



Multicultural Development Association
Marking a new dimension

Discussion Paper

Job Network Providers & employment issues for migrant and refugee jobseekers.

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Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network

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*The following terms are used interchangeably throughout this Discussion Paper

Jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Migrant and refugee jobseekers

Non-English speaking background jobseekers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This Paper has developed from ongoing issues expressed by migrant and refugee jobseekers in relation to Job Network agencies in Queensland. There is widespread concern that Job Network agencies are not actively assisting or unable to provide culturally appropriate assistance to this client group, resulting in increasing disadvantage for migrant and refugee jobseekers seeking sustainable employment.
- Information within this Paper consists of findings from formal documentation and evidence from community based and government workers directly involved with migrants and refugee jobseekers. The Multicultural Development Association in conjunction with Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network (MEAN) has produced this paper as part of its ongoing advocacy function to address the complex employment issues experienced by many non-English speaking background jobseekers.
- The main issues explored in this paper for migrant and refugee jobseekers using Job Network agencies are:
 - Insufficient initial information and resources for migrant and refugee jobseekers
 - Dissatisfaction with Job Network Providers
 - Initial entry point and confusion – roles of Centrelink and Job Network Agencies
 - Limited understanding and awareness of issues experienced by migrant and refugee jobseekers
 - Communication issues
 - Discrimination and Racism
 - Rural and regional concerns
- MEAN has proposed a number of recommendations to various stakeholders to address these concerns, but primarily advocates for a specialist migrant and refugee Job Network agency. This service would match similar specialist agencies in other states that provide a more effective and culturally relevant service for this client group.

1. Introduction to Paper

Since the Commonwealth Government's introduction of the Job Network system in May 1998, a number of concerns have been identified by the community sector in terms of the appropriateness of this service for disadvantaged jobseekers within the community. One such group is jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly refugees, who experience additional barriers in seeking employment and training opportunities.

This paper recognises that both migrants and refugees in seeking employment experience similar issues. Language difficulties, lack of work experience and recognition of overseas qualifications are the most common barriers. However it is also necessary to reiterate that for individuals who were forced to leave their country of origin often experience greater disadvantage in seeking employment. Women and young people are also particularly disadvantaged. *"In terms of labour market outcomes then, refugees appear to be one of the most disadvantaged populations, recording both the highest rates and longest periods of unemployment. They also suffer higher rates of hidden employment and underemployment, despite the fact that levels of skill and qualifications may well be high. While there does appear to be evidence that length of residence helps to alleviate some of this disadvantage, it fails to do so to the extent that it does for migrants, including those from NESB backgrounds."* (Anglican Refugee and Migrant Services "A Skills Audit of Refugees in Brisbane" 2001, p9).

It is important to consider these findings in the context that to date, Queensland does not have a specialist migrant/refugee network provider as in other states. As of December 2001, 29 specialist NESB providers exist nationally. (*Source: DEWRSB 2001a, table 2.2, p.14*). Specialist service provision was introduced within the Job Network system to provide additional support and assistance for disadvantaged jobseekers. Migrant and refugee jobseekers in Queensland are therefore further isolated from receiving appropriate assistance in seeking employment. This Paper highlights many of the barriers experienced by this client group with Job Network agencies, and highlights the need for policy makers to strongly consider funding a specialist service in Queensland as well as other measures to effectively assist migrant and refugee seekers in attaining positive employment outcomes.

While the Job Network system is touted as being innovative, successful and an international example for assisting unemployed jobseekers, there is still insufficient quantitative and objective data available in relation to its impact on disadvantaged jobseekers. *"The Government has made a number of claims of success compared with the previous system, but in the absence of objective data these have been treated with some scepticism by many commentators"* (Eardley, Abello, Macdonald, January 2001). The current framework and funding (in particular the Intensive Assistance) however have imposed a number of limitations on service providers which elucidate shortcomings such as decreased service provision for disadvantaged jobseekers, including language classes, counselling, limited free or subsidised training, support and regular contact with case workers.

The recent *Draft Report – Independent Review of Job Network*, prepared by the Productivity Commission highlights a number of recommendations for Job Network Providers, in particular with the Intensive Assistance program. Evidence from the recent

national review of the Job Network system suggests that while there are some ongoing concerns with migrant/refugee jobseekers, this target group does receive appropriate assistance and positive outcomes in securing employment. Caution is needed in analysing findings from this recent Report, as they reflect a national overview only. It can be argued that 29 NESB specialist services do work with assisting migrant and refugee jobseekers and is thus reflected in the overall findings. However Queensland does not have any migrant specialist service and it is premature to apply national findings across each state. (A copy of the report can be accessed on www.pc.gov.au).

Clients from non-English speaking background constitute a significant proportion (20%) of Job Network clients and make up 21.1% of all Intensive Assistance (IA) clients. They also constitute a strongly disadvantaged group within IA, making up 31.1% of the most disadvantaged participants and 15.5% of participants classified as less disadvantaged.¹

This paper therefore aims to raise these issues within the Queensland context of jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Job Network service providers in order to stimulate discussion between relevant stakeholders. A number of practical recommendations have also been presented to remove the barriers currently experienced by many jobseekers within the identified client group.

We do not intend to be critical of the whole Job Network system, but seek to commence a dialogue with relevant stakeholders to ensure that significant changes can occur for the benefits of jobseekers from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The Paper also provides a platform for the Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network to establish particular links with both the State and Commonwealth Government to explore options in the optimising resources to resolve unemployment situations for the identified disadvantaged groups. We anticipate that this will assist government in evaluating and re-assessing tender allocations to tackle areas of significant employment in Queensland.

It would appear that the numbers of jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are not reflected adequately in Queensland's vocational, educational, training and employment programs. Tangible and measurable strategies are required which clearly provide job readiness and appropriate career pathways for the identified target group.

The Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network advocates for changes to ensure that appropriate monitoring mechanisms are consistent with the Government's standards as set out in the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society. The increasing anecdotal evidence from migrant and refugee jobseekers needs to be addressed.'yet feedback about the latter [Job Network providers] reveals a sense of frustration and lack of hope that such providers offer any real help to refugee jobseekers, or only of the most rudimentary type'. (A Skills Audit of Refugees in Brisbane, p51)

¹ Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Submission Response to Independent Review of Job Network, May 2002, p8

2. Background to Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network (MEAN)

The Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network (MEAN) was formed in March 1995 out of a need to support and advocate on behalf of jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who experienced difficulties in accessing the job market.

MEAN is currently convened by the Multicultural Advocacy worker from the Multicultural Development Association and comprises both generalist and employment workers from multicultural and mainstream services. Some government representatives who are concerned with ongoing employment issues also attend the meetings. Meetings are usually rotated between Logan, Brisbane and Ipswich to ensure some regional coverage. The Network exists with no financial resources and is the only mechanism in Queensland to undertake advocacy and lobbying activities for its constituents.

The Network has undertaken a number of initiatives and activities to highlight the issues as well as provide some direct resources for this client group. Some of these include:

- Publication of Booklet –“*Choosing the Right Person: Employer Preferences on Selection Criteria Statements.*” 1997
- *Mentoring Work Experience Project* – for migrants and refugees from professional backgrounds. 1998-1999
- Public Forum in Brisbane August 2001 “*Employment issues and cultural diversity*”.
- Research project in Logan “*Survey of Job Network Providers: NESB Access Issues in Logan and Beenleigh (1999).*”
- Meetings with both state and commonwealth representatives to discuss concerns of unemployment and insufficient resources.
- Submission to Productivity Commission “Independent Review of Job Network” 2001

Members of MEAN have always recognised and reiterated that meaningful employment is the most important factor in assisting the settlement/migration process for both migrants and refugees. Ongoing employment issues and barriers for migrant and refugee jobseekers (see page 9) provide the impetus for the Network to continue its advocacy role. Linking with relevant stakeholders, raising awareness of the issues and advocating for improved resources ensures that these concerns are ‘kept on the Agenda.’

3. Queensland Current Literature and Documentation

There has been some recent research undertaken in Queensland, formally documenting the employment issues and concerns of migrant/refugee jobseekers including barriers with Job Network Providers.

a) NESB Access Issues in Logan and Beenleigh

In June 1999, MEAN initiated a survey; “*NESB Access Issues in Logan and Beenleigh*” to assess the level of service the target client groups were obtaining. The survey also aimed to gauge the awareness of Job Network Providers regarding employment issues faced by the identified client group. The outcomes from this project provided valuable information, especially in terms of increasing the knowledge base for Job Network agencies in working with this client group. Funding was limited for this project to interview migrant and refugee clients about their experiences with accessing Job Network providers.

b) Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background March 2001

The report “*Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background March 2001*,” (Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Employment and Training), reinforces and provides testimony and evidence from migrant/refugee jobseekers from Somali, Eritrean, Bosnian, Yugoslav and Vietnamese communities.

c) A Skills Audit of Refugees in Brisbane

A recent report “A Skills Audit of Refugees in Brisbane” also identifies employment barriers experienced by refugees within the Annerley area in Brisbane, as well as proposing potential employment programs for this group.

Findings from these reports demonstrate a number of issues and barriers experienced by migrant and refugee jobseekers, in summary, they are:

- Lack of knowledge and information about the Australian labour system
- Lack of local work experience and references from employers
- Lack of culturally appropriate assistance by service providers
- Lack of and cost of transport/childcare facilities
- Discrimination
- Ineffectiveness of many Job Network providers
- Lack of relevant information, contacts and networks
- Age
- Competition for employment
- Difficulties with English language skills
- Limited information and assistance available on the recruitment process, including application letters, interview techniques and addressing selection criteria’s

- Lack of promotion or training on productive diversity and skills representation for industries and employers
- Lack of knowledge and appreciation of overseas qualifications and work experience by industries and employers
- Limited cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity and training within Job Network Providers, training providers and employment program management.
- Lack of opportunities provided to migrants/refugees to demonstrate their overseas qualifications, skills and expertise
- Lack of culturally appropriate employment and training services²

d) Beyond the Pink Collar, March 2001, Premier's Council for Women

This report highlights additional issues for migrant and refugee women in accessing employment or training such as:

- Inadequate, or perceived to be inadequate, levels of English language proficiency
- Lack of employer support for training
- Lack of opportunity to access training during paid work time
- Lack of appropriate and accessible information about training options
- Lack of recognition and accommodation of different cultural and education traditions within training, and
- Inadequate recognition of previous education and training, including professional qualifications.

(Beyond the Pink Collar, March 2001, Premier's Council for Women, p39)

² Further information can be obtained from the Research Reports.

4. Current services of Job Network Providers

a) History

In 1998 the Commonwealth Government introduced a new employment service to replace the previous Commonwealth Employment Service administered by the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. This new system saw the commencement of privatisation of the job search industry including new competitive tendering processes. The Federal Government announced this new framework for the delivery of labour market assistance in the 1996-97 Budget. The system was implemented on 1 May 1998. At that time there were more than 300 private, community and government organisations offering a range of employment services from over 1400 sites across Australia. (Job Network Evaluation, stage 1, February 2000, p2).

A number of intensive structural reforms have occurred since the implementation of the new service. The first formal evaluation Stage 1 occurred in 1999, which culminated in a national report in February 2000.

b) Current services

The Job Network system offers the following services for jobseekers:

- Job Matching
- Job Search Training
- Intensive Assistance
- New Enterprise Incentive Scheme
- Project Contracting (Harvest Labour Services)
- New Apprenticeships Centres

These services are listed, promoted and advertised through various offices and mediums such as Centrelink, Internet, radio, brochures etc.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) also produces some publications to provide information and guidance to migrants and refugee jobseekers about Job Network services. They are:

- (i) Code of Conduct – this document addresses the conduct of all Job Network staff and members – public, community and private, in their dealings with jobseekers and employers. It represents the *minimum* standards of service acceptable to be applied by Job Network members in their delivery of employment services. Also included are details of service provision at Job Network agencies for jobseekers and employers. Compliance with and breach of the Code of Conduct are also addressed.
“ *The Code of Conduct expects that non-English speaking clients needs are recognised through acknowledgement and consideration of individual circumstances and backgrounds, including regional location and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.*” (Claude Huddy, Manager, Job Network, Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, 31st August 2001).
- (ii) A booklet “*Job Seekers - Your Guide to Job Network*” is also available in 20 languages but only from the Internet. Posters advertising Job Network services are available in six major community languages.

5. Common issues for migrant and refugee jobseekers with Job Network Providers

a) Insufficient Initial Information and Resources

Many migrant and refugee jobseekers experience confusion and frustration when accessing information on the role of Job Network Providers. It is not uncommon to speak to clients who after a couple of years, are still not sure of the services provided by their Provider and their rights and responsibilities as a jobseeker.

It is unclear who is responsible for providing accurate information in a culturally appropriate manner, which can be understood by the jobseeker. Feedback from both community workers and clients reveals the type of information needed in the preliminary stage. This includes:

- What is the Job Network system and how can it help me?
- What services do the Job Network providers offer?
- How can clients access assistance or relevant information to make the most appropriate choice for their circumstances?
- What are the contents of the agreements clients are signing?
- What are the obligations of the Job Network agency (e.g. how often should agency staff be contacting clients)?
- What specialist services or training is provided by Job Network agencies?
- Who can they access if experiencing difficulty with the provider?
- What are the provisions or policy for accessing interpreters to assist in this process?
- Can they refer clients to English classes or training courses?
- What is Mutual Obligation?

Often clients may go to a specialist settlement migrant or related agency for assistance, but multilingual information on the role of and services provided by Job Network agencies is usually not circulated to such agencies.

It is worthwhile noting that while the Code of Conduct is currently available in twenty different languages on the Job Network Internet site for migrant/refugee jobseekers, the majority do not have access to Internet facilities and are unable to obtain this information. Many clients are also not informed that this information is available.

As a consequence clients have limited appreciation of the services provided and their rights as a jobseeker. *“While Centrelink promote the services available the code is not proactively promoted along with the information. They often fear retribution if they complain and are mistrustful of client safeguards”*. (Community Access and Equity Worker). The Code of Conduct currently is not an integral part of training support and advice given to jobseekers in accessing Job Network agencies and hence their employment opportunities.

Similarly publications such as *‘Job Seekers – Your Guide to Job Network’* are also rarely sighted by jobseekers as much feedback indicates Job Network agencies do not openly display this information.

This is exacerbated by many Job Network providers who may not understand the significance of the use of client's language to effectively access appropriate services.

b) Dissatisfaction with Job Network Providers

For many migrant and refugee jobseekers, dissatisfaction with their Job Network provider is a common theme, both through Brisbane and regional areas. In speaking and working with clients they will also disclose similar concerns expressed by other family members or people within their own communities. While some jobseekers might have encountered friendly and helpful staff and service, it appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

Ongoing concerns have been raised by both community and government workers and clients with regards to the relationship between migrant and refugee jobseekers with Job Network providers. *“ For most of my clients, gaining employment is their biggest issue. The majority are unaware of services provided by Job Network while some clients report negative experiences with accessing these services’* (Community settlement worker. Brisbane 2001).

A number of critical comments have been made from migrant and refugee jobseekers that have accessed Job Network agencies. Some of these include:

- *“They are not functioning well”;*
 - *“No one gets a job through the Network or if they do the jobs are not secure”;*
 - *“There is no cultural awareness among staff”;*
 - *“No one can speak our language and they are not very keen to call for an interpreter”.*
- (Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report, p34)

One employment worker (based within a specialist migrant and refugee employment project in inner Brisbane) recorded the following comments from her clients:

- *“Job Network Providers are not passionate about our needs”.*
- *“They take our resumes and never contact us”.*
- *“They expect us to use touch screens without any assistance”.*
- *“We would rather come here to you (the migrant and refugee employment project) because you understand our issues and work with us”.*
- *“They did not offer any support to me or the employer when I did get a job – the employer called me names and gave me no directions or assistance, so I left after 3 months, now I’m back at the beginning again”.*

The same employment worker has also noticed an increase in direct referral from Job Network agencies to the program. *“My impression is that they are abdicating their responsibilities in assisting these clients. One employment caseworker at a Job Network agency stated that she prefers working with the ‘cream’ of jobseekers to reach the target for that month – those who are easier to place. We help them here by offering practical*

assistance and support and have successful outcomes as a result – why then does this not happen in Job Network agencies?”

Refugee jobseekers in particular are quite discouraged with the Job Network system as they see it doesn't provide them with sufficient contacts. *'...we lack the appropriate assistance and networks. We are on intensive assistance from [Job Network provider] but they haven't done much good. We don't have the networks here and we hope they would have them...'* (A Skills Audit of Refugees in Brisbane 2001, p 45)

c) Initial entry point and confusion – roles of Centrelink and Job Network agencies

Currently in Queensland there are no Commonwealth funded programs or resources, which provide jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse background with the basic and necessary information for obtaining employment or training opportunities. A small number of state government programs through Breaking The Unemployment Cycle funding fulfill this function but these programs are dependant on yearly funding and are not sufficiently resourced to assist more than a specific number of jobseekers.

Therefore the role of assisting migrant and refugee jobseekers is performed on an adhoc basis by some community services or through English language classes, but there is no holistic approach or formal program provided by any government department or community organisation. As a consequence clients from the identified backgrounds receive minimal or no information about the Job Network system, its employment and training services or their rights and responsibilities as a client. This causes misunderstandings and frustrations for the jobseekers.

The identified issue is not helped by current processes and structures, which link Centrelink offices with Job Network providers. Some examples include:

- Roles and links between Centrelink and Job Network Providers are not clearly established and communicated. It is often not clear who is responsible for employment assessment and other activities and whether there is communication between the two services especially with regards to sharing of information. Many clients find they not only provide relevant information to Centrelink staff but often to a number of Job Network Providers. It has been suggested by some community based workers that jobseekers generally need a visual mapping guide to assist them with information on access points, eligibility and current processes.
- Confusion for clients with the initial assessment process at Centrelink i.e. the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). Many Centrelink officers at the front counter are either not trained in working with the identified group or have insufficient resources to properly collect and ascertain accurate information. Often clients are so desperate for employment (and unaware of the employment processes) that they will provide information they think will increase their chances of getting a job. This is especially evident in terms of language proficiency. Clients will state their language or literacy skills to be 'very good' or 'good' to try and obtain a higher score. The purpose of the JSCI tool is usually not explained to the jobseeker, including what the scores indicate and how they are used.

- There exists minimal formal mechanism for clients to undergo proper testing for language/literacy and numeracy skills, which then contributes to as self-assessment by clients, which can understandably be problematic. The overall rating from this instrument is therefore misleading for both the client and the Job Network Providers and often results in frustration on both sides.
- Some TAFE's formally assess English language and literacy for job seekers who are keen to pursue alternative options to full-time employment e.g. Traineeships. However, this option is only available to people who tick the box at the initial stages of the application for the traineeship. If assistance is not given by the traineeship provider with completing the form, this box is often not ticked by the client, resulting in no English support services during the training.
- For those jobseekers that do identify the need for extra assistance, the assessment reading is not accessed or utilised by Job Network Providers, thus creating another gap in which the client's needs are not adequately addressed.
- The lack of appropriate mechanisms or sufficient communication between Centrelink staff and Job Network providers, is often detrimental to the client, including re-referring of clients, lack of information about working between breaks of English classes and general support for the jobseeker. *"We have several clients having to repeat visits between Centrelink and Job Network Providers before the first steps can even be taken"* (Community Access and Equity Worker).
- Employment issues for jobseekers with post traumatic stress disorders are often not understood and therefore not adequately supported at the initial stages with Centrelink or through the Job Network system.
- The utilisation of touch screens at Centrelink is also problematic, not everyone is computer literate nor is there training or guidance on how to use this product. This includes other Centrelink services and products, such as brochures.

Additional issues also need to be raised within the context of accessing relevant information from Centrelink which is usually the initial entry point for this client group.

- Do all front counter staff recognise when an interpreter is required? Are clients clearly informed about their rights for using the multi-lingual services or interpreter support that are offered by Centrelink?

Some clients do refuse the use of an interpreter, as they fear that use of one will indicate inadequacy for the workforce due to limited English. Staff in determining how this barrier can be overcome may require some training and sensitivity.

- Are clients fully informed of the different types and level of assistance they can access from providers including on how to access them?
- Are clients informed as to how the JSCI tool is used to determine their level of assistance from network providers?

- Are clients given sufficient information and culturally appropriate assistance towards making an individual choice in selecting a provider?
- Do clients fully understand the Agreement contents they are signing, and are they aware of the consequences?
- Are the clients informed of the complaint procedure through the Customer Service Line and the Code of Conduct, which defines the responsibilities of the provider?
- Are multilingual resources available for all clients at this stage of seeking initial information?

In the MEAN initiated Report “NESB Access Issues in Logan and Beenleigh”, “91.66% of respondents did not have information about the Job Network service in another language”. (Poole-Branchu.M, June 1999). This is of particular concern given that people from 161 language groups reside in Logan, of which nearly 25% were not born in Australia. (Source, Logan City Council unpublished data).

d) Limited awareness and understanding of issues experienced by migrant and refugee jobseekers

There is a demonstrated lack of understanding and awareness by many Job Network providers of the complexity of employment issues experienced by the identified client group. This is exacerbated when staff does not access interpreters to assist in understanding their clients and issues. In individual circumstances some migrant jobseekers have found friendly and helpful staff, but were still unable to secure employment through the Provider.

Many of the provider’s staff has limited or no training or knowledge about the effect of the settlement process on jobseekers. Therefore practical difficulties such as the lack of local work experience, current references and the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and skills are inadequately addressed. This is reflected in the production of inadequate resumes where skills are not promoted or marketed towards specific industries.

Cross-cultural training or coaching is not provided to Job Network Providers. This impacts on how they actively assist the jobseeker, in particular when speaking to potential employers. Some knowledge and training of the migration experience and cultural norms would alleviate many of the misunderstandings that create further frustration for both client and provider.

There is also ample anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that some Job Network staff does not provide any service or assistance, including accurate and necessary information about what clients can expect, including any training that is available.

“We have asked them about job training – nothing happened” (Somali client – Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report).

“I went to Job Network and the only involvement I have had from them was they asked me to translate for another client. Other than this, I have not been supported (Columbian Client seeking employment)

e) Communication issues

A common concern is the lack of communication between staff and jobseekers throughout the job search process, including the follow up with clients.

“My client has been with the same Provider for 6 months and has not received any correspondence or phone calls from them” (Ethnic community worker) and;

“They seldom communicate with the applicant. ‘Job Network Providers’ receive documents but no contact is done with the applicant. You have to remind them now and then that you’re looking for work and need help”. (Eritrean client – Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report).

One agency found a job for him at a car wrecker. However, the agency did not advise him of the nature of his work. At the car wreckers, the only thing that he was allowed to do was to clean the yard. After a week of doing the job, the manager advised him that they did not need him any more. When he asked for reason, he was told: “There is no work for you, we just needed you to clean the place. (Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background, p35)

The lack of communication from Job Network staff extends to passing on limited general information about job vacancies, training programs, other support services and relevant resources available.

In addition it has also been reported by clients that there is minimal (if any) staff employed who can speak a second language or who have some understanding of cross-cultural practices/knowledge, including accessing of interpreters. Most importantly, very few staff members understand the settlement-integration processes of newly arrived refugees and migrants to enable them to make a sufficient holistic assessment of the employment needs of these clients.

Communication between Centrelink staff, Job Network agencies and other services is often sporadic and fragmented, resulting in increasing frustration for the jobseeker.

f) Discrimination and Racism

Discrimination and racism forms a major barrier for migrant and refugee jobseekers. This has been further exacerbated through a political climate, which negatively portrays asylum seekers and refugees, thus creating misunderstandings, fear and mis-informed knowledge

about this group. Overseas studies, in particular the ECRE Task Force on Integration reports concludes that discrimination and racism often prevents equality of access to employment services and training, in particular for refugees. *“Racism has also been specifically noted as a major element in explaining unemployment among refugees in Europe. This was felt to be even more of a problem for refugees than for migrants due to the political nature of their forced migration”* (ECRE Task Force on Integration 1999)

The Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland accepted 12.66% of race related complaints in 2001. (Source: Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland Annual Report 2000-2001 p14) This figure is still relatively low, but the racial and religious vilification and provisions legislation for Queensland were only implemented on the 7th June 2001. In addition it is commonly known within the multicultural sector that many migrants and refugees (in particular) will not access or utilise formal complaint such as the Commission of through Government departments (regardless of multilingual information). Those who do undertake the process usually require relevant information, practical assistance and support throughout by community workers or other nominated person.

Migrant and refugee jobseekers will often not complain about Job Network agencies or other employment programs for a number of reasons including:

- Not fully understanding the process involved
- Fear of repercussions of doing so – they often feel the Job Network agency will penalise them for making a complaint and they will never get a job
- Prior history of authority abuse/corruption back in homeland
- Cultural considerations
- Lack of awareness of services which could assist e.g. Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland, Community Legal Services etc.

It is therefore of serious concern that in Queensland, discrimination (both direct and indirect) is cited consistently by jobseekers to community workers. Numerous case studies have been recorded about discrimination in the workplace from employers, but discrimination from Job Network agencies needs to be seriously addressed.

Discrimination, directed at religion and/or race is most prevalent. *“Some of them are based on charity organisations such as Salvation Army and their philosophy is based on religion – if you don’t fill their moral values you will not get help”*. (Somali client – Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report).

“ I was told I would get a job more easily if I didn’t wear the headdress” (Said to a Muslim woman from a Job Network provider).

“Training providers and the industry are also being supported by ill informed Job Network providers that to deny work based on the wearing of the khimar is due to work place health and safety requirements and therefore justifiable. This gross misinformation is occurring over a number of industries” (Manager Ethnic community agency)

It is worthwhile to note that initial concern was expressed by some of the general public at the initial stages of implementing the Job Network system in 1998 regarding the predominance of larger Christian based services applying for and securing tenders as Job

Network agencies. Given the diversity of religious practices in Queensland, it is of no surprise that non-Christian jobseekers perceive they are unwelcome within the agency.

One concern, which is voiced by many community workers, is the perceived lack of appropriate responses by Job Network providers to employers, especially when employers openly stipulate whom they do not want to interview or employ e.g. 'Africans'. 'Samoans' or other groups of people. It appears that many case workers at the agencies do not question or challenge these comments or other beliefs which are inherently racist and often misguided. While employer satisfaction is a vital factor for Job Network agencies, staff needs to be trained and educated on how to rebut racist and discriminatory comments from employers.

g) Accents

The issue of accents would be the most common and controversial barrier and concern experienced by a large number of migrant and refugee jobseekers. The following is a summary of some typical scenarios:

- Often clients with an accent will contact the Job Network provider re: position and will be told the position is already taken. *"As workers we sometimes ring on behalf of bogus clients and are told the position is still available"* (Community worker)
- It appears that reception staff at the Job Network agencies and some employment case workers will make the assessment and assumptions themselves whether their communication is suitable for an interview. *"One employment case worker told a non-English speaking background client 'you have an accent and we don't understand you and nor will an employer'.... This person's English was proficient, she had completed two training programs in Brisbane."* (Employment worker at migrant and refugee employment program).
- Many migrant and refugee jobseekers often feel humiliated, unwelcomed and not assisted by Job Network providers because of their accents.
- Reception staff also appears to not connect the non-English speaking background client to the case worker for the initial interview or assessment. *"The receptionist was speaking to a non-English speaking background jobseeker who indicated she wanted to see a consultant. She contacted the consultant on the internal phone and said 'This person out here with a funny accent insists on talking to you'.....other people in the waiting room also heard this exchange"* (Employment worker at migrant and refugee employment program, May 2002)

h) Interpreters and Translators

Under the current funding arrangements, Job Network service providers do not receive any additional resources or funding to be used for interpreting and/or translation purposes. It is expected they will use funding from their tendered budget where appropriate. However, given the cost of utilising interpreters (in particular on-site) and the lack of awareness of accessing interpreters, most Job Network agencies do not avail this service

for their clients. Staff either justify the expense or are not aware of how to access interpreting services.

Job Network staff infrequently use interpreters to assist in communicating with clients. In the Logan and Beenleigh Survey, 43.33% of respondents requested interpreters and the service was not provided. 16.66% of Job Network agencies that did use an interpreter service did so at the client's request. (Poole-Branchu.M, June 1999). This is a crucial issue as misunderstandings often occur leading to more frustration for clients of the identified group if interpreters are absent from interviews.

It is important to note that native and near-native English language speakers often experience difficulty in understanding the Job Network system and process. Imagine how much more difficult for those with limited or no English language skills who come from diverse cultures and do not have the same job seeking system in their home country. The issues for non-English speaking background women and non-English speaking background people in particular are further exacerbated as with those jobseekers with post traumatic stress disorders.

Lack of usage of interpreters is a serious concern when jobseekers are signing agreement forms and contracts. Evidence suggests that many of them do not fully understand what they are signing, their rights and responsibilities and the jobseeking process they have entered into. This is particularly crucial for those jobseekers that have very limited levels of English proficiency. Liabilities for completion of such forms with uninformed consent opens Job Network providers to possible litigation and failure to provide services to clients.

While interpreting services are rarely used, there are also no translated material on the employment processes e.g. selection criteria's that are quite common in Australia. Such subjects are not taught at universities or other institutions such as TAFE'S so jobseekers are still disadvantaged in acquiring the necessary knowledge and information. *" I have been assisting many refugee jobseekers who are completing university studies in Australia, the context of the language for selection criteria and the current systems are not clearly understood, the jargon and understanding of processes and expectations are even beyond many migrant refugees who have been able to upskill themselves."* (Manager, ethnic community agency Brisbane 2002).

i) Rural and regional concerns

The Job Network system also poses additional concerns for migrant and refugee jobseekers in regional and rural Queensland. This is particularly evident when only one agency exists and does not actively assist the jobseeker. If this agency does not provide appropriate Intensive Assistance there are no other options or choices of other employment agencies. This ensures that the client group continues to struggle in gaining meaningful employment.

It has also been reported that Job Network agencies in regional Queensland offer limited assistance to migrant and refugee jobseekers. *"Job Network employment agencies do not follow up or actively help migrants seek employment. Many of our clients find the necessary forms too complex to understand and complete – and yet little or no assistance is given to them"*. (Regional community worker)

A recent state consultation highlighted a number of employment issues for migrant and refugee jobseekers. Two key issues identified included:

- Not knowing or understanding avenues for finding employment
- Difficulties using Centrelink and Job Network touch screens to search for jobs due to language difficulties

6. Structural issues:

a) Membership Fees

A common issue that has been identified is that clients may be registered at more than one service. Therefore multiple membership fees incurred by clients may be viewed as exploiting the client. This is demonstrated by the following case study:

One older female noted that her son is registered at three employment agencies. Every time he registered himself he needed to pay a membership fee (\$30-40). (Employment issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background, p 35)

b) Language Assessment

The lack of formal mechanisms in Queensland to test clients for their language/literacy and numeracy skills has led to informal and often judgemental assessments by staff at Job Network agencies.

Situations exist in which migrant and refugee jobseekers with some English language skills are being requested to continue participating in English classes, although they are more motivated in looking for paid work. They have often been here for some years, have some basic English language skills and are more than capable of lower skilled employment. These clients recognise that they may never be fully fluent in English and are therefore more committed to securing paid employment. However these clients are referred to more English classes. Participation in these classes therefore limits their time and capacity in actively seeking employment.

Furthermore the English classes are also not necessarily providing clients with work readiness nor industry readiness, including basic information on workplace health and safety requirements.

Current English classes are not related to employment opportunities i.e. industry specific jargon or expectation of managing certain roles within employment. This would be more relevant if jobseekers could access industry specific English language training to place them more competitively within the labour market system. Case management by Job Network providers in terms of clear employment and training pathways appear to be adhoc and inconsistent with either Commonwealth or State policies towards job readiness and promoting a skilled country.

An ongoing concern is those clients who have gained sufficient English language fluency to compete in the workforce. However due to their accents they are often dismissed or discriminated against by agency staff. It appears that staff at some Job Network agencies decides whether their clients English fluency or accent is acceptable to prospective employers. Jobseekers therefore are often not referred on this basis. *“My client from Iran is an educated and highly qualified town planner. His English is perfectly acceptable. Yet his Job Network casemanager told him he still had an accent and was therefore at a disadvantage in gaining meaningful employment. The worker made the decision not to refer based on his assessment”* (Client Settlement worker)

Concerns have also been raised from some Job Network Providers as to the limited levels of English language from some jobseekers. Staff at these agencies feel that employers do not want to take people with no or limited English due to health and safety issues. The network agencies need to ensure they can build relationships with employers and provide appropriate referrals. *“The bottom line for employers is they want jobseekers to be job ready. Employers do not want to spend time or money for training. The jobseekers must have the English language skills and be job ready as soon as possible.”* (Job Network employment caseworker – Brisbane Southside).

Community workers within the multicultural sector would argue there are a number of strategies and alternatives available for an employer. Examples of this could include –

- larger companies are often equipped to provide internal training, including English language skills which address health and safety issues;
- education and information about the jobseeker to the employer (above and beyond other jobseekers) – their skills, experience, migration experience, language and computer proficiency etc
- exploring funding or resource options to assist with additional training
- exploring community organisations that offer Conversational English or Workplace English informal courses
- ongoing professional development for employers re: productive diversity and associated benefits for their business, as well as the wider business community

c) Relationships between employers and Job Network Providers

It appears that there are limited established relationships between many Job Network providers and employers who are or may be receptive to the benefits of productive diversity for their company/business. These relationships are vital to ensure that the training and skills of people with overseas qualifications can be capitalised and used to benefit both the jobseeker and the employer.

The responsibility falls with the Job Network agencies to advocate for and promote migrant and refugee jobseekers and their work history and skills to prospective employers. The agencies are bound by professional standards which stipulate they provide assistance to all jobseekers. *“In my experience Job Network agencies are reluctant to ‘sell’ migrant and refugee jobseekers skills and work experience to employers, they tend to take the easy road by not even providing the basic opportunity for the jobseeker”* (Employment community worker)

d) Clarity for English language students seeking employment

There is sufficient evidence to explore the confusion for students who are studying English as a Second Language and whether they are expected to seek employment during their semester breaks. In many instances, the students are either leaving their English classes (usually through the AMEP program) as they are told they need to get employment. Similarly many are not actively doing English classes because they are

awaiting intensive assistance from the Job Network provider (which is often not forthcoming).

e) Lack of formalised work experience opportunities in Queensland.

Given that lack of work experience in the Australia labour market is the most common barrier, it is vital that Job Network providers progress this avenue if employment opportunities are not forthcoming. Employers are usually reluctant to provide migrant and refugee jobseekers with employment if there is no demonstrated work history in Australia, with referees and evidence of skills and knowledge.

Practical work experience also provides the jobseekers with a range of positive benefits which ultimately benefits them in their search for secure employment.

7. Policy issues

a) The current tendering process and the required documentation is lengthy, complicated and thereby not conducive to smaller non-government organisations. Smaller community based organisations often don't have the necessary infrastructure and resources as larger organisations do to participate in the complex tendering process regardless of their capacity in delivering quality services to a particular client group. In fact many ethnic and community based agencies have the expertise, knowledge and necessary assistance to help their clients in the job seeking process as well as post employment support.

It is also of concern that the larger successful agencies rarely subcontract or utilise the skills of community based agencies to work in partnership in securing the best outcomes for clients:

- Concerns have also been expressed re: the assessment process used to determine suitable providers. The tendering process requires providers to demonstrate their experience as well as strategies in working with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Given the complaints and concerns mentioned in this paper, the assessment procedure needs to be re-evaluated. *“There is a big gap between what they say they will do and what they actually do”* (Community based worker)

- b) There are general policy weaknesses within the overall Job Network system that increase the barriers for migrant and refugee jobseekers in gaining employment through a provider. While the recent *Draft Report- Independent Review of Job Network* highlights many of them, it is vital that any proposed changes or recommendations are designed to create easier and effective pathways for all disadvantaged client groups. Some current policies (some have already been mentioned through the paper) which hinder migrant and refugee jobseekers include:
 - Migrant and refugee jobseekers have already been recycled through Intensive Assistance with minimal or nil tangible outcomes.
 - Little or no assistance while on Intensive Assistance. This is referred to as ‘parking’ in the industry and is discussed with the Draft Report.
 - Financial incentives may underpin the motivation for Job Network agencies, but often disadvantaged clients are put into the ‘too hard’ basket and not given the practical assistance or support necessary. However they still receive a payment if a jobseeker gains employment independently (or often with the assistance of migrant employment agencies).
 - The questionable lower level of activity testing in Intensive Assistance leads to frustration and confusion for many disadvantaged jobseekers generally, let alone those who are not fully informed of the roles and obligations of Job Network agencies.

- Limitations of referral options to other programs e.g. Work for The Dole which may be more suitable. Often migrant and refugee jobseekers need Australian work experience to present to prospective employers.
- Limited monitoring and documentation of jobseekers while on Intensive Assistance indicates that many jobseekers are being left to fend for themselves.

8. Conclusion

Queensland is a diverse society which promotes an image of a 'Smart state'. Both state and commonwealth government needs to capitalise on this diversity and provide opportunities to ensure that industries, education services and businesses including tourism tap into the opportunities a diverse skilled community can offer. It is only through this capitalisation that we can remain competitive and responsive to consumers and innovative services developed to respond to global and local opportunities that diversity and globalisation create.

People and jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are part of our community. They have the rights for appropriate services and should be supported by a responsible government. The current difficulties being experienced by migrant and refugee jobseekers require urgent address, in particularly through the Job Network system.

It is a waste of human resources if migrant and refugee jobseekers are not assisted appropriately to contribute in the job market and a waste of public resources if Job Network agencies are not able to assist all their clients effectively and efficiently.

The recent Work Experience Project undertaken by the State Government has successfully proved that migrants and refugees are skilful, knowledgeable and contribute to the Australian society and economy once they are given the opportunity.

The Final Report - *Independent Review of Job Network 2002* recognises a number of pressing issues, in particular around the design and implementation of the program. There are also a number of useful and practical recommendations which could assist disadvantaged jobseekers. However it is vital that these findings do not deflect from the issues and concerns raised in this Discussion Paper. Many migrant and refugee jobseekers currently in Queensland are not receiving the appropriate or necessary assistance through Job Network agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)

Recommendation 1.

That DEWR provide funding for a specialist migrant and refugee Job Network agency as exists in other states to address ongoing concerns expressed by migrant and refugee jobseekers.

Recommendation 2.

That DEWR funds a research project or undertakes a consultation with migrant and refugee jobseekers throughout Queensland which validates and acts upon the concerns mentioned in this Discussion Paper as well as the Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report.

Recommendation 3.

That DEWR undertakes a consultation in Queensland with relevant stakeholders within the multicultural sector to review and develop strategies within the tendering process for potential providers. These strategies, including the assessment and evaluation process would be measurable and performance based, thus ensuring that providers fulfil their obligations.

Recommendation 4.

That DEWR review its current evaluation, accountability processes and performance indicators to identify and record:

- Usage of interpreters;*
- Display, usage and distribution of multilingual information;*
- Participation in cross-cultural training, and training in accessing interpreters;*
- Measurable outcomes or placement rate NESB vs ESB clients;*
- Percentage of NESB clients access to labour market programs;*
- Percentage of NESB vs ESB customers accessing complaints mechanisms;*
- Reviewing categories for migrants and refugee jobseekers eg evaluation methods to differentiate between people of NESB who have a previous history of employment and English skills, and those with limited English and recent arrivals;*
- Clearer and streamlined pathway processes which provide outcomes and is inclusive of clients.*

Recommendation 5

That DEWR funds a specific Job Support mechanism for migrant and refugee jobseekers in Queensland outside the tendering process which provides specific training and vocational counselling for disadvantaged migrant and refugee jobseekers. For DEWR to understand the difficulties experienced and capacity of community organizations to undertake a service under the current guidelines for tendering process.

In addition, DEWR to provide additional funding, resources to an appropriate agency(ies) to undertake specific jobsearch support services. Such a service could also provide additional functions such as cross-cultural training for mainstream providers.

Recommendation 6

That DEWR extends the current services of job search training and job matching by locating a specific and trained personal counsellor/advisor where providers have funding for Intensive Assistance. This person would be responsible for assessing employment options, providing counselling and support, provide information on their rights and responsibilities and assist migrant and refugee jobseekers overcome the mentioned barriers.

Centrelink**Recommendation 7.**

It is recommended that Centrelink in conjunction with DEWR review and monitor the quality of application of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument which identifies barriers to employment and determines the level of support the customer receives. Feedback from counter staff at Centrelink and Job Network agencies could be utilised in this process.

Recommendation 8

That Centrelink ensures the Preparing for Work agreement is appropriate and reflects the needs and barriers that customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may experience. These agreements currently exist between the customer and Centrelink outlining the steps that the customer will prepare themselves for employment.

Recommendation 9

That Centrelink continue in consultation with stakeholders within the multicultural sector develop and provide regular and culturally appropriate information sessions for jobseekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 10

That Centrelink develops local strategies to work in partnership with Job Network Providers that will enhance the outcomes for customers of this disadvantaged target group.

Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA)**Recommendation 11**

That DIMIA, through convening the Queensland Migrant Settlement Planning Committee provides updated information and resources on accessing of interpreters, fees and relevant interpreting services for Job Network agencies in Queensland. This is particularly crucial in rural and regional areas.

Department of Employment and Training (DET)

Recommendation 12.

That DET undertakes a tendering process whereby funding is provided to an appropriate agency within the multicultural sector to develop a holistic training kit on Australian work culture. This kit would be transferable and would include training materials including video's and provide practical, relevant and culturally appropriate material.

Recommendation 13.

That DET in conjunction with other stakeholders within the multicultural sector develops a video and training kit which will be used by Job Network agencies and employers throughout Queensland. Such a kit would provide useful and practical information, including material on overseas qualifications, the immigration and settlement process, and employment issues for migrant and refugee jobseekers etc.

Recommendation 14.

That DET continue to fund a number of positions (either within the Department or at designated agencies within the multicultural sector) to provide intensive placement support and follow-up for migrant and refugee jobseekers obtaining employment for an initial period of three months. Support and assistance would be provided to the jobseeker and employer to identify any issues or concerns and to ensure sustainability of employment.

Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ)

Recommendation 15.

That MAQ seeks additional funds to investigate possible avenues to provide cross-cultural awareness training for all Job Network agencies in Queensland. Such training would include the promotion of 'production diversity' and associated benefits.

Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ)

Recommendation 16.

That ADCQ targets and promotes factsheets and information on discrimination and racial vilification legislation to Job Network agencies throughout Queensland.

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