Inclusive Recruitment for Culturally and Racially Marginalised Groups

A review of barriers and enablers

December 2023

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Executive Summary

Inclusive recruitment as a practice to increase and support the diversity of the workforce is a key pillar of broader organisational diversity and inclusion agendas in the NSW public service.

The NSW public service has a strong commitment to a diverse workforce and support at all levels of the organisation to enhance the recruitment and inclusion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, the broadness and internal diversity of this cohort and the intersectionality of the structural barriers and discrimination they face make the implementation of effective and targeted inclusive recruitment measures an ongoing challenge.

This paper marks the initial phase of a research project commissioned by Anti-Discrimination NSW and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. The research aims to uncover barriers and enablers of recruitment into the NSW public service for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This paper presents a review of the Australian and international research literature across two areas: 1) research on the barriers and discrimination faced by culturally and racially marginalised groups when accessing the job market; and 2) research evidence on strategies that employers can use to ensure that their recruitment processes are inclusive and accessible for diverse communities.

The review finds that while there is a robust and mature research literature on the barriers that culturally and racially marginalised groups face when accessing the job market, with broad consensus on the key issues, research on 'what works' in terms of inclusive recruitment strategies represents a mixed picture. Many commonly recommended approaches have limited research evidence around their effectiveness, while other approaches have yielded both positive and negative results when tested in field research.

The review finds the following key structural barriers in the employment journey:

- Limited English proficiency, especially among recent migrants and refugees, impacts candidate experience across all phases of the recruitment process.
- The absence of local work experience creates difficulties, limiting references and familiarity with Australian work culture.
- Foreign qualifications and experiences are sometimes undervalued by employers due to disparities in training and unfamiliarity with foreign credentials.
- Unfamiliarity with Australian work culture affects job search and interview performance.
- Limited access to local networks restricts information and advice about the job market.
- Challenges in securing employment due to visa requirements, particularly for temporary visa holders.

The research literature is also clear on how discrimination further compounds these barriers during recruitment processes.

Common biases include:

- Affinity bias - recruiters favour candidates similar to themselves or those they know.
- Confirmation bias - preconceived notions about cultural groups influence hiring decisions.
- Halo effect - singular traits are used to judge overall competency.
- Status quo bias - recruiters lean towards familiar choices, perpetuating the status quo.
- Groupthink - pressure to conform to the views of other panel members affects decision-making.

The review also notes how these barriers and biases yield negative consequences for culturally and racially marginalised job seekers:

- Delays - lower response rates extend job search duration, leading to financial strain and potential visa issues.
- Underemployment - overqualification and low-skilled positions contribute to reduced job satisfaction and well-being.
- Volunteering for experience - individuals often volunteer for Australian work experience but encounter limited employment prospects as a result.
- Cultural networks - informal networks within communities sometimes lead to exploitative work conditions.
- Resume whitewashing - job seekers may modify their applications to minimise racial cues.

The paper also assesses the research evidence around the following strategies to enhance inclusive recruitment for culturally and racially marginalised groups throughout the recruitment process:

- Targeted advertising and organisational employment brand: Research underscores the importance of organisational values alignment for job seekers. Strategies such as targeted advertising, pro-diversity statements, and diverse imagery in employment branding enhance perceptions of organisations and attract candidates from diverse backgrounds. However, messages may be interpreted differently by various applicants within the same racial group due to prior experiences of discrimination.
- Anonymised application processes: Removing identifying details from applications is suggested to mitigate unconscious bias and racism. Some studies show positive results in increasing call-backs, but other research indicates potential drawbacks, such as diminished context cues and possible negative effects on culturally and racially marginalised candidates' outcomes.
- Standardised or competency-based interviewing: Structured interviews aim to reduce bias and discrimination. However, it is important to consider cultural nuances, as structured formats may favour candidates familiar with certain communication norms. Ensuring fairness and accommodating candidates from diverse backgrounds is essential.
- Training to counter bias: While some studies suggest positive outcomes in terms of behaviour change, the overall effectiveness of bias reduction training remains uncertain, particularly over the long term.
- Representation of diversity in staff involved in hiring: Including culturally and racially diverse staff in recruitment panels can attract a broader candidate pool and mitigate selection bias. While evidence supporting this approach exists, concerns of a "diversity burden" and power dynamics must be addressed. Careful consideration of representation dynamics is crucial to ensuring fairness and avoiding undue pressure on underrepresented staff.

- Affirmative recruitment measures: Affirmative measures target specific underrepresented groups and include strategies such as targeted outreach, recruitment quotas, and identified positions. Evidence suggests that affirmative measures increase candidate diversity without compromising workforce quality. However, effective implementation requires building employee knowledge, addressing candidate experiences, and careful evaluation.
- AI-powered recruitment: AI tools are increasingly used in recruitment to mitigate bias and improve efficiency. While they promise objectivity, concerns exist regarding perpetuation of biases and ethical implications. Limited research is available on the impact of AI in inclusive recruitment, and caution is advised due to potential risks.

Introduction

New South Wales is one of the most culturally diverse states in the world; in 2021, almost 30% of the population were born overseas, a figure that has been increasing steadily since the 1970s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Diversity and inclusion strategies in the public service have been central to public administration research and practice for several decades. As noted by the NSW Public Service Commission (NSW PSC), there is a distinct 'moral case' in the public sector for diversity and inclusion initiatives that reflect public sector core values (NSW Public Service Commission 2018). Alongside those values sits the evidence that a diverse workforce and a workplace committed to inclusion and equity drives innovation, higher levels of public trust and higher-quality service to the community.

Inclusive recruitment as a practice to increase and support the diversity of the workforce is widely understood as a key pillar of broader organisational diversity and inclusion agendas (Roberson 2019). The Diversity Council Australia (DCA) defines inclusive recruitment as "the process of connecting with, assessing, and selecting a diversity of individuals when hiring", noting that inclusive recruitment requires practices that are free from bias and value diversity at both the organisational and individual level (DCA 2021).

In NSW, under Section 63 of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* (GSE Act), the head of a NSW government sector agency is responsible for workforce diversity and for ensuring that workforce diversity is integrated into workforce planning in the agency (NSW Government 2023). Workforce diversity includes (but is not limited to)

diversity of the workforce in respect of gender, cultural and linguistic background, Aboriginal people and people with a disability. Under Rule 26 of the *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014* (GSE Rules), NSW government sector agencies can modify recruitment processes to assist employing people from identified groups, including people who, on or after 1 December 2015, enter or have entered Australia on a Refugee and Humanitarian (Migrant) (Class XB) visa issued by the Commonwealth.

This paper has been prepared as the first phase of a wider research project commissioned by Anti-Discrimination NSW in collaboration with the Department of Communities and Justice. The project researches the barriers and enablers of inclusive recruitment into the NSW public service for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This paper has two aims. First, it synthesises and analyses relevant research, both Australian and international, on the barriers and discrimination faced by culturally and racially marginalised groups when accessing the job market. Second, this paper outlines the research evidence on strategies that employers can deploy to ensure that their recruitment processes are inclusive and accessible for diverse communities.

In framing this discussion, we acknowledge the significance of intersectionality – the ways inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of identity intersect to shape how individuals experience discrimination and marginalisation.

We also note that workplace diversity and inclusion initiatives, including inclusive recruitment strategies and practices, cannot fully redress systemic and structural barriers faced by marginalised groups (Riccucci 2021).

Adjustments to recruitment processes can have limited impact on ingrained racism and other forms of bias within the workforce and within institutional cultures. Reflection on inclusive recruitment must be part of broader organisational commitments and actions towards anti-racism and culturally safe workplaces.

A note on terminology

The acronym CaLD (or CALD) stands for 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' or 'Cultural and Linguistic Diversity' and has been in use in Australian multicultural policy and demography since the 1970s to classify individuals and communities outside of the White, English-speaking majority. Precise definitions of CaLD vary considerably across research and policy contexts (Pham et. al 2021). Lay usage in the community usually signifies individuals who were born overseas, have a parent born overseas, speak a language other than English or belong to a visible racial or ethnic minority. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines the CaLD population mainly by country of birth, language spoken at home, self-reported English proficiency, or other characteristics including year of arrival in Australia, parents' country of birth and religious affiliation (ABS 1999).

CaLD has established use in Australia in the government sector. It is used for demographic analysis of diversity as well as to determine and deliver on service needs, most often in health, education and social services settings.

However, within the context of global debates around ethnic and racial categorisation, the acronym CaLD is increasingly considered limiting and outdated. Primarily, the term's centring of culture and diversity fails to acknowledge race, racialisation and

marginalisation (DCA 2023). Its broadness can evoke homogenisation of different racialised communities and ignore intersectional issues (Prentice 2022; Maturi & Munro 2022; Adusei-Asante & Adibi 2018). Further, Australians from racial and ethnic minorities and migrant or refugee communities feel increasingly distanced from the term as a marker of their identities (Prentice 2022).

Other terms are in use by researchers, practitioners and communities. In labour market research, DCA has adopted the operational term 'culturally and racially marginalised' (CARM) to refer to people who are not White. The term CARM distinguishes this cohort from other culturally and linguistically diverse migrants that face less discrimination in the labour market, such as migrants from Europe or North America. In the UK, the terms 'minoritised ethnic' and 'racialised minority' are often used to emphasise how social processes and power dynamics act upon these groups. In the US, terms like People of Colour (POC) and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) have increased in popular and media usage via the Black Lives Matter movement.

In this paper, we use the general descriptor 'culturally and racially marginalised.' This is in acknowledgement of shifting community sentiment around the acronym CaLD, and to situate the discussion in the specific context of people who are most likely to experience bias and discrimination in recruitment. Subsequent phases of this research will engage individuals and communities on their preferred terms. When discussing the content and findings of specific research literature in the review below, we use the terms deployed in the research publications for accuracy.

Scope and method of this paper

The literature review in this paper covers studies that address the barriers to employment/recruitment for culturally and racially marginalised groups, and studies that discuss and assess strategies for mitigating these barriers and making recruitment more inclusive. While grey literature and reports from reputable specialist sources have been included, we have focused on peer-reviewed research studies.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, we did not focus on specific journals but conducted a broad literature search involving the following multidisciplinary search engines and databases for peer-reviewed scholarly literature: Google Scholar, Scopus and ProQuest. We also searched the reference lists of key literature to identify additional studies. In the paper, we have focused on: studies published within the last 20 years; studies that are most relevant to the Australian public service context; and review studies as the best way to synthesise findings and make a rapid assessment of the evidence when there is a large field of literature available. Relevant resources, toolkits and guidelines were sourced through searching the websites of relevant organisations and via Google search. Ninety-five academic articles, books or reports and twenty-one inclusive recruitment resources were sourced for this review and are catalogued in the accompanying Resource Library spreadsheet.

Inclusive recruitment and the NSW public service

The NSW public service sector consists of a range of services and agencies serving the community, including education, health services, public transport and law enforcement. With over 430,000 employees, the NSW public sector is the largest employer in Australia (NSW Public Service Commission 2021). Most public agencies in NSW view the promotion of a diverse workforce as part of their wider commitment to equal employment opportunity (EEO) principles (NSW Public Service Commission 2018). A workforce that represents the composition of the community is better able to advise the government and to provide quality services to the public (NSW Public Service Commission 2018).

However, despite sector-wide pro-diversity commitments and strategies, people from CaLD communities are still underrepresented in the NSW public sector workforce. People with English as their second language were estimated to comprise 18.1% of the workforce in the NSW public sector in 2022 (declining from 18.5% in 2021), but account for 26.9% of the NSW working population. The estimated proportion of people who identified as being from a racial, ethnic or ethno-religious minority group was smaller at 13.9% in 2022, slightly increasing from 13.4% in 2012 (NSW Public Service Commission 2022). The distribution of this cohort across salary bands in 2022 shows that a higher estimated proportion of employees who identify as being from a minority group are represented in the middle salary ranges and a lower percentage in the bottom two and uppermost two salary ranges (NSW Public Service Commission 2022). These statistics suggest that although CaLD jobseekers are strongly represented at middle salary bands, there is still more to be done to increase representation at management and Executive levels. In 2023, the NSW PSC released its strategy to increase cultural diversity in the senior executive cohort and launched a

sponsorship program for culturally diverse employees.

Diversity matters to and is supported by employees and leaders across the NSW public service. Research commissioned by the PSC Advisory Board explored what diversity and inclusion means for the NSW public service through consultation with 150 employees, interviews with leading practice organisations as successful case studies, and analysis of workforce data. This research shows that broad and intersectional, rather than singular group-based approaches to diversity, are valued by NSW public sector employees. Participants viewed senior leaders as integral in progressing diversity and inclusion and creating an open and supportive work culture.

To increase diversity in their workforce and remove recruitment barriers, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) has implemented affirmative measures for First Nations applicants as well as for applicants with disabilities (2022).

Literature Review

Barriers to employment for culturally and racially marginalised people

Access to employment in Australia as well as in other industrialised countries is not equal, disadvantaging population groups along intersectional lines of gender, race, cultural background, age, religion, disability and sexuality. Understanding the barriers, implicit biases and discrimination that people who are culturally and racially marginalised face is crucial in order to ensure recruitment processes are more accessible to this cohort.

Culturally and racially marginalised people can face a number of barriers when entering the labour market that put them at a disadvantage, including:

- Language: Limited English proficiency – including understanding, speaking, writing and reading – is a common barrier, most pronounced among recently arrived migrants or refugees (Edo et al. 2019; Kosny et al. 2017; Refugee Council Australia 2010; Spence et al. 2022).
- Work experience: Lack of local Australian work experience is also a common barrier for migrants and refugees. Absence of local work experience means no local references can be provided and knowledge of Australian work culture is limited – which positions candidates as a perceived 'risks' for employers (Coffey et al. 2021; Kosny et al. 2017; Refugee Council Australia 2010).
- Foreign education/training: People who received their education/training outside of Australia face two barriers when applying for jobs: (1) differences in training and education and (2) a lack of adequate

understanding and assessment of foreign qualifications by Australian employers. Employers often treat foreign qualifications and work experience (particularly from non-Western countries) as less worthy than local qualifications and experience (Kosny et al. 2017; Tan & Cebulla 2023).
- Work culture: A lack of exposure to Australian work culture can be a barrier to finding and sustaining employment for marginalised people – for example, knowledge on how to present yourself in an interview or legal and implicit rules around employment (Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria 2009; Refugee Council Australia 2010).
- Social networks: People who immigrated to a new country more recently often have limited access to networks – i.e., relatives, colleagues, fellow students, mentors – that can provide information or recommendations about the local labour market, including job opportunities and job search advice (Blommaert at al. 2014).
- Visa restrictions: Temporary visa holders, such as international students, report difficulties finding work despite having valid work visas, mainly due to a lack of understanding of the visa conditions by employers. Moreover, many jobs, including government jobs, require applicants to be permanent residents/citizens (Coffey et al. 2021).

In addition to these structural recruitment barriers, culturally and racially marginalised people are commonly exposed to discrimination when applying for work. Discrimination in the recruitment process can be caused knowingly as well as by unconscious preferences of recruiters that are shaped by personal experience, societal stereotypes and cultural context. The most common forms of bias that are present in the

recruitment process in relation to culturally and racially marginalised people are:

- Affinity/group bias: Favouring people who share similar interests, backgrounds and experiences. Recruiters may prioritise candidates that are similar to themselves or someone they know and enjoy working with (Edo et al. 2019; Hiscox et al. 2017).
- Confirmation bias: Focusing on information about a person that confirms initial impressions and existing beliefs, which can lead to not hiring a candidate based on preconceived notions about their cultural group and their competencies (Hiscox et al. 2017).
- Halo effect: One personal trait is used to make an overall judgement, for example, assuming that a candidate who is not fluent in English is less intelligent or competent (Hiscox et al. 2017; Lev-Ari 2021).
- Status quo bias: A preference to not undertake any action to change a current or previous state, for example, recruiters opting for a 'safer choice' by hiring a candidate who is similar to other/previous employees (Hiscox et al. 2017).
- Groupthink: A group reaches consensus without critical reasoning or evaluation of the consequences, for example, feeling pressure to agree with a recruitment decision of other panel members despite having reservations (Hiscox et al. 2017).

These biases in the recruitment process result in culturally and racially marginalised people receiving fewer positive responses to applications. Resume studies in different Western countries have shown that people from ethnic minorities are around 50% less likely to receive a positive response when submitting their resume, despite having equivalent qualifications and experiences compared to non-marginalised applicants – see, for instance, Australia (Adamovic &

Leibbrandt 2023); the US (Pager, Bonikowski & Western 2009; Bertrand & Mullainathan 2004); Ireland (McGinnity et al. 2009); France (Cediey & Foroni 2008); and Sweden (Carlsson & Rooth 2007).

Discrimination of culturally and racially marginalised job seekers varies along intersectional lines. For instance, a study considering gender in addition to ethnic background found that male applicants with an ethnic name face more disadvantage than women (Adamovic 2022). With regards to religion, male applicants with a Muslim belief system have been found to be the most disadvantaged group in online recruitment (Adida et al. 2010).

Employment barriers and discrimination in the recruitment process have several negative consequences for culturally and racially marginalised people, including:

- Delays: Because of low positive response rates, finding a job can take significantly more time for culturally and racially marginalised job seekers, which can result in financial problems and/or visa issues when full-time employment is a visa requirement (Kosny et al. 2017).
- Underemployment: Many culturally and racially marginalised job seekers can only find jobs that they are over-qualified for (Kosny et al. 2017; Tan & Cebulla 2022). Recent statistics show that one in four permanent skilled migrants in Australia is working in a job beneath their skill level (CEDA 2021). In addition to being overqualified, marginalised job seekers often end up working in jobs that are high-risk and poorly paid, increasing the chances of workplace injury (Premji & Smith 2013) and poor mental health (Reid 2012).
- Volunteering: To gain Australian work experience and to enhance their chances of employment, some job seekers work for

free or volunteer (Kosny et al. 2017). However, research shows that volunteering rarely leads to paid employment, as employers do not recognise volunteering as valid work experience (Slootjes & Kampen 2017). One study conducted in Belgium, however, found that listing volunteering activities on their CVs mitigated discrimination for migrants (Baert & Vujić 2016).

- Cultural networks: Marginalised job seekers commonly find work through informal job referral networks within their cultural communities (Smith 2005). However, private referrals or working for community members carries a risk of exploitation, as workers can feel indebted to those who helped them (Kosny et al. 2017).

- Resume whitewashing: To increase their chances of success during the recruitment process, many culturally and racially marginalised job seekers conceal or downplay racial cues in their applications. This can involve Westernising their name or omitting work experiences/achievements that could reveal their ethnic identity, such as work in ethnic organisations or culturally specific scholarships. A US study has found that 30% to 40% of Black and Asian respondents engaged in CV whitening techniques and that whitewashed resumes led to between 10% and 16% more call-backs (Kang et al. 2016). This study also found that applicants are less likely to whitewash their resumes when they apply to work for organisations which position themselves as pro-diversity (i.e., by including diversity statements in job advertisements). However, their analysis showed that pro-diversity employers were not less likely than other employers to discriminate against resumes from racially marginalised communities (Kang et al. 2016).

Overall, these studies highlight the complexity of challenges that culturally and racially marginalised job seekers face, including structural barriers and implicit biases.

What works? Successful strategies for inclusive recruitment

Both in Australia and internationally, a range of toolkits, strategies and best practice recommendations are available to guide employers in how to make recruitment processes more inclusive. A selection of these resources is included in the Resource Library spreadsheet accompanying this paper. There are valuable recommendations and best-practice frameworks in many of these resources, especially when resources have been developed with attention to lived experience, intersectionality and research evidence on 'what works'.

In this section of the paper, we focus on research evidence that supports or does not support common and emerging strategies to improve inclusive recruitment for culturally and racially marginalised groups across various phases of the recruitment process.

Targeted advertising and organisational employment brand

The literature is clear that many organisations struggle to attract and retain culturally and racially marginalised candidates. All job seekers make decisions about the relative attractiveness of roles and organisations based on an assessment of fit between their personal values and those of the organisation. Culturally and racially marginalised job seekers may feel excluded from their perception of the hiring organisation's target audience or perceive the organisation to be unsupportive of

employees from diverse backgrounds (Williamson et al. 2008).

Strategies aimed at managing prospective applicants' impressions of the hiring organisation include:

- targeted advertising through channels commonly accessed by diverse candidates;
- explicit pro-diversity statements in advertisements and/or other recruitment communications;
- overall attention to representing diversity in the 'employment brand', such as including images of employees with a range of identities on websites and in recruitment portals.

These impression management approaches broadly enhance candidates' perceptions of the hiring organisation and may assist in attracting a larger pool of candidates from diverse backgrounds (Ng & Burke 2005). Flory et al. (2021), in one of the few recent field experiments to test these theories, found that when a major financial services corporation signalled explicit interest in employee diversity in recruitment materials, interest from racial minority candidates, as well as the likelihood that they apply and are selected, more than doubled.

However, research highlights that the intended message of an organisation's job advertisement is not necessarily perceived in the same way by all prospective applicants within the same racial group, and impressions may be mediated by previous experience of discrimination (Williamson et al. 2008). Messaging should consider the influence of both group- as well as individual-level characteristics on prospective applicants' perceptions of the hiring organisation.

Overall, there is some evidence to suggest these strategies could be successful in attracting more culturally and racially

marginalised groups to apply for public service jobs, but they would need to be part of a multi-pronged approach and messages would benefit from testing and feedback with members of target communities.

Anonymised application processes

The removal of socially identifying cues e.g. gender, race or ethnic background, age, health status or conditions, disability, sexual orientation, political views, and socioeconomic status (reflected, for instance, by address and education background) from candidates applications at different stages of the recruitment process is commonly identified as a strategy to try and mitigate unconscious bias and racism (McGinnity et al. 2009).

A significant number of studies show that applicants who could be identified as belonging to minority or marginalised groups were discriminated against more often than other candidates (Ahmad 2020; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Blommaert et al. 2014; Booth et al. 2012; Gaddis, 2015). As noted in the previous section, there is evidence from an audit study in the US showing that applicants who 'whiten' their resumes receive more call-backs than when they use their original resumes (Kang et al. 2016). As such, the removal of names and other identifying information from applications could have the potential to increase call backs for marginalised groups.

However, we could find very few experimental or field studies that have assessed the impact of anonymity on the recruitment process, and the results of the studies that exist are mixed. A Swedish analysis of real-world application and recruitment data (Åslund & Skans 2012) showed that anonymised applications increased the chances of women and applicants 'of non-Western origin' moving forward to interviews and of women receiving

offers. But the probability of ethnic minority candidates receiving job offers post-interview did not increase when compared to standard applications.

Some studies have shown negative effects of anonymised resumes. An evaluation of a French experimental program (Behaghel et al. 2015) found that participating firms became less likely to interview and hire minority candidates when receiving anonymous resumes, which researchers attributed to "the self-selection of firms into the program and by the fact that anonymization prevents the attenuation of negative signals when the candidate belongs to a minority" (p.1). Another French study (Lacroux & Martin-Lacroux 2020) showed that anonymised resumes were assessed more harshly than standard resumes, with assessors unable to use context cues about the candidates' background to explain weaknesses in their applications.

A randomised, controlled trial of resume deidentification for executive recruitment within the Australian public service indicated that retaining identifiable details led to culturally and linguistically diverse candidates being shortlisted more often than if their resumes were deidentified; however, results varied considerably across agencies (Hiscox et al. 2017). Also, since participants self-selected to participate in the study, it is possible that the sample was made up of a large proportion of people supportive of diversity hiring. Due to the small body of research specific to the Australian context, it is not clear whether these findings would be generalisable across sectors.

Standardised or competency-based interviewing

Structured and standardised interviewing processes are often a key 'diversity management' strategy to homogenise the candidate experience and mitigate potential bias. This usually requires that all interviews cover the same standardised questions that focus on the role and that interviewers evaluate all candidates with the same ratings and competency metrics. Structured approaches to interviews have been found to improve the reliability and validity of candidate evaluations and to reduce or eliminate discrimination (Consul et al. 2021; Mokhtech et al. 2022).

However, structured approaches may not be sufficient to mitigate the barriers faced by culturally and racially marginalised candidates. Structured formats are not culturally neutral and can favour candidates who have innate knowledge of the type of responses interviewees are seeking. Beyond English competence, interviews require specific expertise in inferencing, reasoning and types of argumentation (Roberts 2013) which are taken for granted by hiring committees but are culturally specific. Linguistics research, for example, notes that the STAR (situation, task, action, result) format of assessment follows and favours 'Anglo-Saxon norms' and specific kinds of sociocultural workplace knowledge (Roberts 2013). This puts non-English speaking background candidates at a disadvantage.

Interviews are a key moment in the recruitment process when barriers emerge for culturally and racially marginalised candidates. Ensuring interviews are based on formal assessments and that all candidates are assessed on the job's key duties are important to avoid subjective and informal assessment of 'suitability' and 'fit' that can be discriminatory (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2008). Further accommodations, support or prior information may, however, be appropriate to supply to candidates from marginalised groups.

Training to counter bias

Training in biases that could potentially impact each stage of the recruitment process enables hiring managers and selection committees to adopt a more conscious approach to candidate review and assessment (Consul et al. 2021). This can involve training hiring managers and recruiters to increase awareness of particular factors that may influence a strong reaction either in favour of or against a candidate. Examples include: education bias that presumes high grades, scores and institutional prestige is correlated with high employee performance; experience bias which correlates a candidate's years of experience with their level of work ethic and achievement; and enthusiasm bias, which holds that a candidate's communication skills and preferences, level of extroversion and self-promotion correlate with their passion and ability to perform immediately in the role (Consul et al. 2021).

However, other assessments of evidence for the effectiveness of unconscious bias training reported mixed findings. Atewologun et al. (2018) conducted a rapid evidence assessment of existing research into the efficacy of unconscious bias training. They reported encouraging evidence indicating that unconscious bias training may lead to behaviour change but highlighted a need for further research involving rigorous methods in naturalistic settings. Lai et al. (2014) examined 17 different interventions designed to reduce implicit racial bias, finding that their effectiveness varied depending on the content, with the interventions that required high self-involvement of participants having the strongest impact.

Using data from a longitudinal study of diversity efforts at more than 800 American firms over 30 years, Dobbin and Kalev (2007) examined the actual effects of diversity efforts on diversity in the workforce. They found that assigning organisational responsibility through affirmative action plans, diversity committees and full-time diversity staff is a more successful approach than diversity training for individual staff.

Overall, as both Fitzgerald et al. (2019) and Dobbin and Kalev (2018) note, despite its popularity as a recommended intervention, evidence of the actual effectiveness of bias reduction training in reducing discrimination, especially over the long-term, is limited. Further, it is not clear from the research the effect unconscious bias training might have in terms of intersectionality – for example, the intersections of gender and racial bias.

Representation of diversity in staff involved in hiring

Ensuring representation of marginalised communities within recruiters, interview panels and selection committees is a common recommendation to attract a diverse pool of candidates and to mitigate selection bias. There is some evidence to support this approach, although it has been less researched than other strategies outlined in this paper. Studies from the field of organisation management have shown 'race similarity effects', that is, that racial similarities between recruiters and applicants have a positive influence on both applicant attraction and selection (Goldberg 2005).

A possible negative impact of implementing this strategy is the 'diversity burden', that is, when employees from culturally and racially marginalised groups are disproportionately required to participate in selection panels and other recruitment activities (Vassie et al., 2020). Further, attention must also be paid to the power dynamics within the composition of selection panels, so that junior members are not under pressure to conform to decisions led by more senior members.

Affirmative recruitment measures

Affirmative measures in recruitment enable employers to engage specific target groups based on race, gender, disability or nationality, as a means to address under-representation, discrimination and unequal opportunities (Hodges-Aeberhard & Raskin 1997; Vitanski 2019). Affirmative measures can include indirect measures like outreach, targeted recruitment and employee development, as well as direct measures like recruitment quotas and identified positions to 'level the playing field' for historically marginalised candidates (Holzer & Neumark 2000).

Assessments and evaluations that investigate the impact of affirmative recruitment measures vary considerably depending on the context and on the specific types of policies and practices investigated. An overarching economic review of empirical evidence in the US by Holzer and Neumark (2000) finds that affirmative measures raise employers' willingness to hire marginalised applicants and increase the number of applicants and employees from the target groups, with little to no impact on the quality or productivity of the workforce.

In the Australian public service context, affirmative recruitment measures currently include identified positions for First Nations candidates as well as candidates with a disability. Affirmative measures can be used in public service employment for specific advertised positions under Sections 31 to 33 of the Australian Public Service Commissioner's Directions 2022.

The 2022 Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) Report, 'Our differences make us stronger' notes increased use of affirmative measures in public service recruitment due to improving employee familiarity and confidence with using these recruitment programs. The use of affirmative measures for the employment of First Nations people increased from 1.2% to 3% between 2019-20 and 2020-21, and for people with disability from 0.4% to 0.8% in the same period (APSC 2022). In addition, the RecruitAbility scheme, the most common affirmative measure, is designed to give people with disability who are found suitable at the first stage of recruitment a chance to progress to the second phase. Use of this scheme has increased significantly from 28.1% in 2018-19 to 66% in 2020-21 (APSC 2022).

The 'Our differences make us stronger' report (APSC 2022) also notes the results of a survey looking at potential improvements for affirmative measures from the perspective of candidates, HR managers and selection panels. Feedback from candidates indicated that 39% of respondents had a prior negative experience with the First Nations affirmative measure in an employment recruitment process. Improvements suggested include: changes to evidence requirements; more information and assistance for candidates; greater transparency; the use of departmental targets and in-agency support after the recruitment process.

In NSW, under Section 63 of the GSE Act, the head of a NSW government sector agency is responsible for workforce diversity and for ensuring that workforce diversity is integrated into workforce planning in the agency (NSW Government 2023). Workforce diversity includes (but is not limited to) diversity of the workforce in respect of gender, cultural and linguistic background, Aboriginal people and people with a disability. Under Rule 26 of the GSE Rules, NSW government sector agencies can modify recruitment processes to assist employing people from identified groups.

In NSW, utilising the temporary exemption process in section 126 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* to designate jobs to culturally and racially marginalised people is also a form of affirmative recruitment measure available to public service employers. Exemptions under section 126 of the Act can be granted to allow organisations to favour a particular group in relation to jobs, programs or services.

Organisations including Transport for NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice have had exemptions approved to provide targeted development programs including talent management programs, leadership development, coaching, shadowing and sponsorship development opportunities for groups such as people from racial, ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups' and 'refugees and asylum seekers who are eligible to work in Australia'. These exemptions also provide for targeted recruitment of refugees and asylum seekers who are eligible to work in Australia, however their use in targeted recruitment of people from CALD backgrounds is just coming into existence and beginning to display signs of future potential.

The existing research suggests that building knowledge and confidence amongst employees, hiring managers and recruiters in the use of affirmative measures is key to ensuring their uptake in recruitment. Further, evaluations of candidate experience as well as the experiences of staff involved in recruitment is critical to ensuring these measures are effective and supported.

AI-powered recruitment

AI-powered tools are increasingly used in HR and recruitment. They perform a variety of functions, including: screening and selection decisions through analysis of resumes and application collateral; automated communication and engagement with candidates; and analysing video interviews using facial recognition technology. A key claim of the companies that produce these technologies is that they can 'de-bias' recruitment by removing markers like gender and race from an algorithmic assessment of candidates, making assessments more objective and helping organisations attain diversity and inclusion goals (Drage & Mackereth 2022).

There is, however, considerable evidence that AI tools can unintentionally perpetuate and entrench existing biases (Drage & Mackereth 2022; Hsu 2020). For example, Amazon scrapped development of an AI recruitment tool in 2018 because it discriminated against women through proxies for gender on candidates' CVs (Dastin 2018).

Research evidence on the impact of AI on inclusive recruitment is still lacking, and, to date, no comprehensive analysis of the ethical implications exists (Hunkenschroer & Luetge 2022). While AI can clearly create workflow efficiencies by streamlining high volume recruitment processes, claims that AI tools can have a positive impact on inclusion are unproven and there is considerable ethical risk to their deployment.

Conclusions

In light of the extensive literature reviewed, several key findings emerge. The barriers encountered by culturally and racially marginalised candidates in the recruitment process are well-established and supported by a wealth of evidence. Structural barriers and discrimination during recruitment all contribute to these challenges. However, the pathways to effective solutions are less uniform, often lacking consensus and empirical validation. Many commonly recommended strategies exhibit limited evidence of efficacy, prompting a need for deeper exploration and refinement.

However, the literature suggests that affirmative recruitment practices to target roles to culturally and racially marginalised candidates presents a feasible and evidence-supported strategy to addressing barriers in recruitment.

Recommendations for resource utilisation

Based on our evaluation of existing toolkits and strategies, we recommend prioritising resources that align specifically with the needs of culturally and racially marginalised job seekers and pay attention to intersectionality, rather than resources that address diversity in generic or singular ways (for example, focusing only on gender). We also recommend assessing the value of existing resources based on their alignment with research evidence, holistic approaches that address all phases of the recruitment process, and frameworks that centre and evaluate the candidate experience.

In the context of affirmative recruitment practices, this could involve further refinement of the temporary exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* to enhance hiring managers' knowledge of and confidence in implementing the process.

Contextualised solutions and next steps

Our comprehensive analysis of the research evidence underscores the nuanced nature of the challenges and potential solutions. While the barriers are evident, the effectiveness of strategies will vary across different organisational contexts and target communities. Recognising that an organisation's structure, culture, and candidate pool play a crucial role, it is imperative to delve into the lived experiences of job seekers from target communities who may be within the pool of qualified candidates for public service roles. In-depth exploration of the awareness in these communities around public service employment and how candidates from these communities perceive and respond to specific interventions in the recruitment process is essential. In complement to the jobseeker perspective, an in-depth exploration of hiring managers' experience and perceptions of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* exemption process and consideration of strategies to address challenges in uptake could prove beneficial to more effective targeting of roles to culturally and racially marginalised candidates. This research approach promises a deeper understanding of the unique barriers and enablers for these communities and within the distinctive public service recruitment environment.

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