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## Skilled Migrants

How can they assist you to meet your  
agribusiness workforce needs?

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## Introduction

Employers, agribusiness owners and managers were invited to attend a workshop on 27 April 2023 hosted by Queensland Farmers Federation. This was an opportunity for key stakeholders to come together to:

- Learn about the available skilled migrant workforce in Australia, and pathways available to employment.
- Help build our understanding of the challenges that exist when employing skilled migrants that are already in Australia; and
- Work together towards identifying strategies to break down barriers to migrant employment and help fill labour gaps.

Agriculture businesses continue to experience a workforce shortage across the sector and supply chain. There is widespread discussion about the difficulties employees are currently experiencing when looking for people with the right skills to fill labour shortages in their businesses.

At the same time, there is a pool of highly skilled migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds already in Australia that are not currently working in their field of expertise as they are finding it difficult to find suitable employment.

The Queensland State Government has invested in programs and initiatives to improve the inclusion of skilled migrants in the workforce; however, we recognise that there are still many challenges and barriers for employers and prospective migrant employees.

This paper will outline the outcomes of stakeholder feedback and explore the benefits of employing skilled migrants already living in Australia.

It will highlight the barriers and provide insights into opportunities and recommendations for industry to embrace diversity and utilise the many talented individuals with a migrant background seeking employment to support the workforce they need.

It will look at how we can engage and provide awareness to all stakeholder about the significant contribution skilled migrants can bring to economic growth and jobs growth.

# What benefits and opportunities can skilled migrants bring to a business's workforce?

**Skilled migrants can bring several benefits and opportunities to a business's workforce in Australia.**

1. **Diverse Skill Sets:** Skilled migrants often possess unique skill sets, knowledge, and expertise that can supplement and enhance the existing talent pool within a business. They may bring technical proficiency, specialized knowledge, and experience from different industries and markets, which can contribute to innovation and problem-solving.
2. **Global Perspective:** Skilled migrants bring a global perspective to the workplace, having worked in diverse cultural and professional environments. This international experience can offer fresh insights, different approaches to challenges, and an understanding of global markets. It can facilitate the development of international business strategies, expansion into new markets, and the ability to cater to a diverse customer base.
3. **Language and Cultural Competence:** Migrants who are proficient in languages other than English can help businesses engage with international clients, partners, and customers. Their cultural understanding and ability to navigate different customs and practices can facilitate effective communication, relationship building, and negotiation in a multicultural business environment.
4. **Innovation and Creativity:** Skilled migrants often bring a different perspective and unique problem-solving abilities. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences can foster innovation within a business. They may introduce new ideas, challenge existing practices, and contribute to a more dynamic and creative work environment. This can lead to the development of new products, services, and processes, driving business growth and competitiveness.
5. **Bridging Skill Gaps:** Skilled migrants can help bridge skill gaps in industries or sectors experiencing shortages of qualified professionals. By filling positions that are in demand but lack local talent, businesses can maintain continuity, improve productivity, and avoid delays or bottlenecks in their operations. Skilled migrants can provide immediate contributions and help meet specific business needs.
6. **Increased Cultural Competency:** Employing skilled migrants can enhance cultural competency within a business. Exposure to different cultures, languages, and perspectives fosters a more inclusive workplace, promoting diversity and understanding. This can lead to increased employee morale, cooperation, and a stronger sense of community within the organization.
7. **Access to Global Networks:** Skilled migrants often have professional networks and connections in their home countries and internationally. These networks can provide valuable opportunities for business expansion, partnerships, collaborations, and access to new markets. Leveraging their connections can lead to business growth and open doors to global opportunities.

Overall, skilled migrants bring a wealth of benefits to the Australian business workforce, including diverse skills, global perspectives, innovation, and cultural competency. By embracing and utilising the talents of skilled migrants, businesses can gain a competitive edge and position themselves for success in an increasingly globalised world.

# What barriers are there to employers utilising skilled migrants in their workforce?

**There can be several barriers that employers may face when considering the utilization of skilled migrants in their workforce. Here are some common challenges:**

1. **Immigration laws and regulations:** One of the primary barriers is navigating complex immigration laws and regulations. Employers must comply with specific visa requirements, sponsorship obligations, and documentation processes, which can be time-consuming and resource intensive.
2. **Language and cultural differences:** Language and cultural barriers can pose challenges in communication, teamwork, and integration within the organization. Employers may need to invest in language training or provide additional support to help skilled migrants adapt to the new work environment.
3. **Recognition of qualifications and experience:** Some employers may have difficulty assessing and recognizing the qualifications and experience of skilled migrants from different countries. Variations in educational systems and professional standards across borders can make it challenging to determine the equivalence of qualifications.
4. **Bias and discrimination:** Conscious or unconscious bias and discrimination against skilled migrants can hinder their recruitment and integration into the workforce. Prejudices based on nationality, race, or ethnicity can result in missed opportunities for qualified candidates.
5. **Lack of local experience:** Employers often prioritise candidates with local work experience, assuming it will facilitate a smoother transition. Skilled migrants may face difficulties in finding employment without local experience, creating a catch-22 situation.
6. **Cost considerations:** Hiring skilled migrants may involve additional costs, such as visa processing fees, relocation expenses, and potential language or cultural training. Employers may be hesitant to invest in these extra costs, particularly if they have alternative local candidates available.
7. **Work authorisation restrictions:** Skilled migrants may have limitations on their work authorisations, such as visa restrictions that tie them to specific employers or industries. This can restrict mobility and flexibility, making it difficult for employers to utilize their skills fully.
8. **Public perception and political environment:** Public sentiment and political discourse around immigration can influence an employer's decision to hire skilled migrants. Debates around job competition, economic impact, and national security concerns can create a less favourable environment for hiring foreign talent.

It's important to note that these barriers vary across industries, and some employers may actively work to overcome these challenges by implementing diversity and inclusion.

## Findings from workshop

There are a lot of areas where information regarding the topic of skilled migrants overlaps.

Networking for migrants is extremely valuable and an area of importance.

It has been identified that there are many barriers around visas and the visa system.

Employers don't know where to go for information on employing migrants and most especially information on visas. It is a complicated area. Most employers are not aware of VEVO? Is there a need for a fact sheet readily available on visas?

Identified gap of students who attend the Adult Migrant English Program and their link with industries.

<https://tafeqld.edu.au/courses/course-types/tells/amep>

There is a lack of connection points between employers and jobseekers making it difficult for employers to reach diverse talent pools and for jobseekers to develop connections with industry and employers.

While there are some programs that help transition migrants around workplace cultural expectations, more work needs to happen in this area.

## Recommendations

1. Create opportunities to link employers and migrants.
2. Trial a speed dating type event – meeting migrants in local areas and regions.
3. Industry Tours for migrants to experience workplaces.
4. Create an employer guide for agribusinesses like the 'Attracting and retaining engineers from migrant backgrounds – Guide for employers.
5. There needs to be one location that hosts information that all industries, employers, and migrants can source. Investigate Migration Queensland and what information already sits within the website. Map any gaps that may be able to sit within Migration Queensland.
6. Undertake an environmental scan of what programs and initiatives already exist with a view to having a collaborative approach to apply for a grant for an eLearning system for multicultural workforce integration, including eLearning modules and digital resources to help employers build multicultural workforce capability. This would be a State-wide, all industries-based tool to be available through a website like Business Queensland.

## Appendix 1

### Stakeholder feedback from workshop

What strategies are needed to break down barriers to employing skilled migrants from a PROCESS point of view?
Complicated/ where do I start?
Understanding of Visa issues
Who, what skills & where – we need a process to simplify access
Barriers in types of ESPs as the rule are too strict in where they can place people region and industry, cropping versus horticulture versus animals.
Organisations to support linkages between migrants and employers i.e. tours/Diverse workforce projects like The Mulberry Project – government support of projects.
Understanding of Visa issues

What strategies are needed to break down barriers to employing skilled migrants from a COST point of view?
If the employee is retained, then the cost is worthwhile. Assistance with retaining migrants.
If an employer shows gratitude – a worker will be motivated.
If an employer shows good attitude – a worker will be dedicated.
Business can't solve some issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accommodation</li><li>• Transport &amp; costs associated.</li><li>• English</li></ul>
Business may not be big enough to support those costs – government support – changes to accommodation.

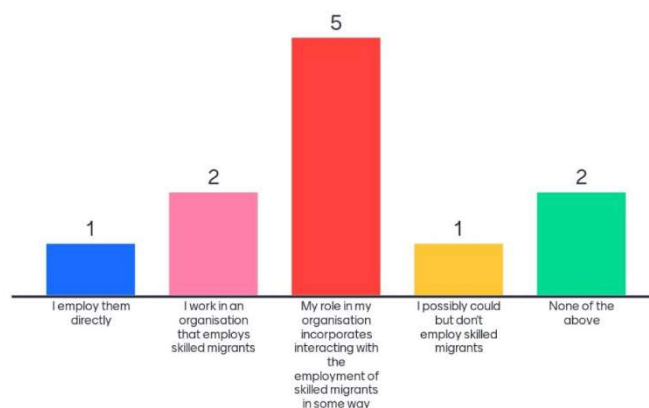
What strategies are needed to break down barriers to employing skilled migrants from an ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE point of view?
Migrants no longer limited on number of hours to learn English; this will allow them to upskill on English.
Support of community/ social groups in the regions. (e.g., only migrant in a region town) Employers creating that community.
Employers creating the environment for fostering community connections.
People on staff that have English as a second language.

What strategies are needed to break down barriers to employing skilled migrants from an UNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS point of view?
Programs that help transition migrants around workplace cultural expectations.

## Appendix 2

### Polling results from workshop

## What has been your experience in employing permanent or part time skilled migrants.



List any barriers you have encountered or heard of in the employing of skilled migrants.

10 Answers

Mentimeter

Complicated and cost

Complicated processes; difficulty in connecting with those already in country.

Cultural barriers in combination with English language barriers.

Skills recognition

Don't know where to start or who to go to for assistance.

Cultural barriers in combination with English language barriers

English language, understanding workplaces in Australia, workplace health and safety requirement of working in Aus

English language "Australian" English/Slang Skills recognition

Lack of English language ability. Lack of willingness to engage with people of different cultures

Finding jobs they enjoy instead of doing low level jobs that have no future of improving there skill levels