

# THE LAST MILE

Experiences of Settlement and  
Attitudes to Return among People  
from South Sudan in Australia



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## *Acknowledgements*

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## SUMMARY

Around the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia began to welcome South Sudanese refugees and their families in increasing numbers. Our research was motivated by the rapid introduction of South Sudanese migrants into Australia and the unique circumstances in their country of origin to investigate their experiences settling in Australia and their engagement with South Sudan in more detail.

We conducted 78 face-to-face interviews with people from South Sudan living in Australia, and a complementary online poll of 300 people who identified themselves as members of the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia. The interviews canvassed a broad cross-section of people, seeking diversity and balance among the participants in terms of gender, age, location, ethnicity and employment status.

Participants raised complex and at times contradictory points of view throughout our interviews. A summary of findings and related recommendations follow below – section headings are hyperlinked so that readers can move directly to the relevant detail of findings.

### Settlement in Australia

Participants expressed a fundamental gratitude for [financial assistance](#) they received from the government, primarily through Centrelink. This gratitude was sometimes mixed with frustration at the difficulties of maintaining a reasonable standard of living on this assistance:

*The assistance [when I arrived in Australia] didn't meet my needs. I believe my experience in the refugee camp was the ideal situation of not getting used to so many expenses or needs, and that helped with my budgeting.*

The objective adequacy of financial assistance to start and develop a life in Australia depended in part on familial and community support networks and the financial management skills of the recipient. This cohort of settlers may have faced greater difficulties in building these support networks.

An expected but significant emotional experience that most participants report is a positive sense of physical security in Australia. On this basic and important purpose of the humanitarian program, it is a success. However, many participants reported feelings of isolation, which is worrying given it is sustained for several years.

For the sample overall, adapting to Australia often felt bewildering in cultural and practical terms. One particular example raised by various parents in our sample was the



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impact of growing up in a new culture or between cultures on their children. This appears to have been a cause or consequence of family breakdown for some, including examples of children being removed by government agencies.

An early disappointment for a majority of participants arose from their expectation that they would receive public housing. [Practical barriers to finding accommodation](#) included the lack of a rental history, larger than average families, and unfamiliarity with cities, public transport systems and Australian rental laws and norms. For over half of the participants, the private rental market was also a focal point for perceptions of discrimination based on their African origin.

Most participants feel strongly about their South Sudanese [identity](#). On the other hand, participants appeared to highlight the interaction between achieving what they perceived to be mainstream success in Australia and the strength of their Australian identity. In short, many people understood their South Sudanese identity as essential while their Australian identity appeared to be contingent. Participants' Australian identity appeared to be more dependent on the perceptions of others, whereas their South Sudanese identity was more clearly self-defined:

*I feel good but being a citizen on a document doesn't give the full meaning of citizenship because at the level of recognition my physical appearance would make (discrimination) happen, which some time is not good to be recognised based on your physical appearance.*

Everyone in our sample was an Australian citizen, in the process of applying for [citizenship](#) or intended to do so. Overall, they were visibly and audibly happy with having Australian citizenship or the opportunity to acquire it, tempered by a feeling that they are socially disconnected from citizenship ideals.

Moreover, every person in our sample reported a perception of [discrimination](#). Three-quarters raised an example before we even asked about it. Given the diversity of our sample in terms of gender, age, employment status, education and location, we are confident that this experience is representative of perceptions among people of South Sudanese origin around Australia.

Beyond the direct impacts of discrimination, participants reported that it played a key role in shaping the direction and strength of their social groups and interactions. In this context, it is relatively easier to cope in the major cities since participants could interact with other people of South Sudanese origin and still have a reasonably sized social group.

Fifty-seven participants were in [employment](#) and 17 were not (the other four did not wish to categorise themselves, apparently because they had very occasional work). Among the 57, the big majority was engaged in low-skilled, irregular work in which



they felt little long-term confidence. In contrast, the sample is well-educated overall but continues to invest in education, with 54 of the 78 studying in some capacity. A lack of employment or “good” employment was given by several respondents as a reason to continue studying. Participants’ academic choices seemed to correlate more strongly with issues of relevance in South Sudan than with the job market needs in Australia.

Many respondents felt frustrated they had not managed to find employment relevant to their field of expertise or at a skill level they felt their education justified. A lack of work experience, social connections and employers’ perceptions of difference, along with discrimination, seem to explain much of the under-employment. Given the importance of social connections in finding job opportunities, it is perhaps unsurprising that the general challenges of building a social support network in Australia also seem to affect the specific problem of finding a job:

*I volunteer with African Community Centre in Queensland for about 26 months because I have not been able to get a job, though I have relevant skills with a degree in Arts and Education.*

In the face of disappointment and under-employment, studying and volunteering are rational channels for individuals’ energy and hope, but on the group or national level these may be sub-optimal directions in which to invest the time, motivation and skill of former refugees.

Isolation, perceptions of discrimination and employment frustrations were more acute in rural areas and Tasmania. Discussions with our participants suggest that newcomers and Australian society more generally are unlikely to be best-served by placing them in contexts that have a greater risk of isolation, especially if employment is scarce. For well-prepared newcomers and well-prepared regional communities, it may be possible to mitigate some of the risks. However, the importance of social support cannot be underestimated and participants in our research seemed to enjoy a lot more of it in major cities and well-connected regional centres.

All participants reported that their most frequent [social interactions](#) were with people in Australia whose origin was South Sudan. Participants feel very positively towards these connections and they are the most consistently and immediately supportive networks in their lives. Formal interactions of this variety increased in intensity and frequency in response to events in South Sudan.

Most participants were conscious that many settings in which they formed connections beyond the South Sudanese diaspora were with other refugees and their families, or other migrant groups. However, many participants also reported making a significant effort to meet and positively interact with non-migrant Australians. Participants tend to enjoy interactions with non-migrant Australians and assign some value to them as indicators of progress in settlement and social networking. We note, however, that



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these connections are also the most frequently troublesome for participants and are the most common vector for discrimination.

The overwhelming majority of participants described with enthusiasm the various ways in which they keep in touch with [people in South Sudan](#). For most people, email, telephone calls, Facebook, Twitter and Skype were commonly listed as communication channels. The most highly valued connections are with family and extended family connections. These are important even for participants who appear to be the most settled and integrated in Australia.

Sending remittances to South Sudan is also very common. It is interesting to hear the emphasis our participants place on sending remittances despite feeling income pressure, possibly reflecting a different culture of familial responsibility and financial management when compared with other Australian communities.

Connections between [people in the diaspora](#) are primarily among clans and families that are split across countries. There is also issues-based social networking that is primarily conducted electronically. Topics that generate these networks include debating politics, development and security in South Sudan, with the specific question of the role of the diaspora in improving the situation.

A number of participants used connections to [law enforcement agencies](#) as examples of interactions within Australia, offering mixed perceptions of these agencies. Some participants emphasised their contentment with the security and order in Australia, while others perceived law enforcement agencies to have a bias against people of African origin, to the point of extreme distrust. Some younger participants in Sydney and Melbourne reported a reduced sense of belonging to Australia as a result of experiencing or hearing about interactions with the police.

## Returning to South Sudan

The hopeful view that participants have towards newly independent South Sudan contrasts with other refugee communities in Australia with which STATT is familiar. Sixty-seven of the 78 respondents expressed an interest in [returning to South Sudan](#), most for the long term or permanently. The most commonly expressed motivation to live again in South Sudan arises from a feeling that there is a need, obligation or opportunity to assist the new country:

*Yes I will go to [South Sudan] because that is where I do feel at home and I think that is where I would help most.*

On the other hand, a minority of participants referred to a lack of personal progress and experience of discrimination as motivations to return to South Sudan.





Conflict is often associated with a 'brain drain', but our participants show the potential for South Sudan to enjoy a 'brain reclaim' from the diaspora. The question of how South Sudan and Australia can both capitalise on this motivation and support those who wish to contribute to South Sudanese nation building remains largely unexplored in research and policy circles.

Almost half of our participants have already visited South Sudan. In general, participants expressed a desire for improved public services and infrastructure in their country of origin, but acknowledged the long timeframe required to produce change and the difficulties faced by the fledgling government to develop the country. Their positive experience of return is indicated by the fact that 37 of the 38 participants who had visited South Sudan plan to return again, temporarily or permanently.

Real and perceived barriers will reduce the number of people who do ultimately return to South Sudan for the long term. In terms of the situation in Australia, barriers relate to familial or financial commitments here or a concern for securing a foothold in Australian society and gaining skills in order to more readily contribute in South Sudan. In terms of the situation in South Sudan, security remains a concern, as does a perceived lack of opportunity. Some respondents felt uncertain regarding the new government system in South Sudan and pessimistic towards their ability to find opportunities for employment.

Based on our participants' perceived barriers to return, we foresee that a significant minority of them will spend a lot of time in South Sudan in the coming years. They will retain Australian citizenship and will live between the two countries. In the medium term, the primary factor determining the amount of time they reside in Australia will be the security and development trajectory of South Sudan.

## **Recommendations**

Many of our findings reflect experiences previously or currently faced by other migrant populations. At the same time, the study also reveals important distinctions between Australians of South Sudanese origin and other groups brought here through the humanitarian program. The differences between migrant groups are deserving of closer consideration in policy and practical approaches to ensure that each group is treated on its own terms and to guarantee that the reciprocal promises of citizenship deliver for all Australians.

The recommendations that flow from our research are summarised below and fleshed out at [the end of this report](#). They do not seek to be prescriptive, but rather aim to serve as the basis for government and other agencies to reconsider current approaches and engage with the South Sudanese community to improve outcomes for integration in Australia and development in South Sudan. On that basis, we recommend the following:



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- Structure more rigorously the pre-departure information that incoming humanitarian migrants receive, develop feedback testing and strengthen connections between offshore sessions and onshore follow-up.
- Develop easily accessed tools to educate and test knowledge absorption about life in Australia and regular challenges for refugees, making these available to family reunion visa-holders from all countries. These could be created and administered efficiently online.
- Focus more on the softer, social aspects of achievement at education and employment. Target advice for newcomers on choosing the best education options and consider subsidising work experience or internships by refugees. If additional resources to do this are unavailable, consider re-allocating some spending currently assigned to non-specific skills development.
- The settlement of groups already at risk of social isolation should focus exclusively on Australia cities and neighbouring medium-sized regional centres.
- Bolster mainstream publicity of the positive contributions made by South Sudanese communities to Australian society, with one specific theme being to downplay their status as refugees (most of them are now citizens). Such publicity could be combined with the aid-related recommendations below.
- There is an urgent need to improve communication channels between police forces and Australian communities from South Sudan. Aside from community liaison channels, the next step is to increase recruitment of sworn officers. Keep in mind the limited experience of democratic and institutionalised police forces among many Australians from South Sudan.
- For our aid program, strengthen and advertise to diaspora communities the mechanisms they have to contribute to development in South Sudan.
- Create a competitive mechanism to which diaspora organisations in Australia can apply to implement projects in South Sudan that align with our aid program priorities.
- Improve opportunities for South Sudanese diaspora organisations to implement development projects through more traditional channels, taking advantage of: their efficient access to remote areas; their ability to conduct useful and hard-to-implement research in South Sudan; the intrinsic motivation of their staff; and the opportunities they may have to embed skills with government ministries or local civil society organisations.
- Initiate a project to track remittances from Australia to South Sudan and flows from South Sudan to Australia. This will identify Australia's economic impact on

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South Sudan, highlight the implications of our domestic social programs on other countries' development and ensure that flows from South Sudan to Australia are legitimate, especially in the face of requests from the Government of South Sudan to protect against corruption.

- Develop a framework to measure the 'displacement dividend', i.e. the benefits of Australia's humanitarian migration program that flow from the subsequent diaspora's investment and repatriation with skills.
- Investigate and fill gaps in communication around family reunion processes – there appear to be legitimate opportunities for family reunion that some Australians from South Sudan are interpreting as administrative barriers and experiencing uncertainty about engaging them.
- Communicate more forcefully the distinctions between offshore streams and systems of humanitarian resettlement from arrangements designed to reduce the number of asylum-seekers arriving by boat.
- The number, frequency and duration of visits to South Sudan (a country with on-going conflict) yields a combination of risks that is greater than other diaspora flows that Australia manages. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade may wish to consider establishing a specific liaison and registration mechanism with the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia so that they can assist in tracking the number of Australian citizens in South Sudan and their likely location. A first step would be to investigate usage and barriers to engagement with the existing mechanism in [smarttraveller.gov.au](http://smarttraveller.gov.au).
- Deepen diplomatic engagement with Australian citizens who are contributing to the Government of South Sudan. Their behaviour will reflect on South Sudan's perceptions of Australia and they offer potentially important points of leverage in achieving Australia's interests in development, investment and trade.



## 1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

This report sets out to investigate the experiences and perceptions of South Sudanese migrants to Australia.

The majority of South Sudanese migrants came to Australia during the final years of the Second Sudanese Civil War through humanitarian or family reunion channels.<sup>1</sup> They now comprise a diverse and vibrant community that has established a place for itself in Australian society across the country. A decade since the first arrivals, there is now a window to examine the successes and challenges of the South Sudanese migration story. Simultaneously, relative peace and a sense of pride following independence in South Sudan provides an opportunity not commonly available to refugees – to re-engage or potentially return to their homeland. For this report, we therefore decided to canvass community views across two broad themes:

1. The South Sudanese migration experience to Australia and people's perceptions of life here; and
2. The engagement of South Sudanese migrants to Australia with South Sudan and their future intentions towards their homeland.

A collection of trends and events combined to provide inspiration for our focus. First, in terms of settlement experiences, we observed recent and on-going research on this topic in Australia, in particular the longitudinal survey of humanitarian migrants.<sup>2</sup> The longitudinal survey will be an excellent opportunity to develop novel insights and we welcome the recent emphasis on quantitative analysis of current arrivals' experiences and outcomes over the next five years. By contrast and complement, we hope our focus here on a specific country of origin and qualitative exploration of settlers' experiences may serve to deepen this corner of the literature and provide ideas for rebuttal or extension in cross-country work.

Second, for at least the last five years in Australia, African settlers – especially people originating from South Sudan and Somalia – have been the most common and sometimes heated topic of discussion regarding Australia's offshore humanitarian program (i.e. excluding boat arrivals). Our initial research suggested there was a diversity of experiences among people from South Sudan but it also hinted at systematic challenges. In this project we therefore aim to disentangle these threads and provide insights into the sources of tension between communities by offering the perspective of Australians from South Sudan on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Ninety-eight per cent of *Sudanese* migrants from 2001 to 2006 were humanitarian entrants. The data from the period does not distinguish between Sudanese and South Sudanese. Issues related to data categorisation are addressed in more detail below.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lrm/>



Third, in discussions with STATT, the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) has indicated an interest in connecting with people from South Sudan now settled in other countries. Interest has grown since independence in 2011 as the movement to self-governance has brought with it great demand for skills and investment, both of which sit nascent within the diaspora. Conversely, some governments hosting South Sudanese who are not legal residents have expressed an interest in returning them home. Both interests suggest a need to understand the perceptions of the diaspora towards their local circumstances and towards South Sudan.

Fourth, among diaspora groups, people from South Sudan seemed to exhibit a different attitude to their country of origin than, for example, people from Afghanistan or Iran. Our initial impressions suggested that optimism around independence had created an interest in returning home and curiosity towards business opportunities. We wanted to confirm or eliminate this impression and, if confirmed, understand the factors that may drive connections with South Sudan and the possibility of return. This seemed to us an important question for three quite different reasons:

- As input into GOSS efforts to connect with the diaspora.
- For countries such as Australia, there may be implications for refugee resettlement, for development assistance, for trade and for migration management if their new citizens are moving frequently or permanently to South Sudan.
- At the global level, it may provide insights into the dynamics of conflict-driven migration.<sup>3</sup>

With the above inspirations in mind, we decided to collect information through one core and two auxiliary methods.

## **Core Survey: Interviews around Australia**

The core method was a semi-structured qualitative survey of people from South Sudan living in Australia. As shown in the map below, STATT travelled around Australia to conduct face-to-face interviews. Potential participants were initially identified through STATT's personal and professional connections and through contact with South Sudanese community leaders.

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<sup>3</sup> On this perspective, see our related web post on conflict-driven migration dynamics: <http://www.statt.net/2012/11/the-last-mile-australia>.





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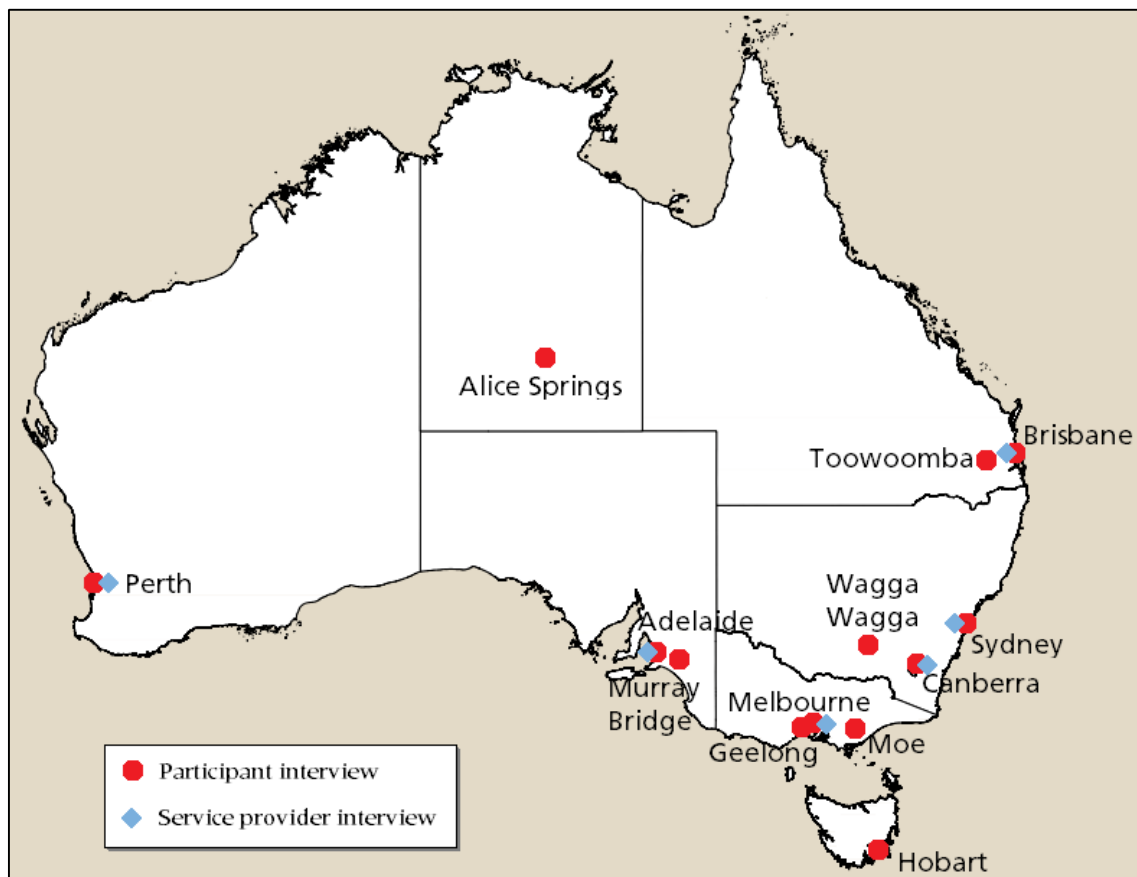


Figure 1: Interview locations for the core survey

We aimed to interview 80 individuals. Ultimately, two people withdrew without the possibility of replacement, giving us a group of 78. In selecting participants, we used a purposive sample that sought to achieve:

- A broad range of ethnic and tribal affiliations represented in Australia.
- Equal representation by sex. After taking into account other aims, selected individuals' willingness to be interviewed and logistical considerations, we interviewed 34 women and 44 men.
- Ages ranging between 15 and 70. The actual age range was 17 to 59.
- A diversity of education and employment status: we set quotas of at least 15 working professionals and 15 unemployed people.
- Representation from people living in urban and rural locations and from across all Australian states and territories.

Interviews generally took between 60 and 90 minutes. Concern for respondent fatigue meant that some interviews occurred over two sessions. The primary language used was English, but where requested or necessary, we also used Arabic, Nuer and Dinka.



The interviewer used pen and paper for the first, structured part of the interview. For the longer, open-ended questions, participants gave consent to audio recordings and later transcription. Participants chose the interview location. In most cases they preferred their homes, or community centres with which they were familiar.

The interview structure aimed for a progressive flow, moving through the following topics:

1. Demographic data, education and employment.
2. Experience of settlement assistance.
3. Experiences and practices of social engagement in Australia; with people in South Sudan; and with the South Sudanese diaspora in other countries.
4. Perceptions of settlement in Australia and life in their current community.
5. Perceptions towards South Sudan and intentions to return or otherwise connect with South Sudan.

Based on previous experience interviewing refugees and surveying South Sudanese, we explained to participants that the interview format was designed to encourage them to speak up and be heard. Based on many participants' efforts to steer conversations towards specific points of interest or contention for them, we assess this was generally helpful in supporting more open sharing of information. Overall, we found participants to be very enthusiastic and happy to share their experiences, opinions and perceptions. This included requests to keep them engaged in results of the research.

On the downside, we noted the following limitations in some cases:

- Finding the time to commit to interviews.
- A few interviewees' choices of location occasionally interfered with participants' habits of sharing information, such as noisy or crowded public places.
- Language barriers sometimes seemed to frustrate participants in slowing down discussion.

In addition to the individual interviews, we interviewed seven service providers in six capital cities.<sup>4</sup> Discussions were held with senior managers within these organisations; people who had been working with the South Sudanese community for several years and had immediate experience working through the challenges faced by the community.

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<sup>4</sup> Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.



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The service provider interviews followed a similar structure to the individual interviews with slight variations to incorporate a broader community focus. The interviews covered four main areas:

1. Agency background and history.
2. The organisation's relationship and engagement with the South Sudanese-Australian community and community organisations.
3. Assistance and support provided by the agency and their understanding of the community's needs.
4. Changing dynamics within the South Sudanese-Australian community and within the broader Australian community.

### **Diaspora Poll**

STATT is currently surveying members of the South Sudanese diaspora. Participants complete the survey online or through volunteers conducting interviews face to face. Its primary purpose is to understand skills and capacities in the diaspora, to explore participants' interest in returning to South Sudan and the factors affecting this interest. Almost all questions are fully structured.

People in Australia have been registering enthusiastically, yielding a sample of 331 in just a few months (see Figure 2 below). The sample is largely self-selecting and is therefore unlikely to be representative of the population of people from South Sudan in Australia. Nevertheless, we found it useful to include here some insights from them, particularly to compare their attitudes towards South Sudan with those expressed by participants in our core survey.

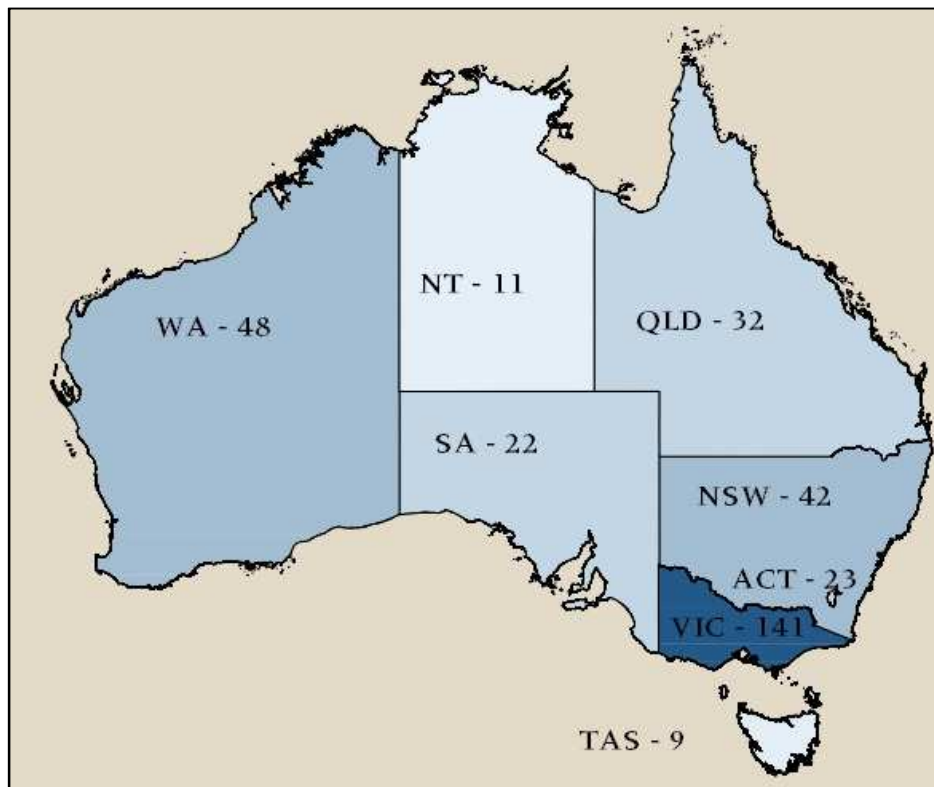


Figure 2: Australian locations of respondents to the diaspora poll as of September 2012

## Census Analysis

Results from the 2011 census have been useful in exploring the wider population of people from South Sudan in Australia. However, robust comparison of our sample with the census is confounded by the difficulty of circumscribing the relevant population based on census variables. A particular problem is the creation of the new country of South Sudan in 2011: from discussions with the community in Australia, it seems that a sizeable proportion of census respondents chose Sudan as their country of origin, which is an accurate answer given the prior non-existence of South Sudan but makes it difficult to determine who should be included in the population for comparison to our participants.<sup>5</sup>

We examined religion, country of origin, ethnic affiliation and ancestry to see if we could develop more confidence in population boundaries. However, census responses and the diversity of people from South Sudan meant this analysis still yielded a level of uncertainty we felt might generate over-confidence if it was used as the basis of extrapolating from our sample to all South Sudanese in Australia. Throughout our report we occasionally offer census results for comparison, but these are intended to inspire creativity rather than offer a definitive conclusion. We hope that further data releases

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<sup>5</sup> While all of our participants would consider themselves to be South Sudanese, some of them would choose for their country of origin "Sudan" and some "South Sudan".



may make this task more fruitful and we welcome collaboration with other researchers to develop a robust approach to extrapolation for this population.

### Implications

Our methods lead to some encouragements and warnings when interpreting results. First, the core survey's purposive sample creates a deliberate bias towards diversity rather than representativeness. We therefore abstain from drawing quantitative conclusions about the whole population of people from South Sudan in Australia. However, where there are common experiences and perceptions reported despite diversity, it suggests a need to consider these as potentially widespread issues.

Second, we were conscious that our method of identifying and selecting participants could miss some of the most marginalised people in our population of interest. We therefore invested a lot of time in this process. Based on some of the stories we heard, we feel confident we gained access to some very isolated people. However, community leaders and our review of online opinions suggest there may be additional pockets of marginalisation not included within our survey population.

Third, we required care and time dealing with linguistic and cultural lenses that risk distorting responses and our interpretation of them. To take an obvious example, phrasing and exposition by people from South Sudan, even when speaking English, often differs from speakers using more common forms of English in Australia. We have taken three approaches to manage this challenge:

- A. Using a multi-cultural and multi-lingual research team.
- B. Presenting quotations as transcribed and offering our interpretation.<sup>6</sup>
- C. Discussing with participants their willingness to have transcripts and audio files made available to other researchers, so our interpretations can be corrected or contested. We encourage expressions of interest from readers in accessing these resources – please write to [thelastmile-au@statt.net](mailto:thelastmile-au@statt.net)

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<sup>6</sup> In this report the location of the participant who provided the quotation is generally also provided. The location is omitted in some cases to protect the identity of the respondent or if it is deemed irrelevant.





## 2. SAMPLE OVERVIEW

Figure 3 shows the age brackets of our participants. The majority of our participants fit between young and middle adulthood, with people late in this range having children entering their teens. For an inexact comparison to the wider population, Figure 4 presents results from the 2011 Census for the Sudan-born population and for the entire population in Australia, which suggests that the Sudan-born population is younger than the average Australian community. To the extent that all Sudan-born people comprise our relevant population, it also suggests our sample under-represents older people somewhat and the young more so.

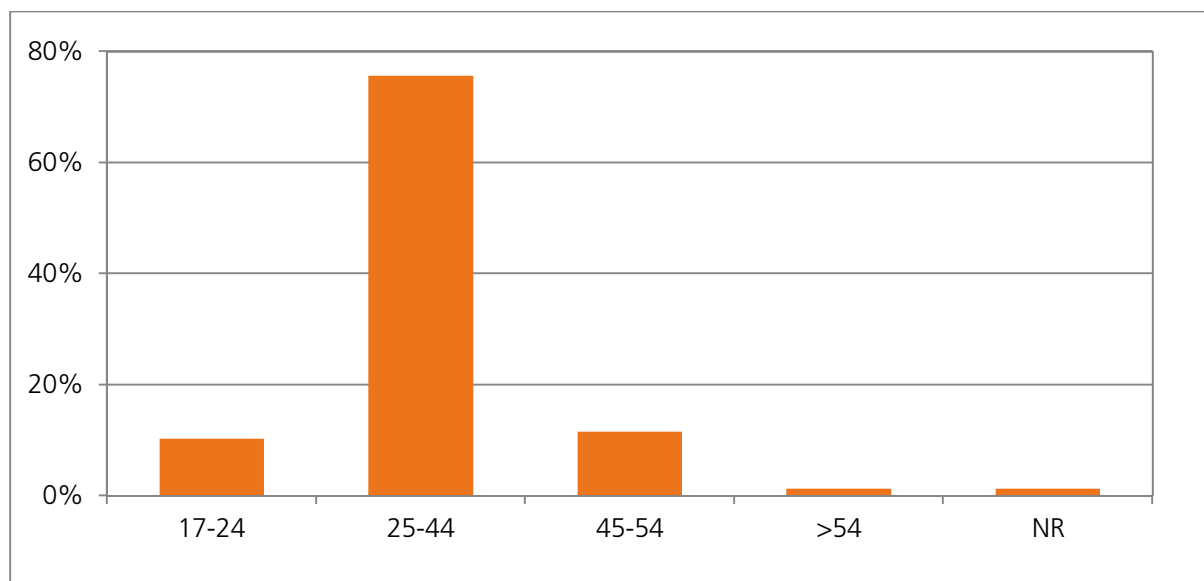


Figure 3: Age of participants

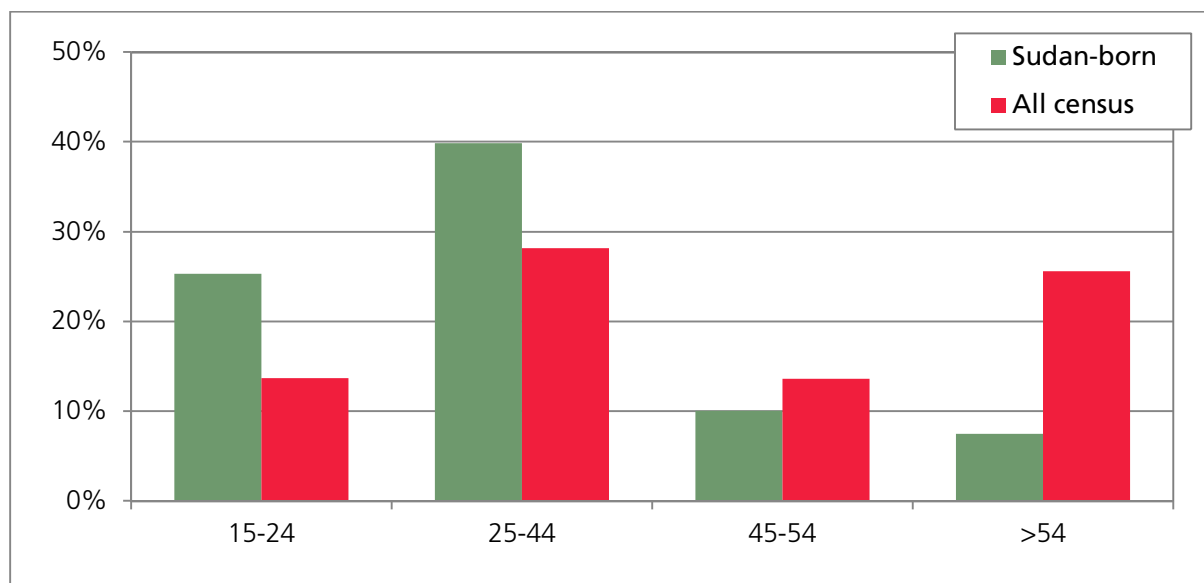
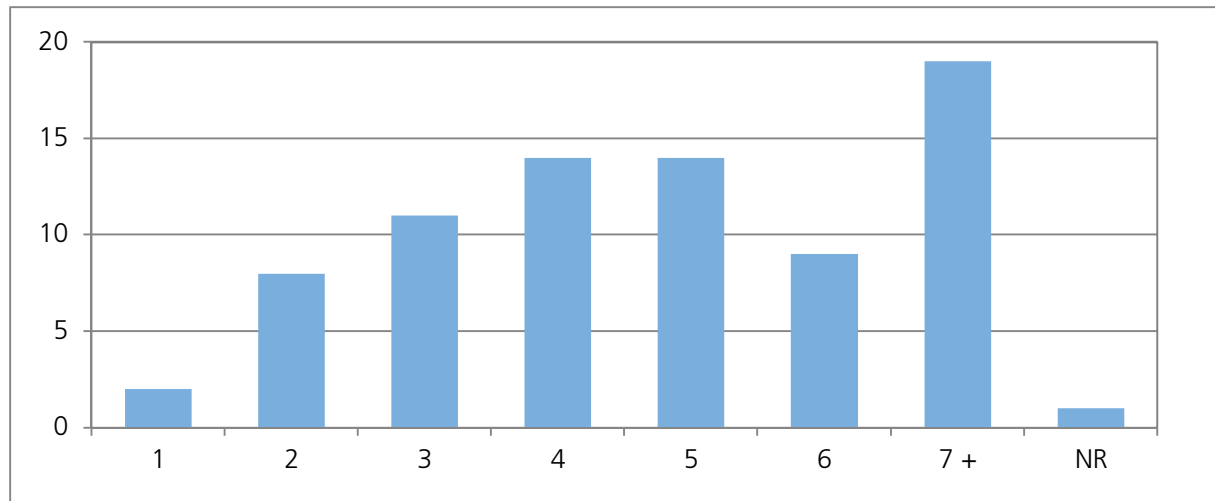


Figure 4: Selected age brackets as % of total populations in 2011 Census



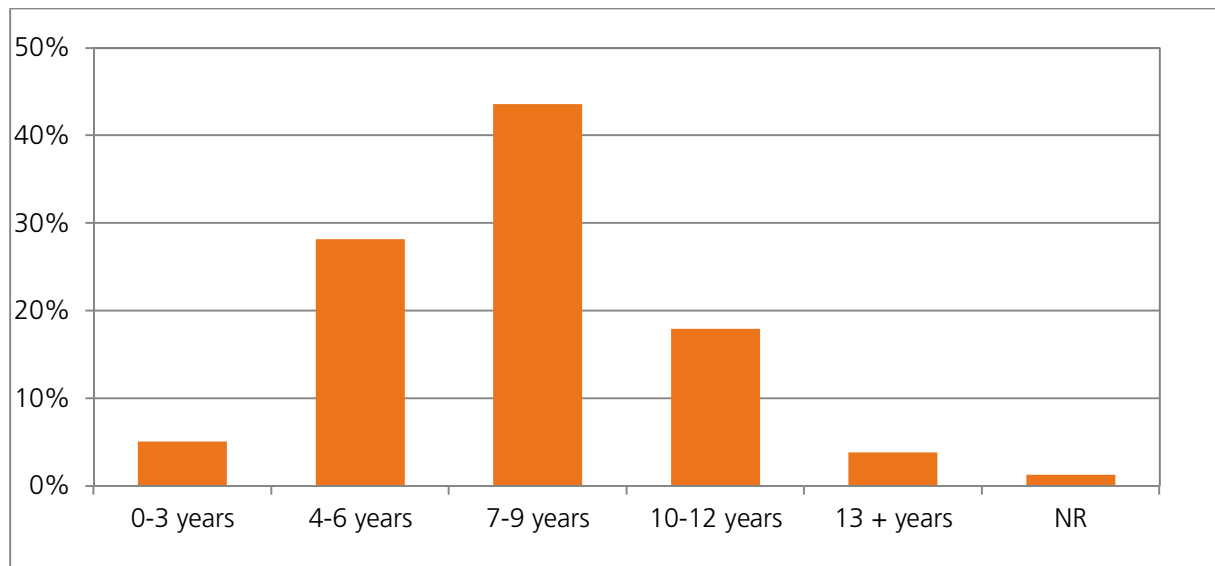
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Figure 5 highlights an important distinction between our participants and the average domestic situation in Australia: they live in large households. The most popular response for number of persons at home was 7+; by contrast, the census reports the average Australian dwelling contains 2.6 people.



**Figure 5: Number of people in household (includes participant)**

Figure 6 shows that over 40% of our participants arrived in Australia 7-9 years ago, followed by almost 30% who arrived 4-6 years ago. The majority of participants have therefore passed out of assistance programs targeting refugees (which tend to terminate after five years), although almost everyone in our sample had some experience of these programs when they first arrived.



**Figure 6: Time since arrival in Australia**

Given most people have been in Australia for more than a few years, Figure 7 below is unsurprising in showing that more than three-quarters of our participants are citizens. Interestingly, ten of the sixteen who are not citizens have been in Australia for four years



or more. The fact that the majority of our participants are citizens is an important point in considering the rewards and challenges of integration, which we discuss [below](#). As many of our participants explained, they are grateful for the opportunity to acquire citizenship and respectful of its obligations. At the same time, it creates a perceived gap between legal equality and their experience of social acceptance. Since most participants are now formally equal and give all indications that they will remain Australian citizens forever, their focus is not so much on formal assistance and recognition, but rather on going the last mile towards informal integration among other Australian communities.

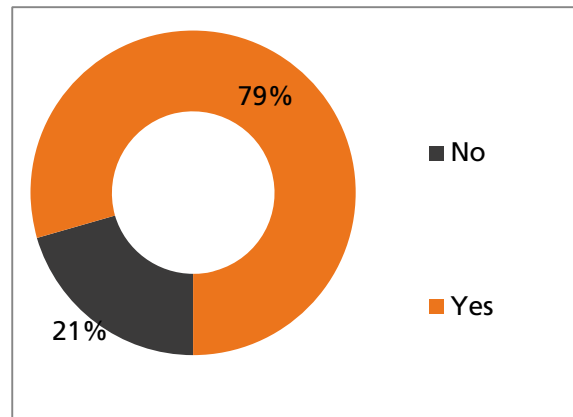


Figure 7: Are you an Australian citizen?



### 3. ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

Our sample has experienced different levels of formal and informal support to settle in Australia, develop their livelihoods and integrate. The most obvious reason for this variability was their segregation into different streams in Australia's refugee and migration system. Differentiation occurred both between simultaneously arriving groups and chronologically as Australia's policies changed over time. The more subtle reasons for variability in assistance and support were individual and family capacity and attitudes, along with random luck in settlement and socialisation.

This section proceeds through different structures of assistance and support that South Sudanese Australians have received, including non-official assistance. However, the objective situation was of less interest to our inquiry than the subjective perceptions of those structures. As our sample themselves made clear, the purpose of this discussion was not to complain. Rather, it was to emphasise gratitude to government, communities and friends for support and to offer suggestions for improving outcomes for this sample and future conflict-related populations settling in Australia.

#### Financial Assistance

As shown in Figure 8, the majority of our participants have received financial assistance through Centrelink. A common theme across discussions with participants was a fundamental gratitude for the financial assistance they had received. Even where participants directed criticism at the level of financial support available or the way they accessed it, such criticisms almost always proceeded from an expression of gratitude. For example, in contrasting gratitude for contributions to his basic livelihood with continuing financial pressures, a participant in South Australia reflected:

*When I first came here in 2004, I was given a very good welcome from the Australian Government...Things became difficult after I got my own address and I paid my own rent, and bought my own foods...it [financial support] was not enough actually.*

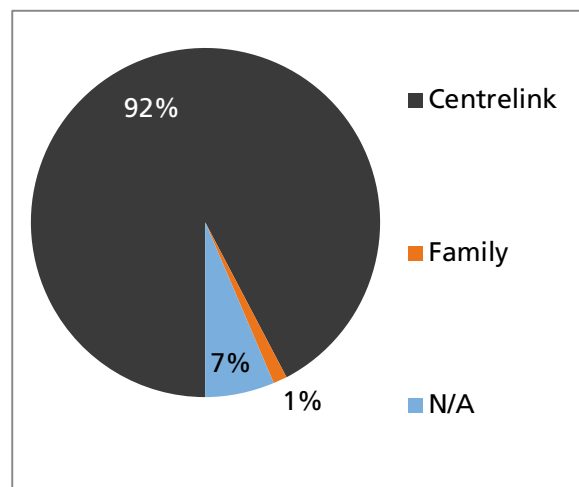


Figure 8: Did you receive financial assistance from external sources after arriving in Australia?

The objective adequacy of financial assistance to start and develop a life in Australia varies with two primary factors. First, large families or nearby extended relatives often



form subsidiary support networks. Culture and necessity appear to drive this trend and, where available, these social structures of financial support encourage families to pool resources and thereby attain a more stable subsistence level. Where background, personal preference or local circumstances inhibited the formation of larger household support networks, financial insecurity was more acute.

Second, participants varied in their capacity to manage income. Previous experience of managing money on behalf of families or businesses was important preparation for grappling with Australia's formal systems of financial disbursements and employment income,<sup>7</sup> as described by this participant from Brisbane:

*That income they provide is actually, if you know how to use it very well, is enough to run your family, to pay rent and to pay your bills and support your kids, but if you are not using it well you will have some shortage.*

Another participant drew a connection between managing sporadic income in a refugee camp with his approach to budgeting for life in Australia:

*The assistance didn't meet my needs. I believe my experience in the refugee camp was the ideal situation of not getting used to so many expenses or needs, and that helped with my budgeting.*

Those with less capacity for income management are more at risk of depleting assistance and support too quickly. As a small but telling example we discuss later in relation to remittances, it is not uncommon for some participants to use immediate income to send money to family in South Sudan, only to find themselves unable to meet basic needs in subsequent weeks. Individual and cultural practices like this make it more difficult to manage what is objectively a low-income situation.<sup>8</sup> Most at risk were people in visa classes that made them ineligible to receive benefits or to be employed. Two of our participants were in this situation and one from Victoria explained:

*When I came to Australia, I came as a non-permanent resident and I was given assistance by the Australian Red Cross. They helped me financially while my visa was processed by the Department of Immigration.*

The reported perception of official financial assistance was fairly consistent between locations and personal characteristics. However, consistency also included some complexity of attitudes. To summarise, the financial assistance was seen as 'satisfactory',

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<sup>7</sup> Budgeting is particularly challenging when employment has been scarce and most often casual – see below on employment.

<sup>8</sup> Although we can invoke culture as an explanation for this increased vulnerability, it should be noted that the risks of poor financial management in a low-income situation are hardly confined to South Sudanese Australians or indeed to refugees in general: it appears to be quite common for low-income households to struggle with the need to match and smooth out income and expenses.





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but also insufficient to maintain a minimum standard of living from an Australian perspective. Participants were reticent to complain about the amount of financial assistance they received, but were more likely to direct frustration at the high living costs in Australia. Put simply by a respondent in the ACT:

*...the assistance was not enough because I had lot of needs, especially meeting transportation, rent, feeding and supporting my family needs, buying books and other needs. So that makes that assistance not to be enough.*

And a single mother in Western Australia:

*Sometime you find out even it's not enough for you, because everything is [increasing], rent is up, kids are in high school and things get a bit expensive and it's very hard to manage the money, the Centrelink money.*

As in the quote earlier, many participants invoked the comparison to their financial situation before coming to Australia, which often included lengthy spells in refugee camps. A few reflected on the food rations that were a staple of that period, against which Australian Government assistance compares favourably.

Official financial assistance became less relevant and less of a focal point for discussion among the minority who had found stable employment. This is expected but nevertheless critically important. Subjective perceptions of financial assistance and general satisfaction with life were palpably more positive among the employed (discussed further [below](#)). A twist, however, is that employed people are now able to compare negatively their current success with a period of unemployment in Australia and dependence on others' formal and informal support. This did not make them noticeably more critical of the level of former support, but such participants were vocally glad to have left it behind. For example, a participant from South Australia:

*I [received the assistance] for about four months before I get my job. I found it was very good and it helped me help myself and support myself in the new place.*

We had considered the possibility that some participants may dislike relying on external assistance out of a concern for maintaining their autonomy and independence. In fact, few participants expressed such distaste. Rather, they tended to focus their attention on the increased importance money plays in defining quality of life in Australia, and the inability to attain this quality of life while relying on government assistance. For example, a participant from Alice Springs:



*Life here depends on how you look at it and how you work. So if you work very hard, you find that you get money and that money make your life very better, but if you don't work, then life becomes sometimes very difficult.*

Encouragingly, the vast majority of participants did not report confusion, misunderstandings or annoyance towards processes of obtaining financial assistance. Sponsors, community organisations and family members appear to have provided adequate support in connecting people to opportunities for financial assistance. The one exception, however, was a minority of mostly older participants who reported language barriers and confusion over lodging forms to obtain assistance.

## **Emotional Experiences and Support**

In a [later section](#) we examine the different social connections that participants maintain. Here, we report on the emotions they have experienced during settlement and the social support networks from which they have benefited.

To begin with, an expected but significant emotional experience that most participants report is a positive sense of physical security in Australia. Taking as a reference point their experience in South Sudan and in refugee camps, they assess this as a concrete benefit of being in Australia. At least on this fundamental level, the resettlement program appears to achieve one of its aims in implementing the *Refugee Convention*.

Expressions of anxiety that some participants express derive from their perceptions of racial and social challenges, which we discuss in more depth in a [later section](#). A challenge that is related but distinct is a subjective and objective experience of social isolation. Most participants reported a feeling of isolation, which is perhaps unsurprising in the short term but more worrying given that it often seems to be sustained for several years. In rural South Australia, when asked about socialising with people other than those of South Sudanese origin, a man in his 20s reported:

*Not very much, especially when you attend place like the club, you feel isolated and discriminated... it is always a negative, given that others look at us different and I feel isolated.*

From Hobart:

*I don't enjoy much of it [interaction], because it seems others don't seem to have much interest in people of my background, maybe because of my language or what, I don't really understand.*

We analyse social connections in detail in a [later section](#), but approximately one quarter of our sample reported they have no meaningful interactions with people other than those of South Sudanese origin. These people described great social isolation and a



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regular feeling of loneliness, which seemed to associate with disappointment towards their lack of employment and experiences of discrimination.

Participants explained they were aware that some non-refugees felt sympathy towards them, although this sometimes seemed to reinforce a sense of distance and isolation. For example, from Canberra:

*At times there could be people who are very sympathetic with you, and at that time probably you don't want sympathy you just need to interact with people, just like being a normal person.*

The pattern of conversations around emotional experiences, support and social connections suggests that people in Tasmania and in rural areas, such as Murray Bridge in South Australia, have felt the most isolated. On the assumption that participants in these areas were otherwise no different from the rest of the sample, there may be three factors in effect.

1. *Before arrival, people in these areas had fewer social connections to other people in Australia.*

Although our data does not give strong insights into this possibility, it seems quite likely to have an impact in some cases. The overwhelming majority of South Sudanese who settled in these areas were directed there by the Australian Government; if someone had prior connections or arrived on sponsorship, they were more likely to settle with or near someone they knew.

2. *In these areas it is more difficult to develop connections with the surrounding community.*

This is difficult to judge objectively from our sample, but subjectively there did not appear to be much difference between the perceptions of urban participants and those of Tasmanian or rural participants with regard to social barriers. In each case, there was a generalised perception of barriers between participants and anyone except other people from South Sudan.

3. *People from similar backgrounds are rarer in these areas.*

This is generally true: rural Australian populations have a smaller number of foreign-born people. Although an extended family or small group of refugees may develop in these areas as a result of government settlement preferences, the overall number is much lower than in the major cities.

By bringing these three threads together, we can discern an important point for many migrants placed in rural locations in Australia – that initial social isolation can easily become self-reinforcing. Refugees may have specific opportunities to receive support,



but it also seems likely that they have particular challenges in overcoming isolation. In rural locations the initial steps to overcome potential long-term isolation can be more difficult due to the absence of people of a similar background and other social support networks. On the other hand, where refugees and the local community can overcome this initial period of cultural difference to reach a common ground for social connections, more positive social engagement is common and social isolation is atypical.

Tasmania and rural areas, even if not inherently isolating, tend to be less densely networked socially, thus reducing the opportunities to develop friendships and establish a place in society. A few participants in rural areas directly referenced loneliness as a motivation to visit cities and to socialise with other people from South Sudan, even if just on weekends. In this context, South Sudanese settled in well-connected regional centres, such as Geelong and to a lesser extent Toowoomba, appear to be more content with their settlement location. Tellingly, many people in our sample had seen migration to a city as necessary for personal advancement and social support.<sup>9</sup> A participant from Tasmania speaks here in reference to unemployment and social isolation:

*I had a very good early settlement, but I am also experiencing a very harsh end of it when it comes to trying to find a job, and to be able to live. If you are not employed you are normally socially excluded...*

*It is becoming very difficult. It only leaves you with the choice that you need to go somewhere where you can get a job. Otherwise you can't live like that.*

Another participant from Tasmania echoed some of these concerns, having worked for several years for an NGO that he founded. He recounts:

*Since 1999 I have seen many people from South Sudanese backgrounds and other African backgrounds being resettled here, and they would stay from two to three years and then they leave, because people are so isolated here in Tasmania without jobs and being socially excluded from the mainstream community activities.*

### **Culture shock**

The Australian Government generally supports pre-resettlement orientation for refugees and information on settling in when they first arrive. A few of our participants mentioned experiences with these services, although it was not a focus of our study. For the sample overall, adapting to Australia often felt bewildering in cultural and practical terms.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that those who came subsequently, through family reunion or other sponsors, settled with them, which over time has been more likely to be in a city – another trend driving a divergence between the social connections of people in urban areas and those in rural areas.



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On the practical side, which we also discuss further below, a participant from Sydney explained:

*I would have appreciated more information in regard to other service provider. There were service provided to new migrants but we were not aware, so there was lack of information after coming to Australia.*

Another participant from Tasmania explains her initial confusion with regard to settlement and support:

*I was brought here by a friend who proposed me to come over, and I didn't know whether that was because I was proposed by someone not a government sponsored program so I was not really supported fully.*

Reflecting on his difficulty in understanding social and government expectations, a participant from South Australia "would have appreciated information regarding laws and regulations in Australia. This could have help in issues related to being law abiding".

Some parents in our sample regularly returned to the impact on their children of growing up in a new culture or between cultures (we did not raise this specifically in our interviews). This appears to have been a cause or consequence of family breakdown for some, including examples of children being removed by government agencies. One participant assessed the situation as follows:

*People who have families, who have younger kids or teenagers, I felt there should be more support around that area...Because if anything [happens] they find themselves falling into the hands of Child Safety. The kids are empowered at school and they learn a lot of things...but then the parents at home they don't get enough information on how to raise children here in Australia, because it is actually different to raise children in Australia to what you know from your country of origin. So that is a gap that I feel that a lot of families went into a lot of difficulties, a lot of challenges.*

A young mother, recalling the months following her arrival in Australia, reported with sadness:

*There was no much support. I felt lonely and isolated. The other issue is how the kids are drawn into other cultures which don't help them grow responsibly.*

Another participant commented that "the negative aspect was how the young people had changes; they adopted the different culture. So it was like a culture shock [to me]."





## Accommodation

An early disappointment for a majority of participants arose from their expectation that they would receive public housing. Many were not prepared, mentally and socially, to search for somewhere to live and felt they lacked knowledge and skills to engage in private rental markets. As a man from Victoria explained:

*I didn't get more help from the Australian community in term of housing, which was one of the things I was expecting before coming to Australia. But it turns out that it was difficult to get a public housing that I needed most with my young family.*

Many participants reported confusion and frustration regarding the search for private accommodation. Practical barriers to finding accommodation included:

- Australian rental markets generally value a rental history, which participants were obviously unable to provide.
- Participants have relatively large families by local standards, which restricts the volume of appropriate accommodation. Several participants reported a great deal of delay and stress in trying to house a large group of people. A service provider in Perth noted:

*The South Sudanese community faces particular issues with regard to housing above and beyond the more general issues faced by migrant communities and other refugees.*

- It is difficult to conduct a search for accommodation efficiently when participants lacked cars, were not familiar with reading maps and found it difficult to ask for directions.

Many participants chose to stay in more established households with friends or family while they settled in Australia. This allowed new arrivals to avoid the stresses associated with the private rental market. It also alleviated some financial pressures and provided a gentler introduction into Australia. After some months, most would then find their own accommodation. Those participants who did not have existing social or familial connections in Australia often struggled to establish and furnish a house on arrival. A participant from Tasmania commented:

*When I first came here, I was given in total \$250 to furnish my house, to buy fridge, washing machine... and I was told to buy them from the second hand shop.*

For at least 40 participants, the private rental market was also a focal point for perceptions of discrimination. This group believes that property owners have a negative



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view of Australians of African origin. They also connected this to a perception that landlords were suspicious of their ability to pay, which they felt arose from being non-white and from being a refugee with presumed or actual low income. Analysing the trouble he had finding somewhere to rent, one participant reported the following experience:

*There are a number of [housing applications] that I failed to be successful. I cannot explain actually why, until I heard one of the agents said that he don't want his house to be given to Africans. After I insist "Why? Why you don't give me the house?" ...the agent told me that the owner of the house said that his house would not be given to Africans.*

On a different and even more concerning aspect of accommodation, one service provider interviewee suggested that young people and young mothers from South Sudan in Australia may be inhibited from integration by *"a cultural dynamic which influences young women who are pregnant and unmarried to leave the home. This can result in homelessness..."* Our participants did not mention any cases like this but we did not ask questions specifically directed at these dynamics, so we are unable to assess their breadth or implications.



## 4. IDENTITY, CITIZENSHIP AND DISCRIMINATION

The literature on identity, discrimination and migration identifies complex processes that generate positive and negative outcomes – or both. The purpose of this section is not to reprise that literature, but it is worth noting that participants in our study would score highly on factors indicating “difference” between a migrant group and a destination population. For example, compared with other migrant groups in Australia, people of African origin are relatively few. Culturally and physically, our sample tends to stand out in their communities.

We were interested to understand how South Sudanese people settling in Australia felt about their own identity, about becoming Australian citizens and whether they had experienced feelings of discrimination. Regarding discrimination, readers of earlier sections will observe that this is a cross-cutting issue for many participants. In this section, we are interested in examining discrimination as it interacts with participants’ identities and attitudes towards citizenship.

We should also emphasise that we had specific questions to ask people on discrimination, but almost all respondents raised the issue well before we could ask about it, linking it personally or generally to a number of areas in our questionnaire.

### **Essential and Contingent Identities**

Many participants spoke with passion and emotion when we raised the topic of their South Sudanese identity and the extent to which they felt they “belonged” to South Sudan. A big majority report a very strong feeling of being South Sudanese and belonging to their country of origin. Responses like “100%” and “completely” were common, with many participants surprised that it could even be questioned. One participant explained that *“this belonging is comparable to nothing else”*. A man in Sydney commented on identity as something absolute but also something established through interaction:

*I do feel as South Sudanese, it is something that not going to be taken away,  
I still being identified as South Sudanese and my descendants will still be  
identify as South Sudanese... it is a feeling that will never change.*

A sizeable minority of participants experienced a heightened sense of their South Sudanese identity when they felt others were emphasising it. For example, a participant from Sydney felt that his South Sudanese identity came to the fore when his identity was questioned or challenged. Here, he compares his sense of belonging in South Sudan with his experience in Australia:



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*I definitely feel as South Sudanese all the time wherever I go. Or if I were in South Sudan I wouldn't feel discriminated from the rest of the people, they would know where I come from and where do I belong. So that would make me feel as South Sudanese. Here in Australia there will be no way I will be called Australian, I will always be referred to as Sudanese, or South Sudanese.*

Another man in Sydney compared two different mechanisms that heightened a sense of South Sudanese identity:

*There are factors that would make one feel South Sudanese; discrimination from other Australians would definitely make one feel unwelcome into Australian society, otherwise more it would be about social interactions with other South Sudanese that make one feel more South Sudanese.*

When asked directly about their sense of belonging to Australia, participants often linked their Australian identity to practical indicators of fitting in, such as employment:

*I feel sixty per cent Australian [due to] lack of [employment] opportunities ... Being jobless sometime make me feel less about being Australian.*

In a more specific trend, younger participants often experienced different feelings of belonging to both Australia and South Sudan. For those who did not grow up in South Sudan, the sense of belonging, while still strong, was qualitatively different to that of older participants. On the other hand, some younger participants in Sydney and Melbourne reported a reduced sense of belonging to Australia as a result of experiencing or hearing about negative interactions with the police. Well-publicised cases involving people of South Sudanese origin have been discussed in the community and, in making younger participants feel like they may be singled out, they explained it had undermined the strength of their Australian identity.

We drew two tentative findings from our analysis of conversations on identity. First, South Sudanese identity was usually conceptualised as essential and immutable, while Australian identity was viewed as contingent and fluctuating. Second, in most cases participants analysed their sense of belonging to Australia and to South Sudan separately. In other words, it did not appear as though being “more Australian” meant having less of a South Sudanese identity, or vice versa. There were certainly some cases in which participants compared their different identities, but apparently not in a trade-off. For example, in the quote above, the respondent refers to himself as Australian (“from **other** Australians”) but feels that external forces also increase his sense of being South Sudanese. Internally, our participants do not seem to see the different identities as two halves, but two different wholes.

As we elaborate below, there were many observations from our participants that highlighted the interaction between achieving what they perceived to be mainstream



success in Australia and the strength of their Australian identity. Perceived discrimination is certainly important, but setting aside race and culture, participants experienced a weaker sense of Australian identity when challenged by long periods of unemployment or lack of housing.

A service provider in Melbourne agreed that unemployment reduces feelings of being part of the broader Australian community, cautioning that the impact of this alienation can differ along gender lines in two important aspects. First, it can be more difficult for men to find jobs than women, possibly due to better skills matching between female migrants and available work, or because underlying paternalistic attitudes in society can heighten employment discrimination towards men. Second, unemployment for men can be more difficult to accept emotionally and socially since they are unable to fulfil their social role and experience a greater loss of identity. As one female participant from Brisbane explained:

*Back home it's the man, it's the husband, who is the bread winner, bringing the money, managing the money, but here it is about equal opportunity and that is where a lot of parents sometimes don't get it and there is this conflict you find and they are separated.*

Although our concentration around identity was focused on notions of Australian and South Sudanese identity, there was a third category that also became apparent through the interviews – identification as a refugee. A number of participants made reference to being a refugee, and being seen as a refugee. In some cases, people felt the tendency to be labelled a refugee robbed them of their capacity to interact on a meaningful level with others and engage in society. From Canberra:

*The negative aspect could be maybe the perceptions of the Australian community as well, in terms of who are you and then maybe underestimating your capabilities whether you are capable of operating just like any other Australian.*

Similar to Australian identity, success in employment, education and mainstream society appear to reduce external identification as a refugee and the related stress this causes.

## **Citizenship and Social Acceptance**

All of our sample were Australian citizens, were in the process of applying to be a citizen, or intended to do so. Overall, they were visibly and audibly happy with having Australian citizenship or the opportunity to acquire it. From Canberra:

*As a citizen of Australia, I'm ready to do what is in the rights and obligations of being Australian citizen. I feel that being a citizen of Australia I deserve*



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*whatever other citizen in Australia deserves. So I have rights and obligations and whenever I'm required to put them in practice then I will always do. Australia is also a working nation where people are working hard so I have also to contribute to the development of Australia.*

Or from Tasmania:

*The fact that I became Australian citizen is the fact that I believe in Australian values and I believe also Australian way of life...*

*I believe that Australia is a developed country that if you give yourself a chance to work hard you will be able to achieve any of your dreams that you want...*

*I am proud to be an Australian citizen as well as to be somebody born in Southern Sudan. So I love Australia and I also love my birthplace Southern Sudan.*

The group then divided roughly in half. On one side were those who considered citizenship a good thing and discussed it separately from discrimination or other challenges. On the other side were people who considered citizenship good but qualified this by practical indications of inequality or discrimination. Interestingly, there was a sense that citizenship is welcome and comes from the government, but equality and discrimination comes from the community (and the media). Towards this gap between theory and reality, or principle and practice, some participants felt disappointed.

Contrasting disappointment from discrimination with citizenship's practical advantages, a woman from Brisbane explained "*I felt it only on paper. But it feels good especially when you can travel freely, so that might be another advantage*". And from Murray Bridge:

*I feel good, but being a citizen on a document doesn't give the full meaning of citizenship because at the level of recognition my physical appearance would make it [discrimination] happen, which some time is not good to be recognised based on your physical appearance.*

In searching for practical responses to this problem, it is interesting to note the opinion of some in our sample that, if citizenship implies equality, then there must be some equally shared mechanism in which they could participate to overcome feelings of discrimination between groups of citizens in the community.



## Widespread Discrimination

Every person in our sample reported a perception of discrimination. Three-quarters raised an example before we even asked about discrimination, such as when describing their experiences in the employment market. Given the diversity of our sample in terms of gender, age, employment status, education and location, we are confident that this experience is representative of perceptions among people of South Sudanese origin around Australia.

As a complementary source on these perceptions, we asked community service providers whether they felt people from South Sudan faced discrimination. One response from Melbourne focused on accommodation:

*Landlords or real estate agents appear to discriminate based on a possible media report or previous bad report against South Sudanese or Africans. There is a particular tendency in Australia to generalise experiences for all Africans.*

From Canberra, an interviewee from Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT, Inc., explained:

*There is racism out there but you can't point to which direction. MARSS is doing its best to fight racism through sporting teams and employment. Through Harmony Soccer Program, MARSS promotes cross-cultural communication among migrants, refugees and Australians. There is also training and competitive games to foster closer relationships between the players.*

The sense of social isolation we described in an earlier section correlates with perceptions of discrimination. In Tasmania and rural areas of mainland states, feelings of discrimination are strongest. From Tasmania, one participant put it succinctly: “We want to be accepted as other Australians. I felt discriminated at school and at work place”.

In Murray Bridge, one man recounted a few experiences:

*For example when I work there on the street, it happened to me that a little boy with his father sitting there just call at me “Dad look at this black man. Monkey.” [...] Also I find that a number of cases on public transport, I have been observing something that when I go and sit on a seat, someone just stand there and don't want to sit there next to me. This is when I came to Australia, it was the first thing when I arrived. [...] And sometimes in the club, when I went with my friend to the club, the bouncer at the door refused us entry. When we asked why, why do you refuse us the entry the guy said you African are trouble makers.*





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A participant from Alice Springs explained:

*At the workplace, you may find that there are some workers that if you are not white you would see from their behaviour that you are [inaudible] and this is not good, because maybe you are black and they are white.*

Another participant from Brisbane, who arrived in Australia as a child, explained:

*Discrimination was something that I faced when I was still young, and even though I didn't expect it or understand it very well I knew from that time on I was always going to be disadvantaged in this country.*

As has often been found in studies of discrimination and integration, these perceptions can become part of a cycle in which people adjust to discrimination by isolating themselves from the broader community, both physically and socially. In our participants' narratives, either explicitly or implicitly, they shared that discrimination played a key role in shaping the direction and strength of their social groups and interactions. It is relatively easier to cope in the major cities, since participants could interact with other people of South Sudanese origin and still have a reasonably sized social group. In areas with lesser numbers of people of South Sudanese origin, participants have been dealing with a very limited number of social connections and/or spent a lot of time and emotional energy trying to go beyond socialising only with people from South Sudan.

Although discrimination was clearly frustrating or hurtful for some participants, our sample was also quite understanding and patient. We asked for ideas about reducing or overcoming discrimination. A common theme in responses was for there to be more awareness about difference and for everyone to have more time: more time for participants to work and socialise with other Australians – and more time for other Australians to get used to them and see that they have the same ambitions, desire for work and respect for the obligations of citizenship.

*The best thing is awareness, creating awareness that these people don't have to be negative to them, they can be helpful... That is what I normally say, "our people are hardworking", although the English language barrier is very huge with some people but they are hard working. They can do things, practical things they can do it, all you need to do is just give them the opportunity instead of blocking someone.*

On the other hand, some participants see attempts to stop discrimination as futile. These people generally displayed disappointment rather than anger, and appeared to accept discrimination as an unfortunate facet of their life in Australia.



For example, one comment from Alice Springs:

*The Australian laws are very clear... but you find that the way people were is different from the application of the law, so I don't think it's something that can be changed.*

One immediate possible step a few participants suggested was to create government and non-government forums that more deliberately try to facilitate communities of former refugees to engage with other Australian communities on discussing inclusive social issues. These forums can have positive impacts on building a sense of belonging beyond the tangible suggestions from the forum itself. A participant from South Australia alludes to some of these less concrete impacts:

*Sometimes you feel less Australian when you discriminated, such as when someone thinks he is more Australian than you. Sometimes the negativity of the person makes you feel less Australian. Sometimes I feel more Australian when you are called to decide in the Australian forum, to give your position and when your position is being considered, being needed, or being asked.*

There was a sense among some participants that something other than settlement service providers might be needed, partly because of the need to reach out to a broader audience, but also because service providers by their mission divide communities into people receiving settlement services and those who do not. We return to this suggestion in our [recommendations](#).



### 5. EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

We included some structured questions on employment and education, but also found that later qualitative responses contained crucial details to interpret participants' success in the job market and motivations for pursuing higher education or other forms of adult education. It is also important to recall that we intentionally included employed and unemployed people in our sample selection.

Fifty-seven participants reported that they are in employment and 21 said they are not. Of that 57, three gave no regular occupation. Among the remaining 54, there were only a few high-skilled occupations, while the majority were employed in low-skilled, irregular work in which participants felt little long-term confidence. Seventeen of the 57 considered themselves to be working part-time hours or less, while 34 considered themselves to be full-time. The remaining six provided no definitive answer.

The sample is well-educated overall (Figure 9) but continues to invest in education, with 54 of the 78 studying. Men are more likely to be studying than women, although the size of the sample is not large enough to extrapolate to the general population. Interestingly, those studying include 18 of the 34 people reporting themselves in full-time employment.

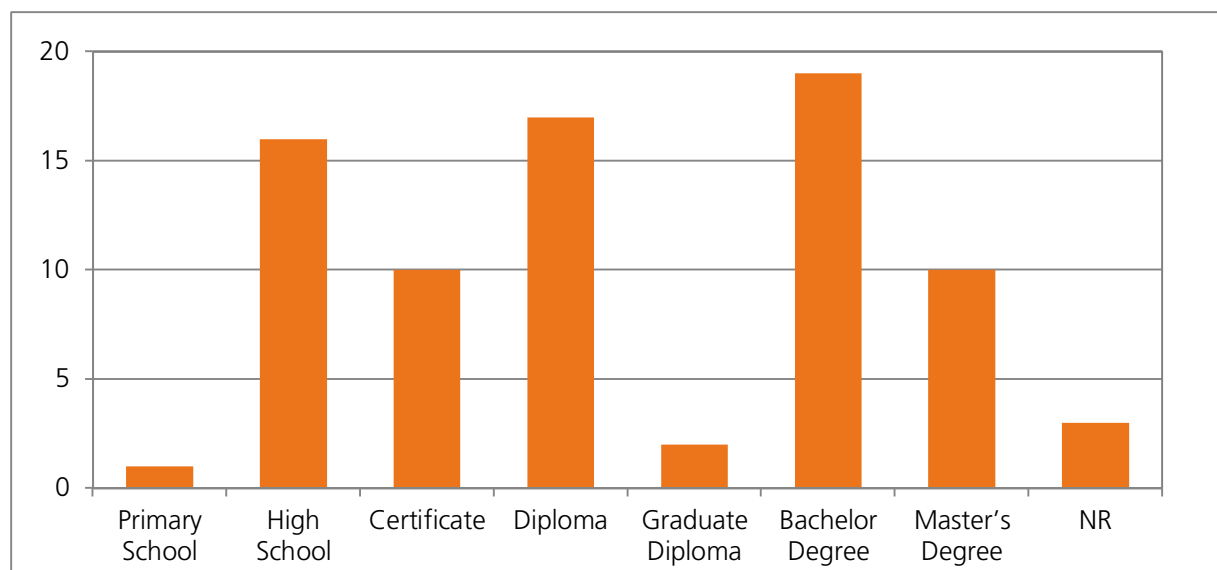
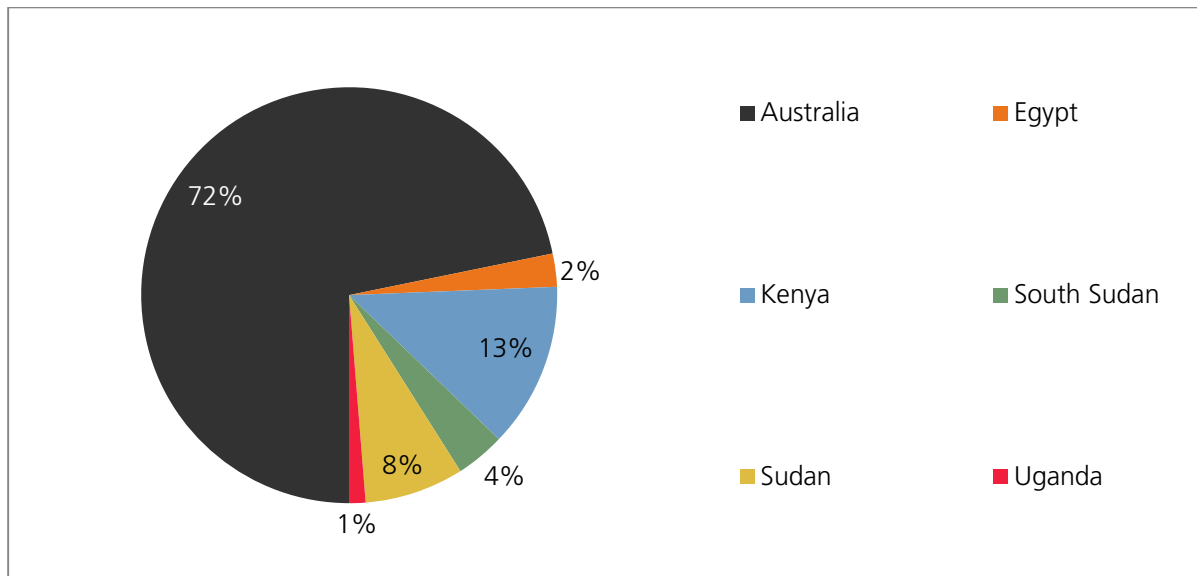


Figure 9: Highest level of education completed

Figure 10 (next page) shows that almost three-quarters of the sample have completed some studies in Australia. Of the 22 participants who have not completed studies in Australia, 14 are currently studying, resulting in almost 90% of the sample furthering their education since coming to Australia.



**Figure 10: Country in which you completed your most recent education**

Participants greatly valued the opportunity to study and regularly displayed gratitude towards the government for providing subsidised education opportunities. A participant from Murray Bridge explained:

*The most important support that I could now remember from the Australian Government was when I was allowed to study at my university without paying some money at the time, although I will be paying that back later. That was a quite good thing.*

At the high school level, however, one worker for a government-funded service provider assessed that education can be a barrier to integration for people from South Sudan.

*South Sudanese refugee children and youths often have less education when arriving in Australia. After participating in English language courses they are placed at a regular high school, usually at a grade based on age. This can lead to discontent and disenfranchisement as they can find it difficult to keep up with other children given their lower engagement in formal education.*

This view is particularly useful since our sample excluded children under the age of 16.<sup>10</sup> However, when we try to apply this perspective to young adults or even older adults, we do not find clear examples of participants who struggled with the rigors of tertiary or

<sup>10</sup> In the course of the research we met with representatives from the University of Western Sydney, who, along with other universities around the country, has introduced a program to support high school students from African backgrounds. Through the program, the university partners students with South Sudanese and other African backgrounds to help with tutoring programs for high school students in the local area.



adult education.<sup>11</sup> In fact, many of our participants are obtaining degrees and certificates that make them well-educated relative to all Australians.

Our sample is also regularly involved in volunteer work, with about half reporting some kind of regular volunteering. It is perhaps significant that 26 people are volunteering in South Sudanese community organisations or with service providers to migrants and refugees. Volunteering among participants varies between regular and sporadic, and can also shade into occasional employment with service providers or government agencies – for example, a few participants find casual employment as interpreters liaising between service providers and refugees from a similar linguistic background.

### **Education, Employment and Expectations**

Many respondents felt frustrated that they had not managed to find employment relevant to their field of expertise or at a level of skill they felt their education would justify. For example, one participant with a degree in applied economics explained:

*One of the negative aspects is that I have finished my Bachelor degree and I cannot get a job...I feel my skills are not being used and I think my contribution is needed. This would help me get off my welfare payment.*

For those who completed their education before arriving in Australia, a lack of acceptance of foreign qualifications was also seen as a barrier to employment and a reason to pursue further studies in Australia. From Perth:

*If you don't have papers from this country, although you come as a doctor from your country, nobody will accept it here. That's the only thing that is really stressing a lot of us who came from home to here.*

We asked participants about their reasons for pursuing education and they commonly cited economic, personal and national development motivations. We did not press them about why they chose their particular field of study, but it is interesting to note that one quarter of those studying are focused on healthcare or public health, and a further quarter of participants are focused on areas that connect directly to issues faced by South Sudan, such as social policy, conflict resolution, international relations and policing and criminology. A participant from Murray Bridge shed some light on his motivations:

*When I came over to Australia I started my higher education at Flinders University, and the course I choose was Government and Public*

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<sup>11</sup> Marianne Turner discusses some of the apparent challenges associated with adult education for people from South Sudan in Australia in her paper: 'Adult South Sudanese students in Australia: The significance of congruence between student and teacher expectations', published in the *Prospect Journal* (vol. 23, no. 3), 2009.



*Management... The reason I choose that course was not only to help myself but to help my people back home.*

The fact that participants are pursuing fields that are relevant to the situation in South Sudan is perhaps unsurprising, but it does raise questions about how their studies match areas of employment growth in Australia. There were comments from the unemployed, part-time and full-time workers in our sample that a lack of employment or “good” employment was a reason to continue studying:

*We did not have any job and so I decided to do more studies, thinking to gain extra qualifications, hoping it would help in getting a job.*

A similar explanation was given by a few participants for volunteering:

*I volunteer with African Community Centre in Queensland for about 26 months because I have not been able to get a job, though I have relevant skills with a degree in Arts and Education.*

For this sample, it is not clear that more education is the solution to disappointing employment experience. As a group they compare well with other Australians in terms of formal education status. The big majority have completed or are undertaking education in Australia, so the hurdle of recognition for foreign qualifications should now present less of a problem.

Instead, a lack of work experience, social connections and employers’ perceptions of difference, along with discrimination, seem more likely explanations for under-employment. Given the importance of social connections (both strong and weak) in finding job opportunities, it is perhaps unsurprising that the general challenges of building a social support network in Australia (see [section below](#)) also seem to affect the specific problem of finding a job. Participants were fairly uniform in citing support from employment agencies, friends or family and church-related groups in providing referrals to job opportunities.

Some participants are aware of this challenge, contrasting education with other barriers and opportunities in relation to employment. From Canberra:

*I think people have to be given opportunities, especially those who are considered to be disadvantaged because English is not our first language and we need to be given more employment opportunities, work training, work experience – and without experience it is hard to get a job in Australia. Even though you have gain professional skill it is difficult.*

In the face of disappointment and under-employment, studying and volunteering are rational channels for individuals’ energy and hope. On the group and national level, however, these may be sub-optimal directions in which to invest the time, motivation



## THE LAST MILE

and skill of former refugees. It may be more efficient and effective to focus on non-education barriers to employment.

Several ideas emerged from our sample to improve employment outcomes for humanitarian entrants. First, the most common interest was for government support to facilitate private sector work experience for at least 2-3 months, with a focus on understanding Australian job culture and gaining referees and employment network connections.<sup>12</sup> Some participants interested in this idea cautioned that there would be a trade-off between accelerating assimilation by early work experience and reinforcing stereotypes by putting new arrivals straight into an unfamiliar work environment.

Second, some participants felt that they did not understand which education streams would give them the best employment opportunities. They suggested that targeted advice would be helpful to support refugees to make informed decisions on education, including on the most marketable skills. As one participant explained, it is mostly a negative outcome for people to study courses that do not make them attractive employees, then waste time looking for a job, experiencing disappointment and returning to work in casual manual labour.

Third, a few respondents who received assistance to search for jobs, such as from Centrelink, felt that the system could be improved. For example, simply requesting people to check jobs on the internet, fill in a form and submit it for payment seemed unlikely to help them much. These respondents contrasted this problem to the suggestion regarding government-sponsored work experience, believing that the latter would be much more valuable than resources spent on administering the current system.

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<sup>12</sup> One similar example is the program previously run by the South East Region Migrant Resource Centre to assist recently arrived skilled migrants gain a foothold in the Australian employment market – the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's *Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia* public hearing held in Dandenong on 25 October 2011.





## 6. CONNECTIONS

The constitution of refugees' and other recent migrants' social networks is both a cause and consequence of practical outcomes across all aspects of their lives. Social networks also have intrinsic value and contribute to quality of life, something that our participants made clear in describing the various ways they felt there were strengths and weaknesses in their social connections.

For analytical purposes, it can be difficult to construct meaningful divisions between groups in social networks; the temptation to divide people by type can obscure important information about real-life interdependence and mixing between them. For migrants, there is also commonly a risk of obscuring information by dividing people into geographical segments, such as people in the destination country versus people in the country of origin. This has become particularly hazardous as globalisation and improvements in communications technology have reconfigured the type and strength of connections between people in different parts of the world. For example, it has become more common to find connections between people in the same country that are mediated through people in another country. Dividing such destination-origin-destination loops by location potentially severs this simple link in two places, making it difficult to analyse.

Acknowledging these risks, we chose to divide the connections of our participants into four types of people:

- In Australia and their origin is South Sudan.
- In Australia and do not hail from South Sudan.
- Outside of Australia and their origin is South Sudan, but they are not in South Sudan (the broader diaspora).
- In South Sudan.

As our research proceeded, we added a fifth, quite specific type that several participants raised:

- Representatives of law enforcement agencies.

Our primary interest in this section is to understand how participants create or join social networks and how these impact their lives. As part of this investigation, we are also interested in understanding how participants feel about their social networks, partly to assess quality of life and partly to understand where there may be opportunities to diversify connections positively, for our sample and for other refugee groups.



We expected that there would be some difference in social connections depending on participants' location. In Melbourne, for example, where there is a large and vibrant community of South Sudanese origin, there are much stronger social and community support mechanisms and networks. On the other hand, as we have already seen, participants in more isolated or less populated places find it much more difficult to integrate and may rely more heavily on friends in other states.

### **In Australia and from South Sudan**

All participants reported that their most frequent social interactions were with people in Australia whose origin was South Sudan. Aside from their immediate family, common types of interaction we collected included:

- Community orientation and support when first arriving in Australia.
- Relationships between families and tribes, e.g. marriage or observing a death in the group.
- General socialising, including sports.
- Social and cultural activities organised around the refugee community, or tribal sub-sets thereof. One participant also highlighted a sub-set of interests based on age:

*My social interaction with South Sudanese is through youth issues. We meet when there are issues to be discussed and we do advocate on behalf of youth.*

- Communal discussion, internally and with outsiders, to manage issues affecting them, for example with government service provision.

Participants feel very positively towards their connections with other people whose origin is South Sudan. These connections are the most consistently and immediately supportive of any of their social networks. To generalise, reported connections to people in Australia who do not hail from South Sudan tend to be more fragile and can, at times, be threatening,<sup>13</sup> whereas connections to people whose origin is South Sudan are seen as strong and positive, providing the foundations of social life. To take two examples from Sydney and Perth:

*I do enjoy them because it is your community and you feel at home when you interact with those you know.*

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<sup>13</sup> As discussed below, this includes perceptions that these connections are discriminatory or involve fear towards police.

## Experiences of Settlement and Attitudes to Return among People from South Sudan in Australia



*South Sudanese in Australia are so good and friendly, I meet lot of people when there is community activity or any social events.*

In a separate example, this time from Canberra, there is a hint of isolation even from connections to other people from South Sudan:

*Most of the time you find yourself lonely, probably because of work or study, so you have that routine that is boring and as a human being you need to interact with other people, to find happiness and get encouraged through meeting other people, so when one gets into such gatherings, you find somebody you haven't met for months or years and it always helpful.*

This is supported by other participants who, when asked about what they missed in South Sudan, recalled the stronger sense of community and communal living: *"I miss a lot my clan, I love the way we live in clan, with the relatives together"*. One of our service provider interviewees also alluded to this when asked to compare people from South Sudan with other refugee groups:

*South Sudanese people have strong ties to each other and that is also demonstrated by the level of their community organisation where they tend to do things collectively. One of the strengths of the South Sudanese community is the level of organisation.*

An interesting set of social interactions occurs in response to events in South Sudan. For example, connections to other people from South Sudan became more intense around the referendum on independence in early 2011 and then again in preparation for independence in July 2011. Practical mobilisation, such as to organise voters, occurred alongside social and political networking, and seemed to raise opportunities and individuals' consciousness of connections to others from South Sudan. A participant from Perth explained:

*During the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] we were together, and when it was time for independence, it was a very big day of my life and I was elected as a chairperson for the independence group. I enjoyed it and it was successful.*

Different interactions in this vein, which are in some ways more enlightening, occur with groups of specific ethnic or geographical origins. This mobilisation and reinforcement of social connections is in some ways exclusionary, but generally for positive aims. For instance, in Brisbane:

*We have our ethnic communities who normally also we have an organised community, sometimes we have a general meeting or a get together for Easter or special days.*



A few participants held leadership positions in community organisations related to specific ethnic groups, or geographic regions of South Sudan such as the Bor Youth Association of Australia and the Anyidi Community in Australia. For the individuals who participate in these networks, they appear to be important sources of friendship and self-affirmation, as well as heightening their sense of belonging to a particular group.

### **In Australia and not from South Sudan**

When we asked participants about their connections to people in Australia who were not from South Sudan, we were deliberately vague about which of these people were of interest. Among other reasons, we wanted to see if participants differentiated strongly between migrants and non-migrants in Australia. In the event, perspectives were mixed.

#### ***Other migrants***

Most participants were conscious that many settings in which they formed connections beyond the South Sudanese diaspora were with other refugees and their families, or other migrant groups. For example, when asked for settings in which they interact with people who were not from South Sudan, many participants began by listing structured events organised around migration and migrant communities. These included “multicultural community events” and celebrations of World Refugee Day. Beyond these structured occasions, a minority of participants reported that they meet other migrant groups at religious services or in sports clubs. In a university setting, one participant reported:

*We sometime interact to discuss about social issues that impact new migrants and international students.*

The idea that there is a difference between connections with other migrants and connections with non-migrant Australians seemed to be a mixture of presumption and experience among participants. It was common to report at least a small level of mutual respect and solidarity with other migrants with whom respondents felt a shared background. More specifically, a few participants explained they felt more “accepted” or less subject to discrimination from other migrants that have arrived in Australia recently.

Input from community service providers suggested that people from South Sudan are generally positive contributors to the settlement of other migrant groups. In reference to their participation in supporting new migrants, one agency worker assessed:

*They give more support because of their networks and this is also part of African culture, because when you get someone that needs help, you always want to help.*



### ***Non-migrant Australians***

One participant made the obvious point that many Australians, from diverse backgrounds, might qualify as recent migrants or children of migrants, suggesting a shared experience of migration ought to be quite broad and perhaps facilitate connections. Many participants seemed to be trying hard to find opportunities to integrate by meeting and positively interacting with non-migrant Australians. In reporting the frequency and nature of their interactions, however, the pattern is for these connections to be infrequent and non-intimate, with a small number considered threatening.

A full quarter of our sample said they never interact with non-migrant Australians.<sup>14</sup> The majority report interactions with non-migrant Australians through impersonal exchanges during daily life, such as shopping or on transport. More sustained interactions occur at school and in work-places, in churches and in social venues such as pubs. Several participants also highlighted, with some enthusiasm, they mix with other Australians at Australia Day or ANZAC Day events. In approximate order of reported frequency, the purpose of these interactions is:

- Impersonal, day-to-day activities.
- Work, education and volunteering, for example from Adelaide:

*I socially interacted with other Australians through volunteer work with South Australia Neighbourhood Watch, Lutheran Community Care and Youth Rotary Club.*

- Government service provision and representing issues to service providers.
- Seeking friendship and “to learn about the Australian way of life”.
- Structured celebrations – a participant from Brisbane elaborated:

*We do celebrations such as Refugee Day, Women’s Day and also at my work place, we do celebrate different activities. At the church we also do lot of celebrations.*

Participants tend to enjoy interactions with non-migrant Australians and assign some value to them as indicators of progress in settlement and social networking.

*I really enjoy it [interacting with broader community] because I have to understand their way of life to be myself, in Australia, part of the wider community.*

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<sup>14</sup> This is unlikely to mean they *literally* do not interact with non-migrant Australians, but rather that they have no meaningful interactions with them.



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Unfortunately, it seems that strong connections to non-migrant Australians are uncommon. Moreover, these kinds of connections are also the most frequently troublesome for participants and are the most common vector for discrimination (discussed [earlier](#)). Participants cautiously acknowledged that there can often be a sharp clash of cultures that is hard to overcome. Others report people can be uncomfortable with their physical appearance and ask questions which in Sudanese culture may be considered out of place. For example, the following responses from Canberra and Melbourne combine some positive and negative reflections:

*To some extent it is sometimes intimidating because of some of the questions that are being asked are not within your cultural background... You could be asked things about your culture that you don't want to discuss, but there are other good discussions, such as those who discuss their academic achievements.*

*I do enjoy interacting with many [non-migrant Australians], although there are some elements of racism there in the form of body language and some words.*

### **In the Broader Diaspora**

There appear to be two main drivers of connections between people in the diaspora who are not living in the same country. First, there are clans and families split between countries. We did not ask people to list the countries with which they have such connections, but our other research has suggested that the most common connections are with people living as refugees and/or working in countries neighbouring South Sudan and people in Canada, the UK and USA.

A participant from Tasmania provides a not uncommon example:

*I have relatives everywhere: Uganda, Kenya, and some also in all Sudan, who often communicate with me.*

Second, there is issues-based social networking, which is primarily conducted electronically but which also inspires people from different parts of the diaspora to congregate.<sup>15</sup> Topics that generate networks include debating politics, development and security in South Sudan, along with the specific question of the role of the diaspora in improving the situation. This also leads to mobilising money and time from members of the diaspora to donate, direct, or return to distribute assistance in South Sudan.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, several people from Australia, South Sudan and Canada were selected to attend a recent conference in Geneva to discuss human security, <http://www.iofc.org/node/62756>.



Clan/family networking and issues-based networking frequently overlap, most notably when groups throughout the diaspora share a common geographical home in South Sudan and organise to support development projects there. For some participants, these connections appear to be very frequent, while for others they hardly exist. It seems education and familiarity with online communication are the major enablers that support and encourage diaspora connections. This tends to mean that older participants are less involved, although a few such participants link to these networks through a younger person who carries out the actual transnational communication.

When reporting their feelings towards these connections, participants were warm overall towards the opportunities to broaden their networks to other people from similar backgrounds who are not physically nearby. Several expressed particular gratitude in the last few years towards social media and online communication tools. On the other hand, a few participants who valued their diaspora connections expressed some concern that these were second-best and in some ways heightened the feeling of distance from families or extended families spread around the world.

## **In South Sudan**

If we were to develop a measure of connection density and perceived value for our participants, we hypothesise that people from South Sudan in Australia would come first, with people in South Sudan second. The overwhelming majority of participants described with a mixture of yearning and enthusiasm the various ways in which they keep in touch with people in South Sudan. For most people, telephone calls and email were common communication channels, while those more familiar with social media and other online communication also used Facebook, Twitter and Skype to connect with people in South Sudan:

*Sometime we have social connections, through Facebook, internet, telephone and that's how we get connected. Sometimes if there are social activities on Facebook then I do watch and comment on the issues.*

The reasons for communicating with people in South Sudan are diverse. Two broad categories that could be drawn are: keeping in touch with, and supporting, family and friends; and engaging in political and business activities. These two categories often converge and combine as family relationships and friendships facilitate other activities.

### ***Family and friends***

Connections to family and extended family are the most highly valued and remain important even for participants who appear to be the most settled and integrated in Australia. Almost all of the participants reflected that they miss their friends and family, and their homeland more generally.





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One response from Melbourne explained:

*There is always communication and financial remittance that one does. With the communication there are a number of people we have left back home, those that we are responsible for would want to get your advice on how they could get on with their daily life and there are friends that you left behind that you need to keep in touch and see them and sometimes they keep in touch with you.*

There are spikes reported in communication around events in home communities, particularly when participants receive news of insecurity in South Sudan. For example:

*The other issue that I call them is insecurity, especially in Jonglei, where I was born and where my family is based. There is a lot of insecurity over there and so I usually call them to check on how they are doing.*

One particularly intense need to communicate with people in South Sudan was to organise family reunion visas. One participant explained the focus he had on this as a primary purpose for his life upon arrival, recalling what he considered a big success:

*When I came to Australia I spent three weeks and then I start work... The assistance met my need at that time. Since I started work in 2005 I was able to get good money, because the rent was good and I managed to pay off the ticket of my wife and my in-laws.*

Interestingly, the drivers of communication seem more commonly to be events and needs in South Sudan rather than events and needs in Australia, which may suggest an imbalance in practical and emotional weights acting on each side of these connections. An obvious indicator of this is remittances, which Figure 11 shows are common. It is interesting to hear the emphasis our participants place on sending remittances despite feeling income pressure. Although we did not examine the issue of remittances in great detail, participants shared information that illustrates the importance they place on this investment:

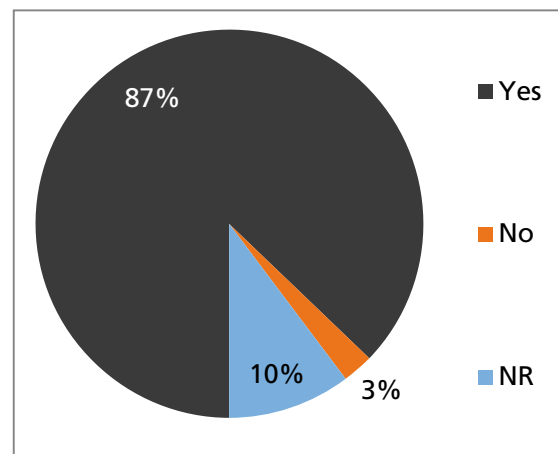


Figure 11: Sending money to South Sudan more than once every few months

*When I came here I asked some of the children to take studies, so I put them into schools. Some are now doing well at universities, one of my brothers is in medical biology in Kenya at Moi University, the other one is doing*



*medicine at the same university. These boys are an investment... and when they finish in two to three years' time they will be able to help the family and the country.*

The strength of connections and obligations towards people in South Sudan may have a somewhat contradictory impact on participants' ability to advance themselves in Australia. On the one hand, familial responsibility motivates people to establish themselves in Australia: *"I have responsibility, I have people back home, I have my mother. I need to establish myself. That means I need to have a good job."* On the other hand, the burden of supporting family overseas can impact people's ability to gain financial security here, which other findings in our research indicate may be linked to their frustration and social isolation.

One aspect of connections to South Sudan, which we examine in more detail in a [later section](#), is participants' travel there, even for extended periods or indefinitely. For obvious reasons we did not expect to interview people who are spending prolonged periods in South Sudan, but we nevertheless received indications that this has occurred, with several participants reporting periods in South Sudan of a few months and some up to a year.

### ***Political and business connections***

With regard to the more practical connections with South Sudan, a community service provider in Melbourne provided the following analysis:

*Ties back home are much stronger with South Sudanese... While other groups have an attachment to their homeland none have the strong attachment to home the South Sudanese have. This can be explained on multiple levels:*

- there is the possibility of a peaceful nation to return to and this is a great motivation for many South Sudanese to remain engaged in current events and politics;*
- many of the people here had a strong involvement with the SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army]. They feel a strong connection to the SPLA and their success in delivering the country. Thus there is a strong emotional attachment to the success of the nation which is not present in the Afghan and Iraq cases, as they have had their country delivered to them by an external force;*
- there is a sense of ownership of the movement for peace and development.*

At the practical level this increased sense of ownership and emotional attachment provides a platform for increased political, developmental and economic engagement. Several participants reported regular or semi-regular contact with elected officials in



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South Sudan as part of personal relationships and political commitments. For example, two separate participants in Perth reported:

*I have got a good relationship with my country; some of my friends who were with us here are working with the Government of South Sudan.*

*I do communicate with the Governor of Western Equatoria very well when there is anything there in terms of elections, for example. Because when the time for elections came in this country I was a volunteer.*

And from Canberra:

*I do enjoy the interactions... I have good connection through my family and other politicians that I know back in South Sudan and I do communicate with them.*

Over time, the political influence of South Sudanese-Australians in South Sudan is likely to rise. The transnational connections between people in South Sudan and Australia will also increase in importance, something we cover in our [recommendations](#).

A minority of participants also reported economic, employment and business interests driving connections to South Sudan. In these cases it was common for participants to engage with family members on business interests or to support a family business. A participant from Adelaide:

*I do communicate with them [my family] on daily basis. I communicate with my uncle who is doing family business.*

Others expressed vague intentions to return to South Sudan to set up a business (which we cover in more detail [below](#)), such as this woman from Toowoomba and man from Perth:

*If I have a little bit of money I will [go to South Sudan to] open a small business.*

*At this time, I would go and do any kind of business rather than working in the government, I would work with government in 4 to 5 years but not at the moment.*

## **Representatives of Law Enforcement Agencies**

Connections to law enforcement agencies, while being qualitatively different to other types described in this section, are nevertheless of interest because a number of



participants used them as examples of interactions within Australia. There are mixed perceptions of law enforcement agencies, with some participants beginning their analysis by noting that they are happy with security and order in Australia, associating these benefits at least in part to law enforcement agencies. For example:

*There is a sense of peace and order in Australia that is being maintained by laws. You will always be free to do what is expected of you by the society and law.*

On the other hand, several participants perceive law enforcement agencies to have a bias against people of African origin – a few responses in Melbourne were even specific regarding Noble Park as a suburb in which these interactions occur with particular negativity. One participant indicated extreme distrust:

*In general, I wouldn't be happy because my community was targeted by the government in many ways, not by state but by the federal government and up to now there are lots of young people that are killed every day and there is not any strong response from the government. Rather than responding positively, the government criticises the community, giving a green light to people to kill others. If someone is killed, a government official, a minister, comments that they are killing themselves, but the finding reveals that the white Australian killed a young migrant. That's not good and even after that there was no response and no one said anything until now.*

Our sample is not designed to be able to provide robust extrapolations regarding perceptions like this, but it is worrying to find such a depth of alienation and frustration being expressed. It seems unlikely that this gap can be closed quickly, but we consider building bridges gradually in our section on [recommendations](#).



### 7. RETURNING TO SOUTH SUDAN

The hopeful view that participants have towards the newly independent South Sudan contrasts with views among other refugee communities in Australia with which STATT is familiar. For example, whereas Afghan-Australians are generally pessimistic towards Afghanistan's prospects and Kosovar-Australians are uncertain regarding progress in their country of origin, our participants express strongly positive emotions towards South Sudan. There was a unanimously positive view of South Sudan's independence in 2011. Participants saw it as the result of their direct or indirect contribution to the southern side of the struggle – whether through fighting or through their vote in the referendum leading to independence.

Many participants link the emergence of a new country of origin to their desire to return. When asked about their intentions to return and their motivations to do so, three themes emerge:

1. A minority cite frustration and discrimination in Australia as a reason to return to South Sudan. A mixture of curiosity, sentiment and interest in contributing to development motivates the majority.
2. In disaggregating plans to return, it is notable that there is a near-unanimous desire to visit as soon as feasible and the majority of our sample desires semi-permanent or permanent return.
3. Participants vary in the degree to which they balance emotional hope for South Sudan against a clear-eyed assessment of the tremendous difficulties that the country faces. This reduces the probability that plans become reality and makes it more likely Australia will face consular challenges.

### Experiences of Return

Figure 12 shows almost half of our participants have visited South Sudan since they arrived in Australia. The number of people returning to South Sudan has increased dramatically since 2009, when the conflict stabilised and independence began to appear more likely. The security improvements that arrived with the end of the war, coupled with the hope for a new nation, provided significant impetus in motivating people to return.

Interestingly, the diaspora poll seems to indicate that rates of return for people in Australia are lower than for those in Europe or North America. Only 32% of respondents from Australia had returned to South Sudan for a visit as opposed to 52% of respondents from all other countries.



There are two common themes that emerge from discussions with participants who have returned for a visit. First, there is a positive emotional response to seeing family members again. This is often coupled with renewed respect for the endurance and stoicism of the people in South Sudan against the daily hardships of life. A participant from Tasmania who had spent three months in South Sudan in 2009 reflected:

*It was a very, very good experience for me. And the fact that I can find my mother still healthy, through all this time, so it was very good... It will always be my interest to go back home and see my family.*

The innate enthusiasm with which people refer to their friends and family contrasts with the varying levels of confidence people express with regard to the government and the progress of the nation. A participant from South Australia:

*Southern Sudan is a developing country where there are a lot of things that are not there. For example, human rights is not adequate, basic issues such as food, clean water, access to healthcare, education...all these things in South Sudan are sometimes not there [...] They are starting from scratch...*

And from Sydney, speaking in relation to employment opportunities in South Sudan, another participant commented:

*I feel like I have acquired a lot of skills that I can take back there and they would be needed to help the people, help the government. When I went back I saw a lot of things that need to be changed, a lot of work that needs to be done and it can't just be done by the people that are there today.*

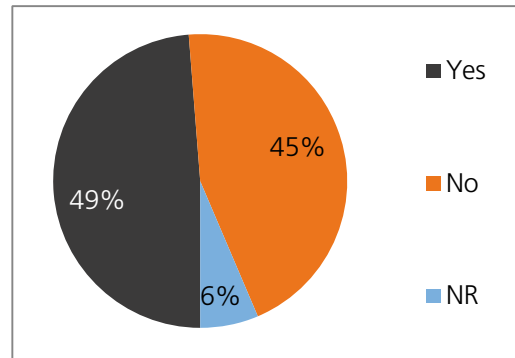


Figure 12: Since you arrived in Australia, have you been to South Sudan?

## Motivations to Return

As in our diaspora poll (discussed below), participants in our core survey show a high degree of interest in returning to South Sudan. Figure 13 summarises responses at the start of a discussion on interest and intentions towards returning to South Sudan, although we emphasise that the first response led to a diversity of plans and ambitions, both temporary and permanent.

The most commonly expressed motivation to live again in South Sudan arises from a feeling that there is a need, obligation or opportunity to assist the new country. While conflict is often associated with a 'brain drain', our participants show the potential for



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South Sudan to enjoy a ‘brain reclaim’ from the diaspora. For example, a doctor who has been practising in Australia for several years explained:

*I believe we need to go back and serve our people, develop the country and help our country... It's my home and I feel responsible towards South Sudanese. I feel sense of helping other especially South Sudanese. I believe God give us opportunities to help other and for that I would want to go and help.*

A participant in Western Australia, who had already visited South Sudan to assess options, expressed something similar:

*I feel my contribution to the development of South Sudan is needed more than here. I feel that the skills or the education that I have acquired here can be utilised better in South Sudan. My first visit was to assess the situation – whether it is safe to live there, what do I need if I want to go back and what would I contribute? I did find out that life is not easy in South Sudan, but one can sacrifice time and contribute, even if I get nothing very much provided, I am helping my people.*

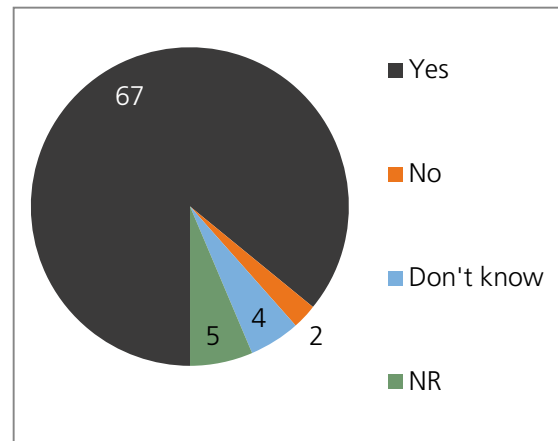


Figure 13: Are you planning to return to South Sudan?

Another participant in Western Australia suggested his social contribution to Australia could be better directed towards South Sudan’s development:

*In regarding to South Sudan, because I have done something here for Australia, I have worked, paid taxes and I think South Sudan needs people to help in the development, I feel I should go and help.*

From the ACT:

*Yes I will go to [South Sudan] because that is where I do feel at home and I think that is where I would help most.*

Only a minority of participants with a development-driven motivation expressed a clear plan to channel it.<sup>16</sup> These varied from an ambition to work with the government, to an interest in starting their own business, to a desire to coordinate assistance from Australia through civil society in South Sudan.

<sup>16</sup> To be fair, we did not press participants for details on plans to convert motivations into impacts.





In South Australia, a participant included a quick assessment of development challenges as a motivation to return:

*I would return to help in the development of new nation and to educate people on good management. I believe there is bad governance which usual cause poverty and war. If there is good wealth management governance then there would be less poverty and war.*

Interestingly, however, the same participant declared a motivation to return that arose out of Australia's humanitarian visa system: his inability to organise family reunion. Having been unsuccessful in this at least twice, his development-driven motivation was followed by: *"Also to be with family because I have tried but it proved to be difficult bring family members here so the other option is to go back and be with them."*

The attraction of being with family was a strong motivator for many, especially those who had been unable to bring family members to Australia, such as in the example above. For one participant, age merged with a desire to see family as a motivation to return:

*For myself I can say that yes [I will return], because now I have become a little bit old so I don't want to be old here because this country... now they take the old people to the aged care. I want to go back home because some people look after you there.*

This perspective reveals an issue that may become more prominent in future years as the population of South Sudanese-Australians grows older. Cultural norms and expectations with regard to aged care vary dramatically between different communities. With less financial security and reduced social support networks many people from South Sudanese backgrounds may find the transition into aged care difficult.

A minority of participants referred to a lack of personal progress and experience of discrimination as motivations to return to South Sudan. A participant from Perth commented:

*One day I will go, because I can't live here all my life [...] My kids here always tell me, "Mum you are suffering, and when you were back home it wasn't like this, you better go."*

A similar sentiment was particularly apparent among people in rural areas and Tasmania. Where this motivation was declared, it appeared to generate emotionally strong but practically vague plans for long-term or permanent return to South Sudan. We now turn to examining these different planning horizons.



### Plans and Barriers to Return

Over three-quarters of our participants express a desire for semi-permanent or permanent return to South Sudan. This is a strikingly high level of interest, including when compared to other communities in Australia developed through the humanitarian program. We did not detect any demographic or experiential factors peculiar to the minority of participants who were primarily interested in short-term return. Among the latter, the common plan is simply to visit family and friends.

It is difficult to assess the resoluteness of people's plans to return to South Sudan permanently. One reason to adopt a sceptical view of the desire for long-term return is that only a minority of our participants have already visited there and the country itself is only emerging now from the 'honeymoon' period following independence. Participants observe several challenges to development and barriers to their own return (see below) – direct experience of living again in one of the world's least developed countries may also temper enthusiasm for remaining there long-term. However, we caution against strong scepticism towards participants' expressed desires because it is inherently disempowering; because optimism and pessimism can become self-fulfilling in countries in transition; and because enthusiasm to contribute to South Sudan's development is an opportunity for South Sudan and an opportunity for Australia – a point covered in our [recommendations](#).

Barriers to return fall into two categories, one related to the situation in Australia and one to the situation in South Sudan. Regarding Australia, out of a mixture of concern for securing a foothold in Australian society and having something to contribute in South Sudan, a few participants want to delay return to South Sudan until they have finished studies or have gained greater experience in the Australian job market. For example, one participant with a relatively long time horizon said: *"I will go after finishing my studies in three years"*.

Others seem torn between generations, tying together factors in Australia and factors in South Sudan:

*I don't really know because my children are here and they call Australia their home, I can't take them back to a country which is not settled, unless I go for a visit – but I can't go there to live.*

On the other hand, most participants' families are spread across multiple countries and visiting family members in South Sudan is also a strong motivation to return. In participants' minds returning to South Sudan does not appear to preclude the possibility of visiting (or being visited by) family members in Australia.



Family and financial commitments go together for one participant in Wagga Wagga: “family issues may prevent me from going back to South Sudan, as well as my small business that I had opened up here in Australia”. Another participant faces a similar mixture but raised additional concerns regarding conditions in South Sudan:

*At the moment, I have a mortgage, which is a commitment for me while here in Australia and that could be one of the things that would prevent me to go back to South Sudan for some time. Also, I may not return if I have no capital to set up business and, moreover, insecurity would play a role in my decision for returning to South Sudan, whether right now or in the future.*

This last point on insecurity was taken up by several participants:

*Insecurity would definitely prevent me, because nobody would want to put their life where they would feel insecure. And just like in Australia if I feel threatened then I would run for my life. So if there is anything that would put my life under threat in South Sudan then I'm not going to succumb to the situation, but to find way to get out of that situation.*

Beyond security, some of those who seemed motivated to find an opportunity to contribute to development felt uncertain regarding the new government in South Sudan and were somewhat pessimistic regarding their ability to find opportunities. For example, a participant in Melbourne felt:

*At the moment it's difficult to get a job because the government has not yet defined the structure of sectors. It seems there are no goals in many departments in the next ten years. So it is hard to get a job.*

And in Sydney:

*There are serious question of how systems operate over there, people have talked about having family connections to get jobs but it has always been difficult. And it can be difficult where there are no functional systems where people can access opportunities and be assessed based on merit for those opportunities*

In Adelaide, one participant also cited barriers to entry for job-seekers and potential business owners: “it's difficult and I believe it is due to bad system; nepotism, tribalism and other form of corruptions. There is no open competition.”

In general, the diaspora poll indicates that people considering return view employment opportunities in layers. As Figure 14 illustrates, when asked about whom they would consider working for in South Sudan, respondents group possibilities into three



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categories: South Sudanese organisations, foreign organisations and self-employment opportunities.

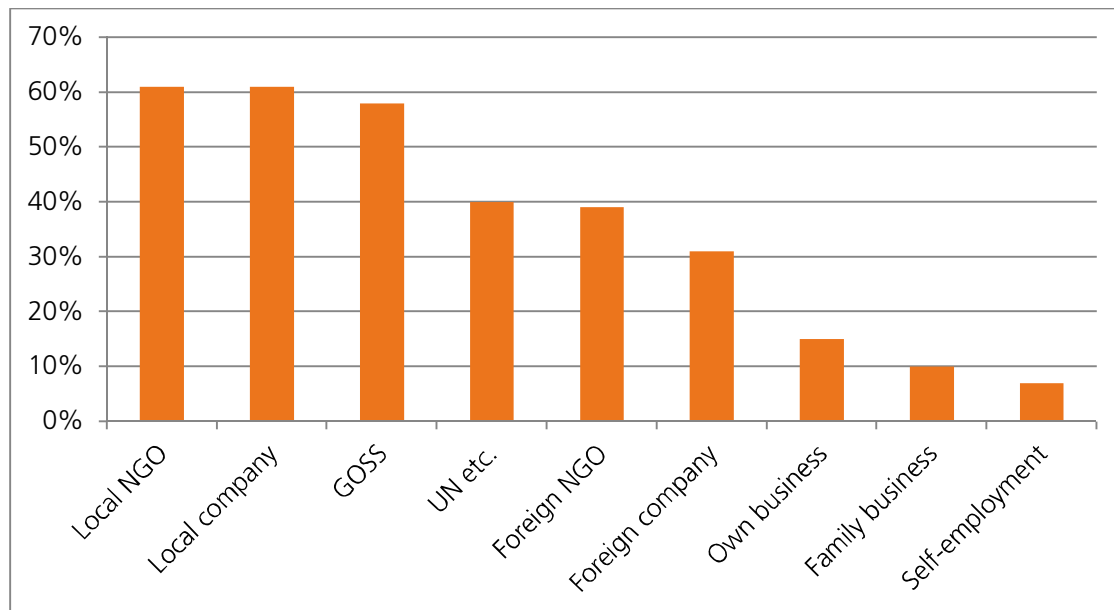


Figure 14: With whom would you consider employment in South Sudan<sup>17</sup>

It is not possible to deduce whether the preference for local organisations is based on increased desire or an expectation that jobs with those organisations would be easier to obtain. Nevertheless, there are implications for the Australian and South Sudanese governments should they implement mechanisms that try to leverage skills and expertise from the diaspora, which was raised by several participants as something they would welcome. From Sydney:

*I imagine if the government had a hand in encouraging people to go back and be part of the government project, it would be really welcome and it would encourage a lot of people to put their hands up and say they want to go back.*

### ***Desire to return: implications for measuring successful integration***

In a recent paper,<sup>18</sup> Dr. Siew-Ean Khoo reviews efforts to measure the slippery concept of 'successful integration', including an interest in permanent residence and a caveat attached to this in the case of humanitarian migrants:

<sup>17</sup> The total number of responses as at 1 November 2012 was 1280. Multiple responses were permitted for this question.

<sup>18</sup> 'How Longitudinal Surveys can be used to Better Measure how well Immigrants are Settling in Australia', in DIAC (2010), *Following Migrants Forward: Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of a new Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants*, papers presented to the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants Workshop, Canberra, 10 September 2010.



*From Australia's perspective as a settler migration country, the most basic measure of immigrant settlement success is that migrants settle permanently and become citizens that they become established and do not return home or immigrate to another country. However, this criterion may be less applicable to refugees or humanitarian migrants who do not have the option of returning home or few resources to remigrate to a third country, and family migrants who may also not have that option because of family ties.*

She goes on to recommend that:

*...successful settlement in Australia involves the following four preconditions:*

- Permanent residence and citizenship*
- Proficiency in English*
- Participation in community and society*
- Satisfaction with life in Australia*

*Obviously the four measures are interlinked and correlated, particularly the second with the third and also the first with the fourth. The important criteria are that they meet both the individual migrant's and the receiving country's perspectives on successful settlement and that they are applicable across all types of migrants, not just economic but also family reunion and humanitarian migrants. They should also be applicable in the context of changing migration patterns.*

Interestingly, our participants suggest two exceptions or qualifications to this framework. First, concern regarding the relevance of permanent residence as an assessment criterion for humanitarian entrants may be softened in the case of Australians from South Sudan, given the level of optimism towards their country of origin and the widespread feeling among them that returning to South Sudan is a positive, practical option. In other words, from the perspective of Australia at least, permanent residence could reasonably be used as a strong indicator of successful integration for people from South Sudan.

Second, if dissatisfaction with Australia drove our participants to return to South Sudan, we suggest this would indicate a lack of successful integration. However, our participants' expressed motivations primarily related to contributing to development in South Sudan. We cannot conclude definitively from our structured questions, but there are indications that on some measures of integration proposed above – proficiency in English, participation in community and society and satisfaction with life in Australia – those scoring the highest are also the most likely to be interested in returning to South Sudan for extended periods.



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Based on the expressed motivations to return and the barriers our participants perceive, we foresee that a significant minority of them will spend a lot of time in South Sudan in the coming years. They will retain Australian citizenship and will live between the two countries. In the medium term, the primary factor determining the amount of time they reside in Australia will be the security and development trajectory of South Sudan. On the one hand, they might be considered integration failures on the criterion of permanent residence. On the other hand, if they are able to maintain a dual national's life, including participation at times in each society and labour market, they might be considered highly successful Australians.

### ***A displacement dividend***

An alternative, non-rival perspective might emphasise a *cycle of development* rather than a *process of integration*. A positive way to think about conflict-driven migration in cases like South Sudan is as a long-term investment in the country's people. In other words, facing grim prospects at home, the international refugee system helps to support some of South Sudan's people, who have been able to develop skills and experiences safely elsewhere while waiting for conflict resolution to open space for them to contribute to their country of origin.

Now, while South Sudan is far from conflict-free, there has been a sense of hope and longing among many in the diaspora to return and investigate options by which they can support development or connect with their roots. UNHCR recognises repatriation as a 'durable solution' to forced displacement, but this does not cover the situation facing our participants. Instead, they are remitting money and searching for employment in South Sudan on the back of capacities developed or refined in Australia. This might be thought of as a 'displacement dividend' enabled by Australia's refugee system. In parallel to measures of integration, it may be useful to measure the support and assistance former refugees contribute to their country of origin through this displacement dividend, in order to provide a more complete assessment of the benefits of the humanitarian program and shape future approaches to international protection.



## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

“The Last Mile” could refer to the challenge of integration for people from South Sudan living in Australia. It could also refer to the plans that many have to return to South Sudan. For the sizeable minority considering permanent relocation to South Sudan, this would complete a circuit of conflict-driven migration and return, having picked up valuable skills and experiences that they are seeking to apply to problems in their newly independent country of origin.

Our focus on qualitatively exploring a diverse set of participants led us to insights in a number of areas. We address these below in recommendations on integration, foreign aid and future targeting of the humanitarian program. We emphasise that our qualitative method deliberately sought diversity and therefore rarely generated robust quantitative analysis. Exceptions include the diaspora poll and structured data captured and distilled during qualitative interviewing. The conclusions we deliver below spring from these exceptions and from points of strong consistency that emerged from the qualitative sample (despite the intentionally diverse respondent pool). Our recommendations acknowledge a debt to participants’ ideas, including their emphasis on opportunities to harness the involvement and skills of the community itself.

### **Closing the Integration Gap**

The history of migrant integration in Australia and comparison to other countries leads us to believe that our research has caught a community still predominantly in the first phase of settlement, but perhaps now coming to the end of it. In this phase, migrants from South Sudan and their families have generally struggled to establish themselves in their new home and many perceive that the last mile of integration has been a long one.

Solid intra-community connections are now available to many, but strong links to Australians outside the community have mostly been elusive. People who arrived as younger adults have worked hard to achieve Australian qualifications but have not been able to access or develop sufficient networks of social capital and intra-community businesses to facilitate good employment outcomes. Gratitude for settlement assistance, citizenship, stability and peace is generally high – but it is accompanied by perceptions of discrimination and frustration at the difficulties of integration.

When we discussed our interim findings with the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), they expressed little surprise about the experiences of Australians from South Sudan. Institutional memory is long and there are some generally recurring themes to stories of refugee (or migrant) settlement. However, as Australian society develops, opportunities and barriers to integration evolve, creating new points of leverage and space for new ideas and approaches. By taking advantage of these





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opportunities, we can adapt our methods to improve integration experiences for a wide range of settling and established communities.

Through a different lens, recurring migration themes can also obscure the diversity of experiences faced by migrants. We need to acknowledge and understand the different strengths of migrant groups in Australia if our integration methods are to be universally supportive, efficient and effective. Our findings include important distinctions between Australians of South Sudanese origin and other groups brought here through the humanitarian program. These differences are worthy of consideration in policy and practical approaches to ensure that each migrant group is treated on its own terms and to guarantee that the reciprocal promises of citizenship deliver for all Australians.

### ***Preparation***

1. Some basic information was not received or understood by people preparing to come to Australia, such as the types of services they would receive and their position vis-à-vis work, housing and education rights. Preparing newcomers for Australian culture is inherently difficult but there is some evidence that improvements to current programs could help develop more accurate expectations.

Australia generally subcontracts this work to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Current approaches to disseminating information understandably pay more attention to people coming on humanitarian visas compared to those coming under family reunion arrangements. Three recommendations result:

- a. Our participants suggests that pre-departure information delivery should be more structured – including simple feedback testing to check that information has been received and understood. Greater effort could also be made to connect IOM content and sessions offshore with follow-up onshore to gauge how rapidly people are acclimatising.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A related recommendation was made in the context of a DIAC-sponsored assessment of settlement in regional Australia: *“It is essential that those involved in planning a regional settlement project have as much information as possible about the background and experiences of the entrants. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has an important role to play in supporting this process and, wherever possible, enabling the planning committee to engage with people who have had first hand experience with refugees from the target region, including those who have provided cultural orientation training (AUSCO) to the entrants offshore”* – *Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot – Ballarat*, Report of an evaluation undertaken by Margaret Piper and Associates for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, January 2009, p.7.



- b. The primary responsibility for educating arrivals under family reunion arrangements falls on their sponsor.<sup>20</sup> From an economic and organisational perspective this makes sense. However, in many cases the sponsor themselves is not well-integrated, and thus integration support can be inadequate. Although the need may be less acute for South Sudanese now that migration trends have stabilised, it may be efficient to provide online tools that educate and test knowledge absorption, then make these open to family reunion visa-holders from all countries. Participants in our research claimed they would be enthusiastic towards these opportunities and their level of participation in the online channel of our work supports that claim.
- c. Participants regularly expressed gratitude towards the government resettlement program and to church and other groups who welcomed them on arrival. Greater difficulties appear to have arisen after this initial support had evaporated. Programs that connect recent arrivals with more established people in the wider community over the medium-term may help alleviate some of the post-settlement stress and ensure people are receiving comprehensive support without requiring significant new resources.

### ***Practical assistance***

- 2. The most important recommendation that came from our participants regarding the assistance they receive is that they would benefit from a greater focus on the softer, social aspects of achievement at education and employment.<sup>21</sup> In the immediate term, this is likely to be particularly important for newly-establishing communities like Australians from South Sudan – they lack a strong ‘beach-head community’ that can help them land on their feet through employment and other support networks. In the longer term, compound interest on these social investments should produce big returns by giving newcomers the cultural and CV-filling work experience of participation in the Australian labour market, which makes them much more likely to obtain subsequent employment. Experiments in this vein fall into two areas.

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<sup>20</sup> Between 2002 and 2007, 74% of all Sudanese humanitarian entrants arrived under sponsorship arrangements through the Special Humanitarian Programme (DIAC 2007).

<sup>21</sup> A generally positive evaluation in 2008 of a regional settlement pilot in Mount Gambier noted the following lesson: “*Recognising the obstacles most refugees face preparing for entry to the workforce, it is extremely valuable to have an employment subcommittee, made up of people with relevant experience, which can focus specifically on organising training, securing support and removing barriers.*” – *Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot – Mount Gambier*, Report of an evaluation undertaken by Margaret Piper and Associates for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, November 2008, p.10.



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- a. First, targeted advice for newcomers on choosing the best education option, including information on the most marketable skills, would be welcome. All participants were very grateful for the opportunity to study, but many have chosen areas that, while relevant to the situation in South Sudan, may not be in high demand in Australia.
- b. Second, new employment programs could include greater emphasis on narrow but concrete job-seeking support by subsidising work experience or internships by refugees. Related recommendations have previously been made to DIAC<sup>22</sup> and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.<sup>23</sup> Similar suggestions were also made by our participants, although they stop short of suggesting subsidies or other bottom-line incentives for employers to take what many seem to view as a risk. If additional resources to do this are unavailable, it may be worth exploring the impact of re-allocating some spending that is currently assigned to non-specific skills development without subsequent employment connections or placements.

### ***Overcoming isolation and discrimination***

Isolation may be easier to tackle than discrimination. In doing so, it is worth keeping in mind the lesson our participants gave regarding the distinction between physical and social isolation: they can be self-reinforcing but they are not the same thing.

3. To start with geographical isolation, several participants seemed quite perplexed by the fact they were settled in rural areas without many people from a similar background nearby. DIAC's assessment of the potential of regional settlement suggests that it:

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<sup>22</sup> See for example the above evaluation, which recommends at p.12: *"those involved ensure the planning includes activities that will:*

- *ensure the entrants receive specialist advice about possible areas of employment;*
- *facilitate their entry into necessary training courses or apprenticeships;*
- *ensure the entrants also receive training about the Australian workplace environment, including Occupational Health and Safety standards, workplace behaviour and worker's protection;*
- *educate local employers about humanitarian entrants and encouraging them to consider providing work opportunities;*
- *consider the merit of organising mentors or workplace supporters for the entrants so that they can get practical and emotional support while they are seeking work and when they enter the workplace."*

<sup>23</sup> Speakers at public hearings of the ongoing Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia raise the issue of unemployment and the need for more targeted employment assistance for recent migrants on several occasions. At the Melbourne Public Hearing, Paul Power, CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia commented: "We hear lots of feedback from refugee communities about the fact that in the early years many refugees feel they get little support from Job Services Australia agencies, which are the agencies funded by the federal government to actually provide this work in brokering employment."



*...can have benefits for both humanitarian entrants and receiving communities, for example:*

- *maintaining and building capacity in regional areas*
- *providing employment opportunities for humanitarian entrants while increasing support for local employers*
- *increasing cultural diversity and vitality.*<sup>24</sup>

We hope the spirit of our inquiry makes clear we are sympathetic to the ambition to increase diversity. However, discussions with our participants suggest that newcomers and Australian society more generally are unlikely to be best-served by placing them in contexts that have a greater risk of isolation, especially if employment is scarce. This finding in relation to participants from South Sudan may contradict that found in government research.<sup>25</sup> For well-prepared newcomers and well-prepared regional communities, it may be possible to mitigate some of the risks. However, the importance of social support cannot be underestimated and participants in our research seemed to enjoy a lot more of it in major cities and well-connected regional centres.<sup>26</sup> We therefore recommend that the settlement of groups already at risk of social isolation should focus exclusively on Australia cities and neighbouring medium-sized regional centres. Given that family members play an immense role in reducing isolation, the government could also consider relaxing family reunion criteria for people settled in remote or rural locations (see also recommendation 12 below).

4. Discrimination, both real and perceived, will not vanish for a long time. The formal framework for anti-discrimination is in place but social practices do not always reflect it. A reliance on formal responses is also a double-edged sword, since it can exacerbate underlying mistrust that often accompanies discrimination.

Most of our participants were frustrated but philosophical on the question of discrimination. Their hope is that both sides, of what could be either misunderstanding or prejudice between citizens, could demonstrate goodwill in identifying and overcoming sources of mistrust. We are confident that Australians from South Sudan are progressively forming connections outside of communities of a similar background, but this is clearly happening slowly and

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<sup>24</sup> DIAC, *Fact Sheet 97 – Humanitarian Settlement in Regional Australia*, [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/97humanitarian\\_settlement.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/97humanitarian_settlement.htm)

<sup>25</sup> See for example *Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals*, p.55, noting that the authors caution they cannot determine whether settlement in regional areas causes better outcomes.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps we need a footnote here noting the good regional locations (if applicable)



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involving some alienation. The sources of tension between more established Australian communities and people migrating from South Sudan are complex. Nevertheless, mainstream publicity of the positive contributions made by the South Sudanese community and education about their stories could help demystify their status as 'refugees' and reduce feelings of difference on both sides. Indeed, a key element of this approach may be downplaying the idea that people from this background are refugees, given that large numbers are now citizens. Such publicity could also be combined with the aid-related recommendations below.

5. The specific problem of alienation from law enforcement agencies suggests there is an urgent need to improve communication channels between police forces and Australian communities from South Sudan. Victoria Police, for example, is recruiting community liaison officers for precisely this purpose. The logical next step is to strengthen outreach in ways that increase recruitment of sworn officers.<sup>27</sup> An important consideration in this process is the limited experience of democratic and institutionalised police forces among many Australians from South Sudan.<sup>28</sup>

### **Aid and Diasporas: Obvious but Reluctant Bedfellows**

In Australia you do not often hear of Abdirahman Mohamud Farole, but he is the Australian who is President of Puntland, a semi-autonomous region of Somalia. He is perhaps the most prominent example of a potential to harness inputs from diasporas in Australia to further our aid interests. In the case of South Sudan, it is reasonable to expect over the coming years Australian citizens will become successful contributors in the government, private sector and civil society in South Sudan – in fact, many already are.

There are several barriers to harnessing the potential of people and organisations in diaspora communities to support our overseas development interests. First, in the case of South Sudan, Australia has a negligible official presence in the country and our aid program is limited. We engage primarily through Australian NGOs and humanitarian crisis response mechanisms, such as those coordinated by the United Nations. These institutions' current practices do not naturally draw from groups or organisations based in the diaspora.

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<sup>27</sup> The attention given to the first Sikh police officer was welcome but itself a reflection of the sometimes long lag times that are involved in police forces reflecting the diversity of the communities they serve.

<sup>28</sup> In this, such communities perhaps start in a better position than communities originally from Afghanistan and Iran, whose experience of police institutions has generally been very negative. For Australians from South Sudan, policing in their country of origin was more absent than malign.



Second, Australian communities populated by large numbers of refugees almost by definition come from places where security challenges are great and Australia does not have a big presence. Prominent examples include South Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iran. If Australia's aid interests are engaged at all, the constraints of operating in these places make us conservative because it is difficult to ensure that projects will have a positive impact and that money is well spent.

Third, organisations in the diaspora vary greatly in their motivations, capacity and skill at operating with the Australian aid system. This increases the due diligence and potentially the support required from AusAID to select and fund diaspora organisations. However, many of the same concerns apply to selection processes for organisations overseas and for monitoring their activities. In the case of diaspora organisations, if they were engaged for targeted assistance through offices in Australia, they would seem to offer great potential to act as conduits of assistance and to be easily available to AusAID programmers for monitoring, guidance and coordination.

The following recommendations are relevant both to Australia's aid program and to the GOSS in its interest to encourage diaspora contributions to development:

6. The first step in assisting diaspora organisations may be merely opening the space for dialogue and ensuring these spaces are inclusive.<sup>29</sup> The Australian Government has directed support to some efforts that focus on South Sudan and there is demonstrated interest from organisations like Oxfam Australia to encourage or support diaspora organisations' participation in overseas development. However, awareness of these efforts does not seem to have penetrated deeply into the community of South Sudanese in Australia – none of our participants seemed to know how they could channel their skills and motivation through such efforts.
7. Create a competitive mechanism to which diaspora organisations in Australia can apply to implement projects in South Sudan that align with our aid program priorities. This could take the form of an 'entrepreneurial economic development fund' to encourage development projects and economic investments into South Sudan. In addition to regular monitoring and evaluation processes, which would be required to ensure the fund meets its objectives, a co-payment requirement for all projects would help avoid lack of delivery.
8. Improve opportunities for diaspora organisations to implement development projects through more traditional channels. We do not suggest abandoning support through non-diaspora NGOs in Australia and the United Nations.

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<sup>29</sup> People's desire to engage on issues related to South Sudan and South Sudanese migration to Australia was also demonstrated in completing this study. Many participants explicitly requested to be informed of the results of the study and any follow-up actions.



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However, testing a diaspora-driven conduit is justified by the likely competitive advantages that such groups would have over other delivery mechanisms, which include:

- a. Efficient access to remote areas. As an illustration, during finalisation of this report it took our lead researcher 72 hours to travel from Melbourne to an area near Bor in Jonglei state. Jonglei is considered highly insecure and in Bor there is a limited presence of foreign workers. This capability may be particularly useful for short-term projects focused on local humanitarian activities or basic skills transferral. In considering the scope of this advantage, it is worth highlighting that South Sudan may be insecure in some areas, but it is a different kind of insecurity compared to, for example, Afghanistan – there is little ideological hostility to foreign development assistance in South Sudan. Nevertheless, access and receptivity will improve if local and cultural barriers can be overcome.
  - b. Negotiating and managing projects that embed skills from the diaspora into government ministries or promising local civil society organisations. They may have a particularly acute advantage when doing this at the sub-national level, where international presence is lacking despite an acknowledged need in South Sudan.
  - c. Conducting research, due to enhanced access to information and having the background to bridge perspectives between beneficiaries in South Sudan and the interests of foreign donors.
  - d. Intrinsic motivation. Among our participants, there is clearly a great deal of heart-felt enthusiasm to contribute to the development of South Sudan. Even if such contributors demanded the same salaries and conditions as others currently delivering Australia's aid to South Sudan, this intrinsic motivation should not be discounted as a source of operational advantage towards achieving outcomes.
9. Drawing on the diaspora, embed skilled technical experts and mentors in South Sudanese government institutions and civil society organisations, or in positions to develop South Sudan's higher education and training institutions. Australia has joined other donors taking an interest in the embedded approach.<sup>30</sup> Australians from South Sudan are likely to enjoy some advantages over others lacking this background when integrating themselves with a host organisation and delivering their advice and mentoring appropriately.

Two prominent risks that are commonly cited in using human resources from the diaspora are: (1) the risk that diaspora interests do not align with national

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<sup>30</sup> See for example <http://www.sudantribune.com/Australia-urges-transparency-in,42960>





interests, and (2) that the presence of diaspora professionals stifles the development and growth of local staff and the government in general.<sup>31</sup> However, one could hypothesise that these risks may be even greater when it comes to human resources who lack a background in South Sudan, so they suggest a need for careful preparation and communication rather than simply adopting a preference for non-diaspora workers. As a first step, it may be worth examining how people from the diaspora are currently employed and perceived in South Sudan.

10. Initiate a project to track remittances from Australia to South Sudan. These remittances may already be almost as large as Australia's aid program to South Sudan and they flow more directly into the country. Understanding their origin, destination and usage would be a relatively simple step to help identify Australia's economic impact on South Sudan, including how our domestic social programs create this impact. It would also highlight opportunities to leverage these flows as part of our development interests. The other side of this coin would be a project that investigates the flows of money coming into Australia from South Sudan to ensure their source is legitimate and transparent, which may be particularly useful in the face of statements from the GOSS to protect against corruption.
11. Develop a framework to measure the 'displacement dividend' enabled by Australia's humanitarian program, i.e. the benefits that flow from the subsequent diaspora's investment and repatriation with skills (discussed [above](#)). Such a measurement would help to provide a holistic assessment of the benefits of the humanitarian program and shape future approaches to international protection.

## Future Humanitarian Intakes

People from South Sudan were not the first community from sub-Saharan Africa to settle in Australia under the humanitarian program, but they have become the biggest. As noted above, there may be some aspects of their experience that they share with other communities generated by the humanitarian program. They may also share with others some strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the challenges of integration. One of our interests in this research was to identify any lessons that might be useful in future when selecting locations or populations under Australia's humanitarian program.

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<sup>31</sup> The question of salaries would also require close consideration in these programs. In other contexts inflated salaries for returning members of the diaspora has led to resentment from local workers. Minimum periods of service, sliding salary scales over time and volunteer-based programs have all proven successful at reducing animosity. It is worth commenting, also, that many of the participants in our interviews acknowledged the different pay and employment conditions in South Sudan but did not see these as major barriers to them returning. For example, one explained "*it's part of being passionate for your country*".



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12. Changes to family reunion processes have had big impacts on a minority of our participants, to the extent some feel they would be better off returning to South Sudan rather than remaining separated from their family. This would be an unfortunate result given the investment in resettlement by Australia and the individual. It seems that in some cases changes to rules are interpreted as impassable barriers by our participants, rather than as a requirement for them to engage with new processes, which suggests there are gaps in communication.
13. Under new policies aimed at reducing the number of asylum-seekers arriving by boat, Australia is differentiating family reunion options for such people from those available to people settling through the offshore humanitarian program. The experience of our participants would support this distinction, given they generate a low risk of encouraging subsequent irregular arrivals. Some of our participants have felt caught up in community anger towards boat arrivals, suggesting the Government could more forcefully and clearly differentiate the objects and purposes of its varied approaches to streams of humanitarian arrivals.

### Consular

14. The effort required to protect and evacuate Australians in Lebanon during the war with Israel in 2006 was a challenge for the Australian Government. In South Sudan, our research has highlighted the growing risk that Australians could find themselves in danger and our government would be unable to respond quickly or easily. The Australian Government does not have a presence in South Sudan and the Government of South Sudan does not have an embassy in Australia.

Our participants indicated there is already a lot of travel by Australians to South Sudan to visit family or investigate semi-permanent return. Several participants displayed confidence in the ability of the Australian Government to assist them should they encounter trouble: *"When it happens that something is not good when you are travelling, maybe overseas, you will be protected by the Australian government."*

It is only a matter of time before travellers to South Sudan experience kidnapping, violence or detention, any of which would strain our consular reach. The number, frequency and duration of visits to South Sudan (a country with on-going conflict) yields a combination of risks that is greater than other



diaspora flows that Australia manages.<sup>32</sup> There is only so much we can do without a presence there, but DFAT may wish to consider establishing a specific liaison and registration mechanism with the diaspora in Australia so that they can assist in tracking the number of Australian citizens in South Sudan and their likely location. Aside from monitoring the risk, such a mechanism may support speedier and more effective responses to a crisis. A first step would be to investigate usage and barriers to engagement with the existing mechanism in [smarttraveller.gov.au](http://smarttraveller.gov.au).

15. Given that there are already several Australian citizens participating in the Government of South Sudan, including as Members of Parliament, it would seem judicious for Australia to extend its diplomatic engagement to these 'expatriates'. For many in the local community, their behaviour, whether positive or negative, will reflect on Australia. Moreover, they offer potentially important points of leverage in achieving Australia's interests in development, investment and trade.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, there are more Australians from South Sudan than from Somalia, they have a greater interest in return than Australians from Afghanistan, South Sudan is more dangerous than Kosovo and we have less of a presence than in Lebanon.



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