Mind the Gap

Refugees and communications technology literacy

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

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Mind the Gap: refugees and communications technology literacy

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This work can be cited as:

Leung, L. 2011. Mind the Gap: refugees and communications technology literacy, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Executive summary

This report details the findings and outcomes of the Mind the Gap project.

The project sought to:

1   examine refugees' knowledge of telecommunications products and services when newly arrived in Australia

2   investigate telecommunications literacy in refugee settlement service provision; and

3   develop a telecommunications consumer education program tailored to recent arrivals from refugee backgrounds.

The report has two parts. Part 1 concerns the consumer research phase of the project. The research was conducted within the existing i.settle.with.IT! project managed by WorkVentures. The i.settle.with.IT! initiative provides newly arrived migrants from refugee backgrounds with IT skills for employment purposes through computer training workshops, and is being rolled out through WorkVentures' partner organisations throughout Australia. The research was situated within the i.settle.with.IT! project, from which over 30 participants in greater Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth were interviewed or surveyed.

Part 2 reports on the consumer education program that was developed based on the findings of the consumer research. It was designed to provide newly arrived refugees with a basic knowledge of Australian telecommunications products and services that suit their needs. Four modules covering landlines and mobiles, mobile phone plans and costs, as well as phone cards were devised for face-to-face training contexts. Feedback about the program was sought through organisations involved in WorkVentures' i.settle,with.IT! project and refugee settlement, enabling it to be evaluated and promoted. The research found that technology literacies are informed by country of origin so consumer education and training needs to be tailored for different refugee communities, especially for those who have spent significant periods of time in refugee camps.

As an action research project, it brings to light, to, advocates, policymakers, regulators and telecommunications providers:

–   the low levels of technology literacy and knowledge about communications services and products on the part of newly arrived refugees. Communication technology literacies can be understood as part of a hierarchy of skills. While refugees arrive with base level consumption literacies (which enable them to basically use at least one telecommunications device to primarily receive calls), living in Australia demands higher level literacies (such as owning and taking financial responsibility for a range of technology products)

–   the lack of support for communications technology awareness and use in settlement service provision for refugees

–   the gap that exists between telecommunications literacy (for which there is no formalised support during settlement) and computer literacy skills (which, along with English language tuition, are provided as part of the refugee settlement process).

The report concludes with recommendations that emerged from the consumer research and education program and a discussion of the implications for immigration policy as well as regulation in the telecommunications industry.

Part 1: Consumer Research

Over 30 interviews and surveys were conducted with respondents who had arrived in Australia as recently as 2009, and as early as 1995. Following ethics approval from the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, the research data was collected over 2010 and 2011 across four states (NSW, QLD, VIC and WA).

Allowing for low levels of English and native language literacy, participants were surveyed and interviewed in person rather than in writing. In some cases, interviews were conducted in pairs to allow participants to translate questions and responses for one another.

There were 3 main groups of interviewees, grouped by regions of origin. These included respondents from:

- Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan (respondents beginning with M)
- Sudan and other African countries (respondents beginning with A)
- Burma, Cambodia and Thailand (respondents beginning with I)

Respondents from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan included young people and older men over 40 years of age. Corresponding with this diverse range of ages, the older men had been in Australia for over 11 years, while the young people had arrived within the last 2 years.

Respondents from the Sudan were almost all women in their 20s and 30s. Most had arrived in Australia from 2004.

Almost all respondents from Cambodia, Burma and Thailand were the newest arrivals compared with the other groups, generally settling in Australia from 2007. A broad range of users was also represented, from late teens through to respondents in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

Furthermore, there was a miscellaneous group of older refugees and a settlement worker (a migrant himself) from outside of the 3 key regions.

	Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan	Sudan and other African countries	Burma, Cambodia and Thailand	Other
Male	4	2	7	2
Female	4	7	5	1
Total	**8**	**9**	**12**	**3**
Late teens	6	1	3	0
20s	0	5	4	0
30s	0	2	4	0
40+	2	0	1	2
Unknown	0	1	0	2
Total	**8**	**9**	**12**	**3**
Arr 1995–2002	3	1	1	3
Arr 2004–2009	5	7	11	0
Unknown	0	1	-	0
Total	**8**	**9**	**12**	**3**

Six written surveys were completed with assistance from volunteer tutors. The remainder were face-to-face interviews which were either noted and/or transcribed.

The findings identified a hierarchy of telecommunications literacies as follows:

- Able to liaise with telecommunications provider
- Able to initiate calls independently
- Able to initiate calls with assistance
- Able to receive calls
- No access or familiarity with telecommunications technologies
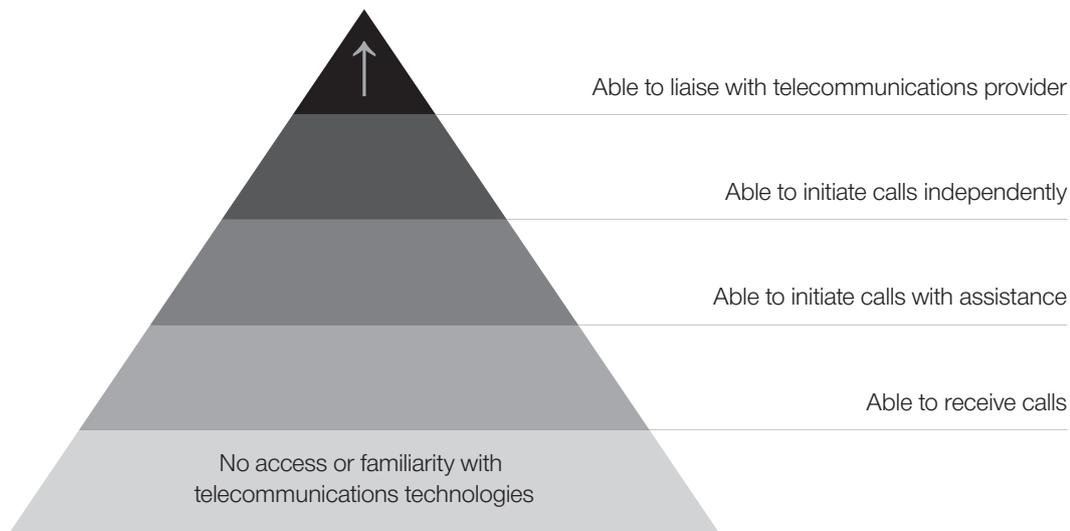
1.1 Telecommunications literacies according to countries of origin

Patterns in technology literacies were detected based on where the participant originated from and the extent of telecommunications availability, affordability and accessibility in that country. This resulted from the extent to which communication technologies were available, affordable and accessible in the countries from which they were displaced.

According to respondents originating from Iraq, prior to the wars of the 1990s and 21st century, Iraq had a well-developed telecommunications infrastructure. It was commonplace for respondents to have landline phones in their home. However, at times, there were restrictions on technologies for political and security reasons. Nonetheless, some of the younger respondents who arrived in Australia within the last 2 years recall using mobile phones in Iraq and that internet was also available.

> *"…we had all the technology. We got the technology from internet and from telephones, from computers, from like all the economy was there." (M6 arr 1995)*

> *"No mobile. It was not permitted to anybody to have a mobile phone when Saddam was the president." (M8, arr 1999)*

> *"Yes but not all of Iraq people had a computer at home like just like some of families…." (M5, arr 2009)*

> *"Well in Iraq we don't have already computers." (M2, arr 2009)*

Respondents from Iraq did not have experience of making calls outside of the country because these were either not permitted and/or relatives would call from overseas.

There were mixed findings from the Sudanese respondents regarding telecommunications usage in Sudan. While 6 out of the 7 surveyed said they used phones back in Sudan, both landline and mobile, more than half indicated that they stayed in touch with family members through other means, such as letter writing:

> *"Because we live all together we verbally communicate to tell the story." (A1 arr 2006)*

> *"…when I was in Sudan, we can write letters or visit them." (A2 arr 2004)*

> *"No technology; we just visited each other. We would travel by transport - bus. Sometimes news would take a long time because it would rely on visits." (A3, arr 2002)*

> *"…it was a little bit difficult because we used to communicate by writing letters and then we have to possibly give it to someone to send it to communicate with the family…So sometime if there's anyone going who you trust to take the letter directly to your person or your family, you can send the letter easily, you could still send sort of letters in couple of days depending on who would take the letter.*

But you see late 90s to 2000, it become more easier because we have access to use maybe home phone especially in the Khartoum area… But back at Southern Sudan - maybe because there was no home phones we just use when our parents or our family members are in the office, we use the office telephone actually. Like we use our own phone in Khartoum but there (Southern Sudan) we have to make sure that it is working hours so we can communicate with them during - what do you call it - in their working hours…From 2005 the mobiles were so spread out so everyone has mobile, it become more easier to communicate. It was anyone in all parts of Sudan." (A7 arr 2004)

While some had access to phones, those that did not would physically visit their family in order to receive news.

'Landlines phones were only in offices. Some people had mobile phones.' (A3, arr 2002)

As mentioned above, at least two thirds of the Sudanese respondents reported that they were sometimes literate in telecommunications technologies before leaving the country. In addition, they learnt to use these technologies from various sources:

"Home phone - when the Sudatell company put it [in] they show us how to use it.
Public phone - I learnt it from the company.
Mobile phone - I learnt it from the shop I bought it from." (A1 arr 2006)

"We learnt to use these. They taught us at school or the technical people." (A2 arr 2004)

Respondents recalled being taught how to use telecommunications technologies by phone companies, retailers selling telecommunications products and within the school environment.

Therefore, while such technologies were available, their accessibility and use were hampered by war and conflict, meaning respondents resorted to other means to make contact with family.

"I'm living in a far Western part of Southern Sudan so by that time it was closed, not any means of transport between the area because that part was closed, controlled by the rebels for example… because by that time (early 90s) most of the areas were closed and then we used to use the Red Cross letter… but that takes time to reach the destination also." (A7 arr 2004)

During times of upheaval, alternative technologies for communication were also available but cost was a prohibitive factor:

"Satellite telephone was also there but it was expensive and then unless you feel something burning, this is why you can go spend your money - it cost was expensive to use the satellite connection." (A7)

At that time actually emails were available but I could not have access to the email because by that time it was not that easy to even own a computer. Although the internet café they start coming out in say mid 90s where you can go and pay your money. Then I can remember sending an email to the UK, I wrote my email and then I take it to the post office and then they went and forwarded the email So I remember like taking my message and then taking it to them so that they could type the email and then send it. (A7)

Respondent A7 also talks about using CB radio to communicate with colleagues who could then send an email on his behalf.

In contrast, the Cambodian, Burmese and Thai respondents had little or no experience of these technologies prior to coming to Australia. This resulted from periods of internal displacement within Cambodia and Burma, in which communication technologies were largely unavailable and to make contact with relatives was dangerous.

'…the battle between the government and the ethnicity - the ethnic group there who fight each other, and people can't stay in their [own] town. They have to flee. They move to place to place and then they lost their farm, lost their home, and then they [start] starvation and then some people become - they flee from their own village. [And then to] famine.' (I12 arr 2009)

'So they have to change the place and they go and do another place. Yeah, so that they change. They move around, yeah.' (I5 arr 2008)

'We moved from town to town…and that was like for three years and eight months, during the course of the war.' (I1 arr 1995)

'I mean, if we are able to buy a telephone we can use but it's not easy. Even if you can, you know, because everything is controlled by government…if you have a telephone, and then you can accuse by the government at any time. So there's no people are not dare to buy the telephone.' (I12)

This itinerant existence combined with the fear of being located meant that phoning relatives within the country of origin was avoided even if communication technologies were available and accessible. Contact was also infrequent because phone calls were expensive.

'…as you know Burma is a very poor country. You can't use the telephone, internet if you are not the member of the government. If you are not rich you can't use at all because very expensive. Only people who, they work for the government, is a member of government and if they are related to the government.' (I12)

'I was really little, but they probably wrote letters to each other, 'cause the mobile phone, by what I know was only introduced more recently into the year 2000 and even then it was only the rich people that could afford the plan…' (I1)

'…it's hard to contact from Burma… you don't have [open] communication… when we write a letter the postmen [they were not] working well… We have several [times we lost] our letter.' (I2 arr 2009)

'…we don't have [mobile phone]. Also we don't have phone line. Just we communicate with, when we saw some people who came from our state and they will write a letter… Probably just one or two times every year. …just we can tell we miss you and we want to see you, just like that. Because also we are afraid of the government. Yeah, we cannot tell anywhere about our situation or what's happened to us. Just only we miss you or we stay there, or something like that.' (I6 arr 2008)

Similar to some of the respondents from the Sudan, the Burmese used a system of communicating with family members by having notes passed through messengers. Very urgent information could be sent via telegraph or telex, which would entail going into a post office-type establishment and paying for a message, the price depending on the number of words.

A couple of respondents claim to have never seen a telephone at all in Burma:

'Even I never seen the telephone.' (I12 arr 2009)

'We never seen before … what you call…mobile phones… Public phones, very few times.' (I11 arr 2009)

Lack of availability and security meant communicating from within Cambodia or Burma to outside of those countries was almost impossible, even if family members were just across the border. Stories of families having no contact for years were commonplace, even if the distance was not great.

'We can't because they didn't have a phone also and we never contact. We never communicated.' (I4 arr 2007)

There were also instances of borrowing technologies from those who had access to it.

'…in our village, we didn't have anything - just only camera really… Not ours, just my friend… we didn't have any electricity as well.' (I5 arr 2008)

*'…we don't have television. Just one or two - for example in village because I live in small village, just two or three people have television and then we have to go to their house and then watch it.' (I6 arr 2008)*

'…we had to go and borrow - like every time my uncle called (from Australia), he would "prank" a call to the neighbours (arrange with the neighbour fetch the family to receive a call at a later time)' (I1)

Country of origin was a significant factor in determining the level of technical literacies with which respondents migrated. In hierarchical terms, the Burmese respondents had little or no access and familiarity with telephones. Those who had some experience only received phone calls, and were always assisted on the rare occasions when making phone calls. Only some of the Sudanese were literate in the use of mobile phones and landlines that were not necessarily their own. Their limited experience included making and receiving calls. All of the Iraqi's generally owned their own phones at some point and were experienced and familiar with both mobiles and landlines.

At least two thirds of the Sudanese and Iraqi respondents had acquired base level telecommunications literacies in their country of origin, compared with only a minority (less than 17%) of the Burmese.

Fig A.: Base level literacies with which respondents left countries of origin.

Able to initiate calls with assistance

Able to receive calls

No access or familiarity with telecommunications technologies
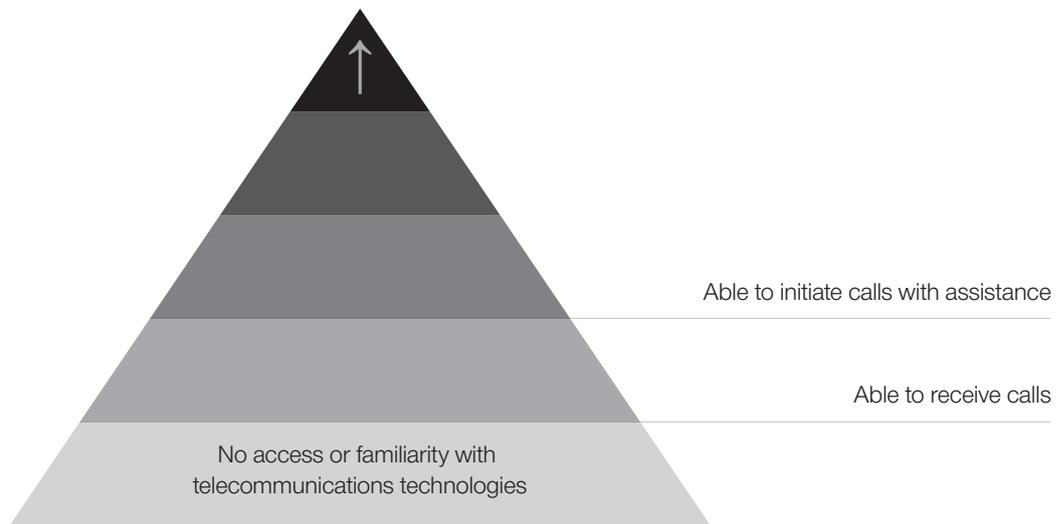
1.2 Telecommunications literacies according to countries of displacement

Countries of displacement are those intermediate countries in which refugees live between fleeing their country of origin and settling in Australia.

Respondents originally from Iraq fled because of the wars in their country and were displaced to intermediate countries before arriving in Australia.

M6 travelled from Iraq to Jordan (for two months) and then onto to Bulgaria (2 weeks-3 weeks). Smuggled from Bulgaria across the border to Greece. In Greece for 8 months. From Greece travelled to Australia.

M7 left Iraq with parents and siblings, stayed in Syria for about 5 years then came to Australia with parents. Older brother arrived a few months before him. Another brother and sister arrived a few months after he arrived in Australia.

M1 left Iraq when she was about 1-2 years old. Then lived in Lebanon for 15 years, migrated to Australia in 2009.

M8 left Iraq to avoid persecution. Travelled through Turkey to Greece and met up with wife and 2 daughters.

"We have to leave Iraq to Syria. My neighbours help us help my family and me and we go to Syria. We live in Syria three years." (M2 arr 2009)

"I left my country in 2003, I went to Syria for one year then I came back to Iraq then I stayed in Iraq about one year and then I went to Jordan. I lived in Jordan about five years or six years then I came to Australia." (M5 arr 2009)

Respondents from the Sudan left because of the war and political persecution and most, but not all, came through Egypt before coming to Australia:

"For me I can't come to Australia direct because we don't have an Australian embassy in Sudan but we have British embassy it can help us in case. From Sudan I flight to Cairo and then I spend like 5 months, 2 weeks in Cairo and I went to Egyptian embassy to make my process to come here." (A1 arr 2006)

"I come from the Khartouna [Khartoum] city of Sudan to the Helfa [Wadi Halfa] border of Egypt by train. Then I caught [a] ship from Helfa [Wadi Halfa] to Asewan [Aswan]. Asewan [Aswan] is a port of Egypt. Then I caught a train from Asewan [Aswan] to Cairo. Then I met my husband at train station. I almost took eight months in Egypt after that. My husband and I travelled to Australia by plane from Egypt to Dubai. From Dubai to Manila. We stay six hours in airport. Then we travelled from Manila to Sydney." (A4 arr 2004)

"I went from Sudan to Egypt by boat. I stayed in Egypt for 2 years and then came and settled in Australia." (A5 arr 2005)

"From Sudan I went to Cairo. I was [in] Cairo three and a half years. Then I came to Sydney." (A6 arr 2005)

"We leave Sudan because my husband use to work as a journalist and the government put him in the prison. When he come out he decided to leave Sudan to any country. We went to Lebanon and then to Australia." (A2 arr 2004)

"Because the conflict in my country was mainly between south and north…we Southerners who move from our area to other area considered us IDPs, internally displaced people because we're not in our area…I took a refuge to Egypt…I stayed in Egypt for nearly one year and-a-half before moving to Australia." (A7 arr 2004)

According to Cambodian and Burmese respondents, after being displaced within their countries of origin, their families escaped into neighbouring countries, principally Thailand, to live in refugee camps for a number of years before migrating to Australia.

"Yeah, so it was like four years of lost contact. 'Cause when he lived in the refugee camp, we didn't really know much about him. There wasn't any communication there." (I1 arr 1995)

"In 1990 we had to flee into Thailand and then we stayed in Thailand around 18 years in a refugee camp." (I6 arr 2008)

"Also my grandpa was like…a soldier…. so he can't go back in the Burma country…. when he was going in there some people will kill him or something. So he didn't go in so he moved around and they moved to Thailand." (I5 arr 2008)

Because the various countries to which the respondents fled were so diverse, experiences of technology in those countries was similarly very wide-ranging:

In Jordan, M5 recalls having access to mobile phones, phone cards and internet and being able to easily stay in touch with relatives in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (but not landline, as they did not have their own).

M6 also reported using telephones and phone cards regularly in Jordan, as well as Bulgaria and Greece, as well as faxes.

Like M5 in Jordan, M7 says that while in Syria they did not have their own landline, so would use mobile phones to contact other displaced family members, or would go to a shop where you could make telephone calls.

M2 says that while she was in Syria all contact with family abroad was conducted through the landline telephone and phone cards, although this was infrequent, and involved receiving calls only. Her family did not have a mobile phone.

M1 remembers having a home phone in Lebanon, and that her family used phone cards. The internet was also used but only in establishments similar to internet cafes or shops. Her father had a mobile phone. Like M6, she says that faxing was also more common than letter writing, which was practised as well.

M8, who came through Turkey and Greece, claims to not have been able to make telephone calls because of the expense: 'No we were in shortage of money. I can't call and pay money for calling.'

Respondents originating from Sudan who had been displaced to Egypt clearly had more consistent exposure to telecommunications technologies in this intermediate country. All stated they had experience of using landline or home phones, public phones, mobile

phones and phone cards in Egypt. Respondents had to either teach themselves or be coached by family members in learning to use these technologies.

A3 recalls using a phone and phone card for the first time in Egypt: "I first use the phone in Egypt to call my sister with the phone card. The phone card was easy to use. I followed the prompts in Arabic."

"I just lucky to also - to get - what do you call it - all the means for the new technology handy. So we have telephone at home - home phone - and then the other thing is I was lucky to get some employment, to work as an IT - what do you call it - as an office assistant. So basically I was working on the computer with all the internet facility for the first time. So maybe in Egypt this is where I establish my first email address here. That's pretty cool, hey. Then also in Egypt, I start using emails as a means of communication, we start using - instead of telephone we start using - what do you call it - I don't know what you call it - the phone which is connected through the internet...' (A7 arr 2004)

"Yes, we always had a phone (in Egypt) - a home phone - but my parents they didn't have mobile phones. I know how to use home phone." (A9 arr 2005)

Because telecommunications facilities were more accessible and affordable than in their country of origin, Sudanese respondents who had been displaced to Egypt found themselves having to bear the cost and responsibility of staying in touch with family members in their country of origin:

"…we'll like [buy] the card from Egypt when we'd call them… I would call them - I'll like set up on that day we're going to call. So like all of them they come to one house, one of my cousin's houses so we can talk to all of them." (A9 arr 2005)

The Thai refugee camps had little or no facilities for communicating with the outside world, as there were no phones or computers whatsoever available.

'In the city, yeah, they use mobile phone. But in our village, no. No connection as well I have never see a computer when I was in Burma; never, ever, seen computer.' (I5 arr 2008)

"In Thailand because we live in the refugee camp so we don't know how to use the phone." (I4 arr 2007)

Those with relatives who had emigrated to countries of settlement occasionally had mobile phones, although this is described as 'very very rare' by I10 (arr 2009). Refugees who did not have their own phone could pay to receive calls on other people's mobiles. Calls were generally initiated from the outside as making calls was more expensive than receiving them.

'When I lived in Thailand I didn't have mobile…Just like a big (public) telephone.' (I5 arr 2008)

'They contact us, yeah…Because in camp we didn't have enough money to contact them…Yeah, it was too expensive to contact in the other country.' (I4 arr 2007)

As calls were mainly received, respondents had little experience of making calls. Furthermore, on rare or emergency occasions when calls were made, it was done in a shop/call centre environment where the making of calls was assisted or done for them:

"…when we use, the owner press for us, just [we show] the numbers and they press for us…operate everything." (I6 arr 2008)

In certain circumstances, respondents worked for NGOs or would go to school outside their refugee camps. This exposed them to technologies such as computers and mobiles phones, with which they were free to use and experiment.

"When I finished high school, I moved to - because I wanted to improve my study as well because I move to another camp to study there. That have connection phone…Because of my teacher that I live with him, because I always help him in his house so he give me one (mobile phone)... I just copied him and looked at what he did and how he did it." (I3 arr 2007)

"…because I work with NGO, yes, they showed me a little bit. [Then I play around] here, I know how to use." (I10 arr 2009)

"Later on around 2005 I am working outside the camp…I can call coordinator - he provided a mobile phone for me because we worked together and then he provide for me. Then he showed me how to use it…I learn Microsoft Office, I just have to learn a little bit, not too much." (I6 arr 2008)

Countries of displacement also impacted on levels of technology literacy. For most respondents (those originating from Iraq or Sudan), intermediate countries exposed them to new technologies as well as new skills and literacies in using them. This was not the case for those who had spent significant periods in refugee camps (those originating from Burma). Therefore, there was no correlation between amount of time spent in intermediate countries and level of technology literacies. Those who spent as little as one year displaced might have acquired the additional literacy of being able to initiate calls independently while those who had spent 20 years in a refugee camp found that their technology skills stagnated at the lower levels of the hierarchy.

Able to initiate calls independently

Able to initiate calls with assistance

Able to receive calls

No access or familiarity with telecommunications technologies
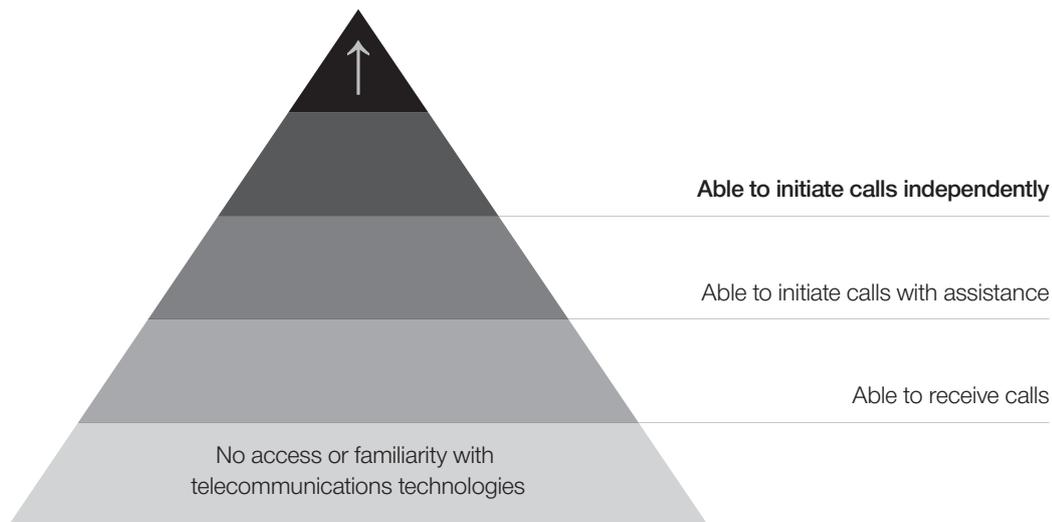
Fig B.: Additional literacy of independent communication technology use which only some respondents acquired whilst in intermediate countries

1.3 Arrival in Australia
All respondents came to Australia with family members, and so, had networks of support for learning communication technology.

1.3.1 Landlines
Respondents described their first experience of having and using a home phone when in Australia:

"It's very hard to do it in my first home. But, yeah, somebody will come and show us how to do that and they're like you might actually want to contact with friend in Thailand. So we want to do that but we don't know how to call them. We don't know how to use the [country code] or something like that. So the other friend, they told us you have to buy full coverage like that. Then you have to use this [country] code to call and then press this key with that key." (I3 arr 2007)

"Like because when we live in Thailand we never have a home phone. Yeah, just here and then like when we heard the phone ring we are looking at it [laughs]." (I5 arr 2008)

Since arriving in Australia, all respondents had used landlines in the form of home phones, despite some never having a telephone in their homes prior to coming to Australia. As part of the initial settlement process, it appears that respondents were mostly set up with a home phone in their new accommodation.

The home phone was a more foreign technology than mobile phones for a number of respondents. This was a factor in some electing not to have home phones after a period of time in Australia.

"It cost me a lot of money (around $40 per month)… for me very expensive because I have to pay my electric, gas, water and telephone, house telephone and mobile. So each month I have to pay a lot and cost is really we don't need… So right now it's cost me a lot of money (last month $60) so I decided not to have any more. But I have the mobile phone." (I10 arr 2009)

Sometimes landlines are not the most appropriate technology to stay in touch with relatives abroad, particularly if there are ongoing obstacles to family members overseas accessing a telephone to receive calls:

"…my grandparents stay in Burma… They have to come a long way to the city and they have to pay for - they have to pay (approximately AUD$5) per minute in Burma… just to receive the phone call." (I3 arr 2007)

A settlement worker (O2) observed that he is also seeing older clients from refugee backgrounds who have long been settled in Australia giving up home phones in favour of mobile phones. He says that this is often done as a cost-saving measure.

Where home phones were a technological mainstay, they were used in conjunction with phone cards to make international calls to family members overseas.

"Because I have used home phone many times it is not difficult to[for] me to use it… Even to call overseas by using card phone." (A1 arr 2006)

"The home phone for outside Australia… my dad buys like cards but you can use it because our home line, you can use it for outside. It's not only for inside." (M1 arr 2009)

"The home phone we call to the other place. We just use the phone card… To call overseas because we usually call overseas." (I3 arr 2007)

Respondents who had been in Australia longer agreed that the cost of making international phone calls has become considerably cheaper:

"In 1995. At that time it was very hard to communicate. Like I remember when we first arrived in Australia it was very hard to [cover the cost] of communication, they maybe didn't have flexibility like these days where it's like Skype, the internet and stuff like that. So it used to cost my mum like hundreds of dollars to make a half an hour call back to her mum and relatives back in Cambodia." (I1 arr 1995)

Respondents seemed to mostly have started with Telstra as their home phone provider. About one third of respondents reported changing from Telstra to another provider. Respondents commented on the expense and poor service offered by Telstra:

"I think I used only Telstra line it's about three months. The last bill is over $50 and I decided to change to another telecommunications services." (I11 arr 2009)

"Now we are dealing with Optus, but before with Telstra…they bill us for telephone number which we never use it…How can we use - who I know in Afghanistan? I don't know nobody there…I wouldn't even know how to call Afghanistan. [Laughter]" (M8 arr 1999)

"Before we had Telstra but the speed wasn't very good. Then we changed it to Optus. Now it's good… Yeah just for speed and sometimes when we speak with our family their voices wasn't too clear. My father said maybe it's poor line, so we changed it." (M4 arr 2002)

"First I arrived, my home phone is Telstra…My uncle changed it and [because] if I do internet, internet bill was $75 and for phone bill $80."(I7 arr 2008)

"I bought a [home phone] maybe very old because I pay very less money. So [when I connect with people] sometimes the line is not clear when people are talking to me - the sound is very low. So I used to [complain to Telstra], please can you check, can you update for my [home phone] because it's not clear sometimes." (I10 arr 2009)

One respondent, O3, in attempting to have his home phone connected with Telstra, spent so long waiting on his mobile phone trying to get through that he used his entire $30 of pre-paid credit. After that experience, he decided against having a home phone. He also disliked the requirement of telcos to directly debit his bank account.

Approximately 20% of respondents remained Telstra customers. The reasons given for changing from Telstra to Optus were the attractiveness of home phone and internet bundles. Half the respondents had all inclusive bundles that included unlimited local and national calls as well as internet. Spending ranged from $80 up to $150 per month for these bundles with the average being $109 per month.

1.3.2 Mobile phones

Generally, the Iraqi respondents had previous experience of using as well as owning their own mobile phones prior to coming to Australia.

For respondents from the Sudan and Burma, Australia is the first place where they have *owned* their mobiles, although they may have used them in the past.

Respondents waited anywhere between 2 weeks and 3 years before buying their own mobile phones.

In some cases, settlement organisations equipped families with a mobile phone until more permanent housing was found and where there was no landline in the temporary accommodation:

> *"…when you come to Australia there is people that help you and they gave us a mobile phone to use it for emergency." (M1 arr 2009)*

> *"When I come arrive I be give new one - very old one - mobile phone… So can ring case worker all the time… [After a while I] buy for myself and they will give back to worker." (I10 arr 2009)*

> *"They gave us one only to contact with case worker can call us or we can call to our case worker. Yes just only in…for the group …in the community." (I11 arr 2009)*

A settlement worker for older refugees observed that his clients were limited users of mobiles, using them only for voice calls and rarely did they know how to use SMS.

All respondents had acquired and were continuing to use mobile phones since arriving in Australia.

> *"…when we first came to here, then one of our friends - because we don't know how to buy the phone or nothing like that - so he bought for us. Because I don't know how to use the other mobile phone in Australia because it's really hard to do for me personally. So I just have my own bought for me, the Nokia one because I know how to use that." (I3 arr 2007)*

Respondents who previously had mobile phones before coming to Australia, also bought new ones after arrival but would also use handsets purchased in other countries by inserting a new SIM card.

> *"I had one from Jordan but I just change it when I can…" (M5 arr 2009)*

Experience of using mobiles prior to coming to Australia did not appear to inform the learning process. Overwhelmingly, respondents were taught how to use mobile phones informally by observing friends and relatives or having them actively demonstrate functionality.

> *"I just copied him and looked at what he did and how he did it. Then, yeah, I tried to do that." (I3 arr 2007)*

In rare cases, respondents who had no previous experience of mobile phones taught themselves through experimentation, trial and error: however, this was extremely uncommon, and confined to young people from refugee backgrounds.

> *'Honestly I learn by myself.' (I12 on texting)*

> *"At first it was hard like to go to the settings and tools but now I tried by myself to go there and I learned how to use them." (M1 arr 2009)*

All mobile phones were individual objects that did not have to be shared with others: each member of the family had their own handset. A few respondents had more than one mobile phone each. One respondent carried at least two mobiles with different providers so that he is able to get coverage no matter where he may be. Another did this to take advantage of free talk time with users on the same network. For example, I2 had mobile with Vodafone, the other with Optus.

The mobile was regarded as the key technology for staying connected with immediate family members with them in Australia, so that they are accessible, particularly in any emergencies:

> "I used mobile phone because everyone want [to] call. They will find my anywhere." (A1 arr 2006)

> "I use mobile phone to contact my friends and my husband if he is out… if I need something from the shop or if I want to go somewhere." (A2 arr 2004)

> 'Sometimes [when] I away I use it." (A4 arr 2004)

> "My husband just bought it for me because if I needed help or to know where he is and I want him to buy me something from the shop." (A3 arr 2002)

There were instances of respondents not wanting a mobile phone, as they did not see a need (O1, I1). However, family members insisted they needed one so that they could be contactable:

> "…when I went shopping for buy a mobile phone, I didn't like all the phones. They were all ugly… Finally, the last time when I went to the shop for buy a mobile phone my mother said I don't care, you have to buy one." (M3 arr 2009)

> "My father said it's a very important thing so you have to do it, to buy." (M4 arr 2002)

> "Because if we - sometimes if we are walking we need a mobile. If my aunty calls…don't know where we are." (I4 arr 2007)

> "Because most of my family members, they have their own phone and then sometimes I can use their phone so I thought it's not necessary for me yet… and I see that, you know, in here. This is - sometimes, you know, I need for myself, like when I go out and I probably have some problem or... and then sometimes, you know, because ...privacy." (I12 arr 2009)

Mobile phones were also used for making international calls to family members overseas in urgent circumstances.

> "Whenever it's necessary because it's not cheap." (I12 arr 2009)

> "Just once before when I […in 2008] had one of my brother pass away in my country so I had to talk…on my mobile." (I2 arr 2009)

In other cases, the mobile phones were used with particular phone cards like the Optus $10 international calling card:

> 'Yes, that's for 200 minutes for $10. So Optus pre-paid is very useful for international calls to Malaysia, Thailand.' (I11 arr 2009)

> 'Ten dollars you can call three hours. Yes, so very useful…China, Canada, US or Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore.' (I10 arr 2009)

In cases where respondents had more than one mobile phone at a time, one of the phones was used exclusively for making international calls, usually with a Lebara pre-paid SIM card:

> "We have two mobile like one for the Optus and one for Lebara." (A9 arr 2005)

1.3.2.1 Mobile phone functionality

Mobile phones were primarily used for voice calls. The data indicates that there is wide use of bluetooth for exchanging music files, and that listening to songs was the 2nd most used function behind voice calls.

SMS texting was used to a lesser extent by a third of the respondents. This was not necessarily age-related, as some younger respondents also reported that they did not regularly send text messages. It is possible that this is due to low levels of English literacy, rather than a lack of technical ability. Therefore, it could be surmised that there is a preference for functionality that utilises aural literacies (such as voice calls and music) over reading and written literacies (such as texting and internet searches).

For those that did not use the internet, there is a perception that accessing the internet on a mobile phone was unnecessary (particularly if it was available on the home computer), and furthermore, that it was relatively more expensive.

> "I don't use the internet on my mobile phone, 'cause I don't feel the need to. 'Cause I can access the internet at home and when I'm at work or when I'm at school. There's the internet everywhere, I don't want to waste money with the net connection. What else? To listen to music - I have a memory card and store music there." (I1 arr 1995)

> "Because I don't know how to use internet on phone and I don't know - because some people they know how to - how much they have to pay when they use their mobile phone for internet. But for me no, I didn't know yet so I don't want to use it yet. If I know more information I will use it. Because sometimes it's very dangerous for us when we don't know the information right then there will be big problems." (I6 arr 2008)

> "Oh no, no. I never use the internet - internet on phones… I know that this quite expensive to use the internet on the phone…I didn't press and they say the internet automatically come out and then all your money is gone after a minute. So I was so surprised. Yeah, it's a very expensive [mistake]. I [didn't press this] on purpose, you know, some kind of [accident] and I see that and then I - the - finally when I checked the money [because the credit is gone]." (I12 arr 2009)

A2 says that she does not use MMS, email or internet from her mobile phone "because they are expensive".

Where internet is accessed from a mobile phone, this was done by the younger respondents on pre-paid plans. 7 young people (M5, M1, I5, I3, M4, A9 and M3) from refugee backgrounds indicated they used mobile internet mainly for Facebook (including sending email) and YouTube. These respondents were also attending school and heavy users of the internet at home and school).

1.3.2.2 Choice of mobile phone
Nokia had the dominant market share with nearly 55% of respondents preferring this brand of handset:

> "Because I like Nokia because most of the people in Egypt are used to Nokia and [the signal] is strong…Nokia's easy to use." (A9 arr 2005)

> "The price was very important because being A6 arr 2005n they didn't want to spend that much money. And then we came to Nokia because of the brand. My parents - I think we can state that they're very loyal customers. And word of mouth from the community, oh Nokia's really good and then they kind of like have that mentality that Nokia, Toyota. So that's why they're followers." (I1 arr 1995)

> "Nokia for me was easy to use." (I2 arr 2009)

> "…in Nokia I had before, there was like guide book in your mobile phone so you know what you have to do…. But in Sony Eriksson I didn't find anything to get information what's this and how can use it…You know, Sony Eriksson have more things…more function in there. But using Nokia is very easier." (M4 arr 2002)

> "Because before me, my sister bought a Nokia and she said it's more easy to use." (M3 arr 2009)

> "Nokia is, I think everyone can use easier to search something." (I11 arr 2009)

> "…just at the time I didn't know that whether I should choose Nokia or Samsung but I just look for the one that I can use easily…It is Samsung." (I12 arr 2009)

> "I don't like Samsung." (A9 arr 2005)

When purchasing her first phone, I2 got recommendations from family and friends and they suggested Nokia. She has only used Nokia since.

The remaining 45% of respondents had handsets from Samsung, unknown and Sony Ericsson respectively.

1.3.2.3 Changing mobile phones handsets

Handsets were changed more often than mobile phone plans. Respondents generally changed handsets every 1 to 3 years. However, A9 claimed to have 9 handsets in 3 years because they lacked durability: "I had the first one, it break, the second one went to the [water]…"

A few respondents had the same handsets for 4 to 6 years. The reasons given for changing handsets were cosmetic and improved functionality, with younger respondents changing handsets more often.

> "So he bought for me the simple one (Nokia). Then later when I saw when I went to the school I saw many of my friends, they have mobile phone like touch screen or something like that. I was really interested of that…. But later I just bought the Samsung… Then I'm interested of the iPhone." (I3 arr 2007)

> "This is my third phone I have now… I look at colours. My first phone was pink… the first one was Nokia and the second one was Nokia as well. But this one is Sony Eriksson… the shape of this mobile phone is very nice. It's not too heavy so it's easy to move." (M4 arr 2002)

> "The first one [doesn't come with] internet. The second one was Samsung and I like Nokia, so I changed it." (M5 changed phones 3 times in 18 months)

A typical response from an older respondent:

> "The one that I used since I came here is just broken in the last two years. I used it for six years. Why it's broken is someone dropped it into the [toilet bowl]. So I was so angry because I loved that phone. I said I don't want any fancy thing, I just want to talk only." (I2 arr 2009)

1.3.2.4 Choice of service provider

Optus pre-paid plans were over 5 times more popular amongst respondents, than other service providers (in descending order) Vodafone, Virgin, Telstra, TPG and Three. Those with other service providers were often in contracts.

While a couple of respondents reported spending as much as $100 per month, in one case it was for 2 mobile phones. In another case, the (younger) respondent was not sure of the cost because she was not financially responsible for the account:

> "I think $100…it's a plan. I don't know, because always my father pays, I'm not sure." (M4 arr 2002)

Respondents overwhelmingly recharged $30 at a time. While this pre-paid credit usually lasted a month in most cases, approximately 17% of respondents said they could make it last longer from 2 months to a year. However, there is evidence that respondents misunderstood the cost of calls.

> "I don't know why but if you call from Vodafone you call to Telstra, you can't hear clear voice. I don't know why. Yes. But from Vodafone, if you call somebody like Optus, you pay less because I think Vodafone is at the top, the first and then Optus then Telstra. I don't know… that's just…I am thinking…" (M4 arr 2002)

M4 believes that the cost of calls differs depending on which particular network you are calling. In other cases, respondents reported their pre-paid credit being used more quickly than anticipated, but were unsure of the reasons:

M5: I'm using my credit really quickly. [Laughter]

Interviewer: By doing what?

M5: I don't know.

Interviewer: What do you think uses up the credit the quickest?

M5: Maybe the calls.

On a pre-paid plan, respondents were able to minimise the financial impact. However, those on post-paid plans received unexpectedly high bills:

"…the first time I discovered a (mobile) phone and I started using it so much that it reached like 100 and something. It was like what - in one month… That was when I was with a plan…" (I1 arr 1995)

Others had been stung by internet usage charges and only realised after the fact:

"You know my first plan it was every now and then. It's every now and then. They give you $30 for six months but they don't give you like free things - they don't give you data. I used my internet and all my credit would go, like finished… they charge you a lot for internet; $1 when you open the internet - just opening it is $1." (M1 arr 2009)

"One time I used the internet, because that's plan. With plan you use internet so you have to pay much… I don't know why. All my friends have pre-pay, they use internet that's normal. But with plan that's very hard to use internet because you have to pay." (M4 arr 2002)

1.3.3 Phone cards

The vast majority of respondents used phone cards. Those that initially said they did not use phone cards, actually used discount SIM cards in their mobile phones to make cheap international calls. While phone cards can be used with both landlines and mobile phones, SIM cards can only be used in mobiles. Phone cards and SIM cards are technically different, but are adopted by respondents as cost-efficient alternatives to using major telecommunications poviders for making international calls. It was more common for respondents to use phone cards with landlines than with mobiles.

While some respondents had used phone cards in intermediate countries (A7, M1, M2), respondents more commonly only discovered and used phone cards after arriving in Australia, having been recommended them by word-of-mouth through their communities.

"…the corner shop guy is a friend obviously, 'cause we always go there and buy a lot of stuff. And he's like oh try this phone card 'cause it's much cheaper. That was the first time they introduced the phone card. It was more reliable and now that there's competition within the phone card, once they establish customer and whatever, actually the service decrease and then she will find another phone card that's more competitive. Then it just moves in a cycle." (I1 arr 1995)

"My father have friend here and he showed my father to buy…and then how to use that. He teach all my father…and then my father learn for to show my sister; my big sister and then my big sister show me." (I5 arr 2008)

Respondents told of cousins, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, sisters, brother-in-laws, family friends, neighbours, case workers and interpreters recommending the use of phone cards. In many instances, they learnt through relatives who had been calling them using phone cards.

"I was in Burma because every time the [relative call] they using cards." (I2 arr 2009)

"My father knows about that because always he used to call us…his friends told him if he want to call overseas to your family, so you use this phone cards, that's easier to use." (M4 arr 2002)

I12 talks about being shown how to use the phone card upon arrival in Australia, but he had not even used a phone yet. That is, he was taught how to use the phone card having never used a home phone previously.

In one case (I3), the home phone was restricted to local and national calls only, therefore, the only option for making international calls was to use a phone card.

1.3.3.1 Learning to use phone cards for the first time

While a settlement worker commented that phone cards were very 'multicultural' in that they

catered for different languages, there was evidence to suggest that respondents needed assistance in using them at least the first few times.

> *"In the back of all the phone cards they have how you can use it. But when we first came to Australia, we hadn't enough knowledge about how we can write in English. But my father learned me how to use that." (M4 arr 2002)*

> *"I go to my family friend to do it for me…Very hard but now I'm used to it, they teach me…I never knew how to use it so they show me how to use it…because my Dad he's the one used to calls so when I buy I don't know how to use it. I went to my family friend house so they used to do it for me." (A9 arr 2005)*

> *"When we got the card, we had to follow the instructions. Sometimes I was bad with my English…Sometimes we have to press the PIN number. We had to enter the PIN number and if we did the wrong number, it's not there…When I would recharge it, oh, I was so confused with it." (I3 arr 2007)*

> *"The first time is really hard because I not like how we have to do. Is it like number one, two, three or a lot the number…and then you have to read. Because the first time I can't read English properly, yes, then just guess and then ask my sister. So she showed me." (I5 arr 2008)*

> *"Actually it was my sister, my older sister, she showed me how to use that at first, but and after that, but you know, it's not for me. It's not easy for me to remember, you know, and I have to try it by myself several times and then, yeah, it take about a couple of weeks…I am calling to one of my friends to Thailand. First I have to call the local number first and then I call the - put in the pin number and type the number what I'm calling to and then, yeah, it's hard, and also the code." (I12 arr 2009)*

> *"You only like spend the first two weeks are hard because you don't know how to use them. But then, when you practice it's easy." (M1 arr 2009)*

> *"The first time yeah, difficult. Because we had to dial the city code, the state code… and then we have to insert the card number and then later on we have to insert the number that we want to call… So probably three steps so I have to write down the steps." (I6 arr 2008)*

> *"At first complicated for me. When you listen to the [unclear] instructions it's very clear for me. But if you don't understand instructions, if you can't read these things then very difficult for the other people. So we have to approach a person who understands very well." (I10 arr 2009)*

I10 goes on to explain that phone cards are so difficult for some members of his family that they have to use the more expensive but simpler option of international direct dialling, when no-one is available to help use a phone card.

For other respondents, there were ongoing difficulties with using phone cards:

> *"I have to use for my grandparents. They can't read the tiny print on the card. They can't read it… So I have to call for them." (I1 arr 1995)*

> *"Yes you can find Spanish, Arabic, China, Indonesian language, any language, but not Persian." (M3 arr 2009)*

> *"Yes, difficult… I do not understand English… I have to listen to English, but too hard." (I7 arr 2008)*

In addition to the problem of understanding the verbal instructions in English, in one respondent's (I12) case, there was also fear that doing something incorrect would have dire consequences:

> *"…sometimes I feel like…if I press and then…something happen. You know, I suppose they will hear and if we just press something wrong and it - we must have that, international police or some police or some [emergency], they will come and they see you." (I12 arr 2009)*

1.3.3.2 Brand loyalty

There were cases of loyalty to a brand, where respondents repeatedly bought the same phone card (for example, Sunflower). But brands were not necessarily recognised by name, but rather by how the phone card looked:

> *"Olive and - I don't know, it's red. I don't know if you have seen that before… with fire."* *(M4 arr 2002)*

> *"Plus the most good is a green card that you can use for one hour…for Burma"* *(I11 arr 2009)*

> *"They didn't use the same one like when the first time they used, I didn't remember the name. The symbol was with the chicken one but now they use new - their card is like blue." (I3 arr 2007)*

Where there was no of loyalty to particular brands of phone cards, it was largely because respondents had repeated experience of them being unreliable. However, the potential cost savings are worth the risk of the relatively small investment of $10 in a phone card:

> *"She's (mother) probably loyal to one for a couple of months until she's like, oh you know, when you get disconnected and then they're cut a lot. They're like you have 200 minutes and then you get disconnected within the first 15 minutes instead of saying you have 185 left. Oh you only have 140 minutes remaining. And she's like what? So yeah, they're a bit smart now with the phone card." (I1 arr 1995)*

> *"When you use this 60 (minute card), it'll come to 40. Most of this is about 40 minutes, 30 or 28 minutes, so I can change up because it had 67 minutes, like what they told me in Kenya. When I come to use them, my own phone did just, cut off at 26…" (A19 arr 2006)*

> *"It depends whether you call which company, you buy, its always got it's own problems. They cut off in the middle of the conversation and some of them have got a connection fee and probably that's why they cut off and when you ring again, whatever, its all different, but it is still cheaper for me." (M9 arr 1984)*

> *"…if you buying card and then if you like to call them…that finish quick. If you try with… another one, they'll be better than the other ones." (A22 arr 1998)*

> *"Other card, you recharge it today you talk like 30 minutes, after a minute, tomorrow you didn't get it…Some card you buy it, when you need to recharge it, it didn't get any of the money inside. You need to call back and talk to the company, why I buy the card and didn't get anything?" (A24 arr 2004)*

> *"Sometimes you press the number more than once. On the card, it said number already been used." (A44 arr 2006)*

> *"Any one I buy if it does what I want it to do then I'll buy it. If it doesn't do the job I want it to do, I don't buy it… If it doesn't work I change it… Sometimes in Call Mama just they hang, just after one minute it finished." (A35 arr 2010)*

> *"Still you're dialling, dialling and then disconnected, disconnected, they say to you, you have to ring to customer service and then before you use your money gone, you didn't connect." (A37 arr 2003)*

O3 also found that after using a phone card after some time, the quality of connection degrades, so he will then move to another brand.

Because of the unreliability of phone cards in terms of quality of connection and amount of talktime, word-of-mouth recommendations were important:

> *"I ask like how many minutes for overseas to Jordan or Syria and they say they like this one better than this." (M5 arr 2009)*

> *"…people who have been using it tell you, this card is good. This one it's not good. This one you have more credit on it. This one, no. This one is good for this country. This one is good for that country." (A28 arr 2003)*

The number of minutes the phone cards claim to have for $10 was an incentive to purchase. Phone cards that claim to have more minutes for the same amount of money was a motivation to change brands.

> *"I can call to Burma $10 for half an hour but the other card we can use only 15 to 20 minutes." (I2 arr 2009)*

> *"My grandma…she would shop around the whole Cabramatta just to get a 50 cents cheaper phone card" (I1 arr 1995)*

An alternative to phone cards used with the home phone were pre-paid SIM cards. Respondents discovered that the latter could be an even cheaper means of making overseas calls. However, as this required some knowledge of removing and inserting SIM cards into mobile phones, this was not as prevalent amongst the respondents although some did have two mobiles, one of which had a pre-paid SIM such as Lebara installed to be used only for international calls.

Where A9 did not know how to use phone cards as her father was the one using them, she nevertheless found a SIM card relatively intuitive to install and use:

> *"Easy, I get to read and I did it." (A9 arr 2005 on using a Lebara phone card)*

1.3.3.3 Internet and comparing phone cards with other technologies
Respondents were open to using new technologies, but cost savings were weighed against whether it was a practical option for staying connected with family members abroad. That is, they were constrained by the accessibility of these new technologies to their relatives overseas, which was further limited if those relatives remained displaced or in refugee camps.

Almost all respondents were users of the internet, to which they were mostly introduced only after arriving in Australia. Uses of the internet included email, instant messaging and VOIP calls.

However, these were generally not technologies used to sustain connections with familial networks abroad. For example, while the internet may be cheaper still than using phone cards, it was impractical to keep contact with family members abroad as access to the internet at the other end was problematic:

> *"…with the mobile phone they can call and they can be anywhere. For Skype they have to be in front of a computer. So it's very inconvenient. But most of the time we use phone cards. Rarely we use Skype even though it's free and it's better, but yeah rarely… the thing with Skype is the other people that we're communicating have to have a Skype account and not many of the relatives who live in remote villages and stuff - they all have mobiles, they don't have a computer, the internet - 'cause it cost a lot to join the internet in Cambodia." (I1 arr 1995)*

While younger people from refugee backgrounds were more comfortable with using email and internet to stay connected with friends and family around the world, their parents more regularly relied on landlines. Younger respondents were also exposed to daily computer use through school. Although young refugees would maintain connections with members of their family abroad, this tended to be with relatives of approximately the same age and of the same generation. Furthermore, they did not assume the primary responsibility for sustaining relationships within family networks; instead, the parents did so with the most appropriate technologies available and affordable, shouldering the financial and legal liability for each.

> *"My parents don't email [relatives]. I email my cousins and stuff, back and forth, but my parents no. They're not very technical with the keyboard and stuff." (I1 arr 1995)*

> *"My daughter use it but I don't know - she talks with her friends and sometimes with a webcam. It's called webcam?" (I2 arr 2009)*

Where technologies such as Skype, chat or email were used, younger members of the family had to help facilitate this communication for their parents. In addition, the family members with whom they were communicating had already migrated to city areas or

countries of settlement:

> "Just in the Thailand, just in the city and some camp they have computer. So they can talk with us but not really to see face to face…they do have Skype but they have to pay lots of money for that if they use the internet. So we usually email and send pictures." (I3 arr 2007)

In other cases, using internet to communicate overseas was a more expensive option than the telephone for the recipients:

> "I didn't contact my friend with the email in refugee camp [Because it very expensive.]. So I just call with a phone." (I6 arr 2008)

1.4 Costly mistakes and misconceptions

Over a third of respondents had experienced unexpectedly costly bills. In some cases, they did not understand the nature of the expense. Others involved excess usage charges for internet. Settlement workers also commented that clients often believed that what they had been charged was incorrect:

> "Time-to-time actually I have people usually they're walk-in clients and they complain on the wrong bills, that they've been billed incorrectly for strange phone numbers or something like that or because again English issue… I think if just to generalise it probably the main issue is that they believe they were wrongly charged…" (O2)

Another settlement worker described the case of a client who had a home phone bill of $764 for one month's use, after which she was disconnected. This comprised $421 for international calls and $140 calls to non-Optus mobiles.

Respondents largely paid off the bills themselves without seeking further advice or assistance, and would devise their own strategies for minimising spending on communication technologies.

For internet use, one respondent only used pre-paid because he was wary of any excess charges:

> "Because if you buy the full plan you have to pay every month…So every month you've got a charge and if you use high speed you have to pay more money. We are now with this company Optus. They used to come to my house to lobby our family - to use internet. I know it will cost a lot of money…So if you have the money you can use, you can check. But if you are broke you can stay without internet." (I10 arr 2009)

I10 believes that internet speed (not downloads) is the reason for excess charges, and is concerned to control spending on the internet by using pre-paid. He also does not want to commit to a monthly plan because he understands that there are hidden costs over and above the amount that is advertised.

1.5 Conclusions from consumer research

- Country of origin informs technology literacies. Consumer education and training needs to be tailored for different refugee communities, especially for those who have spent significant periods of time in refugee camps.
- Displacement can increase technology literacies if refugees are exposed to new technologies, but this was not the case for those in refugee camps.
- Refugees are used to going without technology (when there is none available and/ or they do not have the finances to access it) but have also experienced fear of technology and can associate it with danger.
- Refugees arrive in Australia with base level literacies. Settling in Australia demands higher level literacies that not only include setting up accounts for home phone, mobile and internet service provision, as well as managing spending on communication technologies. That is, both financial and technological literacies are required at the higher end of the hierarchy.
- Settled refugees usually bear the cost and responsibility for staying in touch with displaced family members.
- The data strongly showed that adhoc, informal training was required for using home

phones, buying and using mobile phones and phone cards. This learning was different to that of the internet which was done formally as part of school, TAFE and compulsory English language classes.

– When respondents believed they had been wrongly charged for services, they were more likely to change service providers than make a direct complaint. However, queries might be made through settlement workers who would liaise with telecommunications companies on their behalf.

Home phone
– The majority of respondents were Optus customers and had actively moved from Telstra for two reasons. One is the perception that Telstra was not providing value for money or a quality service. The other was the attraction of home phone and internet bundles.

– The majority of respondents used home phone and phone cards to maintain connections with family members abroad.

– Refugees are not heavy users of internet when it comes to sustaining familial networks.

Mobile
– Mobiles were used to stay networked with family in Australia (where home phones and phone cards were used for relatives overseas) and as 'back-up' for making overseas calls if absolutely necessary.

– Mobiles were treated as personal, individual devices where home phones were shared between family members. For many respondents, unlike other migrants, it was the first time taking sole responsibility, ownership and/or financial liability for a communication technology.

– Mobiles enabled respondents to be accessible and for immediate family members in Australia to be accessed easily, that is, to maintain a much tighter communication network than with landlines.

– Respondents favoured functionality which utilised aural literacies (voice calls, music) over written literacies (texting and internet use).

– Nokia was the preferred handset for the majority, with younger respondents changing handsets more frequently.

– Optus prepaid was the most popular mobile plan, as it minimised financial impact. There was evidence that respondents did not understand the cost of calls and why their credit would run out quickly.

Phone cards
– Respondents experienced particular difficulties with phone cards and seemed to have no recourse when the cards did not provide the amount of talk time advertised.

– Just as service providers were changed (from Telstra to Optus) when it was perceived that respondents were not getting value for money or quality service, respondents would also change phone cards in similar circumstances. Conversely, they would be brand loyal only if they felt that the performance of the phone card was consistent.

Part 2: Consumer Education

The findings from the consumer research informed the development of a series of fictitious personas that represent the target audience for the consumer education program. The personas were used to ensure that the program would cater to the range of literacies across refugee communities.

A consultant from a teaching and education background was engaged to assist in designing and developing the program for the varying literacy levels of the user personas.

Given the low levels of English language literacy amongst the respondents, the program prioritised oral rather than written methods of consumer education. That is, the program assumes face-to-face discussion amongst participants. Resource kits were developed that could potentially be used by trainers, facilitators, volunteers or case workers with refugee community groups.

Four units were developed. These centred on the technologies for which refugees receive no formal training during settlement.

      Unit 1: Landlines vs mobile phones

      Unit 2: Understanding mobile phones

      Unit 3: Mobile phone plans

      Unit 4: Phone cards.

2.1 User personas

	Name: Ethra **Age:** 19 years old **Ethnicity:** Iraqi (Mandean) **Occupation:** high school student **Location:** Fairfield, NSW **Language:** Arabic (fluent), English (good) **Technology usage:** internet (email, web especially Facebook) and mobile
Scenario of use	Ethra is at school in his IT class. It is in a computer lab. When the teacher isn't looking, his classmates are logging onto Facebook and messaging their friends. When he gets the chance, he does so too as it is free and doesn't cost any money, unlike doing it on his mobile. Anyway, he can't get Facebook on his phone right now as he has to get more credit for his phone. He knows his dad won't be happy with him as he asked for $30 for phone credit just a week ago. But he doesn't know how the credit ran out so quickly and he can't explain to his dad either. He quickly gets Google up on the web as the teacher is nearby. He is not looking forward to doing his essay on IT networks, as he finds writing in English so hard after not going to school for 3 years while his family lived in Syria. He decides that once he gets more phone credit, he will text his friends to get together for a study group.

Name: Fahima
Age: 38 years old
Ethnicity: Sudanese
Occupation: mother of five
Location: Frankston, VIC
Language: Arabic (fluent), English (intermediate)
Technology usage: home phone and mobile

Scenario of use

Fahima wishes she had more time to study and learn new technologies so she can keep up with her children, and they didn't have to translate so much for her. "I'm getting much better at English but it's still very embarrassing - they are so young, yet know so much of our business. I am quite ashamed." With five children to look after, she doesn't have a lot of opportunities to interact with others and practise her English. She looks forward to the times when she can call relatives in Egypt and Sudan, and just speak freely in Arabic. It comforts her to hear their voices after losing touch with them for so long, not knowing their whereabouts after her family members had to scatter because of war in her home country. Even though it makes her feel at ease to be able to just pick up the phone at home and call, it costs a lot of money. She has heard that there are cheaper ways to call with special cards, but doesn't understand how these work and is not confident about listening to the instructions in English. What if she presses the wrong buttons? Anyway, she is ashamed to ask after receiving a very expensive phone bill. She had no idea that calling Sudan would cost so much money. She was even more surprised that calling numbers here in Australia can cost a lot of money too. Now she is worried about how to pay the bill and scared of making any more calls unless it is an emergency.

Name: Aye
Age: 25 years old
Ethnicity: Burmese
Occupation: unemployed
Location: Brisbane, QLD
Language: Burmese (fluent), English (basic)
Technology usage: home phone and phone card

Scenario of use

"I miss most of school when I was in refugee camp so my English not good." Aye is glad that Australia accepted her and her family. They want to make a good life in Australia. She wants to get a good job but knows that for this she will need good English. Her family also want her to get a good job so she can help support them. She feels torn between doing more study and finding work so they can have more money. After all, they are waiting for her brother in Thailand to be accepted to come to Australia. And until he arrives, they have to send money to support him and other family members still in the refugee camp. They also have to call him from Australia because it costs too much for him to call from Thailand. She and her parents did their English classes when they got here, but her English is better than her parents, so they rely on her to help them when things need to be translated, to go to the shops to ask for things, to pay bills and take them to the doctors and Centrelink. There is so much she has to do for them, she doesn't know how she would have time to study or work. Everything is new to her so it also takes time to learn. One the new things she has had to learn is how to use the home phone. They have never had a phone in their home, but the settlement worker taught her how to put the numbers in. They had to find out from other Burmese people how to ring to Burma or Thailand. They told her to use a phone card, which you can buy at the shop. They showed her how to do it once, but it was hard to understand the English. Aye hopes that using the phone card won't make their home phone bill go up. A couple of times she tried the phone card and it didn't work, but when it does, it is good to be able to talk to her brother.

2.2 Resource kit units

2.2.1 Landline vs mobile phones

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

– Gain an understanding of the major differences between landline and mobile phones

– Become more familiar with terminology specifically related to phone technology

– Recognise the particular functions of landline and mobile phones

– Make more informed choices when purchasing a phone based on which type of phone best meets their needs

Resources:

– Phone type definition cards

– Definition word cards

– Label cards: mobile, versus, landline

– Landline and mobile phone photo cards

– Phone function cards

– Need cards

– Blu tac or tape

Teaching and Learning Activities:

Lesson Preparation: Divide a white/black board or wall space in half using chalk, marker or masking tape. Label one section "Landline", the other section "Mobile" and place the "versus" card on the dividing line.

1   Introduce this unit by reading the definitions of a landline and a mobile phone. Hand out the definition cards and have students place them under the correct heading: landline or mobile. As a group look at each definition card and discuss if it is placed in the right section.

2   Spread out phone photo cards on the floor or a desk so that all students have access. Ask students to sort cards into two piles: landlines and mobiles. Have students select photo cards and place them under the correct heading: landline or mobile. Again, ask the group to make sure that each photo is placed in the correct section.

3   Hand out phone function cards and ask students to read out their function. Discuss each function and explain further if needed. Ask students to place their function next to the matching phone type: landline or mobile. As a group, ensure that each function is in the right section.

4   Hand out need cards. One by one ask each student to display their card next to the phone type that best suits that need. If both phone types apply, then the card can be placed on the middle line.

5   Review the features of each phone type. Ask each student to state which phone is best suited to their needs.

2.2.2 Understanding mobile phones

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

– Gain an understanding of the major characteristics and functions of mobile phones

– Become more familiar with terminology specifically related to mobile phone technology

– Gain an understanding of the functions of a SIM card

– Become more familiar with different models of mobile phones.

Resources:

– Examples of different models of mobile phones

– Examples of SIM cards

– Terminology cards and corresponding definition cards

– Phone and SIM card characteristic and function cards

– Butchers paper or white/black board

– Chalk or markers

– Blu tac.

Teaching and Learning Activities:

1   Introduce this unit by handing out the mobile phones and allowing students to examine them and pass them around. Once the students have looked at several different examples, ask them to name the phone brands they have looked at or know about, write these on a board or butchers paper.

2   Hand out SIM card examples and allow students to pass around. Demonstrate how to insert a SIM card and then have students insert SIM cards into the phones.

3   Hand out characteristic and function cards. Ask each student to read out their card, then stick it on the board or butchers paper. Discuss and explain each card.

4   Give half the class a definition card and the other half a terminology card. Explain each one then ask the students to match each term to its corresponding definition. Display these on the board or butchers paper.

5   Review the phone models, characteristics and functions of phones and SIM cards, terminology and meanings. Allow for questions and discussion.

2.2.3 Mobile phone plans

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

– Become familiar with major mobile phone companies

– Gain an understanding of the major features of mobile phone plans and the fine print

– Become more familiar with terminology specifically related to mobile phone plans

– Be able to better understand a mobile phone bill

– Be able to make more informed choices regarding mobile phone plans.

Resources:

– Mobile phone company logo cards

– Examples of different mobile phone plan advertisements

– Examples of different mobile phone bills with explanations of important sections

– Terminology cards and corresponding definition cards

– Phone plan comparison table

– Voting magnets or stickers

– Butchers paper or white/black board

– Chalk or markers and highlighters

– Blu tac.

Teaching and Learning Activities:

1   Introduce this unit by asking students to identify the major mobile phone companies and display their logos on a board or wall.

2   Hand out examples of mobile phone plan advertisements while displaying the same examples on a board or wall. Have students highlight any terms in the ads that they do not understand or are unfamiliar. Ask students to read out their list of unknown words and highlight or circle on the display copies.

3   Using the list of unknown and unfamiliar terms given by students, match with definition cards and explain each one further if required.

4   Display enlarged copies of mobile phone bills. Deconstruct important sections of the bill by referring to the explanation cards. Allow for questions.

5   Create a table and compare phone plans by looking at main features. Have students vote for the best plan by using a magnet or sticker to indicate their choice.

6   Review the terminology and meanings, bill explanations and different mobile phone plan advertisements. Allow for questions and discussion.

2.2.4 Phone cards

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

–   Gain an understanding of phone card types, features, what they offer and how to use them

–   Become more familiar with terminology specifically related to phone cards

–   Be able to make more informed choices regarding phone cards.

Resources:

–   Examples of different phone cards

–   Terminology cards and corresponding definition cards

–   Benefits and drawbacks cards

–   Phone card comparison table

–   Voting magnets or stickers

–   Butchers paper or white/black board

–   Chalk or markers

–   Blu tac.

Teaching and Learning Activities:

1   Introduce this unit by handing out examples of phone cards while displaying the same examples, enlarged, on a board or wall. Explain common features of cards using terminology and definition cards eg. scratch pin numbers, access phone number, card amount, instructions.

2   Discuss benefits and drawbacks of phone cards, list on board or butchers paper.

3   Explain how to use cards, how to chose cards depending on customers requirements and where to purchase.

4   Create a table and compare phone cards by looking at main features.

5   Review the card types, features, uses and terminology. Allow for questions and discussion.

2.3 Testing and evaluation

The resource kits were demonstrated to workers at a community legal centre in Melbourne, a refugee settlement support organisation in Wollongong and tested with young people from refugee backgrounds enrolled in an Intensive English Language Centre.

The feedback from these tests and demonstrations were as follows:

–   Timing of this consumer education is crucial, new refugee arrivals receive a mobile phone as part of their resettlement as soon as get to Australia, but this is before they receive any of their compulsory English language tuition. Also, it is necessary to deliver this consumer education before critical decisions are made and contracts are signed on the basis of informal recommendations.

–   Home phones would be irrelevant in some cases until consumers decide to install internet at home. Even so, many are bypassing landlines and going straight to prepaid mobile internet bundled with their mobile phone service provider.

–   Given the critical role played by settlement organisations in orienting newly arrived refugees, the process of choosing telecommunications products and services perhaps should also be assisted by case workers and refugee support groups.

–   Interpreters would also be needed at most workshops offered to recent arrivals who have not yet begun English classes.

–   Experimentation with different formats for the resource kits is warranted so that reliance on written literacies is further minimised. Suggestions were made to utilise visual literacies more, that is, employ infographics, icons and symbols where possible over text. Developing the resource kits around aural literacies in different languages was also worth considering given that the consumer research respondents preferred this to reading and writing in English.

–   It is redundant to attempt to simplify the key concepts of mobile phone plans, as they are often intentionally deceptive and misleading. The resource kit should also highlight the active misrepresentation by telecommunications providers and alert consumers to this, rather than adopt a neutral position on telecommunications products and services.

Part 3: Conclusions & Recommendations

The Mind the Gap project has conducted research into refugees as vulnerable consumers. As new arrivals to Australia, they have low communications technology literacy having generally been deprived of available, accessible and affordable communications during their displacement in refugee camps and/or intermediate countries.

The consumer research has examined the challenges faced by refugees as new consumers of communications services in Australia. The project addressed these through a consumer education initiative that developed communications technology literacy programs. The programs focused on appropriate communications services suited to sustaining and strengthening their connections with displaced family members abroad, promoting emotional wellbeing during their settlement in Australia.

As an action research project, it brings to light, to, advocates, policymakers, regulators, telecommunications providers:

- the low levels of technology literacy and knowledge about communications services and products on the part of newly arrived refugees. Communication technology literacies can be understood as part of a hierarchy of skills. While refugees arrive with base level consumption literacies (which enable them to basically use at least one telecommunications device to primarily receive calls), living in Australia demands higher level literacies (such as owning and taking financial responsibility for a range of technology products)
- the lack of support for communications technology awareness and use in settlement service provision for refugees
- the gap that exists between telecommunications literacy (for which there is no formalised support during settlement) and computer literacy skills (which, along with English language tuition, are provided as part of the refugee settlement process).

Consumer Education:

Consumer education about telecommunications products and services should begin before newly arrived refugees make any key decisions or sign contracts for service provision.This education must be more than an introduction to the various products on offer, and must take into account both low levels of English literacy, communications technology literacies, and financial literacy. Building on the experience of the Mind the Gap project, community education initiatives would be successful by focusing on mobile technology, the differences between pre and post paid services, and proactively highlighting specific traps to avoid, and providing advice on the existing products that give consumers more control (prepaid options, for example). Experimentation with different formats is warranted, so that resources are easily adaptable for specific communities.

Learning of communication technology literacies should be formalised as part of the refugee settlement process, just as English language tuition is provided to boost literacies in reading and writing and computer classes encourage IT literacy. Computers are not the most appropriate starting point for increasing the technology literacy of refugees, as telephones (home phones, mobile phones and phone cards) are more resonant and meaningful as tools for staying connected with loved ones overseas. Settlement services have a critical role in addressing the gap in those technology literacies.

Implications for Policy:

There are two main policy dimensions to be considered. The first pertains to immigration policy. The second relates to the telecommunications industry.

Current immigration policy allows refugees to undergo basic orientation prior to coming to Australia. However, this ought to address refugees' communication needs and the technologies which are best suited to helping them sustain vulnerable connections with family members who have been displaced and/or have emigrated to resettlement countries.

Immigration policy also covers settlement service provision upon arrival in Australia. While this includes English language classes and computer training, the policy neglects vital literacies in communication technologies such as the home phone, mobiles and phone cards. As such, there is no formal learning of such literacies incorporated into the settlement process.

Policies regulating the conduct of the telecommunications industry need to be strengthened in the areas of contracts and phone cards (international calling cards). Better measures are needed for protecting consumers from refugee backgrounds and those with low levels of English language literacy from being persuaded and locked into contracts which they do not fully understand and which can lead to unaffordable debts to telecommunications service providers.

This research also supports the call by consumer groups and the industry regulator for action to assist consumers in avoiding bill shock. Refugee consumers would benefit from new accessible spend management tools, so long as there is sufficient promotion of the resources. The research also suggests that the community might benefit from the development of simpler products which are straightforward to manage, and which are suited to the documented needs of this group of consumers (ie more voice calls included than texts, and affordable international rates).

While home phone and mobile service providers are subject to industry regulation and scrutiny, the phone card industry is not subject to the same degree of scrutiny. There is much policy and advocacy work to do in this area to ensure that consumers are supplied with the advertised amount of talk time, and an acceptable standard of service.

Refugee consumers are more likely to switch to another phone card company than to make a complaint. Yet the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) generally relies on consumer complaint to commence investigations.. Any inquiries by the ACCC into the operations of the phone card industry would likely benefit from active engagement with the consumers who use them most, and utilizing pre-existing networks such as migrant resource centres and settlement service providers.

Appendices
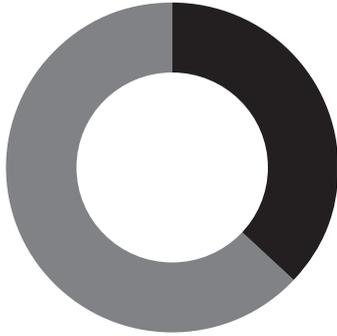
Proportion of survey respondents with and without experience of using landline telephones before coming to Australia.

27 out of the 43 respondents had experience of using landline telephones, while 16 had none whatsoever.

◉ Have experience 63%

◉ No experience 37%

Data taken from Leung,L.; Finney Lamb,C. & Emrys,L. (2009) Technology's Refuge: the use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees, Sydney: UTS ePress, online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2100/928

Appendix 2

Comparison of survey respondents with and without experience of mobile phones before coming to Australia.

Of the 43 survey respondents, nearly three quarters had no experience of using mobile phones before coming to Australia.

◉ Have experience 28%

◉ No experience 72%

Data taken from Leung,L.; Finney Lamb,C. & Emrys,L. (2009) Technology's Refuge: the use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees, Sydney: UTS ePress, online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2100/928

Appendix 3
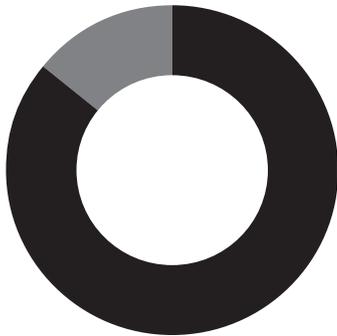
Survey respondents with no experience of email before coming to Australia.

86% of survey respondents had never had any experience of email prior to arrival in Australia.

◉ Have experience 14%

◉ No experience 86%

Data taken from Leung,L.; Finney Lamb,C. & Emrys,L. (2009) Technology's Refuge: the use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees, Sydney: UTS ePress, online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2100/928

Appendix 4

Percentage comparison of respondents with experience of technology before and after arrival in Australia.

Technology	Before	After
Landline telephone	63%	72%
Mobile phone	28%	84%
Letter writing	49%	12%
Fax	9%	23%
Email	14%	51%
Internet	5%	23%

Data taken from Leung,L.; Finney Lamb,C. & Emrys,L. (2009) Technology's Refuge: the use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees, Sydney: UTS ePress, online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2100/928

Appendix 5

Comparison of most used technologies after arrival in Australia.

Technology	Number of responses	Percentage
Landline telephone	14	33%
Mobile phone	18	42%
Letter writing	0	0%
Fax	0	0%
Email	4	9%
Internet	7	16%
Unknown	1	2%
Phone cards (could be landline or mobile)	4	9%

Data taken from Leung,L.; Finney Lamb,C. & Emrys,L. (2009) Technology's Refuge: the use of technology by asylum seekers and refugees, Sydney: UTS ePress, online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2100/928