

Connecting with students from new and emerging communities in social work education

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This research was made possible by a University of South Australia Teaching and Learning Grant.

New and emerging communities?



- Defined as :
 - Being small in number and newly arrived
 - Significant increase in numbers over last five years
 - Often limited established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources (compared with more established communities)
 - Often from a refugee background and experiencing displacement due to civil unrest
 - Limited access to education and skills due to displacement
 - Limited English language skills
 - Unfamiliar with mainstream government services available in Australia
 - Unfunded community organisations (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia, www.fecca.org.au)

Context



Worldwide

- In 2011, 42.5 million people ended up: as refugees (15.2 million); internally displaced (26.4 million) and in the process of seeking asylum (895, 000)
- Underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Syria have the largest refugee populations at 1.9 million, 1.1 million and 1 million respectively. (UN High Commissioner for Refugees)

Australia

- In 2009-2010, 13,770 refugee and humanitarian visas were issued divided between 9,236 offshore refugee and humanitarian visas (the lowest number in eight years) and 4,534 onshore visas (the second highest on record).
- The main source regions for offshore refugee and humanitarian visas were Asia (38.6%), Middle East and South-West Asia (31.8%) and Africa (29.2%).

Department for Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)



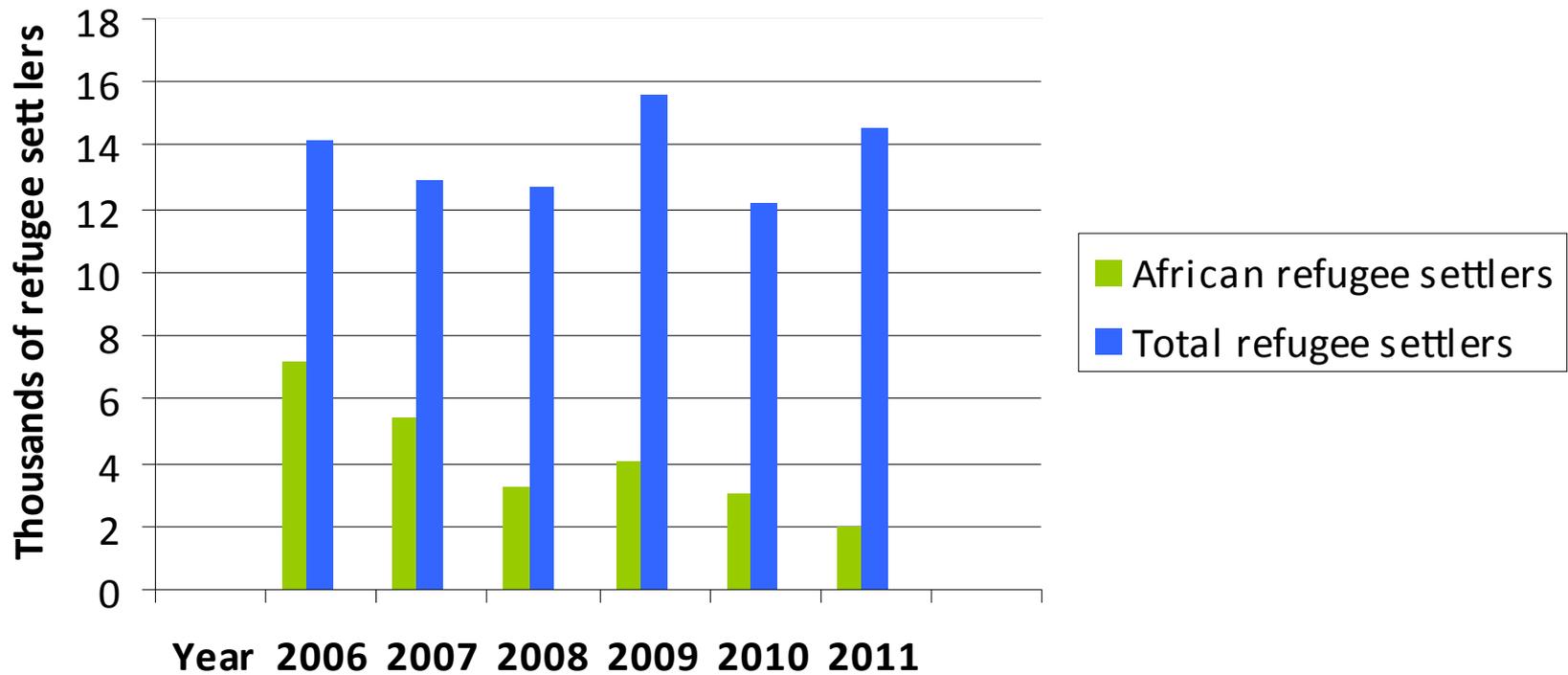
2010–11 offshore visa grants by top ten countries of birth

Countries	Number of visas granted
Iraq	2151
Burma	1443
Afghanistan	1027
Bhutan	1001
Congo (DRC)	565
Ethiopia	381
Sri Lanka	289
Iran	271
Sudan	243
Somalia	190

Comparison of refugee settlers



Refugee settlers in Australia



Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Humanitarian migration stream

Case Study: Perspectives of African students in social work education



Aims of the project

To gain a deeper understanding of African students' experiences of higher education and to inform teaching and learning approaches in social work education.

The project was designed around three unknowns:

1. Why African students from refugee backgrounds in a School which delivered Social Work degrees came to university
2. What their experience was once they were studying
3. What they thought could be done to better support their learning.

African students enrolled in Australian Universities



Reported in the literature

African refugee students enrolled at Australian universities:

- 47 Curtin University (Earnest, Read, DeMori, 2007)
- 52 Murdoch (Silburn et al, 2010)
- 50 Queensland University of Technology (Lawson, 2011)
- 56 Flinders University (Harris & Marlowe, 2011).

UniSA 2011 statistics

African students with:

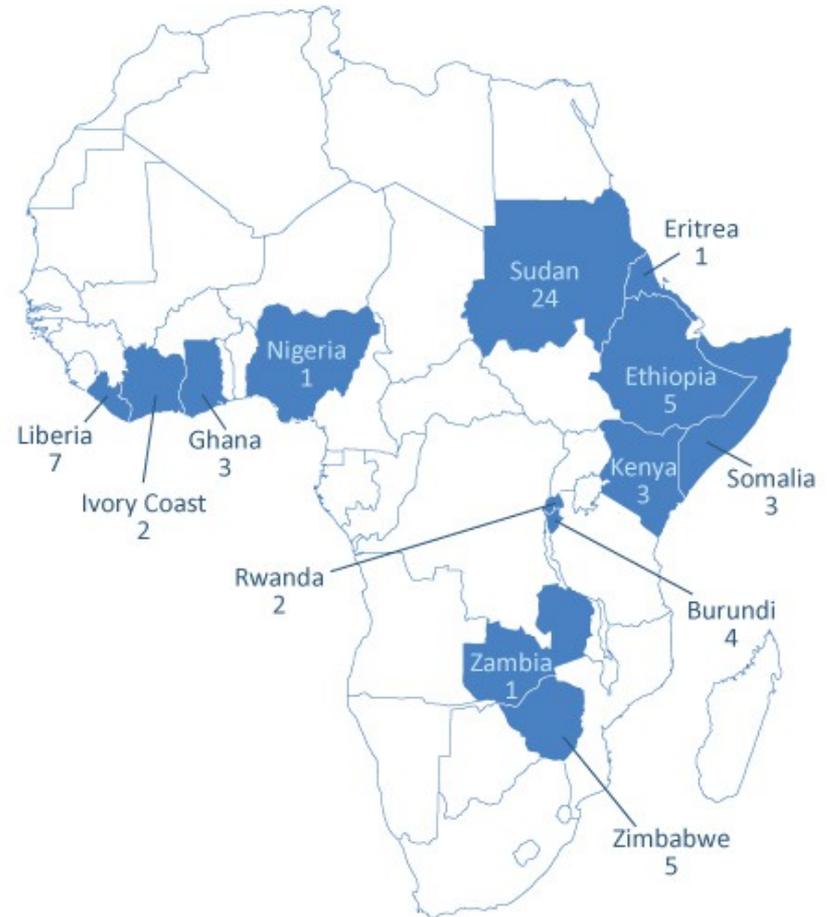
- Permanent Humanitarian Visas - 48 students
- Permanent residency/ Australian citizens – 335 students.

(UniSA Planning and Performance reporting system 2012)

Statistics from School of Psychology, Social Work and Social



- 61 students from African countries currently enrolled in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs
- 36 of these students are enrolled in undergraduate Social Work programs
- Students come from 13 African countries
- Majority of students are from the Sudan.



Approach



- Ethics approval gained
- Information sessions with flyers and posters
- Individual face-to-face interviews
- Semi-structured interview explored areas related to:
 - The educational aspirations of participants
 - Students' learning experiences at the University
 - Recommendations for responding to the learning needs of African students.
- Students completed a questionnaire to provide information about their:
 - Educational background
 - Languages spoken
 - Basis for applying to university
 - The degree they were enrolled in.

Responses to paper questionnaire



The responses to the paper questionnaire revealed a diversity of migration experiences:

- Participants came to Australia on migrant as well as humanitarian visas after living for many years in refugee camps
- Their main form of entry into the University was via TAFE once they had completed either a Certificate 4 in Community Services, a Diploma in Counselling or a Diploma in Community Welfare
- Most had participated in the 510 hours of free English language instruction which is offered to them during the first 2 years of their stay (Refugee Council of Australia, 2012)
- A few had completed the equivalent of Year 12 in another language or country
- They were enrolled in a double degree with the Bachelor of Social Work, Social Work as a single degree or a Bachelor of Social Science
- All students were bilingual and some students spoke up to five different languages
- Students were, in the main, Australian citizens.

Interview findings: *Expectations*



- To better themselves
 - *'I wanted to change my education, be more positive. I wanted to educate myself so I could have a better future and opportunities'* (Interview 1)
- To help their communities
 - *'It is important for the African diaspora to help with issues like literacy and health back home but I am an Australian citizen so if I went to Africa to teach, it would be through and Australian organisation or NGO'* (Interview 1)
- To improve their educational and employment opportunities
 - *'[I wanted to] upgrade my skills; get the knowledge, to get a good career'* (Interview 3)

Interview findings: *Experiences*



- **Prior learning**

- *‘The system of learning here is different. There are no assignments in Africa only exams.’ (Interview 1)*
- *‘I thought coming from TAFE I would be able to do it OK...’(Interview 5);*
- *‘At TAFE you are told exactly what to do but here you have to understand it in your own way’ (Interview 6)*

- **Computer literacy**

- *‘Most African students come from refugee backgrounds, they have been living in camps where there is no computer technology’ (Interview 5)*

- **Institutional learning support**

- *‘I don’t really see the role of the learning adviser compared to what I get from lecturers and tutors’ (Interview 3)*
- *‘When you go there are only certain times you can see someone and they don’t match people’ (Interview 3)*
- *‘You have to book in advance...I need to have time to do the assignment...but then there isn’t enough time to get help from them...’ (Interview 5)*

Interview findings: *Experiences*



- **Learning support from peers**
 - *'We are non-English speaking background...you can have an idea but the way you interpret it is different...unless you have information from different people...we try to have a lot of friends and have group work and work together'* (Interview 1)
 - *'If we really don't understand a question we discuss it...with Australian and African students'* (Interview 5)
- **Social experiences at university**
 - *'...the uni is supposed to be inclusive but it wasn't what I expected – western society is not like the African way, African people are very social. I joined Unilife but they didn't organise anything to bring people together. It's not very multicultural really. They should invite people from different ethnic groups to get involved in organising events, not just put things in place and invite them'* (Interview 3)
- **Exclusion**
 - *'Sometimes in group work my contributions aren't listened to, this is hard, it makes the motivation go down, it makes it hard to get back up and contribute'* (Interview 6)
- **Prejudice**
 - *'There is some prejudice if you are someone who looks different'* (Interview 5)

Interview findings: *Suggestions*



- **Support**

- *‘The School could provide extra staff to help African students when they get their assignment and go through things...’ (Interview 4)*
- *‘When marking assignments from African students, tutors should consider the strength of the argument and not just focus on grammar’ (Interview 5)*

- **Computer literacy**

- *‘Computer workshops are useful but there should be more of them and perhaps a separate one for each course’ (Interview 6)*

- **GPA**

- *‘Help needs to start from the outset of your studies so you can get yourself prepared and know exactly what you need to do. Otherwise your GPA will be down and you can’t do things like Honours’ (Interview 6)*

- **LTU**

- *‘It would be useful if the different roles of the Learning Advisers and the tutors/lecturers at the School were made clearer’ (Interview 4)*

Possible strategies for support



- TAFE/university articulation
- Transition to University from TAFE
- English language support
- Academic literacies development
- Computer literacy skills
- Preparation for group work
- Getting involved in student life on campus.

Where to from here?



- Analyse and integrate additional student interviews conducted in 2012
- Identify responses and resources developed by other universities, to assist the learning development of African students
- Conduct consultation workshops with academic staff in the School, to ask for feedback about possible resources and changes
- Final development of resources, strategies or processes that can be implemented by the School and the LTU.

Key support factors for new and emerging communities (www.fccs.org.au)



- Recognising the needs of new and emerging communities
- Providing effective settlement services
- Eradicating racism, discrimination and bullying
- Providing appropriate healthcare
- Improving education and training outcomes
- Enhancing workforce capabilities (e.g. cross cultural training for staff and inclusive recruitment strategies)

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