

# MIGRATION OF YOUNG FRENCH PROFESSIONALS TO AUSTRALIA<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Australia has long been referred to as the ‘Lucky Country’. It is one of the few developed countries to have survived the global financial crisis of 2008 without a serious recession, and this comparatively prosperous environment has triggered a recent increase in economic migration from Europe, particularly from France. Australia is often depicted in the global media as an economic and social paradise, offering limitless opportunities to the newcomer. The French press has also taken up the charge, portraying Australia as one of the new economic powerhouses of the Asia Pacific region where jobs are plentiful, and where integrating into this dynamic workforce is easily achieved. According to Miranda (2013), the number of work visas granted to French applicants has increased by 50% over the last five years, and, in 2012, the number of French people coming to Australia was twice as high as Italians (9600) and all the Scandinavian countries put together including Sweden (4772), Denmark (1484), Finland (1181) and Norway (617). However, despite such large numbers of French migrants flocking into the country to achieve their dream, many discover that the reality is not quite what they anticipated.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article. It should be noted that this research project was undertaken in 2013 and that the article was written in the first half of 2014 based on statistics and figures available at the time. More recent economic trends in both France and Australia have therefore not been taken into account. Indeed, it will be interesting to see if the recent economic downturn in Australia has an adverse effect on the current flow of young French migrants to Australia.

To date, there has not been a great deal of research on the economic success and integration<sup>2</sup> of French professional migrants in Australia, or indeed skilled economic migrants at all (Ryan and Mulholland 2014). Our small-scale study offers a modest contribution to the existing literature by examining the circumstances leading some of these young French professionals<sup>3</sup> to leave France for Australia, the difficulties they face on arrival and the specific skills required for successful integration. This will be done through questionnaires and interviews with a small number of young French professional migrants living in Melbourne. The authors will also examine the recent depiction of Australia in the French media and whether the realities awaiting French migrants on their arrival match these images: does Australia meet their expectations? We hope the results will help provide some understanding of what is involved for young French professionals migrating to Australia.

### **Australia—the ‘Lucky Country’**

Australia is now considered an economic powerhouse, 13<sup>th</sup> in the world (French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2012), home to some of the most multicultural communities in the world (Collins 2012).<sup>4</sup> It is currently enjoying its 21<sup>st</sup> year of continued economic growth (3% per annum on average) and has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the developed world (French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2012). The overall unemployment rate stood at 5.6% in March 2013 (Bartnik 2013a), increasing only marginally to 5.8% by April 2014 (Trading Economics 2014). The youth unemployment rate was 12.7% in October 2013 (Trading Economics 2014). While the rate of overall unemployment reached 6% in January 2014, ‘the worst in 10 years’ (Kwek 2014), this rate is minimal in comparison to the overall unemployment rate in France of

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<sup>2</sup> Integration here refers to successfully participating in and being accepted in a new culture professionally and socially (Collins 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Young French people between the ages of 25 and 35 who hold Working Holiday visas (subclass 417) or Temporary Skilled visas (subclass 457), and are currently working or in search of employment in Australia.

<sup>4</sup> 31% of current Melbourne residents were born overseas (InterNations 2013).

12% in April 2013 (Bartnik 2013b), although this was down to 10.1% by January 2014 (Trading Economics 2014). Youth unemployment figures increased from 21.8% (Sedghi 2012) to 23.2% in France over the same period (Trading Economics 2014). It has also been reported however that, despite the low unemployment rate, Australia is experiencing a lack of skilled labour in certain sectors (French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2012).

Australia has also been judged one of the most reliable countries for foreign investments, which represent a third of the country's current GDP (French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2012). In addition, Australia remains one of a small group of nations to have received AAA rating from all three international credit agencies: Standard and Poor's, Moody's and Fitch. Over 2011 and early 2012, the value of the Australian Dollar was at an all-time high (Australian Dollar 2014).<sup>5</sup> All of this contrasts sharply with the economic climate in France, where the recent global financial crisis and present unemployment rates have resulted in a 'démoralisation collective', where the percentage of French people who claim to be optimistic for their children and future generations had decreased to 39% in 2012 from 67% in 1993 (Gri 2014, 73).

The Economist Group providing forecasting and advisory services, the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 2013 Global Liveability Survey, recently voted Melbourne the world's most liveable city (of the 140 cities surveyed) for the third year in a row. The ranking is based on the city's performance in five broad categories: stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Four other Australian cities made this year's top ten, including Adelaide (ranked 5<sup>th</sup>), Sydney (7<sup>th</sup>) and Perth (9<sup>th</sup>). These findings were immediately challenged in the media however: James (2013) and Albérola (2013) questioned the criteria for ranking the cities, and pointed out the realities of Melbourne's high cost of living, including accommodation, healthcare, education and public transport costs, as well as the problems of congestion and the city's massive 'ecological footprint'. However, this number one ranking prompted several

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<sup>5</sup> Despite the strong economy, both the report of the 2014 roundtable convened by Australia 21, the ANU and the Australia Institute (Douglas, Friel, Denniss and Morawetz 2014) and the Oxfam Australia (2014) 'Still the Lucky Country?' report show an increasing tendency towards wealth inequity in Australia.

other French publications and documentaries to showcase Australia, and Melbourne in particular, such as ‘Melbourne, le nouveau chic australien’ (Billaud 2013), and ‘Pourquoi Melbourne est-elle la ville la plus agréable au monde?’ (Abdelkhalek and Paquier 2014). Apart from only a brief reference to the high cost of living, these reports were overwhelmingly positive.

At the same time ‘CadresOnline’ (a professional employment website based in France) published a 2013 report on ‘Les 10 pays les plus attractifs pour s’expatrier’, where Australia ranked third after the USA and the UK. Sydney was ranked the fifth most attractive city to migrate to in the same report. With promises of high levels of employment, a dynamic economy and what can be considered some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, many young French professionals are tempted by these images of Australia. Indeed, according to the 2011 Australian Census, 24,675 French people were residing in the country at the time, an increase of 28.6%. According to the former French Ambassador to Australia, Stéphane Romatet, in February 2014 this figure had grown to more than 40,000 French migrants in Australia and continues to grow by 10% per annum. This is partly due to approximately 350 French owned companies currently operating in Australia in all areas of industry from energy, mining, infrastructure, engineering, science and technology to hospitality and beauty products (Romatet 2014).

For the most part the media has provided somewhat one-sided information, painting a picture of an Australian ‘El Dorado’ (Nicolas 2013). Images such as those shown on television station France 2 in a 90 minute documentary on the ‘nouveau far-west’ (La Villardière 2013), and the guide to professional life in Australia included in the weekly *L’Express* tend to portray an overly attractive view of Australia, highlighting the low unemployment rates and the standard of living, while glossing over some of the negative aspects, such as the high cost of living and the relative difficulty in obtaining work.

A more balanced documentary, ‘Australie: la vague française’ (Waleckx, Duboz and Bozo 2013), focussed primarily on three young French economic migrants who had left France in search of a better quality of life. All referred to the lack of job opportunities back home, having all found better and more highly paid jobs in Melbourne and Sydney relatively quickly. One young woman, Juliette, said that she would not have left France if she had been able to find work, but after three years of searching, despite her qualifications from a prestigious School of Commerce in Lille, her 1,200

job applications had amounted to nothing. Juliette said that she had been called for more interviews in her first two weeks in Melbourne than in one year in France, and she was now earning twice as much as she could have in a similar position at home. All three interviewees said they particularly enjoyed the Australian climate, the outdoor lifestyle, and the more balanced way of living, where they felt that people work less and earn more than would be possible in France. The report did note the increasing difficulty in obtaining or renewing Australian work visas, and a fourth young French migrant interviewed for the documentary had overstayed her visa and was now obliged to survive by undertaking whatever cash-in-hand menial tasks she could find. Despite this, she explained, she could still afford to live in a large house and buy expensive sporting equipment, such as a boat, a bicycle, diving and camping gear, and was even able to put aside some savings. Such reports contribute to the attractive image of Australia, where, even under these circumstances, one can earn a better living than collecting the unemployment benefit in France.

More realistic reports have also started to emerge in other international media, and these reveal that the high standard of living in Australia comes at a high price. In February 2013, BBC News reported that today three of Australia's cities are in the top fifteen most expensive cities in the world, and the price of a single lime is the equivalent of what 'some of our neighbours in Asia are paid in a day' (Morris 2013). Recently, *Le Figaro* announced that, according to a study undertaken by the British bank HSBC, studying in Australia costs French international students 29,000 Euros a year (as opposed to 4,700 Euros to study in Germany). This is due to the 'exorbitant' cost of living in Australia of 9,900 Euros per annum (Chaudanson 2013). A report published in April 2014 ranked Australia as the fourth most expensive country in the world behind Switzerland, Norway and Bermuda respectively (Farrer and Wearden 2014). Another article in *Le Petit Journal* described the housing crisis in Melbourne: tenants can pay up to \$200 a week for a room in a share house with up to ten or twelve other tenants, sometimes even sharing the room itself (Nicolas 2013).<sup>6</sup> Affordable accommodation can be

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<sup>6</sup> Anecdotes told by another French migrant include stories of sharing a house designed for eight people with up to twenty-two other tenants, and of spending several weeks living in a campervan and showering in public toilets in cold water due to the housing crisis in Melbourne.

found however, if one knows where to look; for example, on websites such as Gumtree, an online classified ads and community site.

These reports suggest that migrants need to be financially self-sufficient when moving to Australia; if possible they should begin their search for affordable housing and suitable employment before leaving France, and be aware that they may face difficulties securing jobs and accommodation on arrival. Other factors involved in finding work in Australia are outlined in Szufiak (2013a), who explains that it is the simple things that can make all the difference for a successful experience: for example, a French curriculum vitae should be modified to conform to Australian norms (see also Ralph 2013), including clarifying the equivalence of some French qualifications which are not recognised in Australia. While seemingly obvious, it should also be remembered that networking will work differently in Australia, and that any previous in-country work experience will help with finding further employment (Szufiak 2013a). All of these factors can affect how quickly the newly arrived French professional will find work.<sup>7</sup>

Once employed, however, other challenges may arise. French migrants may face unexpected difficulties adapting to the Australian workplace where interactions are generally more informal and egalitarian than in France (Béal 2010). While seemingly insignificant, these differences can be disarming and frustrating for the French professional who may be used to a more formal and hierarchical workplace. In defining workplace culture, Vorhölter (2009) claims that organisations are cultures, and resemble ethnic groups. Adjusting to these work cultures can be challenging for migrants:

the process of becoming a member of a community of practice, as typically happens when we join a new workplace, involves learning the appropriate behaviours, including verbal behaviours, that characterize this group and distinguish it from others. In other words, joining a community of practice inevitably involves acquiring the cultural norms of the community (Wenger 1998, 56).

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<sup>7</sup> One of the authors is regularly contacted by such professionals looking for work and is often faced with an overly informal covering letter and a curriculum vitae inappropriate to the Australian context.

In their research on the distinctiveness of particular communities of practice in New Zealand and the importance of social identity in the workplace, Holmes and Marra (2002) observed that regular greeting rituals, the exchange of small talk between staff members and humour all differ depending on the company and its work culture,<sup>8</sup> but are vital to establishing one's social identity. 'Work is one important source of an individual's social identity, and workplace interaction is a crucial means of instantiating that identity' (Holmes and Marra 2002, 1683). This can be particularly difficult when the new workplace is in a foreign country and where the language spoken is not one's mother tongue.

### **Young French professionals in Melbourne**

The data for this study is based on a small-scale survey undertaken in 2013 with twenty-five young French migrants between the ages of 25 and 35 living in Melbourne. These participants held either a Working Holiday visa (subclass 417) or a Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457) at the time of data collection. While the WHV is a temporary one year visa renewable after three months of work in a regional area within Australia, and is limited to applicants between the ages of 18 and 30, the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa has no age restrictions, provided that an approved business in Australia agrees to professionally sponsor the applicant.<sup>9</sup> The participants in our survey are included in the government statistics for the period 2012–2013.

The 2013 Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship Working Holiday maker visa program report gave the number of first time Working Holiday visas granted to French applicants in this period as 22,539 (an increase of 22.6% from 2011–2012 and representing 10.7% of all first time WHVs granted in 2012–2013), while 2,249 second term WHVs were granted to French applicants (up 32.4% from 2011–2012 and representing 5.8% of all second term WHVs granted in 2012–2013).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See also Pullin (2011) on the role of humour in integrating new staff into the workplace.

<sup>9</sup> The participants in our survey are included in the government statistics for the period 2012–2013.

<sup>10</sup> The breakdown of figures was not available by State.

According to the Department's Subclass 457 State/Territory summary report (2012–2013), a total of 2,420 Temporary Work (Skilled) visas were granted to French applicants in the same period, an increase of 1.9% from 2011–2012. 250 of these were granted in Victoria in 2012–2013, bringing the total number of Temporary Work (Skilled) visas in Victoria to 440 as at 30th June 2013. However, this represented a decrease of 5.6% from those granted in Victoria in the previous period 2011–2012.

Many of the young French migrants in our survey were hoping to renew their Working Holiday visa for a second year and/or obtain a Temporary Work visa, some with the longer term intention of applying for permanent residency or Australian citizenship.

The young professionals participating in the survey were recruited through the French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FACCI) Young Professional<sup>11</sup> Facebook page and networking events. The survey was conducted online and anonymously and divided into two parts: the first part asked the participants about their general expectations of Australia prior to arrival; and the second part focussed on the participants' professional experiences and integration since their arrival in Australia (Appendix 1).

The survey was followed by a more in-depth interview with three of the survey respondents. This included questions such as: 'What do you think defines the French integration process into Australia?'; 'What specific challenges did you face on arrival in Australia?'; and 'Did you have to change anything about your lifestyle to positively integrate into Australia?'.

Clearly, the limited size and scope of this sample prevents the results from being more widely generalisable, but when considered alongside experiences of other migrant communities (for example Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007, Collins 2013, Ryan and Mulholland 2014) and reports in the media, a definite trend can be identified.

The first section of the survey asked the respondents about their level of education, their professional experience, the image they had of Australia prior to their arrival and their reasons for wanting to migrate here, including to what extent media images had played a part in this decision.

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<sup>11</sup> Defined as members of the French-Australian business community under the age of 30. <http://www.facci.com.au/young-professionals/young-professionals-corner/>

In answer to the question concerning their educational and professional background, 79% of survey participants had a Master's degree, while the remaining 21% either had a Bachelor's degree or a specific professional degree. In addition to this, approximately 58% of participants had previous work experience in their field of specialisation. All participants can therefore be considered 'highly skilled'.<sup>12</sup>

The participants were asked to rank several factors motivating them to migrate to Australia. The need for a professional change and adventure was cited as the most influential factor (40%), closely followed by the quest for a profession which would be more easily obtainable than in France (26%).

Fourteen per cent of the respondents confirmed that images of Australia in magazine or newspaper articles, television documentaries and radio programmes had considerably influenced their decision to migrate.

Professional transfers and maintaining a relationship with a significant other were selected as the least influential reasons for migration (10% each). The desires to obtain a successful profession and to live the 'Australian dream' were therefore the two major motivators for French migration into Australia.

The final question in the first part of the survey asked participants to describe their image of Australia prior to arrival. Many respondents commented on what they perceived to be the beauty of Australia (Australian wildlife, vast landscapes, sun, surf and beaches), but also on the image of a dynamic and multicultural society, a strong economy with plentiful professional opportunities, and a high standard of living, for example:

A country with little unemployment and a high GDP, a country not concerned with the global recession, international cities

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<sup>12</sup> Defined by the OECD and European commission/Eurostat as having successfully completed tertiary education and/or employed in occupational roles normally requiring these qualifications (Vasileva 2009 cited in Ryan and Mulholland 2014).

where you can start a new life easily, a spacious continent where nature is part of your everyday life.

A friendly and multicultural country with amazing landscapes, a better economy than in Europe, and so more professional opportunities.

One respondent made direct reference to a particular article in the media that had influenced them:

I didn't know anything about any other city than Sydney. About Melbourne I just knew it was ranked as the best city to live in by National Geographic.

The second part of the survey focussed on the migrants' post-arrival experience, particularly on their employment status: the majority of respondents (80%) confirmed that they were now employed (twenty of the twenty-five participants). When asked how long it had taken them to find employment, although approximately 71% of the employed candidates had obtained a job in less than two months (twelve of seventeen participants, as three participants did not answer this question), 60% (three of the five) of the currently unemployed participants had been looking for work for over six months, and 40% (two of five participants) had been looking for work between three and six months. Three of these five unemployed participants had previous work experience in their field of specialisation. All five had higher education qualifications, such as a Bachelor, Masters and/or a professional degree.

While 80% of the participants (twenty of the twenty-five) were satisfied with their experience and agreed that the French media had mostly portrayed an accurate image of the positive aspects of Australia, two thirds of those who answered this question (fourteen out of twenty-one participants) explained that, despite their expectations being met on many levels, they felt that some major obstacles facing young French migrants on arrival in Australia had not been mentioned, such as the difficulty in obtaining a sponsorship visa, or even in finding work, despite tertiary qualifications and

previous work experience in their field of specialisation. As one participant explained:

French media presents Australia as a promise [sic] land for finding a dream job and living an incredible lifestyle. Which is not too far from reality but far from being accessible as easily as it is portrayed. Coming to Australia on a working holiday visa in order to find that dream job is very hard, and only very few end up finding it, especially because you will need to find an employer willing to sponsor you for a long term working visa, which is nearly impossible without knowing anyone and without a solid work experience.

Another respondent commented that:

Australia has met my expectations socially, but not in other ways. The media made it look like I would find a job very easily. I'm not sure if this is because my English has a strong accent, or if there just aren't as many jobs out there [sic] as I thought.

Yet another participant was quite indignant about the mismatch between expectation and reality:

French media talks about an Australian dream and motivates French people to come here as it will be easier to find a job in this paradise. But concretely it is not easy to find a job especially because of the visa, and most of the young people from France arrive with a working holiday visa thinking that they will find a job in their field of specialization, but the companies don't want to hire someone with a 1 year visa and able to work only 6 months.<sup>13</sup> I think that it's a total disappointment for this [sic] young people. French media doesn't portray a realistic image of

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<sup>13</sup> One condition of Working Holiday visas is that migrants are restricted to a maximum of six months employment with the same employer.

Australia at all and shows only amazing places in the country and a good economy, but it's not as easy in my opinion...

However, one participant acknowledged that French media images of Australia were actually rather accurate:

From what I have seen in the French media, that is to say France 2 'reportages' and 'complément d'enquête', I think it is safe to say that it was a realistic portrayal of Australia. The two main elements being firstly a dream place for young French people who had not been given a chance back in France and who were now successful in Australia, and secondly an expensive place with controlled immigration with great difficulties to remain in the country for more than 2 years.

Three participants agreed to be interviewed on their general experiences in Australia, the challenges they had faced and their recommendations for future French migrants.<sup>14</sup>

After completing a Masters in IT at RMIT University, Marc,<sup>15</sup> a 27 year old from Marseille, tried to find his dream job. Despite his qualifications and previous experience in France, his lack of experience in the Australian market disadvantaged him in a way he had not expected. After six months of unsuccessful searching, he finally found a non-remunerated five-month internship in the IT sector. He was over-qualified for this position. However, after only two weeks of demonstrated dedication and a specific skill set, he was offered a full-time position in the firm. Marc reported that in his experience, knowing or getting to know the right people who can assist, provide contacts, and referrals for future employment was equally as important—if not more so on occasion— than the job application itself. Marc explained that many employers hire people who have been referred to them, and that establishing contacts and networks on arrival in a new country is understandably difficult. However, having previous Australian

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<sup>14</sup> One of these participants (Lionel) had returned to France at the time of the interview.

<sup>15</sup> Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

work experience, what is commonly known as ‘local experience’, is the first step to establishing good contacts within a specific professional community.

Marc also experienced some cultural differences—differences which affect the whole professional process from hiring to daily interactions with colleagues. He did not seem to find these differences too much of a problem however:

I think they are actually more laidback here; they make things last for months that could be completed in two days. A bit like Africa! They spread themselves around a bit and then get lost on the way. We have some things in common and some which are noticeably different, but they don’t prevent us from having good professional or personal relationships.

Elisabeth, a 32 year old originally from Paris, experienced similar cultural difficulties. On arrival, Elisabeth only held a tourist visa while searching for sponsored work, which made the task that much more difficult. It had taken her four months to find work in her field. She had to adjust her curriculum vitae to Australian conventions, take English classes and accept a position below her qualification level. Socialising in the work place and understanding the different culture of professional behaviour in Australia were both major challenges for her. She discovered that forming an amicable relationship with one’s colleagues and superiors is expected and that everyone seems to have a comparatively casual approach to their tasks. In addition to this, she had found that it is important to show enthusiasm for Australian culture: demonstrating knowledge about Australian football and politics vastly improves one’s chances of developing strong relationships with colleagues. Elisabeth also mentioned how difficult she had initially found the Australian accent, especially during job interviews. Despite her level of proficiency in English, she had found this accent very challenging as, until her arrival in Australia, she had mostly been exposed to a British English accent. Elisabeth decided that she needed to undertake classes with a native Australian English speaker.

Lionel, a 26 year old from Toulouse, arrived in Australia with a Working Holiday visa, which he later renewed without hesitation. Two weeks after his initial arrival, Lionel found work in hospitality and found a share house in Melbourne’s inner city suburbs. Having already lived outside

France, and having met and known some Australian travellers before, he found it rather easy to integrate into Australian society. Lionel chose to spend his two years in Australia discovering the country by moving to a different city every six months. He reported that his experience in Australia was an adventure that many French people his age dream of. Like many French young professionals on a Working Holiday visa, Lionel had hoped to subsequently secure a sponsorship visa but was unable to do so:

I moved to Australia to discover something new and to live an adventure. Luckily, I had money saved up and found work rather easily, because if you want to live well, travel, and see the amazing things there are to see, you either have to work hard or have a lot of savings. My Australian experience was amazing and I would have moved there permanently. It's a shame that it's so hard to get a visa.

All three interviewees agreed that while previous work experience is necessary, local experience in Australia is a distinct advantage. Marc explained that if he had had previous work experience in Australia, securing a job in his sector would have been a much easier task. This could also have been achieved more easily with the aid of local referrals and contacts. Elisabeth faced different challenges, in particular after having secured a job. Adjusting to the different work culture and establishing relationships with Australian colleagues were unexpected challenges. Both participants underlined the need for proficiency in English, especially given the distinctive Australian accent. Lionel, on the other hand, faced very few difficulties, although he had not anticipated that securing a more permanent visa would be so difficult and, after two years in Australia, he returned to France.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

All migrants face an array of challenges on arrival in a new country, and Australia is no different, as evidenced by our participants. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) explored the issue of integration into the Australian labour market across three 'visibly different' (2007, 61) cultural groups:

ex-Yugoslavs, ‘black’ Africans and people from the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Of the ex-Yugoslav participants, 70% stated that they had completed a tertiary education (66); and 66% and 52% considered their proficiency in spoken and written English respectively to be very good or fluent, indicating that they were ‘capable of competing in the skilled job market’ (67). Despite this, 80% of the ex-Yugoslavian migrants confirmed that they were working in jobs not requiring their educational qualifications, and 58% had experienced difficulties in actually finding any work (68, 70).

As well as the unanticipated length of time taken for some participants to find work, another recurring theme was the difficulty some had experienced in finding employment due to their visa situation. Many organisations are unwilling to offer skilled work to migrants on Working Holiday visas as the employee is limited to six months’ work with the same employer. This is consistent with Collins (2012) who reports that the Australian Productivity Commission (2006) found that unemployment data for 2004 showed that immigrants on skilled visas in Australia had a slightly lower unemployment rate (4.3%) than the Australian born (4.9%), but immigrants with temporary visas had a higher unemployment rate (6.4%).

In May 2013, then Australian Immigration Minister Brendan O’Connor announced changes to the Skilled Occupation List in order to protect Australian workers. This change was implemented following a 20% increase in skilled workers migrating to Australia on a Temporary Work (Skilled) 457 visa (Eliasson 2013). Minister O’Connor expressed his concern regarding the provision of Australian visas and the need to reinforce current visa reforms.<sup>17</sup> He argued that ‘one in ten visas were [sic] being used illegitimately’, although little evidence was provided to support this claim (Kirk 2013). The Minister’s comments caused widespread controversy, and led to talk of implementing a ‘genuineness’ test which aims to prevent ‘457 visas being used to fill unskilled positions’ (Jones 2013). These reports have

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<sup>16</sup> While these migrant groups originally came to Australia as refugees, all participants had been in Australia for at least five years by the time of the research, and are described by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury as mostly tertiary educated, employable people of working age, with a good level of English (2007), similar to the young French migrants described here.

<sup>17</sup> Debate over the extent of the use of this visa to procure cheap labour grew during 2013–2014, as unemployment increased.

reinforced the idea of ‘Aussie jobs first’ (Jones 2013), perhaps encouraging some employers to give preference to Australian workers. It also highlights the need for migrants to arrive with a specific skill set responding to the updated Skilled Occupation List to be eligible for a 457 visa in Australia. Subsequent developments to this class of visa under then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd included the increase of the cost from \$455 to \$900 to \$1035. Further amendments to the conditions of this class of visa will now depend on the outcome of the review of the integrity of the 457 programme.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the price of the Working Holiday visa also increased from \$365 to \$420 from 1st September 2013 (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection). Speaking to the French-Australian Chamber of Commerce in 2014, the former French Ambassador to Australia, Stéphane Romatet, argued that neither the Working Holiday visa nor the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa were suited to young French professionals, and that France was currently discussing a new visa category with Canada and would like to do the same with Australia.<sup>19</sup>

While the length of time needed to find a suitable job and visa problems might be anticipated, many migrants underestimate the challenges that will face them in trying to adjust to Australian work culture. However, this is an essential part of the integration process and strongly influences the migrants’ levels of satisfaction with their adopted country. While Marc did not find fitting in to an Australian workplace community of practice (Wenger 1998) overly difficult, Elisabeth struggled with the different style of professional behaviour in the workplace and the need to form amicable relationships with colleagues.<sup>20</sup> This may be due to the relative informality and egalitarianism in the Australian workplace as opposed to the typical

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<sup>18</sup> Announced by the coalition government on the Australian Government migration blog on 25th February 2014.

<sup>19</sup> This should be welcome news to the French Researchers in Australia Network (FRAN) which launched a lively discussion in June 2014 on LinkedIn entitled ‘Can’t the French government help French 457 visa holder[s] with no jobs?’ [http://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&gid=5171128&type=member&item=5886976129956331521&qid=c7007a94-3f36-481c-a7a7-d1eb4438aa43&trk=groups\\_most\\_popular-0-b-ttl&goback=.gmp\\_5171128](http://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&gid=5171128&type=member&item=5886976129956331521&qid=c7007a94-3f36-481c-a7a7-d1eb4438aa43&trk=groups_most_popular-0-b-ttl&goback=.gmp_5171128).

<sup>20</sup> See Teller (2013) for an article specifically for French expatriates on the Australian workplace. See also Woods (2003) on the specificities of different business cultures.

French workplace (Béal 2010, 57), and the fact that English speakers tend to value informality and humour in all situations and frequently use humour as a means of creating cohesion (Béal and Mullan 2013, 129; Holmes and Marra 2002).

The overall economic situation of Australia as portrayed in the international media has triggered a recent increase in young professional economic migrants from France. This study has compared the experiences of a small number of young French migrants to Melbourne, looking at their expectations of life in Australia and asking whether their experiences here corresponded with French media images of the sunny, southern country.

The participants all confirmed that the positive aspects of life in Australia—the strong economy, the comparatively low level of unemployment and the high standard of living—referred to in the French media were a reality. The majority had decided to come to Australia for these reasons, and were satisfied with these aspects. However, while many young French professionals had found successful employment, others remained disappointed. These migrants had been somewhat underprepared, not realising that several factors would influence their success in finding suitable employment: the differences in the layout of French and Australian CVs; certain French qualifications not being recognised; the advantages of established contacts and networks ('knowing the right people') and of previous in-country work experience; a high level of English proficiency; the challenge of the Australian English accent; and the recent visa reforms (see also Gregorini 2012).

Szufflak (2013b) interviewed a number of French migrants at a French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Young Professionals event. Many reiterated the comments made by our participants, but two interviewees made some additional comments regarding low salaries and precarious work conditions: 'the salaries are generally lower, and we also need to take into account that we are not earning anything towards our retirement plan in France. In addition, we are aware that we are the foreigners in the company, and that if anyone ever needs to be retrenched, it is more likely to be us'.

Despite these challenges, when asked why she chooses to stay in Australia rather than return to France, Julie smiles and says, 'There are already lots of problems in France. If I am going to have a hard time somewhere, it may as well be here'. According to Szufflak (2013b), many

young people share this opinion. Even if Australia is not the ‘El Dorado’ they expected, the young French migrants interviewed all wanted to stay in Australia and keep looking for their ‘perfect’ job, which would allow them to live the Australian dream portrayed by some French media.

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### **Online resources for French migrants to Australia**

<http://www.ambafrance-au.org/>  
<http://www.australia-australie.com/forum/posts/nouvelle-zelande/74291>  
<http://australie-vie-pratique.com/>  
<http://boomerangaustralia.com/fr/>  
[http://www.facci.com.au/fileadmin/template/australie/Documents\\_FEDERAL\\_USE\\_ONLY/Fiche\\_Pays\\_Notes\\_de\\_marche/Reussir\\_en\\_Australie.pdf](http://www.facci.com.au/fileadmin/template/australie/Documents_FEDERAL_USE_ONLY/Fiche_Pays_Notes_de_marche/Reussir_en_Australie.pdf)  
<http://frenchassistmelbourne.org/>  
<http://www.francais-du-monde.org/>  
<http://www.gumtree.com.au/>  
<http://mapremierefoisenaustralie.com/>  
<http://www.melbourneaccueil.org/><http://www.internations.org/melbourne-expats/guide/moving-to-melbourne-15600>  
<http://www.my-australian-job.com/>  
<http://www.ufe.org/fr/>

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## Appendix

### SURVEY

#### (A) Prior to arrival

1. What is your age?
  - 18-25 years old
  - 25-35 years old
  - 36 years or older
  
2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (If currently enrolled, highest degree received).
  - High school
  - Some college credit, no degree
  - Associate degree
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Professional degree
  - Doctorate degree
  
3. Do you have previous work experience?
  - In your field of specialisation
  - In another field
  - No previous work experience
  
4. Out of the following, please rank from 1 to 5 the order in which the following categories contributed to your decision to migrate to Australia (1 being the most important, 5 being the least)
  - Searching for a profession
  - Professional transfer
  - Boredom, in need of adventure
  - To maintain a relationship with a significant other
  - Influence of the media (radio, television, newspaper, billboards, internet...)
  
5. In 100 words or less, please describe the image you had of Australia prior to your arrival.

**(B) Post-arrival**

1. How long have you been in Australia?

- Less than 1 year
- Between 1–5 years
- More than 5 years

2. Employment status: Are you currently...?

- Employed
- Self-employed
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Unemployed but not currently looking for work
- Other:

3. If currently employed, out of the following, which most closely represents the timeframe for which it took you to find you a job in Australia?

- Less than 1 month
- 1–2 months
- 3–6 months
- More than 6 months

4. If currently unemployed, which most closely represents the timeframe that you have been seeking employment?

- 1–2 months
- 3–6 months
- More than 6 months

5. Thus far, has your general experience in Australia met your expectations, and do you feel that the French media portrayed a realistic image of Australia?