



Barriers Encountered by African Refugee Youth as they Integrate into the Australian Labour-market: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This review explores the barriers faced by African refugee youth as they integrate into the Australian labour-market. The number of young refugees from African countries is steadily growing in Australia, yet the obstacles they encounter in the Australia labour market remain under-researched. Utilising a systematic review, we explored the barriers that impede their integration. Data analysis included 13 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Findings indicate that African refugee youth face an array of challenges including a lack of Australian work experience, racial discrimination, a lack of strong connections and social networks, and psychological and mental health problems. African refugee youth may however play an important role in addressing labour and skills shortages in Australia especially during the post-Covid-19 recovery era. Policymakers and service providers should develop holistic interventions to actively support African refugee youth to integrate into the Australian labour-market.

Key words: Australian labour-market; Integration, Employment; African refugee youth; racial discrimination; mental health problems

Introduction

A refugee is defined as a person who has fled war, conflict, violence, or persecution and managed to cross an international border into another country to seek safety (UNHCR, 2020), and Australia is a destination for many. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), 30.7 percent of Australia's population was born overseas, and since the early 1980s Australia has resettled thousands of refugees from countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe (Molla, 2021). Among those who have been resettled in Australia is a sizable proportion of African refugee youth (Ziaian et al., 2019). Young people from African refugee backgrounds are among the most disadvantaged cohorts of people in many countries. Most of these young people have fled war and persecution from their home countries in search of a better life in resettlement areas (Baker et al., 2021). One area in which young people from African refugee backgrounds struggle within their new environments is finding employment (Ziersch et al., 2023). Employment is significant for African refugee youth and failure to integrate successfully into the labour-market result in financial instability (Thern et al., 2017). Unemployment can also cause massive impacts on the mental wellbeing of African refugee youth including anxiety about the future, depression, despair, and stress (Abur and Mphande, 2020). People of African origins are already facing many challenges in life, for example racial discrimination and racial profiling, and failure to secure employment exacerbates the obstacles that African refugee youth encounter and disempowers them in almost all aspects of life (Udah et al., 2019).

Research and scholarly interest in the participation of African refugee youth in high school and higher education has grown (Molla, 2020; Naidoo, 2019). However, little research focuses on the challenges that impede African refugee youth from finding employment (Curry et al., 2018; Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021). While the successful integration into the labour-market remains significant for African refugee youth to realise their aspirations, only a few studies have explored this area. For example, Baker et al. (2021) argues that despite the increased focus on the integration of African refugee youth into higher education in Australia little is known about their integration into the labour-market. Less attention is given to how African refugee youth integrate into the Australian labour-market; available scant research has focused on the experiences of the adult population (Patulny, 2015). There is a huge

silence in the current literature about what happens to African refugee youth when they complete education and seek employment, let alone professional employment commensurate with their qualifications (Baker et al., 2021).

Literature shows that African refugee youth face higher rates of unemployment than the general youth population (Beadle, 2014, Abkhezr et al., 2015). The integration of African refugee youth into employment is associated with some unique challenges compared to the workforce integration of other university graduates (Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021), and it is important to understand those challenges. A comprehensive understanding may inform policy makers and service providers about the barriers and so this article addresses the question: what obstacles impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market? We draw from a systematic review of the existing literature, and regard Australia as a suitable typical case for research of this nature. Not only is the number of African refugee youth growing: there is also a growing body of literature indicating poorer working conditions for African refugees generally, compared with native-born workers in Australia (Beadle, 2014; Cain et al., 202; Curry et al., 2018). There are many reasons for this, including segregation into niche occupations and industries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007), non-recognition of prior educational qualifications (McMaster, 2001), lack of social networks to assist in finding employment, and poorer English language proficiency (Curry et al., 2018), as well as the sending home of remittances which necessitates risk taking and working in survival jobs (Reid et al., 2014).

Background

As of 30 June 2023, Australia's population included 8.2 million people who were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The proportion of Australia's population born overseas increased to 30.7 per cent in 2023 (up from 29.5 per cent in 2022) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In addition, Australia's African-born population is now over half a million and has more than doubled over the last 20 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). By comparison, Australia's overall population has risen by 35 per cent or 6.9 million at the same time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In 2020, an estimated 3.2 million young people aged 15-24 lived in Australia, making up 12 per cent of the whole population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021).

These figures also include a sizable proportion of young people of African origin (Ziaian et al., 2019). There is non-linearity in how African refugees integrate into employment in Australia (i.e., any type of employment) due to a variety of factors, including cultural differences, English language difficulties, and past-traumatic events experienced during displacement (Baker et al., 2021). Often, an individual is considered to be integrated into the labour-market when that person is part of a formal employment relationship (Felbo-Kolding, 2018). A formal employment relationship exists when a person performs a job under a certain set of conditions in return for remuneration. In line with this definition, African refugee youth who are outside of employment are not integrated into the labour-market (Felbo-Kolding, 2018).

Australian literature shows that employment outcomes for refugees of all ages are poor, especially through the early settlement period (Kellock, 2016). The literature also indicates that humanitarian entrants are more susceptible to being unemployed even after five years of settlement (Kellock, 2016). They are often under-employed, lowly-paid, in low-skilled and precarious employment (Webb et al., 2021). In the previous decade, African and Middle Eastern refugee groups in Australia were exposed to the government's effort to relocate immigrants to rural regions with guaranteed jobs (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). These are insecure and poorly paid jobs like farm and abattoir work (Kellock, 2016).

The process of getting into employment is determined by several factors, one of which is a lack of knowledge of the host country's labour-market and employment norms (Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021, Centre for Multicultural Youth Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008). Understanding the local labour-market is essential for knowing better employment opportunities and locating vacancies (Dunwoodie et al., 2021). Young African refugees are often unfamiliar with the new environment, and this disadvantage is compounded by their dependence on family members, who may also lack knowledge about employment opportunities in Australia (Lauer et al., 2012). Due to these difficulties, young African refugees are forced to work in precarious jobs.

Unemployment at the start of a career exposes vulnerable young African refugees to a high level of uncertainty, which can lead to serious mental health problems as well as feelings of rejection and hopelessness (Ziersch et al., 2023). For example, the Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) longitudinal study discovered high levels of psychological

distress among all young people aged 18 and above, with 31 percent of young men and 37 percent of young women classified as having moderate or high psychological distress at Wave one of data collection (Rioseco and Liddy, 2018). This is significantly higher than the general population proportions of moderate or high psychological distress, that is 5 percent of males and 12 percent of females aged 16 to 25 years. This statistic shows how unemployment and job-search related difficulties affect young people in general before unique vectors of disadvantage such as race are added. The literature shows that unemployment at a younger age has long term effects on a person's career prospects, both in terms of the likelihood of future unemployment (Helgesson et al., 2014) and future diminished income (Laurijssen and Glorieux, 2015). Despite challenges in securing employment, African refugee youth prioritise employment because it opens doors for successful resettlement and social inclusion (Beadle, 2014, Streitwieser et al., 2019).

The literature suggests that Australia has the problem of a segmented labour market, where racially and culturally visible migrants are allocated the bottom jobs regardless of their human capital (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). A segmented labour-market is one whereby social and institutional forces reduce opportunities for certain social groups like refugees and women and relegate them to the second division (jobs that pay low wages) of the labour-market (Flatau & Lewis, 1993). In Australia, labour-market segmentation negatively impacts immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, who at the same time come from economically and culturally distant countries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). Others have pointed to the labour-market disadvantage of CALD as a result of the competitive labour-market being blind to ethnicity and the inescapable loss of human capital in the process of migration, frequently associated with the lack of English proficiency (McAllister, 1995). However, others consider it as primarily owing to ethnic and racial discrimination leading to the segmented labour-market, which is favourable to the capitalist economy at a societal level as well as for individual employers, because it offers a constant supply of cheap labour ready to take on the bottom jobs (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Howe et al., 2020).

Inexperienced African refugee youth, particularly those with low educational backgrounds, are often disproportionately represented in situations characterised by poor labour-market integration (Kang, 2021; Bellani, 2020). Young African refugee graduates face challenges in the

labor-market, including stiff competition, family responsibilities, and discrimination (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011). Struffolino and Borgna (2021) suggest that young African refugees often transition into part-time jobs during their first job, which often lack benefits like health insurance and sick leave (Bellani, 2020). Several studies have argued that moving into employment has now become a complicated process for young people (Furlong, 2006, Baker et al., 2021). The complexity is seen in the employment experiences of African refugee youth which are no longer individualised because of the impact of institutional policies and structural factors like race (Brzinsky-Fay, 2015).

Research design and Methodology

Research question: This systematic review was conducted to assess existing research on the barriers faced by African refugee youth when integrating into the Australian labour-market. Our research question was “What obstacles impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market?”

Identification of relevant studies: The identification of relevant peer-reviewed articles was conducted in two steps. *Search 1* was conducted in two databases, Scopus and Web of Science, and *Search 2* on Google Scholar. Search terms were used in each data base to locate relevant articles were: “African refugee youth” OR “Refugee-background African youth” OR “Refugee youth from African backgrounds” OR “Refugee youth” AND “Labour-market” or “Job” or “Work” or “Career” or “Occupation” or “Employment” or “hire” AND “Barriers” OR “challenges” OR “obstacles” OR “Experiences” AND “Australia”. The search was first conducted on 10 September 2023 and repeated on 10 June 2024 after ten months. The reason for repeating the search in the databases was to look for papers that had recently been published so that their findings could be included in this systematic review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: The research articles that met the inclusion criteria were original peer-reviewed papers found in the databases as above. The focus of the selected papers was on the barriers that impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market. We included only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2007 and 2024, written in the English language and studies located in Australia. The search was limited to the most recent 17 years because studies on the labour-market integration of African refugee youth in Australia are scanty and still emerging. Both papers that used the

qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies were included in this paper to gain a comprehensive understanding of the evidence published so far on this topic. Studies on African refugee youth participation in high school were not included as the focus of the paper was mainly on the obstacles African refugee youth encounter post-higher education.

Selection process: Search 1 returned 174 articles and after screening the titles and removing the duplicates, a total of 44 articles remained. Abstracts were then reviewed based on the exclusion and inclusion criteria and 22 articles were removed, leaving 22 articles for a full-text review. Following that, 12 articles were excluded as they did not fully address the research question. Thus ten (10) articles from search 1 were selected for thematic analysis. Search 2 returned a total of 857 articles. Fifty-three (53) articles remained after title and abstract screening and the removal of duplicates. The remaining 53 articles were further reviewed by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, leaving a total of 3 articles to be included in this systematic review. The PRISMA diagram (Figure 1) highlights the process.

Results: A total of 13 eligible articles that met the selection criteria for this review were included for analysis from both searches. Methodologically, most articles (n= 7) used a qualitative approach. One article used a quantitative approach (n=1) and four (n=4) used mixed methods (n=4). One article was a literature review (n=1). The authors included literature reviews due to the scarcity of literature on the barriers that impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market.

Analysis: Thematic analysis was used as a framework to analyse the 13 articles included for synthesis. We followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of conducting thematic analysis, that is: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, the definition of themes, and writing (2006).

Limitations of the study: We acknowledge that there are methodological limitations to systematic reviews. There is a probability that the review has not identified all the relevant articles due to the terminology and search criteria utilised. Since the review included only peer-reviewed, academic articles, relevant policy documents and commissioned report may have been excluded.

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram

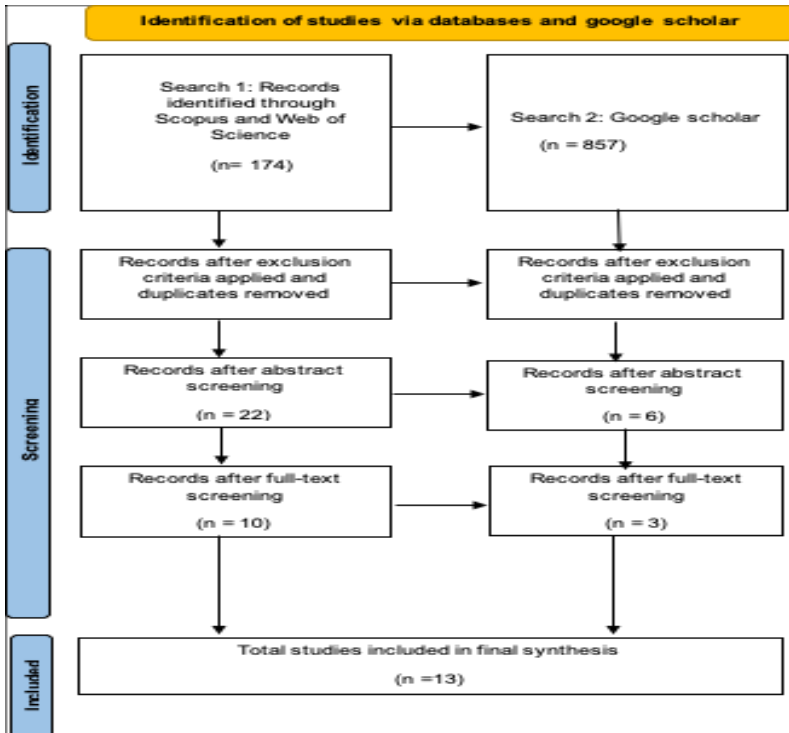


Figure 2: Study characteristics of the included articles

Study	Description	Design	Population	Setting	Key findings
Udah et al. (2019)	The study focused on the economic integration of black African immigrants in South-east Queensland, Australia. The article discusses the employment experiences and perspectives of black African immigrants in Australia's labour-market, as well as the barriers preventing successful labour-market integration.	Qualitative	Black African immigrants (n=30)	Australia	Black African immigrants in South-east Queensland face several challenges to a successful labour-market integration, such as prejudice, the rejection of foreign qualifications, and a lack of knowledge and networks. Employment is significant in the settling and integration processes of black African immigrants as it impacts their socio-economic well-being and sense of identity and belongingness.

Colic-Peisker, and Tilbury (2007)	The research article examines the employment and integration experiences of refugees from Sudan, Bosnia, Afghanistan in Australia.	Qualitative	Refugees from Sudan, Bosnia, and Afghanistan (66)	Australia	Due to their physical characteristics and cultural heritage, refugees in Australia from countries like Sudan, Afghanistan, and Bosnia confront substantial difficulties in obtaining jobs and integrating into the workforce. The successful integration of refugees into the labour-market is made easier by factors such as language proficiency, cultural familiarity, and social networks. The significant obstacles to refugees' integration into the Australian labour-market include racism and discrimination.
Baker et al. (2021)	The paper explores various challenges that culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees experience when transitioning from education to employment in settlement settings by examining the available literature on the subject.	Literature review	Literature Review (n=110)	Australia	Culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees face many hurdles in transitioning from education to employment in settlement environments. Language barriers, discrimination and racism, a lack of recognition of overseas degrees, and a lack of social networks are among the challenges that they face. Effective policies and programmes that address these challenges may enhance the employment outcomes of culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees.

Ziersch et al. (2023)	The article explored the impact of job seeking and employment experiences on the health of refugee women in Australia, highlighting the difficulties refugee women endure in finding employment, the adverse impacts of unemployment on mental health, and the negative effect of poor working conditions on both mental and physical health.	Qualitative	Refugee Women (n=42)	Australia	Refugee women encounter great difficulties in finding employment in Australia. Employment could increase happiness by providing a feeling of identity and contribution, as well as through expanding social networks. Unemployment has devastating consequences on the mental health of female refugees. Also, employed refugees were working under risky conditions, which impacted their physical and mental health. In addition, women were shy and hesitant to complain about bad working conditions, claiming a lack of understanding of processes, fear of losing their jobs, and concerns about the implications for their legal status.
Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007)	The paper examined Australia's refugee resettlement programme and employment assistance for migrants and refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with a focus on the impact of visible difference on employment outcomes for recently	Mixed methods	Refugees from middle east, ex-Yugoslavia, and Africa (n=150)	Australia	There are high unemployment rates among skilled refugees. In the job market, refugees are at a structural disadvantage due to things like qualifications that are partially or completely ignored and a lack of readily available references. Unfulfilling employment outcomes are a result of racial, religious, and ethnic background discrimination. Soft skills such as awareness of Australian culture are used as grounds for discrimination by employers. Daily public racism has less of an

	arrived refugees in Western Australia.				impact on life satisfaction than perceived discrimination in the workplace.
Curry et al. (2018)	Understanding the factors that contribute to the successful resettlement of refugees in rural New South Wales, Australia, and what could be done to ensure successful resettlement	Qualitative	Refugee adults (n=9)	Australia	Access to employment and education, social support, and feeling secure in their new community were all cited as attributes that led to successful resettlement by refugee respondents. Racism and English language problems were mentioned as the primary obstacles towards successful resettlement. Policymakers need to consider the distinctive experiences and needs of refugees in regional locations when formulating resettlement policies and programmes. Community-based support services and programmes are momentous in supporting successful refugee resettlement in regional locations.
Hebbani and Khawaja (2019)	The goal of the article was to understand the employment-related ambitions of former refugees from Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Democratic Republic of Congo resettled in Australia,	Mixed methods	Refugee adults (n=222)	Australia	Refugees were unable to find their desired jobs because of lacking the knowledge of how to search for employment, their limited English language, and the poor health of their relatives and loved ones. A lack of formal educational qualifications has led several refugees to become entrepreneurs and their own bosses.

	using a mixed method approach.				
Olliff et al. (2022)	The article explored how social capital and social networks can positively or negatively impact African migrants' employment possibilities in Australia by analysing how social capital and social networks can assist or impede African migrants' job prospects in Australia.	Mixed methods	Black African migrants	Australia	African migrants in Australia suffer serious employment obstacles owing to factors like a lack of acknowledgement of qualifications, racial discrimination, and a lack of social networks. Social capital is crucial in black African migrants' employment-seeking experiences in Australia. African migrants who have strong social capital and social connections are most likely to get jobs and have better employment outcomes than those who do not have strong social capital. Nonetheless, social capital and social networks can be a double-edged sword, strengthening inequities and restricting opportunities for individuals outside the web of social networks.

<p>Losoncz (2017)</p>	<p>The research examined the relationship between emerging discriminatory narratives, resettlement policies and practises, and resettlement outcomes for refugee migrants in Australia.</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>Refugee adults (n=1798)</p>	<p>Australia</p>	<p>Regardless of being legally entitled to relocate, several humanitarian migrants in Australia face significant socio-economic hardships. Refugees are economically sidelined, stopping them from fully engaging in or fitting to the larger society. On the other hand, the Australian government does not accept the systematic exclusion of migrant minorities, instead stating that specific migrant groups are unaware of Australia's cultural norms and are prone to engaging in inactive behaviours.</p>
<p>Beadle (2014)</p>	<p>The study focuses on factors that facilitate refugee young people transition to employment, with a particular emphasis on determining what works in terms of policy and practise.</p>	<p>Mixed methods</p>	<p>Refugee youth</p>	<p>Australia</p>	<p>There is a significant scarcity of data that distinguishes the challenges that young people from refugee and other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face in transitioning to the workforce. It is essential to equip employers with adequate training so that they can provide culturally sensitive services and understand the context of young refugees' experiences in Australia.</p>

Mwanri et al. 2022	The study focuses on the postmigration stressors and mental health issues faced by African migrants in South Australia.	Qualitative	African migrants	Australia	Access to meaningful employment may shape African migrants' lives. Employment helps African migrants to secure basic needs such as housing. However, barriers such as a lack of work experience, language barriers and poor physical health impede African migrants' job opportunities. Limited employment opportunities lead to poor fulfilment of family needs.
Riordan & Claudio, 2022	The article looked at the factors that were associated with increased well-being among African refugee youth.	Qualitative	African refugee youth	Australia	Employment and integration in the labour-market increased the well-being of African refugee youth in Australia. African refugee youth mentioned that their African identity limited their employment opportunities and career prospects. Discrimination was indicated as a factor that acted as a barrier to African refugee youth looking for employment.

Nunn et al. 2014	The study focuses on the factors mediating employment trajectories among young people who migrated to Australia as refugees during adolescence	Qualitative	Refugee young people	Australia	The employment trajectories of African refugee young people and adolescents are mediated by a constellation of intersectional factors, which included low literacy levels, insufficient access to information and support, and lack of experience.
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Thematic findings and discussions

This systematic review identifies some of the key obstacles African refugee youth face when seeking entry to the Australian labour-market as (i) lack of Australian work experience, (ii) recognition of overseas qualifications, (iii) low English language proficiency, (iv) social networks and connections, (v) psychological and mental health problems, and (vi) racial discrimination.

Theme 1: Lack of Australian Work Experience

African refugee youth find it more difficult to secure employment than anyone else in many countries. One of the dominant factors that deter African refugees from securing employment in the literature is the lack of work experience (Ziersch et al., 2023). In Australia, African refugees can work, they have equal working rights as Australian residents, and they are entitled to receive minimum pay as directed by the Fair Work Ombudsman (Farbenblum and Berg, 2017). Regardless of their right to work protected by the law, African refugee youth struggle to secure employment due to the lack of Australian work experience which is a critical requirement most employers look for when they are recruiting employees (Ziersch et al., 2023). Even African refugee youth with previous work experience, their skills might not be transferable to the Australian labour-market due to differences in the size of the economy and way of doing business (Baker et al., 2021). The literature shows that what is considered work experience in Australia is often Australian work experience (Mwanri et al., 2022). Previous work experience in the country of origin, no matter how relevant it might be, does not really matter. Even African refugee youth with post-graduate education qualifications lack work experience, therefore making it difficult for them to be hired (Beadle, 2014).

Also, the lack of understanding of the Australian workplace culture, systems, and effective communication skills makes it hard for African refugees to secure professional and meaningful employment (Baker et al., 2021). Meaningful employment entails a situation whereby the skills, competence, and experiences of refugees are acknowledged while they are engaged in paid work (Curry et al., 2018). Resettled African refugees frequently struggled to understand Australian systems and

workplace culture, which caused them to take longer to be hired by employers. In Australia, refugee employment rates highlight the challenges that this group of people face when looking for employment (Losoncz, 2017). Securing employment in Australia has grown tough; the country has had high unemployment rates in the preceding decade, and the hurdles have fallen disproportionately on Africans, who are constantly racialised as faraway strangers in the Australian labour-market. Due to barriers in securing employment, African refugee youth without relevant work experience end up accepting unfair job contracts in sectors with poor working conditions. Poor working conditions involve working longer hours and accepting low wages (Ziersch et al., 2021). Ziersch et al. (2021) indicate that women mostly suffer more as they are overrepresented in low-paying sectors such as cleaning.

A study by Colic-Peisker (2007) has shown that refugees from non-English speaking countries face more barriers as compared to refugees from English-speaking countries when finding employment in Australia, adding to the fact that refugees from Africa are more susceptible than other cohorts of migrants (Nunn et al., 2014). For example, the lack of relevant Australian work experience has led African refugees settling in regional Australia to work in hard jobs such as construction because they lack the work experience and English language skills needed to occupy colour jobs (Curry et al., 2018). Lack of Australian work experience prevents African refugee jobseekers from competing with other applicants in the Australian labour-market, and connections beyond family and friends provide the capacity to be more successful at obtaining employment (Losoncz, 2017). However, research has pointed to different forms of capital in alleviating these barriers such as social networks, proficient English language skills (Hugo 2011), previous recognisable employment experience and familiarity with the Australian workplace culture (Baker and Irwin, 2021).

Theme 2: Recognition of Overseas Qualifications

Even though African refugees might be holding educational qualifications from their home countries they often face challenges in making them recognised in Australia, as many employers do not recognise overseas qualifications (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). For

overseas education qualifications to be recognised, African refugees like other migrants must undergo a qualifications and skills assessment process in Australia. The qualification recognition process is expensive (Settlement Council of Australia, 2019) especially for refugees struggling to settle in the new environment; this adds another layer to the existing challenges of settlement (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). For instance, the entire process could cost more than \$3000 Australian dollars. The cost breakdown for interviews, practical tests and assessment of documental evidence can be seen online on the ‘Trades Recognition Australia’ website, one of the institutions offering assessment programs in Australia. Some occupations such as social work and nursing are even more complicated because they require employees to have accredited licenses.

A study by Cameron et al. (2019) show that the Australian skills and qualification recognition system is complicated which makes it challenging for African refugee youth. The Australian federal government has made significant progress in providing financial support to humanitarian migrants and even making the process completely free of charge (Settlement Council of Australia, 2019). However, for certain occupations, such as general practitioners, African refugees, like other migrants, must still pay for assessments to practise in Australia. In some cases, African refugees must attend additional education or training for their qualifications to be recognised, and they receive no financial assistance to cover these costs (Correa-Velez et al., 2015).

The literature indicates that the process to recognise overseas qualifications acts as an obstacle to employment for African refugee youth who are prepared to work but lack relevant knowledge and English language skills to navigate the Australian labour- market (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). In specialised occupations of the economy like nursing, previous post-secondary qualifications and work experience outside Australia have no effect on employment as that experience is not recognised in Australia. Prospective employees who might have relevant qualifications must be registered and get their qualifications assessed before they can apply for employment in Australia. Current hiring practices in Australia undermine the human capital of African refugees and humanitarian migrants (Losoncz 2017).

In the context of the Australian labour-market, research has long identified a strong relationship between skills assessment and employment (Refugee council of Australia, 2010, Iredale et al., 1996). However, a recent longitudinal study of refugees conducted by Correa-Velez et al. (2015) indicate that the recognition of overseas qualifications does not guarantee getting employment in Australia. Contrary to the findings of previous research, this study found that refugees whose qualifications are assessed will only search for jobs in their respective areas of profession limiting their chances of getting employment opportunities in other occupations (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). According to this study the recognition of skills and qualifications alone is not enough for African refugees to negotiate employment barriers. For example, qualifications of African refugees might be assessed but if they lack Australian work experience or relevant licenses then they will still not be able to secure employment until all the requirements are met.

Hugo et al. (2011) argue that the human capital of African refugees is not adequately embraced to contribute to the Australian economy which results in ‘occupational skidding’. Occupational skidding is whereby humanitarian entrants are not working in jobs appropriate with their skills, education, training, and experience (Hugo et al., 2011). Reid (2012) argues that underutilising refugees’ skills is associated with poor mental health, as measured by persistent emotions of depression, anxiety, and sadness. Educating and training Australian employers about the skills African refugees bring and their contribution to the Australian economy, as well as establishing measures to ease the process of skills recognition, will all help African refugees obtain employment that corresponds to their skills and qualifications (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). According to the Refugee council of Australia (2010), finding skilled African refugees working in low skilled or survival jobs such as cleaning and meat processing in factories is one of the challenges associated with occupation skidding in Australia. The literature suggests that the failure of African refugee youth to have their educational qualifications recognised, as well as the absence of other types of embodied cultural capital (like the right accents, cultural knowledge, and work experience) are fundamental to

downward occupational mobility (Creese and Wiebe, 2012).

Theme 3: Low English Language Proficiency

Low English language proficiency can act as a vital barrier to employment for African refugee youth even after completing higher education studies (Baker et al., 2021). For African refugee graduates who want to work in certain professions like nursing and social work, registration with relevant boards is mandatory. A professional English language score must be met before practising. Precisely, individuals whose first language is not English and who have not been staying in Australia, must have a 7.0 score in all areas of the International English Language Testing System (IELTs) to work as a nurse. With appropriate academic qualifications for professional jobs, African refugees may lack the necessary English language skills needed to work (Baker et al., 2021). Curry et al. (2018) conducted a study on the resettlement experiences of African refugees in regional New South Wales Australia and found that several participants were employed in labour-intensive employment because of lacking English language skills (Curry et al., 2018).

Low English proficiency has a negative impact on paid work with African refugees who have been in Australia for many years able to get jobs due to improved English language skills (Losoncz 2017). In the context of Australia, adequate policy structures to support refugees to learn English are absent. Previous research showed that the process of learning a language takes 7 to 11 years yet only 510 hours are provided to refugees on arrival in Australia (Thomas and Collier, 2002). While linguistic deficiencies are somewhat eliminated due to formal education, subtle differences in grammar and style persist (Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021). Accent is another important determinant in impacting the chances of African refugee youth finding employment in Australia. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, accent and other local cultural competencies are a form of embodied cultural capital that is significant to the labour-market integration of refugees. Embodied cultural capital functions on a symbolic level that is recognised as legitimate competence or incompetence, and hence remains largely unacknowledged as a form of power (Bourdieu, 1986). Compared to other immigrants, African refugee youth encounter extraordinary challenges during their migratory journeys which results in interrupted education, which deters them from coping

with others when settled in host countries (Losoncz 2017). In addition to the challenges associated with migration, lower English language competency has been shown to be negatively connected with employment outcomes (Beadle, 2014).

Theme 4: Social Networks and Connections

Refugees from Africa make up a small proportion of the Australian population when compared to immigrants from other continents such as the Middle East. The countries of origin and languages spoken by this population are diverse (Olliff et al., 2022). Despite its small size, the African community is comprised of individuals with diverse skills and experiences. However, when it comes to integrating into the Australian labour-market, this population faces various difficulties including discrimination (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007), racism (Hebbani and Khawaja, 2019), and lack of work experience (Udah et al., 2019). While there is a scarcity of research on the relationship between social networks and African refugee youth labour-market integration, research is emerging in this area (Lancee, 2012). Social capital, social networks, and connections have been found to be pertinent factors that facilitate integration into the Australian labour-market (Lancee, 2012). According to the Australian Productivity Commission, social capital is a resource that enables cooperation within or between groups of people, with the fundamental characteristics of social networks being trust and social norms (Australian Productivity Commission, 2002). Olliff et al. (2022) examined the significance of social networks for labour-market outcomes in Australia and found that social networks are imperative to employment for African refugees. While the significance of social networks in employment is obvious, it remains less clear how these social networks work throughout various professions for African refugee youth (Olliff et al., 2022).

Patulny (2015) argues that social networks can function in complicated ways, with different negative or positive impacts on job seekers. There are two common types of social capital: bonding social capital and bridging social capital, and each works in a different way (Portes, 1998). Bonding social capital denotes relationships among close friends and family members. These are relations within relatively homogeneous groups that are frequently restricted in scope and imply a depth of multi-stranded relationships. This is the most common type of

social capital African refugee youth possess, they rely on family and friends for career advice which results in limited employment opportunities in most cases. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, alludes to relationships between colleagues and acquaintances, that is, the ties that connect an individual to a diverse range of people, resources, and institutions (Granovetter, 1974), and this form of capital usually results in useful connections with people outside family or friends.

The literature indicates that bonding social capital is crucial for 'getting by', in other words, for a sense of 'ontological security' or a sense of agency, while, bridging social capital is essential for 'getting ahead', specifically achieving upward social mobility and material success (Putnam, 2002). The ability of African refugee youth to integrate into the Australian labour-market is impacted by family networks and community support (Peisker and Tilbury, 2003). These networks offer positive emotional support but limited employment. Though connections within the community and informal networks help African refugee youth to settle, these networks do not necessarily increase their chances of employment. A study by de Vroome and van Tubergen (2010) shows that the economic integration of African refugees is significantly linked to their social interaction with the larger Australian community not only relations with networks from their ethnic communities.

Theme 5: Psychological and Mental Health Problems

African refugee youth are more likely to experience psychological and mental health issues than other African youth. African refugee youth face traumatic situations in their home countries, during their settlement, integration, and migration journeys (Tomasi et al., 2022). Mental health problems have been shown to be triggered by a variety of factors that affect the well-being of people from African refugee backgrounds (Ziersch et al., 2023). For example, trauma, torture, destitution, long periods of time in limbo or in refugee camps, social isolation, English language barriers, and the multiple stresses of resettlement in a new country can all lead to the development of lasting mental and physical health problems, restraining the capability of African refugees to integrate into the Australian labour-market (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other health problems have been also discovered to substantially decrease the likelihood of employment and occupational status among humanitarian

migrants (de Vroome and van Tubergen, 2010). Reid (2012) argues that underutilising African refugees' skills is also linked to poor mental health, measured by ongoing feelings of sadness, depression, and loneliness. While psychological and mental health issues are not a universal phenomenon among African refugees, studies have revealed that many people from African humanitarian backgrounds face one or both challenges (Nelson et al., 2016; Ziersch et al., 2023). Chang (2022) asserts that some refugees can overcome the challenges of migratory journeys and quickly adapt to new environments, but this is not generalisable to every refugee. However, the fact remains that mental health and psychological problems impact the employment prospects and careers of young African refugees in Australia and elsewhere.

Theme 6: Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination in the Australian labour-market has been identified as one of the significant obstacle African refugee youths face when looking for employment opportunities in Australia (Baker et al., 2021). Racism is understood as an 'exclusionary practice and ideology that essentialises and valorises phenotypical and cultural differences to defend and advance the privileges of its users' (Fox, 2013). Racial discrimination in securing employment can manifest in various ways, such as favouritism towards other job candidates, particularly those who are not from diverse ethnic backgrounds. African refugee youth may experience multiple types of discrimination based on their English language skills, accent, or ethnicity during the job hunt and even after they have been hired (Booth et al., 2012; Riordan & Claudio, 2022). Due to racial discrimination, most African refugee youth find it hard to integrate into the Australian labour-market and often work in low-skilled jobs that do not match their qualifications (Reid et al., 2014). The literature shows that Australian employers may also exhibit negative stereotypes towards African refugee youth, victimising them and regarding them as less competent despite their educational qualifications (Nunn et al., 2014). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) found that most African refugee youth do not report cases of racism and discrimination for fear of losing their jobs. There is a greater chance that African refugee youth experience harassment in the workplace and they do not report it due to economic insecurity, impacting their long-term professional development (Stokes and Cuervo, 2008).

Australian employers often use the excuse that African refugees lack the cultural knowledge required for a position or may not fit in with other staff, and this may lead to the denial of employment inclusion. Australian employers interviewed for the Tilbury and Colic-Peisker's study often called this a 'soft skill' related to 'Australian-ness' (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007). Losoncz (2017) asserts that the simplistic application of government policies and recruitment processes may not account for the marginalisation of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals, particularly African refugees who face complicated challenges in navigating the Australian labour-market. A targeted approach, especially for the poor populations, may help improve economic participation for African refugee youth, and addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers the unique needs of ethnically diverse individuals and promotes equal opportunity in the Australian labour market.

The literature suggests that African refugee youth have no chance of entering the labour-market on equal footing with Australian-born youngsters (Losoncz, 2017). By ignoring to take responsibility for the marginalisation of African refugee groups, these processes obstruct African refugees' meaningful economic inclusion and exacerbate their social and economic disadvantage in Australia. As a result, labour-market discrimination against African refugees cannot be understood in isolation from government policy, specifically the deficiencies in recruitment processes. The Australian government's emphasis on multiculturalism and equal opportunity in recruitment processes may not account for the relative disadvantage and discrimination of African refugee groups, who often face intricate challenges in the Australian labour-market due to factors such as English language barriers, lack of cultural knowledge, and racism (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007). In addition to being an obstacle to accessing services such as employment and healthcare, discrimination and racism also impact on the psychological well-being of African refugees, with unaccompanied young African refugees being particularly vulnerable to the effects of discrimination due to a lack of family support and counselling (Borsch et al., 2019).

Conclusion

African refugee youth face complex obstacles in accessing employment opportunities in Australia. This review shows that lack of Australian work experience, racial discrimination, low English language proficiency, limited social networks, and psychological and mental health problems all contribute to the difficulties that African refugees encounter when trying to integrate into the Australian labour market. These challenges intersect and form a constellation of impediments that complicate the economic integration and overall well-being of African refugee youth. To alleviate these barriers and encourage the labor-market participation of African refugee youth, the focus must shift away from blaming African refugee job seekers towards what businesses could do differently to accommodate the skill sets of African refugee youth. Ramping cultural awareness training programs could be a useful starting point in helping Australian employers to understand and appreciate the diverse skills brought by African refugees, reducing biases related to cultural differences and accents.

Also, Australian employers should be constantly encouraged to adopt authentic inclusive recruitment practices and promote diversity and equal opportunities to all. Likewise, recognising the impact of psychological and mental health problems on employment outcomes through interventions that address past traumas can support African refugees in their journey towards economic integration and meaningful employment in Australia. By putting these suggestions into practice, Australia can build a more diverse labour market that values the potential talents and contributions of young African refugees. In addition to helping individual African refugees, providing the necessary policy and support systems may promote harmony, mutual benefits, social cohesion, economic growth, and (multi) cultural diversity.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability

This paper is a systematic review based on scholarly literature available on scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of science.

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