department of Education, the three South Australian Universities, Aged care and NDIS, Job Active and the State Department for Innovation and Skills. The migrant and refugee communities are valuable partners as they provide significant employment and opportunities for small business startups.

AMRC recent employment initiatives for refugees and migrants have included:

- In partnership with AMPC, MINTRAC and TFI, to develop a model to support employment of migrants and refugees in the meat processing industry (**See attached AMPC Report**)
- “*Launch into Work*” in partnership with the Department of Jobs and Small Business that included training and mentoring to build a workforce for the Disability and Aged Care sector and
- The current *Try, Test and Learn*, “*Women’s Employment into Action*” which has been extended. (**See attached TTL Evaluation Report**).

Over the past 3-4 years the AMRC Volunteer Program has provided over 1500 newly arrived refugees with their first employment experience in an Australian workplace through in-house and non-accredited and accredited training and engagement with external employers.

We base our submission on this extensive experience over the last 41 years and lessons learnt working with vulnerable cohorts and with partner and collaborating organisations.

### **Establishing a panel and the licensing system**

By having both generalist and specialist organisations on the same panel would allow it to benefit from the diversity of experience and expertise around the table. This diversity would assist in building equitable collaboration.

Sub-panels of specific specialist organisations and/or generalist organisations would also be beneficial in sharing best practice models, despite there being specific local challenges or expectations.

“Specialist Cohort Providers” should be engaged to service areas smaller than Employment Regions. This is particularly the case when the target cohort may be only a small part of the Employment Region. Eg in South Australia, most regional towns have small populations compared to the eastern states, so attracting and retaining vulnerable and or marginalised cohorts requires a partnership approach with agencies who have direct connection with these cohorts.

The addition of specialist services will go a long way to address this gap. We have been able to demonstrate in the last few years that it is because of our expertise and collaboration with Job Active, as well as with specific industries, that many refugees and migrants found jobs. AMRC staff, trained in cultural competency and highly experienced in working with people from diverse backgrounds, were mindful of engaging with project participants in culturally appropriate ways.

Having “cohort specialists” would generate better outcomes for specific cohort job seekers, however, the model should reverse the limitation of cohort specialists only being able to operate in an area of “identified need”. This would disadvantage regional areas or smaller cities, where there is a need for workers and a push for new settlement as well as disadvantaging prospective workers living in those areas.

The number of specific cohort job seekers, while very relevant in the local town, can be very low in comparison to the rest of the regions in Australia. This could disadvantage different regions if the same level of service is not offered by the generalist providers and could push internal movements and displacements of people due to lack of services. This is despite the population needed in a specific region for economic sustainability.

Specialist cohort needs should be identified in accordance with local needs for employment, despite the number of job seekers in a specific region.

Adequate services should be made available in metro and regional areas where there is a considerable number of job seekers from a specific cohort.

There is a need to rethink quality of services versus quantity as the current quota system disadvantages vulnerable cohorts. We have noted that in the current system Job Active Providers have to fill a quota and ensure their star rating is not affected, which in turns can affect the level of service and long term outcomes for job seekers. Clear assessment processes informed by experts working with refugees and migrants are required to put job seekers in appropriate streams.

The new model will need to deliver a methodology with more transparency and adequate funding for intensive case management to ensure individually tailored support is provided to job seekers from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The AMRC TTL WEIA and LIW Project outcomes have been positive indicators in identifying and addressing significant barriers to employment faced by culturally and linguistically diverse

migrants and refugees. Through intensive case management and mentoring, through non-accredited training in work and life skills, and through support to achieve formal qualifications, the women recipients have been better placed to achieve employment pathway milestones and, for many, employment and economic independence.

As the TTL Evaluation Report shows, the economic benefits for the families of the women gaining employment are real and obvious. The positive impact of the program on the female participants flowed onto their families, with several unexpected outcomes. As the women's skills and confidence developed, and they were empowered to achieve, they took their families with them. In one case, a woman's progress in working towards her goals to become recognised in Australia for her overseas qualifications triggered her husband's dream of working at his level of qualification rather than continuing in an entry-level job in food processing. The husband has since applied for jobs at this higher level of technical expertise and has been interviewed for a high-level employment.

In the evaluation of the project, a key factor that assisted participants to obtain a qualification and either find employment or a pathway to employment, was intensive case management and mentoring. Indeed, individualised support built on strong and professional relationships between AMRC's experienced and culturally competent staff and participants, and the close partnership with TAFE SA AMEP and Job Actives and certain industries was the backbone of the project.

At the outset of the program women described a range of barriers and challenges hampering their ability to find jobs. These ranged from resumés that were not up to standard, a lack of ICT skills and language barriers through to family care responsibilities, low self-esteem, and poor time management. Specific mentoring combined with group training allowed many of the women to address these issues and break down barriers to achieve their goals, albeit at their individual pace. From a service delivery perspective, the WEIA cohort structure was an important factor in delivering the program to participants that were not only culturally different, but from a range of work/study backgrounds and with different levels of literacy and language.

### **Digitalised and Enhanced Services**

AMRC supports the Department's model of flexible service delivery. There is a need to keep all options open as we have learned through the impact of COVID-19. Participants in our employment projects faced a number of barriers such as: no access to internet at home, no computer in the home, not being able to spend time learning online at home to complete certificate training required for work, not being able to use a computer at home to do online learning due to children and/or partner computer priorities as well as lack of ICT skills in English to access email or online information to study or apply for jobs. A number of participants could not cope with online learning and therefore could not complete training. The need to keep face-to-face services open or having flexibility based on the needs of each job seeker is highly welcomed. However, there is a need to review current assessment procedures to identify the required needs of the job seeker, including their ability to access digitalised, enhanced, or intensive, case management services.

### **Licence Reviews**

The proposed model captures a performance system for a high performer. For those that are moderate and low performers, there is a need to add certain performance criteria that are not general but allow for flexibility and consideration of the local context and targets groups the provider is working with. Eg, a region that has higher employment demands could lead to that provider assisting more job seekers into employment in comparison to a provider with few employment opportunities in their Employment Region. It is a similar case for those who have more clients in the intensive case management stream compared to those providers where most of their clients can use digitalised services etc.

## **Red Tape Reduction**

Having to do onerous applications every few years has not been a viable process, specifically for smaller organisations. Developing a simple streamlined process in communicating with the Department around licensing is highly welcome. Especially for specialist providers, who have been engaging and providing pathways to employment but have not been able, to date, to engage in formal employment service provision. Red tape reduction will encourage diversity that will have a higher impact on the outcomes for job seekers, by giving them more choice in achieving their employment goals.

While organisation capacity is a major service criterion, smaller providers would benefit from upfront engagement fees to ensure service diversity to meet the needs of very vulnerable job seekers.

There should be a consideration of the funding costs for compliance around cyber security. This is a highly costly exercise to maintain IT Security and Auditing to maintain their customised ISO 27001 certificate. This could be one of the factors that could impact negatively on the number of smaller organisations that have the ability to invest in such services.

## **Encourage Collaboration and reduce competition**

The AMRC experience indicates that some funding changes have often impacted the most vulnerable job seekers who require a longer training timeline. One of these impacts has been that private RTOs have gained the Work Ready subsidy for Certificate III in Individual Support and have a shortened delivery model that will be a major barrier to students with English as a second language. A positive impact has been the recent changes to AMEP access. Through our partnership with TAFESA AMEP we have shifted our coordinated local area English classes for vulnerable women from being conducted by volunteers to them now attending AMEP accredited classes run by accredited teachers, held in our community centres in metropolitan and regional SA and assisted by community volunteers - to add value to the women's learning. Over the last 4 weeks our AMEP, AMRC, Volunteer partnership has established AMEP classes in the Adelaide CBD, Salisbury, Bordertown and Naracoorte, providing over 80 women previously ineligible for AMEP to register and attend. A barrier that will need addressing is adequate crèche support for parents wanting to attend classes.

Price driven models that are barriers for vulnerable cohorts need to be factored into future budgets to break down barriers for vulnerable job seekers, through timely, flexible and appropriate assistance at the point of requirement.

We have found that to thrive and prosper in Australia, migrants, but especially refugees and humanitarian entrants who bring so little with them and face such major settlement challenges, benefit from finding employment within a reasonable timeframe. Employment reduces dependence on government payments and is a major driver of positive settlement outcomes, giving migrants and refugees a sense of fulfilment and belonging which can facilitate successful integration into the community (Wood et. al., 2019).

TTL WEIA has provided an opportunity to develop a flexible model of social, education and economic engagement for women, but has also provided considerable insights into partnership relationships in terms of service improvement, compliance and sharing of responsibilities.

Work gives women greater opportunities to integrate into Australian society, in many cases where women previously were experiencing significant social isolation. Women in employment are achieving financial independence, and meaningful work gives them a sense of self-worth as

productive members of society. A key to this, too, is the broader economic benefit for Australia, critically reducing welfare dependence. So, over the long term, the benefits from the WEIA program, to individuals, their families and communities, and the whole of society, outweigh the costs.

We make available for your consideration the evaluation and recommendations of the WEIA, and refer you to recent reports that may assist with the future employment model.

### **Intersectionality**

The AMRC is eager to work with government to support the economic independence of vulnerable migrants and refugees. A cross department, cross government approach would harness the experience and expertise of the employment, settlement and other intersecting sectors to creatively address barriers to employment collectively.

While the focus is the preparation of individual job seekers, there is an urgent need to match new arrival populations with areas of high employment opportunities and need, to support permanent and sustainable employment in those localities.

As example, in the case of South Australia, most refugees are referred to the Adelaide metropolitan area, while Murraylands and Whyalla have one of the highest needs for workers, and have the necessary infrastructure for new arrival settlement.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the proposed licensing system – future employment model.

We are happy to take part in any further discussions and/or development of a model that provides access and equity for CALD communities and particularly new migrants and refugees.

For further information, please contact: AMRC on [admin@amrc.org.au](mailto:admin@amrc.org.au) or Ph: 08 8217 9545

### **References**

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*Demographic Profile of SA Refugee Youth Population – Pathways to Active Citizenship: Refugee youth and their transition from school to further education, training and employment*, University of South Australia, ARC\_LP, 2019

*An Evaluation of the Australian Migrant Resource Centre Women's Employment into Action Program*, Hugo Centre for Population and Housing, August 2020

*Developing a Model to Support the Employment of Migrants and Refugees in the Australian Meat Processing Industry*, MINTRAC, February 2018