

# Impact Case Study

## Post-Covid-19 capacity building in migrant entrepreneurs



### Introduction



Australia's history over the last two centuries has often been one of migrants and refugees, from the first prison colonies to the gold rush influx and those seeking better opportunities away from famine, war and persecution. Each incoming wave has faced barriers to social and economic integration.

In recent decades, migrants engaged in entrepreneurial activities have faced significant challenges, often beginning with language barriers, compounded by lack of networking opportunities, limited finances, poor digital literacy and low social capital.

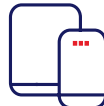
Despite these barriers, many migrants turn to self-employment because of the opportunities it offers for self-determination, with both social and economic benefits for the migrants and the wider community.

### Background



The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-22 deeply affected many Australian businesses and their employees. However, the pandemic also brought extra challenges and had a disproportionate impact on Australia's migrant entrepreneurs, who predominantly operate in the hospitality, retail, construction and freelance industries. All the traditional barriers to work and entrepreneurship were accentuated and exacerbated during the pandemic's difficult social and economic circumstances.

### The Research



RMIT's *Migrant entrepreneurs in post Covid-19 economy: Enabling sustained entrepreneurship through enhanced financial and digital skills* project was developed in partnership with Migrant Women in Business (MWiB) and international organisation YGAP, which focuses on making entrepreneurship accessible to all.

Led by Centre for Organisations and Social Change (COSC) members Dr Afreen Huq and Dr Ashenafi Biru, the project worked with 35 migrant entrepreneurs from Footscray and Dandenong to build their capacity to deliver value to their customers, and to co-design interventions that would sustain their businesses in the post Covid-19 economy.

While the migrant entrepreneurs were highly educated and greatly experienced in their professional field, they often lacked confidence and agency to be more competitive with their mainstream counterparts. Part of their difficulty in leveraging their abilities came from the challenges arising from a lack of trust from financial institutions and their customers and suppliers, which affected their ability to form partnerships and gain traction to compete in mainstream markets. Cultural differences and lack of policy support for growing migrant businesses also contributed to these challenges.

Despite these factors, however, the participants were able to benefit from the co-designed interventions, which included workshops and focus groups.



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## Funding support and/or institutional support



The *Migrant entrepreneurs in post Covid-19 economy: Enabling sustained entrepreneurship through enhanced financial and digital skills* project was

supported by a \$30,000 grant from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust (HMSTrust).

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## Project outcomes



### Report

*Migrant entrepreneurs in post Covid-19 economy: Enabling sustained entrepreneurship through enhanced financial and digital skills* was published in 2022.

- [Final Report on Migrant and Refugee Entrepreneurs- HMST-AHuq & ABiru.pdf](#)

## Educational videos

Two educational videos, on financial management skills and on digital marketing skills, were created to support migrant and refugee entrepreneurs to improve their financial and digital skills. Participants reported significant improvement in their understanding of finance, digital skills and innovative business models as a result. The videos remained available to them for referral as they developed their skills.

## Events

- *Venture Beyond Borders: Opportunities & Challenges of Migrant Entrepreneurs*, 16 November 2022

A collaboration with the RMIT Global Business Innovation Enabling Capability Platform and RMIT Activator hosted a roundtable discussion with migrant entrepreneurs, support agencies including Catalyst and Startspace, and other industry experts. The event explored how Australian migrant and refugee communities might optimise their experience and skills to take on entrepreneurial opportunities.

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## Overview of the impact

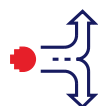


As a result of the project, most participants reported improvements in many aspects of their entrepreneurships.

- 80% reported having increased financial and digital skills.
- 80% had increased understanding of innovative business models.
- 90% were more confident in their ability to manage their enterprise.
- 90% reported increased self-perception of wellbeing, identity, and resilience.
- 75% felt more connected to the entrepreneurial community.
- at least half the participants were able to pivot their business as a result of the intervention.

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## Next Steps



The *Migrant entrepreneurs in post Covid-19 economy: Enabling sustained entrepreneurship through enhanced financial and digital skills* focused on financial and digital literacy. The post-project survey – conducted with the participants, focus groups and business mentors – further reveals that enabling sustained entrepreneurship will need a more diverse approach, leveraging different forms of support and, significantly improving access to adequate financial capital.

The team is currently developing two further research projects: one focusing on the unique capabilities of entrepreneurs with ‘outsidership’ status; the other exploring how migrant women entrepreneurs can use financial technology to scale up their business.

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## COSC Research Theme

- Multicultural inclusion and organisations

This theme explores issues of inclusion and exclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse people, migrants, refugees and indigenous communities in workplaces and for organisations.