



**TALENT BEYOND  
—BOUNDARIES—**

# The role of displaced talent in Australia's migration framework

Submission to the Employment White Paper

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# Executive Summary

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. In particular, migration has played a critical role in filling skills shortages to complement Australia's domestic workforce for decades. While Australia's borders were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the critical skill shortages were exacerbated. In this post-pandemic era, the fierce competition for talent continues to a greater extent, meaning Australia must look at diverse sources of talent to effectively complement Australia's domestic workforce.

Skilled refugees and other displaced workers abroad are an untapped source of talent that can help address Australia's skills shortages. Talent Beyond Boundaries (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.

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.

## Recommendations

TBB proposes the following recommendations in response to part 5.4 of the Terms of Reference for this inquiry, “Migration settings as a complement to the domestic workforce”. To complement the domestic workforce, TBB recommends:

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 scheme. Immediate recommended modifications include:**
  - 2.1. Increasing the age cap to less than 55 years instead of less than 50 years to broaden the talent that Australia can access through this pathway.
  - 2.2. Exempting dependents of Skilled Refugee pilot applicants from the second visa application charge and providing free access to the Adult Migration English Program (AMEP) for all adult dependents.
  - 2.3. Applying the same health criteria that applies to humanitarian visa applicants to Skilled Refugee pilot applicants.
  - 2.4. Applying the same definition of “member of family unit” that applies to the humanitarian visa program to Skilled Refugee pilot applicants.
  - 2.5. Providing government funding for a lighter-touch version of the Humanitarian Settlement Program for which Skilled refugee pilot applicants are eligible.
  
3. **Australia should transition from the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot to an employer-led permanent Displaced Talent Visa scheme to increase the attraction of talented and skilled refugees at scale. The scheme 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. It should be proactively promoted by Australia to ensure wide take-up.**

# About Talent Beyond Boundaries

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.

## Attracting diverse sources of talent for Australia

**Recommendation 1: To complement the domestic workforce 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.**

The global fight for talent has escalated to unprecedented levels, meaning that Australia is competing with countries in Europe, Canada, USA and NZ for the same pools of talent. In 2022, employer competition for talent continues to be fierce, with 75% of high-income countries globally reporting difficulty in filling vacant roles - up from 30% in 2010.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, Australian employers are often vying for talent in countries that are already experiencing skills shortages, and their employers in turn are actively trying to recruit Australian talent.

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<sup>1</sup> Manpower Group Employment Outlook Survey, Q3, 2022, available from: [https://go.manpowergroup.com/hubfs/MEOS/2022\\_Q3/Q3%20MEOS%20Global%20Report.pdf](https://go.manpowergroup.com/hubfs/MEOS/2022_Q3/Q3%20MEOS%20Global%20Report.pdf), p17.

In order for Australia to complement its domestic workforce we need to think innovatively about accessing diverse talent pools internationally, including the millions of refugees who are highly motivated to move to countries where they can rebuild their lives.

### **Case study 1: Diversifying recruitment of nurses**

There is a global shortage of nurses, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and Australia must compete to attract overseas trained nurses to our shores. Australia recruits its largest cohorts of overseas trained nurses from the UK and Ireland, countries that both have their own chronic nursing shortages. Meanwhile, the UK actively recruits Australian nurses, including through job fairs and recruitment drives.

While we are competing for the same pool of talent, thousands of refugees with nursing qualifications and experience are living in limbo as refugees. They would welcome the opportunity to resume their careers and rebuild their lives in Australia. Refugees face significant barriers in migrating into licenced professions like nursing, but these barriers can be overcome.

In 2021 TBB began a partnership with the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and various National Health Service (NHS) Trusts to begin recruiting refugee nurses from predominately Lebanon and Jordan and placing them in various hospitals around the UK. So far over 200 nurses have secured job offers in the UK and 165 have already departed to start work. This number is projected to double in 2023. On arrival in the UK the nurses are supported to complete the steps required to register as Registered Nurses, with full registrations often achieved within 12 months of arrival. This program has helped to diversify the UK's pool of nurses and inform policy re-design whilst giving refugees an opportunity to advance in their nursing careers while rebuilding a life with dignity and equal rights.

## **The untapped potential of displaced talent**

There are over 100 million forcibly displaced people in the world today<sup>2</sup> - almost half are working age. Yet refugees and other displaced people in most countries around the world

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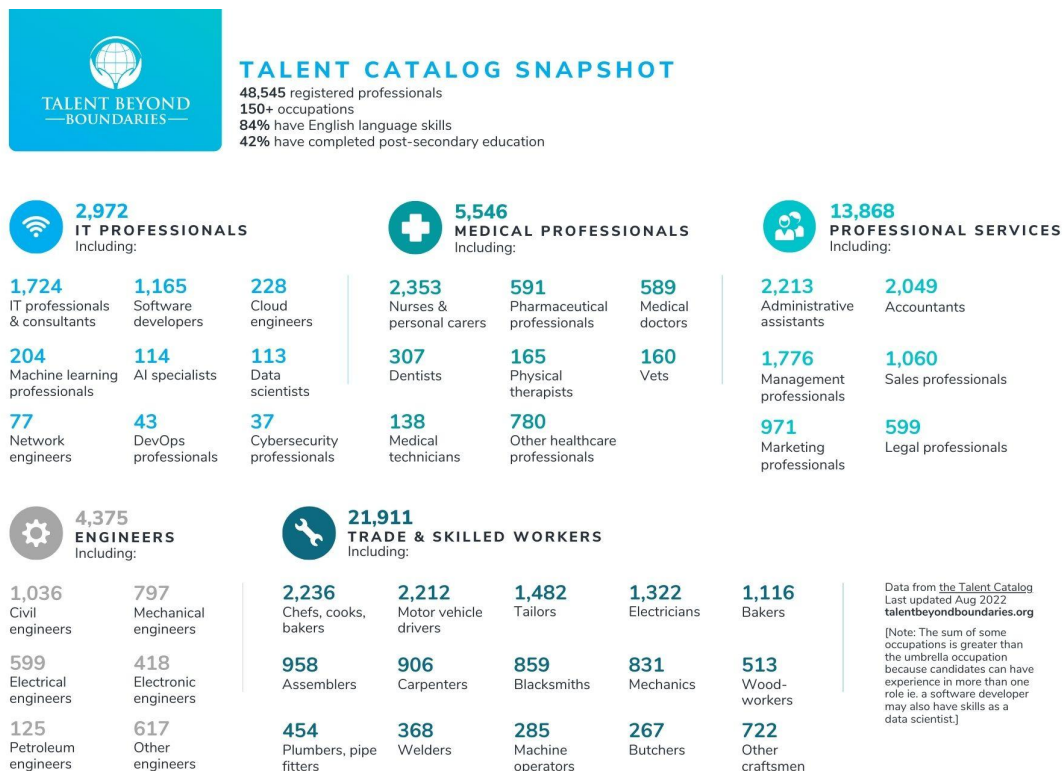
<sup>2</sup> UNHCR announced on 23 May 2022

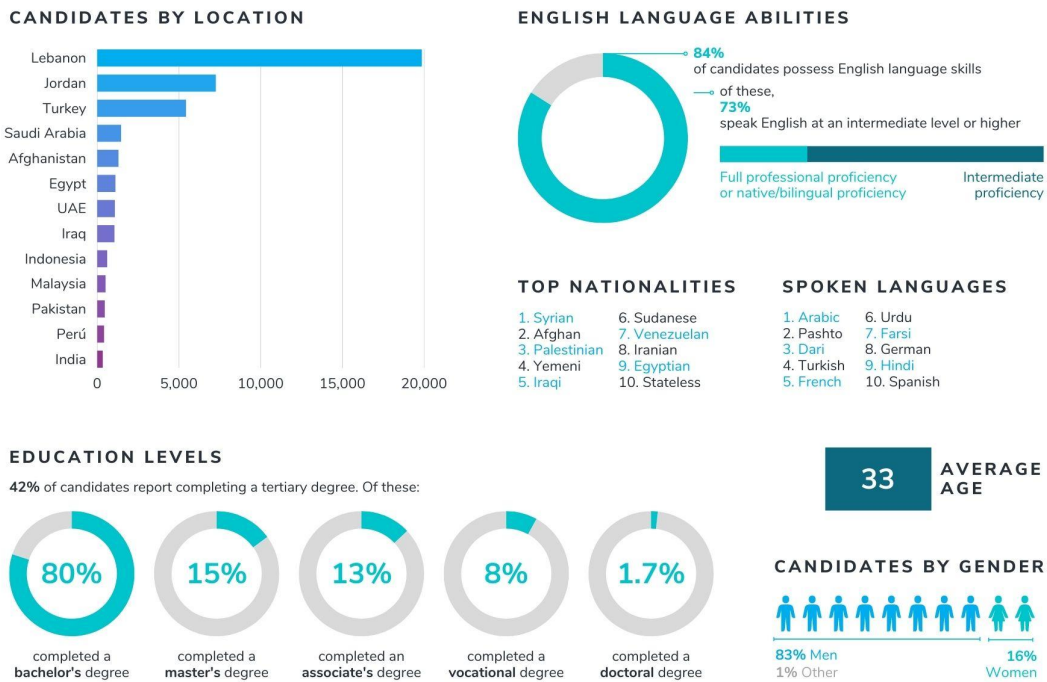
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/5/628a389e4/unhcr-ukraine-other-conflicts-push-forcibly-displaced-total-100-million.html>

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. 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.

TBB runs an online Talent Catalogue of skilled refugees around the world, on which more than 48,000 displaced people have registered. Registrants on the Talent Catalogue are mainly Syrian, Afghan and Palestinian refugees as well as stateless people and a range of other displaced nationalities. The Talent Catalogue 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.





The data collected through the Talent Catalogue 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

**Recommendation 2: Australia should expand 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 scheme.**

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.

## How the pilot works

Employers endorsed by TBB can access the pilot program by entering into a company-specific labour agreement with the Department of Home Affairs. The labour agreement allows employers to sponsor a TBB-endorsed refugee or displaced person for a subclass 186 (Employer nomination scheme) visa, subclass 482 (Temporary Skills Shortage) visa or subclass 494 (Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional) visa. The labour agreement has been pre-negotiated and gives access to the following concessions that address the typical documentary barriers preventing refugees accessing the standard skilled migration program, including:

- Waiver of skills assessment requirements
- Waiver of minimum work experience requirements
- Requirement for applicants to meet a reduced “Functional English” requirement demonstrated through English language testing
- Processes to waive police clearance and passport requirements
- Exemption from Labour Market Testing requirements

The Department of Home Affairs has approved [683 occupations](#) that can be sponsored under the labour agreement. With TBB's support, employers themselves are able to assess a refugee candidate's skills and experience to determine whether they are suitable to work in Australia under this pilot.

## Progress so far

Through the Skilled Refugee Pilot, Australian businesses have hired 74 displaced workers to relocate with their families to Australia so far.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> See TBB video showing impact of the program here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLOv59A1BFY&t=8s>

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 the 2021-22 financial year was AU\$68,391.

## Experience of participating employers

As part of TBB’s remote refugee recruitment pilot we have engaged extensively with employers about the potential of hiring from this hidden talent pool. Since 2018 TBB has assisted 50+ employers to hire refugees from abroad, including:

Accenture	APNIC	Clayton Utz	Foxtel	KPMG
AI Group	Auto and General	Culture Amp	Harvey Beef	Lorwellan Farming
Aligent	Bluemar Engineering Consultants	Deloitte	Hatchette	Minter Ellison
Animal Logic	Boston Consulting Group	EY	IRESS	Nine Network
Prosperity Advisers				

ASX-listed Financial Technology company IRESS has recruited 5 software engineers to Australia through TBB’s program and has incorporated a streamlined recruitment process to recruit talent through the displaced talent pool with TBB. IRESS recently expanded its partnership with TBB, stating publicly in their announcement::

***With talent shortages already an issue and expected to impact the future of the world’s largest economies in the coming years and the scale of the refugee crisis worsening, developing new and creative solutions to address these shortages***

***and issues is both an economic and humanitarian imperative. By linking skilled refugees with countries and companies that need their skills, TBB is forging a sustainable solution for refugees and their families to rebuild their lives while boosting the global economy.<sup>4</sup>***

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.

### **Case study 2: Lorwellan Farming, regional VIC**

Lorwellan Farming is a good example of the benefits regional employers stand to gain by recruiting from the global displaced talent pool. Lorwellan was struggling to find sufficiently experienced dairy cattle farmers in Australia. After multiple recruitment efforts, they received an application from Ebrahim, an Iranian refugee displaced in Turkey who had many years of experience running his own beef and dairy farm in Iran. He could not return to Iran for fear of persecution on the basis of him being a Christian convert. He was identified by the business as having unique skills in dairy cattle farming. Elizabeth Jordan, Owner of Lorwellan Farming stated:

*Ebrahim went through an intensive interview process with me personally and I was immediately able to assess the rare experience and skills he possesses. I have thoroughly assessed Ebrahim's skills and background through this process and I cannot stress enough that the vast knowledge of dairy farming acquired by Ebrahim cannot be fabricated by any individual and can only come through hands on experience.*

The business then proceeded to lodge a Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS) visa to work in Australia in 2019. Ebrahim's application was in processing for over 12 months due to his inability to provide traditional documentation evidencing his extensive work experience. This is when Lorwellan Farming reached out to TBB about their predicament.

Ebrahim registered his skills and experience on the Talent Catalogue and was interviewed for the TBB program. Once TBB had determined his eligibility, we were able to endorse him and Lorwellan Farming for the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement pilot. This unlocked the skilled visa pathway which included documentary concessions for skilled refugees. Ebrahim was granted a subclass 186 visa and relocated to Australia in July 2022. He continues to work for Lorwellan Farming and has made an enormous difference for Elizabeth Jordan's business:

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<sup>4</sup> IRESS Press Release *Iress expands partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries to address tech skills gap*, 6 September 2022:  
<https://www.iress.com/about/media-centre/2022/09/iress-expands-partnership-with-talent-beyond-boundaries-to-address-tech-skills-gap/>

*His work has exceeded our expectations! ...[Ebrahim's] understanding of dairy nutrition is beyond our own knowledge. Obviously he is trying to get his head around the pasture based systems and our dairy but he is passionate about the industry and is learning our systems quickly. His handling of the cattle is beautiful to watch. We couldn't be happier and he is such a decent and kind person.*



### Case study 3: Aligent in Adelaide, SA

Aligent is another good example of the benefits particularly in the technology sector that faces critical skill shortages and has gained by recruiting from the global displaced talent pool. Aligent has recruited four software engineer refugee candidates through TBB and are currently continuing to recruit.

Aligent is an e-commerce business consulting firm who like other businesses in the tech sector were facing critical shortages in filling Software Engineer roles. Jonathan Day, Managing Director reported in 2021 when the borders were still not fully open, “There’s a triple hit to staffing at the moment with closed borders to skilled migrants, less skilled graduates and the huge demand from business.”<sup>5</sup>

Sarya is a Software Engineer who fled Syria with her husband and three children. They spent 7 years living as refugees in Jordan. Sarya and her family was surviving only on intermittent remittances from family abroad. She holds a Bachelor Degree in Information Technology and Engineering from Damascus University. She saw an advertisement for Talent Beyond Borders on Facebook and registered on the Talent Catalogue. TBB helped her build her resume and prepare for English-speaking interviews with global technology companies including Aligent.

Sarya was hired by Aligent Consulting and now lives with her family in Adelaide, SA, where she is loving contributing her tech skills and being part of a multicultural team. Jonathan Day stated that “We were blown away by the quality of the candidate.” Now Sarya and her family are safe and financially secure due to Sarya's work.

Sarya said “I left my country with a broken heart. Life in Jordan was hard; we couldn’t work legally and we had no rights. Now I’m in Australia with my family. This is like a bright hope in the dark and, in simple words - we can start dreaming again. I wish that all refugees can have this opportunity to get their dream job and move to a new better life.”



<sup>5</sup> *The Refugees who could solve Australia’s Tech skills crisis*, Australian Financial Review, published on 5 Nov 2021: <https://www.afr.com/technology/the-refugees-who-could-solve-australia-s-tech-skills-crisis-20211105-p596bu>

## Expanding through improved Skilled Refugee Pilot design

The Refugee Council of Australia in its 2022 report *Eight opportunities to increase the potential of humanitarian migration to Australia* about the Jobs and Skills Summit recommended that the pilot be immediately expanded and extended:

***This initiative can be seen as a constructive response to addressing Australia's skills shortages, as well as providing a durable solution for refugees with relevant skills who may not otherwise be considered for resettlement due to vulnerability criteria, and who may face significant barriers to applying for skilled migrant visas due to their refugee status. Expanding and extending the SRLAP to 500 places in 2022-23 is achievable, particularly in the context of considerable private sector interest in attracting overseas talent and meeting corporate social responsibility targets... a scaling up of numbers within the parameters of the pilot in close consultation with Talent Beyond Boundaries is a viable short-term proposition.***<sup>6</sup>

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 (see recommendation 3 below). In order to extend the current pilot with expanded visa places, we recommend adjustments to the current Pilot design. 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

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<sup>6</sup> 2022 *Jobs and Skills Summit: Eight Opportunities to increase the potential of humanitarian migration to Australia*  
[:https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/202209\\_Brief\\_Jobs-Summit-and-Refugees.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/202209_Brief_Jobs-Summit-and-Refugees.pdf)

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 into 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 case for a Displaced Talent visa

**Recommendation 3: Australia should establish an employer-led permanent Displaced Talent Visa scheme to increase the attraction of talented and skilled refugees at scale. The scheme should build on the lessons from the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot and address the constraints skilled refugees and other displaced workers face in meeting visa requirements. It should be proactively promoted by Australia to ensure wide take-up.**

TBB proposes a new mode of migration which empowers employers to recruit skilled and talented people who happen to be displaced and living under constraints. The Skilled Refugee pilot demonstrates that there is a demand and a deep well of potential in this diverse source of talent. However, TBB's approach is distinct from Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program, which aims to protect refugees, resettle the most vulnerable people and those with family links in Australia. While Australia's humanitarian program also contributes to economic output and growth over time,<sup>7</sup> this is not a central purpose of the

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<sup>7</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake*, Oxfam Australia, August 2019, available from:



program - and nor should it be. The policy intent of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program is and should remain the humanitarian imperative. TBB's approach is also distinct from traditional skilled migration. While Australia has a long history of recruiting displaced people for work, Australia's modern migration system was not designed with the needs and circumstances of displaced people in mind. As a result, skilled refugees and other displaced and stateless people face real barriers in securing skilled visas to Australia.

The results of the Skilled Refugee pilot so far prove that there is a depth of talent in refugee and other displaced populations around the world and Australian businesses are ready and willing to recruit from this diverse source of talent if the right migration settings are in place. However, the Skilled Refugee pilot should be viewed as a stepping stone to what should be a permanent employer-led Displaced Talent visa scheme within the skilled migration program. The current pilot framework is not a permanent solution given the complexity of having to factor in policy settings from both the skilled and humanitarian program to allow displaced workers access to the pathway. In order to scale this solution to its full potential, displaced workers need certainty of an established visa 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.

An establishment of a permanent employer-led Displaced Talent Visa scheme needs to 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. TBB recommends that a strategic marketing and communications plan should be implemented which would turbo charge the take up of this solution.

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

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<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-social-impact-increasing-australias-humanitarian-intake-280819.pdf>

# 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 which is an imperative in a time of a global skills crisis. 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
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 scheme.
3. Australia should establish an employer-led permanent Displaced Talent Visa scheme to increase the attraction of talented and skilled refugees at scale. The scheme should build on the lessons from the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot and address the constraints skilled refugees and other displaced workers face in meeting visa requirements. It should be proactively promoted by Australia to ensure wide take-up.