



TENT



**BREAKING  
BARRIERS**

*Integrating refugees through employment.*

# UK EMPLOYERS' GUIDE TO HIRING REFUGEES





TENT

## ABOUT TENT

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**Tent is mobilizing the private sector to improve the lives and livelihoods of the more than 25 million men, women, and children who have been forcibly displaced from their home countries.**

As traditional actors struggle to cope with the global refugee crisis – with ever-increasing numbers of refugees, displaced for longer periods of time – it is clear that businesses have a more important role than ever before.

Tent works closely with businesses to help them identify and understand opportunities to help refugees.

Learn more at [tent.org](https://tent.org)



# ABOUT BREAKING BARRIERS

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**Breaking Barriers is one of London's leading refugee charities, enabling refugees in London to acquire the knowledge, confidence and experience they need to secure stable and fulfilling employment. We offer bespoke, intensive and flexible support to assist individuals to integrate in the UK and create fulfilling lives.**

We give a central role to businesses, involving them directly in finding employment solutions for refugees. We partner directly with businesses committed to hiring refugees, providing work experience placements or delivering skills-based workshops for refugees to gain vital work experience and develop the skills they need to secure long-term, sustainable and meaningful employment.

Breaking Barriers supports refugee clients for up to 12 months after they enter new employment, improving their personal outcomes and adding benefits for employers including increased retention, diversity and employee engagement.

Learn more at [breaking-barriers.co.uk](https://breaking-barriers.co.uk)



# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>FACTS ABOUT REFUGEES</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>WHY HIRE REFUGEES</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>HOW TO FIND &amp; HIRE REFUGEES</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO RECRUITMENT &amp; RETENTION</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ANNEX I: <i>ORGANISATIONS AND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK</i></b>	<b>36</b>
<b>ANNEX II: <i>ADDITIONAL RESOURCES</i></b>	<b>44</b>
<b>ANNEX III: <i>BREAKING BARRIERS</i></b>	<b>46</b>



# INTRODUCTION

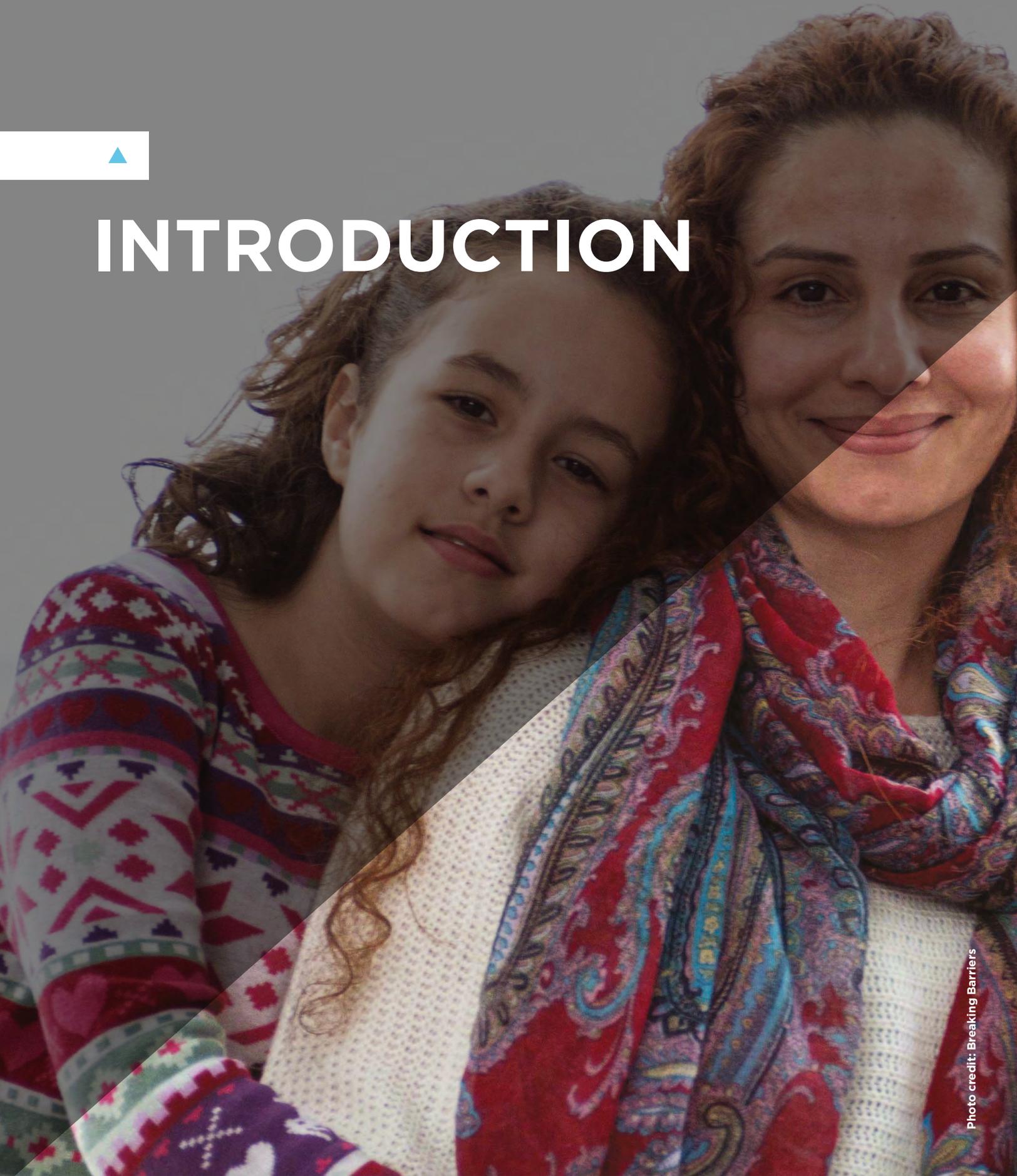


Photo credit: Breaking Barriers



## HIRING REFUGEES IS AN IMPACTFUL WAY FOR COMPANIES TO DRIVE THEIR BUSINESS FORWARD WHILE ADDRESSING ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME – THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS. THIS GUIDEBOOK CONTAINS PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR BUSINESSES TO HIRE REFUGEES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Political and media coverage in the UK regularly blurs the distinction between asylum seekers, economic migrants and refugees. This creates a climate of confusion and suspicion, but as a nation we have benefited from the contributions of refugees to our society throughout history. Evidence has proven that in the long-term, people fleeing across borders for their safety end up contributing disproportionately to economic growth. In order to do so, however, refugees in the UK need access to sustainable and meaningful employment.

Leading businesses have already experienced the many benefits of hiring refugees, including higher retention rates, increased diversity, and a strengthened brand and reputation. However, the fear of unwittingly employing an illegal migrant worker seems to be an ever-present concern, and the time involved in undertaking checks can still be a serious deterrent. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recognised in their report, *Engaging with Employers in the Hiring of Refugees*, that HR departments often lack knowledge of the rules surrounding the employment of refugees and feel discouraged or overestimate the restrictions and complexity surrounding hiring.

The *UK Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees* is designed to assist businesses wanting to hire refugees. It contains essential information related to refugee recruitment and employment and will show how working with an expert organisation such as Breaking Barriers may simplify the process.

This document includes:

- **Information on refugee populations in the UK**
- **The business benefits of hiring refugees**
- **Best practices for recruiting refugee employees**
- **Common barriers – and solutions – to refugee hiring and integration**



# FACTS ABOUT REFUGEES

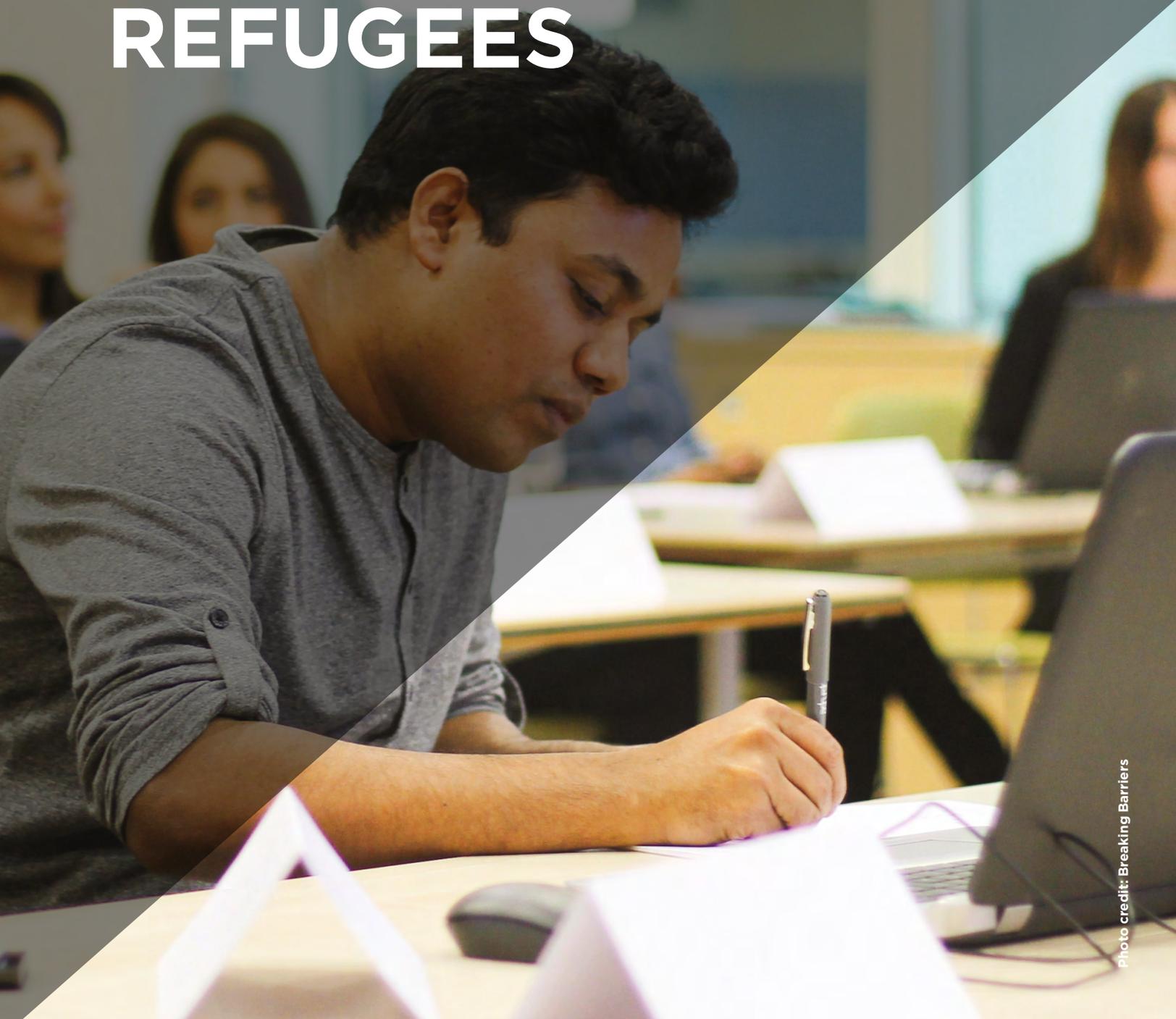


Photo credit: Breaking Barriers



## WHO ARE REFUGEES?

A refugee is defined as someone with a well-founded fear of conflict or persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group in their home country, and as a result of such circumstances, is unable to return to it. In the UK, refugee status is awarded to someone the Home Office recognises as a refugee as described in the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. A person given refugee status is normally granted leave to remain in the UK for five years, and at the end of that period can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

Refugees are protected by international law and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom may be at risk. The protection of refugees has many aspects, including ensuring refugees' basic safety by preventing them from being returned to danger, granting them access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, and implementing measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REFUGEE AND AN ASYLUM SEEKER?

An asylum seeker is an individual who, since arriving in the UK, has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the Refugee Convention or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. An asylum seeker has not yet had their status determined and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application. Many asylum seekers may eventually be granted refugee status and the associated protections within the UK.

Some refugees will have spontaneously arrived in the UK and lodged an asylum claim from within the country. They will then be protected from any removal procedures until their claim has been processed and their status determined.

Resettled refugees have had their status determined by UNHCR abroad, often in major host countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, or Egypt. They will then be chosen to relocate to the UK to start a new life under a specific resettlement scheme implemented by the Home Office. The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme is an example of a programme established to help resettle Syrian refugees in the UK.

## WHO ARE REFUGEES IN THE UK?

In the UK, a refugee will have either been relocated to the UK on a resettlement scheme or have had their application for asylum accepted by the UK government, through proving to the authorities that they would be at risk if they returned to their home country. Refugees, and members of their family joining them on family reunion visas, have permission to stay in the UK long-term or indefinitely.

Find more in-depth information on the backgrounds of various refugee communities in the UK on the Cultural Orientation Resource Center's website: <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders>

There is no official figure for the number of refugees in the UK. The UNHCR Population Statistics Database estimated that 121,837 refugees were present in the UK at the end of 2017, but the estimate is based on the number of successful asylum applications over the previous ten years. The assumption is that after a decade a refugee will no longer need protection and be in a position to be granted citizenship in their host country. What data is available may therefore be inaccurate: for example, someone who arrived in the UK as a refugee may have since been granted British citizenship and no longer consider themselves to be a refugee, whilst others would still consider themselves to be refugees over twenty years later.

In 2016 the top nationalities of asylum applications were Iranian, Pakistani, Iraqi, Afghan and Bangladeshi. The top nationalities to be granted refugee status without appeal were Syrian, Iranian, Eritrean, Sudanese and Afghan. It is estimated that over 30% of those receiving refugee status end up in London. The remaining majority are spread across all areas of the country, from Glasgow to Oxford. Traditionally many refugees in the UK headed for larger urban centres, particularly London, where there are established or emerging communities to draw on for support and information. Many of these communities remain in London but more recently the UK government has introduced methods of dispersal to encourage settlement and integration in all regions of the country.

### **HOW MANY REFUGEES IN THE UK ARE UNEMPLOYED?**

Unemployment rates in the UK for refugee communities may range depending on the location and community monitored. With limited data to distinguish the rate of unemployment of refugees from that of other groups in society, it is difficult to get an accurate percentage. However, it is estimated that refugees have an unemployment rate of around 70%.

### **CAN REFUGEES RECEIVE BENEFITS?**

Yes. Most refugees are entitled to welfare benefits in the UK once they cease to receive asylum support.

Refugees are entitled to:

- *Income Support*: If they are learning English (for at least 15 weeks) in order to find employment, and have been in the UK less than a year.
- *Jobseeker's Allowance*: If they can prove they are looking for work.
- *Employment and Support Allowance*: If they are unable to look for work because of a mental or physical disability.
- *Pension Credit*: If they are over working age.
- *Universal Credit*: If they are in certain areas of the UK.
- *A Refugee Integration Loan*: To help pay for a rent deposit, household items, education and training for work.

## ▲ OTHER HUMANITARIAN IMMIGRANTS

In addition to those who have received refugee status, there are several other official immigration statuses under which migrants may fall. These people may not qualify for the same rights to work and to claim financial assistance as refugees, but it is likely that they will also have experienced forced displacement from their home countries and may have had very similar experiences to refugees. Refugees and migrants with the right to work in the UK for longer than 6 months receive formal documentation from the UK Home Office that will indicate their right to work.

- **Asylum seeker:** An individual who has lodged an application for protection in the UK on the basis of the Refugee Convention or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Most asylum seekers are denied the right to work in the UK but have access to basic public funds. A small minority are granted permission to take employment from a small selection of jobs outlined in the shortage occupation list; predominantly those requiring specialist training or unusual skills.
- **Humanitarian Protection (HP):** The UK Government grants protection to individuals that are deemed to be in significant need but do not meet the status of refugee as defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention – these individuals will be granted humanitarian protection. HP covers situations where someone may be at risk of serious harm if they return to their country of origin but they are not recognised as refugees because the risk is not of persecution for a reason covered by the Refugee Convention. It was initially enacted as UK law in order to meet EU obligations but will not be applied to EU nationals seeking protection.
- Individuals with HP will be granted Leave to Remain for 5 years (the word 'leave' is here used in the archaic sense of 'permission'). When they apply to extend this leave a review will be carried out to evaluate whether they still need protection. If the risk is no longer applicable they will not qualify for further leave under HP rules.
- **Family Reunion:** Family members who have been accepted as dependants on a granted refugee or humanitarian claim will normally be granted leave and receive status and rights in line with the main claimant.
- **Indefinite Leave to Remain/ Enter (ILR):** Indefinite leave may be granted following an application to stay in the UK indefinitely. In the UK, refugees and migrants with Humanitarian Protection will usually be able to apply for ILR after 5 years.

## ▲ OTHER HUMANITARIAN IMMIGRANTS (CONTINUED)

- **Limited Leave to Remain/ Enter (LTR):** When a migrant or person seeking asylum has an application to be in the UK granted, they will be given a period of time during which they have to remain in the UK, or enter if applying from a third country. For refugees and migrants with HP, this period is 5 years, during which time they are able to work. This immigration status is not limited to refugees, and when non-refugee migrants are granted LTR, this is often on condition of 'No Recourse to Public Funds', meaning they are not able to access public funds, such as housing benefit, jobseekers' allowance, or non-emergency medical care. However, refugees with LTR status are able to claim financial and housing support from the state.
- **Discretionary Leave to Remain (DL):** DL is given in exceptional cases where an individual does not qualify for leave in any capacity under the immigration rules and also does not qualify for leave outside the rules. This may apply in some medical cases or when an individual has been trafficked or a victim of modern slavery. This gives the person legal right to live and work in the UK, although sometimes the condition of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' is attached to this status. DL is not normally granted for more than 30 months at a time.
- **Leave Outside the Rules (LOTR):** LOTR on compelling compassionate grounds may be granted where the decision maker decides that the specific circumstances of the case warrant a grant of leave despite the requirements of the Immigration Rules or specific policies having not been met. Sometimes the condition of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' is attached to this status.





# WHY HIRE REFUGEES?



Photo credit: Breaking Barriers



## HIRING REFUGEES HAS A NUMBER OF POSITIVE IMPACTS THAT CAN BENEFIT ALL EMPLOYEES AND DRIVE BUSINESS GROWTH.

### DIVERSITY

The benefits of diversity and varying experiences in the workplace are well-documented, and diversity is increasingly being seen as an enabler and a strategic priority in order to succeed in the evolving global marketplace. Research has shown that companies with employees from a variety of ethnic backgrounds are 35% more likely to outperform their competitors. When companies harness the power of their employees' diverse experiences, knowledge, and skillsets, including their refugee employees, it can drive innovation, better decision-making and leadership, and positive organisational culture shifts – and ultimately, business growth.

### RETENTION

When businesses hire refugees, they also benefit from refugees' comparatively high retention rates. Refugees are often seeking periods of stability, and are therefore likely to take jobs with longer-term employment and careers in mind. Studies have shown that employers regularly find retention rates for refugees relatively high and turnover amongst refugees tends to be lower. A recent report by the Fiscal Policy Institute and the Tent Partnership for Refugees found that 73% of the U.S. employers interviewed for the study reported a higher retention rate for their refugee employees. This observation was consistent across various sectors and locations, with many employers also seeing an overall improvement in the company. For example, many senior employees became more versatile as they adjust to managing a more diverse workforce.

High retention rates are facilitated by employers' efforts to accommodate and integrate refugees into the workforce. Working with an employment organisation which lends ongoing support to refugees in the workplace can improve retention by helping refugees and businesses navigate the integration process. This improved retention can result in demonstrable savings, for example in the case of IKEA:

**“Not only am I planning to break even on the amount we put into the Breaking Barriers partnership, I plan to double the amount we invest by the end of the FY19, based on business savings alone. The best philanthropic giving is also a smart business proposition. Let’s be honest, it’s a harsh retail climate out there and we’re looking hard at what we spend.”**

HILIARY JENKINS | PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES LEADER, IKEA UK & IE

## ▲ THE LIVING WAGE

Most organisations should also seek to pay the Living Wage based on real living costs, which can be particularly high in London. The 2017/18 Living Wage was calculated to be £8.75 across the UK and £10.20 in London. This helps to ensure independence through employment for a refugee and increases the probability of the work being sustained for a significant period of time. Research undertaken by the Living Wage Foundation shows that paying the Living Wage increases motivation and retention rates for employees and improves relationships between managers and their staff, as well as improving business reputation.

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Non-refugee employees are increasingly seeking to work for employers with strong reputations, where staff feel they can give something back to society. Breaking Barriers has started collecting data on the effect employing refugees has on wider employee engagement as well as educating individual employees on the challenges faced by refugees in the UK. Although data collection is in its early stages, initial feedback from businesses and their employees has been overwhelmingly positive:

**“We offered a placement to a refugee who hadn’t worked in over ten years and was also facing significant personal challenges. As someone from a different culture, she needed guidance to adapt to a fast-paced UK business environment. Her colleagues’ patience, time and support were vital in helping her to develop new skills. We found it genuinely rewarding to have taken on a refugee placement and we would encourage other companies to do the same. In light of our collective success, more teams in our firm have asked us about running future placements.”**

KAREN HIGGINS | HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY, GRANT THORNTON UK LLP

**“The people we’ve hired through Breaking Barriers seem keen to make the most of the opportunity and that has a knock-on effect on other co-workers. It’s humbling when you find out what some people have been through and yet they still come into work every day in an ironed uniform with a smile on their face. It gives everyone a perspective beyond primary marketing objectives.”**

HILARY JENKINS | PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES LEADER, IKEA UK & IE

## ▲ SAM'S STORY

**“I can't remember much from before the war, but I do remember my family was always together, and that I loved school and wanted to become a surgeon or doctor. In 2011 my school was destroyed by a bomb and many of my friends died. Blood ran through the streets. We moved to my auntie's house where we stayed for six months. We moved from city to city, house to house - we were refugees in our own country. Three years into the war my mother had had enough and we left Syria for Jordan. We stayed in Jordan for four years. The country was safe, but we couldn't work legally or study.**

**The UN contacted my family and asked if we wanted to move to the UK. We were so excited, we needed a new start – but I spoke no English and had not attended school for years.”**

Research conducted by UNHCR shows that employment can lead to independence, confidence, family security and re-establishes refugees' dignity and self-worth. It facilitates new social networks and provides opportunities to improve English language skills. The story of Sam, who was a young teenager when the war broke out in Syria, shows the challenges that refugees already face when they arrive in the UK and the difference that an employment opportunity can present. Sam's future has been transformed with the appropriate support and resources:

**“I went to English classes. I took part in discussions and learnt how to speak to managers in interviews. [Case workers at Breaking Barriers] helped me create my CV, to start volunteering at a Community Cafe and to practice for interviews and I now have a job as a Barista at a coffee shop. I had nothing when I arrived in the UK – getting a job has changed my life. Having somebody that believes in you changes everything.”**



OR · QUALITY



# & HOW TO FIND & HIRE REFUGEES





## THIS SECTION PROVIDES COMPANIES WITH INSIGHT INTO COMMON CHALLENGES THAT ARISE WHEN RECRUITING REFUGEE JOB SEEKERS AND LAYS OUT PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR NAVIGATING THEM FROM THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE.

### UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY REFUGEE JOB SEEKERS

Participation in the labour market is the most important factor favouring long term integration into society, but unemployment rates for refugees can range nationally from 20-82% . For example, unemployment for refugees in London is estimated to be approximately 70%, compared to a London-wide unemployment rate of around 4%.

Refugees can bring a diversity of experiences, cultures, and skills into the work place, yet they are often subjected to barriers to employment above and beyond those experienced by other disadvantaged and marginalised groups or those experienced by refugees elsewhere in Europe, the US or Canada. A primary factor contributing to this is the relatively unique asylum process in the UK. The UK asylum process is often longer than elsewhere in the world and, unlike the US and much of Europe, almost all UK asylum seekers are denied the right to work until they are granted official refugee status. Once an individual has refugee status, they have permission to work in the UK in any profession and at any skill level. This right to work does not expire – they are now free to undertake any work they may choose, for any period of time.

However, the UK currently has no national strategy to aid the transition of refugees into the labour market, instead relying on NGOs and community-based charities to provide specific and tailored employment services.

Some of the barriers faced by the refugee community include:

- Significant gaps on the CV due to prolonged asylum process during which most refugees are unable to work.
- Public and workplace perception that additional costs and admin will be required when hiring a refugee.
- Lack of work experience in host country – in the UK, work placements and other job experience opportunities are often too short and do not allow participants sufficient time to acclimatise to a different language and a different culture of work.
- Racism and negative stereotyping. Cross-cultural misunderstandings can contribute to misplaced suspicion and hostility.
- Lack of host country references.

- Unrecognized educational and professional qualifications. Refugees gained qualifications and work experience in a very different labour market and they may not be able to provide proper documentation to demonstrate or clarify their level or education and skill.
- Lack of access to networks which would strengthen employment prospects and knowledge of recruitment methods.

## **TAILORING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

When hiring, it is important to remember to be considerate of certain factors specific to refugee candidates when reviewing applications and assessing.

- A gap on the CV that usually might be reason for rejection should not be a disqualifying factor. Usually this will be a result of the unavoidable process of fleeing an unsafe environment followed by a lengthy asylum process in the host country.
- It is important to remember that many refugees will be unfamiliar with the interview process or online tests required by many organisations during selection. Often it is a good idea to ensure candidates are fully aware of the process, what will be expected and how interviews are conducted (e.g. what are 'strength-based questions' and 'transferable skills'?).
- Sometimes skills and experience may not seem entirely matched to the job advertised or a refugee candidate may appear over-qualified. It is common for refugees to look for lower-skilled jobs that are suited for their immediate needs, in order to improve their English language ability, for instance. This should not be grounds for disqualification and organisations should be considerate of these circumstances.

Working with a partnership organisation can significantly improve refugee recruitment outcomes. Businesses have testified that having an expert organisation on hand to help with this preparation simplifies the process and ensures a more streamlined phase of recruitment.

*Examples of partner organisations can be found in Annex 1.*

**“Partner with an organisation that understands the sector - this is hugely important. People from vulnerable backgrounds often need extra support and we just don’t have the HR capacity to give it.”**

**HILIARY JENKINS | PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES LEADER, IKEA UK & IE**



### ▲ IS IT DISCRIMINATION TO HIRE REFUGEES OVER OTHER CANDIDATES JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE REFUGEES?

Companies should not preference candidates based on refugee status in their hiring process but should seek to hire the candidate most qualified for the position. Under UK law you cannot choose a candidate who is not as suitable for the job just because they have a protected characteristic.

You can choose a candidate who has a protected characteristic, such as those relating to race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, over one who does not if they are both suitable for the job and you think that people with that characteristic are underrepresented in the workforce, profession or industry, or suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic. For more information on discrimination in recruitment, visit <https://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination/recruitment>.

### REQUESTING THE APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTATION

When you have successfully recruited a refugee candidate, you will need to complete pre-employment checks to confirm they have the right to work as well as the normal procedures for taking on new staff. All documentation will outline the individual's leave to enter or remain or leave granted outside of the rules and it will state their right to work in the UK. Documentation may not necessarily state that an individual is a refugee.

You might expect a refugee to have the following documentation:

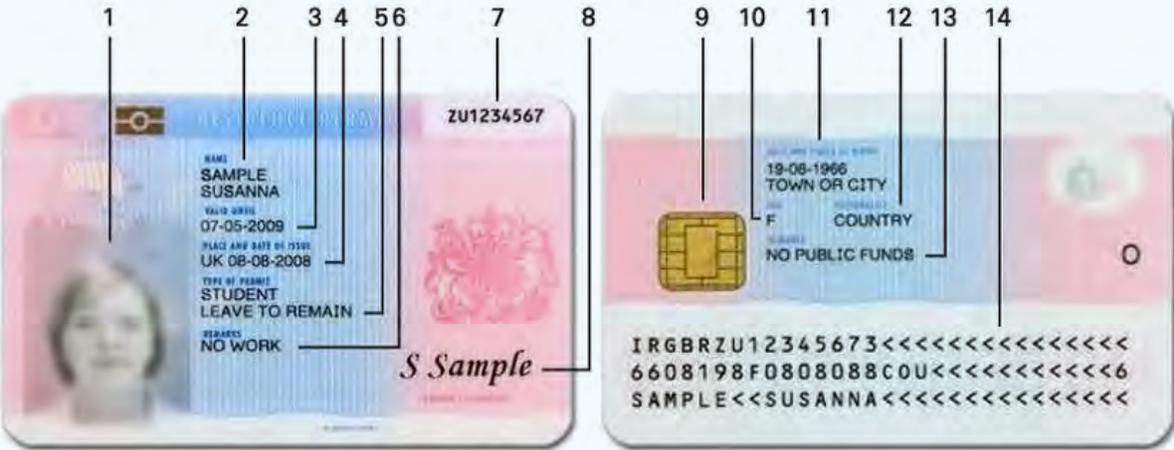
#### ***National Insurance Number***

Refugees should receive a National Insurance Number shortly after receiving refugee status. In reality there may be a slight delay, but refugees are always entitled to apply and receive one.

#### ***Biometric Residence Permit (BRP)***

The most common form of documentation is a Biometric Residence Permit issued by the UK Home Office. A biometric residence permit is issued to all migrants with the right to live in the UK longer than 6 months. All refugees have a BRP. The information on this will include immigration status and the conditions of the stay, including your entitlement to access public funds. Some BRPs may also have a National Insurance (NI) number printed on the back of your BRP. Not all BRPs have this - it depends on various factors, such as the date it was issued and your visa status.

## COMPONENTS OF THE BIOMETRIC RESIDENCE PERMIT



**1. Holder's digital image**

**2. Holder's name**

**3. Valid until**

The date the permit expires. This date is at the end of the time the holder is allowed to stay; or five or 10 years if the holder has been given permission to settle in the UK (known as indefinite leave to remain)

**4. Place and date of issue**

This is the UK followed by the date the permit was issued

**5. Type of permit**

This is the immigration category the holder is in (for example, REFUGEE)

**6. Remarks**

These are the immigration entitlements for the length of the holder's stay and may continue on the back of the permit. This is the section that will document the holder's right to work.

**7. Unique permit number**

**8. Holder's signature**

**9. Biometric chip**

**10. Holder's gender**

**11. Holder's date and place of birth**

**12. Holder's nationality**

**13. Remarks**

This is a continuation of immigration entitlements for the length of time of the holder's stay (see 6 above). In some refugee cases the National Insurance Number will appear here. It will also document whether the individual has access to public funds.

**14. Machine readable zone (MRZ)**

This area allows information printed on the permit to be read quickly by machine.

### *Family Reunion Visa*

This is a travel document issued to the family members of someone in the UK with refugee status.

### *Resettlement Document*

This document is specifically issued to refugees who have arrived in the UK as part of a resettlement scheme. Their eligibility for refugee status will have been granted in a host country outside of the UK, usually by UNHCR. Upon settlement in the UK, they will receive refugee status in the UK and will be issued with a biometric residence permit. A refugee applying for a job in the UK that was part of a resettlement scheme should be able to produce a BRP as identification.

### *Formal letter from the Home Office*

This may be for several reasons. A letter may have been issued if refugee status was granted prior to 1984. This letter will state an individual's refugee status and right to live and work in the UK.

When applying for further leave to remain or for settlement in the UK, an individual may be required to send their BRP or alternative documentation to the Home Office to verify their status. The letter temporarily issued in place will outline that their formal documents are unavailable but that they retain the rights within them – including the right to work.

To understand more about certain documents and check a candidate's right to work, you can learn more at [www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk](http://www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk)

## **WILL A REFUGEE'S RIGHT TO WORK EXPIRE?**

- Documents that show the holder is not subject to immigration control or has no restrictions on their stay in the UK will state the holder has Indefinite Leave to Remain or Enter. This individual may work for you for an indefinite period.
- Documents that show a holder has been granted Leave to Enter or Remain for a limited period of time will state the date on which the holder's leave expires. In this case, a follow-up check will be required at the end of the period for which the document is valid.
- Refugees applying for indefinite leave following their initial period of 5 years leave will retain their rights to employment and training during this period awaiting decision, despite the fact that documents may need to be sent to the Home Office. This also includes people with Discretionary Leave who are still waiting for a decision on their application for further leave to remain.

**If you are unsure, or there are abnormal circumstances – such as a refugee employee submitting an application whilst documents are unavailable because they have been sent to Home Office to await a decision, or they have an appeal outstanding – you may make an application to the Employer Checking Service or find out further information through the Home Office's ['Employers guide to right to work checks'](#).**

## ▲ ADDRESSING COMMON CHALLENGES TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

### A LACK OF QUALIFICATIONS

Many refugees have high levels of education and unique skills gained and developed in their country of origin. However, these are often underestimated or disregarded due to language barriers and a lack of documentation or other proof of qualifications.

### WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

Employers have a variety of options to fully understand a candidate's previous experience. Employers should consider evaluating skills and competence during on-the-job training through skills profiling tools. When documents outlining qualifications and education are only available in a foreign language, they can be translated into English with the help of translators. There are also resources available online, such as NARIC UK, that will verify educational and skills equivalence from institutions across the globe.

### A LACK OF SKILLS

Some refugees may not evidence their skills as well as non-refugee applicants, or their skills may be out-of-date. This is likely to be due to long periods of unemployment (possibly as a result of the lengthy asylum process in the UK), a change of sector and job, and different technologies and different education in their country of origin.

### WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

Provide on-the-job training and offer additional courses to aid with learning and development. Provide opportunities for job shadowing. Utilise refugee employees' existing skills and implement strength-based interview techniques that do not focus solely on UK work experience.

### A LACK OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Some refugees may not be completely fluent in English upon arrival in the UK and this can create a perceived or genuine difficulty during recruitment and on the job.

### WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

Many partner organisations may be able to assist with English language training provision and with translation and paperwork completion during the interview or recruitment process. Employers could nominate a bilingual colleague to act as a mentor during the first few months to aid with English tuition and help to ensure important notices and documents are understood. Translations of such documents could also be provided to aid with training processes. Employers could incentivise English proficiency in some way and help employees to advance their language skills in the workplace.

### **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Refugees may have different experiences of workplace culture and may practice different traditions or observe different religious beliefs. Some refugees may also have come from countries with different communication styles and may not be used to using such direct forms of communication as are commonplace in the UK.

### **WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?**

Employers should be open about the nature and culture of the workplace in the UK generally and the specific behavioural expectations at their organization. Strive for strong two-way communication between employers and refugee hires to ensure that both parties' points of view are fully understood by the other, and do not assume that refugee employees' silence is confirmation of their understanding. Simultaneously, employers should make accommodations to account for cultural differences, such as allowing time off for religious holidays and ensuring leave is approved or allowing for modified break times or working hours (for example, during Ramadan or Eid). Finally, employers should consider offering diversity training for existing staff and assigning willing mentors to each new refugee employee could to facilitate integration.

### **PROVIDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE EMPLOYEES**

Many refugee candidates have been through traumatic experiences and come to the UK in unique and often vulnerable situations. This may mean that extra support is required on many levels. Holistic support is valuable when a candidate is first seeking employment, and this will often range from emotional support and confidence building to help understanding the cultural differences of the workplace in the UK, interview procedures and professional business language training.

Additional upskilling is often required to ensure employment is found and then sustained. This may not always be teaching new skills, but also adapting existing skills to new settings and working cultures that refugees may not be familiar with in the UK. Specialised case working and coaching support from people that understand a refugee's specific needs and vulnerabilities is always beneficial and often necessary to ensure meaningful and sustainable employment is an option. When relevant, this support should also be extended to line managers to ensure they are fully equipped to support refugees.

Working with a partner organisation can make all the difference in providing the additional support required to help integrate a refugee into the workplace, providing support to both refugee and employer. *A list of partner organisations can be found in Annex 1.*





# CONCLUSION



**NOT ONLY DOES HIRING REFUGEES MAKE FINANCIAL SENSE FOR BUSINESSES, IT ALSO PROVIDES HOLISTIC BENEFITS TO THE ORGANISATION AND ITS EXISTING EMPLOYEES BY EMBRACING A DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE AND CULTURE, ENHANCING THE PRODUCTIVITY OF TEAMS, AND BUILDING AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF A CRITICAL ISSUE THAT SURROUNDS AND INVOLVES OUR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.**

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**“Being a refugee defines an experience, not an identity”**

MOHAMMED BADRAN

Refugees are too often depicted in the media as helpless individuals needing charity and benefits. Most are far from this perpetuated image and instead want to be given the chance to utilise their talents, skills and training in the UK labour market and to add a unique perspective to any organisation that offers this opportunity.

The assistance required by refugees often boils down to support as they navigate their way in an unknown society and strive to re-master occupations in a new language and unfamiliar job market. For many, employment is more than just a job; it offers the opportunity for independence in a new home, exposure to professional and social networks, and ultimately, integration and the meaningful strengthening of communities. **By committing to hiring refugees, you can bring enormous benefits to your refugee employees – and to your business.**



▲

# CASE STUDIES

# ▲ IKEA

IKEA is recognised as a forward thinking and leading organisation in the refugee sector. Working alongside Breaking Barriers, IKEA has worked in partnership for 18 months to hire 30 refugees into long-term employment within a variety of different roles across UK stores, ranging from catering to interior design, and have provided valuable data of incredible retention rates of over 94% so far in the process. A further 80 refugees have been supported through the Customer Service English programme.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

IKEA develop and hosts a customer service course for refugee candidates across a range of store locations. This teaches the basics of a role that requires regular customer interaction before assessing their suitability for a role within the company. These occur on roughly a quarterly basis, in line with regular turnover rates and business need.

IKEA provides a significant financial contribution to support the resource intensive process of readying refugees for the workplace and the customer service course, including enrolment on English language courses and help writing CVs. Specialised case workers are also provided by Breaking Barriers to each refugee and their holistic support and coaching continues after an offer of employment to ensure this is sustainable and successful. Breaking Barriers' caseworkers are trained to understand a refugee's specific needs and vulnerabilities and are always on hand to answer any questions or overcome any problems IKEA may have. A key aspect of this support is also for line managers. Breaking Barriers' caseworkers work alongside corporate employees to help foster a deep understanding of the issues and complexities of managing a refugee and provide training on the relevant pastoral elements of line management specific to the needs of the candidate.

**“It’s been like a boost to morale. The people we’ve hired through Breaking Barriers seem keen to make the most of the opportunity and that has a knock-on effect on other co-workers. I’ve seen a huge shift in perception amongst co-workers about what a refugee is.**

**It’s humbling when you find out what some people have been through and yet they still come into work every day in an ironed uniform with a smile on their face. It gives everyone a perspective beyond primary marketing objectives.”**

**PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES  
LEADER, IKEA**



# WEWORK

The WeWork Refugee Initiative brings together a worldwide network of companies and business leaders to harness the power of community and create a movement in support of refugees. WeWork has committed to employ 1,500 refugees globally over the next 5 years, beginning in the US and UK. WeWork is inviting their 50,000+ member companies and the broader business community to join in the movement by hiring refugees or offering their support, skills or networks in other ways —working toward a collective goal of catalysing business commitments and action.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

In the UK, WeWork has just begun their journey to look at how they can better support hiring refugees into their business. From identifying full time positions to hire, to engaging internal recruitment teams to raise awareness of the initiative, the movement has just started. WeWork also supports refugees by utilising their own meeting room space to enable Breaking Barriers to host English language courses and IT and numeracy classes for refugees in their UK offices and providing space for events aiming to raise awareness on the refugee crisis or support for refugees in the community. This type of holistic support from the company enablese better employment outcomes, not just through full time employment, but by also utilising the infrastructure at WeWork to deliver value.

**“At WeWork, we believe that refugees make our community stronger. It’s been such a humbling experience to learn from their stories, and helps us approach our daily job differently. It also opens the door to further recruitment efforts of other groups -- which leads to a more diverse workforce.”**

**ANTHONY YAZBECK, COO  
EUROPE, WEWORK**



Photo credit: Breaking Barriers





## MAYER BROWN

Mayer Brown provides work experience and upskilling opportunities for refugees in the UK. Recruiting into full time employment isn't always the best outcome for a refugee. Often a more gradual approach to work, which doesn't impact on benefits claimed can be just as valuable. The Employment Academy is Mayer Brown's six-month programme in which corporate partners offer refugees paid part-time placements. Each company takes on one or more refugees for 16 hours a week. During the placement, refugees gain vital work experience, build confidence, improve their English, cultural understanding and workplace skills.

Over the same period, each refugee is also supported directly by Breaking Barriers with bi-weekly advice from a mentor, advanced English language support and training workshops. This holistic approach gives the refugees the best possible preparation for going on to find permanent jobs.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?

Mayer Brown worked with Breaking Barriers as an infant charity and pioneered the first of the 6-month work placements approach. Alongside this valuable experience, Mayer Brown develop, host and deliver skills workshops on a variety of topics, including interview prep, cultural orientation and IT skills. All of which have successfully helped a cohort of refugees to gain the necessary confidence to search for jobs.

Additional upskilling is often required throughout the work placement programme to ensure employment is found and then sustained. This may not always be teaching new skills, but also adapting existing skills to new settings and working cultures that refugees may not be familiar with in the UK. Support is also extended to line managers at Mayer Brown, where bespoke training and knowledge is shared by caseworkers throughout the placement process to ensure a thorough understanding within the organisation of how best to support a refugee employee.

**“The value of working with refugees has made our own people better understand the reality of living in the UK as a refugee, it has broken down misconceptions and made our people value what they have themselves and they have given more.**

**It's not impossible! Take your time, learn from others and give time and learn. Refugees are employees like any other, they have masses of skills to give and many qualities which are not apparent. Hiring a refugee is far more than a CSR initiative but individuals who have a lot to give to any business.”**

**HEAD OF CSR, MAYER BROWN**

# **ANNEX I:** **ORGANISATIONS AND PROGRAMS** **THAT SUPPORT REFUGEE** **EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK**



## THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT MATCHING, JOB TRAINING, WORK EXPERIENCE, AND OTHER EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN IMMIGRANTS.

Many of these organisations also offer additional integration support services and programming. If you are interested in partnering with an organisation below on a refugee employment initiative, please contact that organisation directly.

### **ACTION FOR REFUGEES IN LEWISHAM**

Action for Refugees in Lewisham supports refugees and asylum seekers in the borough to help themselves and integrate into their communities. Their aim is to empower refugees to rebuild content and purposeful lives in the UK through their community services that help families find employment, develop personal skills and learn English.

Learn more at: [www.afril.org.uk/](http://www.afril.org.uk/)

### **BRIDGES PROGRAM**

The Bridges Program is an agency in Scotland that supports the social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Glasgow. The agency offers a variety of programmes and resources to help their clients build confidence by re-engaging them with their skills, provide additional training, support, advice and guidance. Furthermore, the Bridges Program works with their clients on work placements.

Learn more at: <http://www.bridgesprogrammes.org.uk/>

### **COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL**

The Coventry City Council runs a project called Building Bridges aimed at helping refugees integrate. One of the aspects of the project focuses on developing and improving skills by providing intensive ESOL classes for employability, creating volunteering opportunities, and implementing information, advice and guidance sessions on topics such as education, housing, mental health, and equality. The sessions are open for the whole community.

Learn more at: [http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/41/community\\_and\\_living/548/newly\\_arrived\\_communities/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/41/community_and_living/548/newly_arrived_communities/)

### **FWT - A CENTRE FOR WOMEN**

FWT offers a culturally sensitive and empowering setting for all women to access education, training, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The focus of the organisation has been on refugee and asylum women since 2017. FWT offers education and training courses for women with direct progression pathways to Employability programmes within the organisation. FWT operates in Coventry and the surrounding areas.

Learn more at: <http://www.fwt.org.uk/>

### **GOSAD**

Golden Opportunity Skills and Development (GOSAD) is an organisation based in London aimed at enabling individuals to realise their development possibilities, training goals, and aspirations. The organisation has run a number of projects aimed at finding employment opportunities for a variety of vulnerable groups, including refugees and asylum seekers. GOSAD provides employment support training that covers practical CV writing and filling job application forms, job search strategies and techniques, structured work experience and placement, career and progression planning and other subjects.

Learn more at: <http://gosad.org.uk/>

### **JET**

JET is a charity in Newcastle aimed at helping people from the Black Minority Ethnic community, asylum seekers, refugees, and new migrant communities to find work, improve their skills, and to integrate into the community. JET runs a work programme and an integration programme where they cover confidence building, CV writing, identifying volunteering opportunities and interview skills. JET also works with individuals to identify employment opportunities.

Learn more at: <http://www.jetnorth.org.uk/>

### **JOB CENTRE PLUS**

Jobcentre Plus is an initiative within the Department for Work and Pensions that delivers employment support services throughout United Kingdom. Job Centre Plus offers advice, work focused interviews, help with CV preparation, training allowances and connects individuals who have been granted leave to remain with training and employment related courses.

Learn more at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/refugees-guidance-about-benefits-and-pensions/help-available-from-the-department-for-work-and-pensions-for-people-who-have-been-granted-leave-to-remain-in-the-uk>

## **KENNEDY SCOTT**

Kennedy Scott was founded with the aim of supporting people in Rickmansworth to achieve their potential and progress in their careers and lives. Their project “Work and Health Programme” is focused on assisting marginalized communities, including refugees, to secure employment. Programme components include help job search assistance, work trials, and securing interviews. Kennedy Scott also offers a dedicated change coach to help with skills development, 24/7 online service with learning, resources and support, and a range of community-based activities. Once refugees have found a job the organisation has an “In-Work Support Team” that helps them navigate their new organisations and roles.

Learn more at: <http://www.kennedyscott.co.uk/about-us.html>

## **MIGRANTS ORGANISE**

Migrants Organise is a platform in London where refugees and migrants organise for power, dignity and justice. Their aim is to develop refugees’ leadership and open up spaces for relational, organised participation of migrants and refugees in public life. Migrants Organise works towards developing people’s skills, confidence, experience and capacity to act through workshops, training sessions, action and experience to help people develop. They host The Migrants Organise Community Leadership Academy, a nine-month programme building power, leadership and networks across the migrant and refugee community sector.

Learn more at: <https://www.migrantsorganise.org/>

## **MIGRANTS RESOURCE CENTRE**

Migrants Resource Centre has worked for over 30 years to help migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers overcome the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in British society. They have helped people secure protection in the UK, regularise their immigration status, learn English, and find work. The Migration Resource Centre has a career advice service especially focused on assisting refugees and migrants find work where they offer tailored one-on-one services to help refugees identify the skills they need to go into the career path they want, develop interview and CV-writing skills, and more. They also offer migrants and refugees advice on how to start a business in the UK through hands on coaching. The centre is based in London.

Learn more at: <https://www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk/>

## **NHS EDUCATION FOR SCOTLAND**

The NHS Education for Scotland (NES) offers the Refugees Doctors Programme. The programme is designed to assist asylum seeking and refugee doctors living in Scotland to achieve registration with the General Medical Council via the PLAB examinations in order to be in a position to compete for posts in the NHS in the UK. Doctors, dentists and pharmacists that have refugee status or are applying for asylum status in Scotland are eligible for the programme.

Learn more at: <http://www.scotlanddeanery.nhs.scot/trainee-information/careers/refugee-doctors-programme/>

### **PRAXIS COMMUNITY PROJECTS**

Praxis Community Projects provides support to migrants at-risk in the UK through advice and training to front-line workers within agencies such as local councils, children centres and homeless centres with the aim to improve the response and services to migrants in London. Praxis works with migrants as active partners and use their voices to improve upon the available integration services.

Learn more at: <http://www.praxis.org.uk/>

### **RECONNECT**

Reconnect is a London based charity that provides one-to-one guidance, signposting and support to help refugees into higher education. The charity works toward enabling unemployed refugees to gain skills & mainstream their qualifications through appropriate guidance, training, work experience and development of innovative projects.

Learn more at: <http://reconnectonline.org.uk/about-us>

### **REFUGEE ACTION KINGSTON**

Refugee Action Kingston is an organisation aimed at welcoming and enabling refugees in Kingston to become valued members of the local community. The organisation supports refugees finding employment and education by providing support with applications and CV writing, interview techniques, and by helping refugee job-seekers to secure funding for ILETS & vocational course fees.

Learn more at: <https://www.refugeeactionkingston.org.uk/about-us/>

### **REFUGEE COUNCIL**

The Refugee Council's Holistic Integration Service supports newly recognised refugees to take their first steps towards resettlement. The Council runs an employment service that aims to provide information, advice, guidance and support to refugees looking to access training, volunteering and employment opportunities to those based in Greater London. Specifically, the employment programme includes an individual assessment and customized job-search plan, expert advice and support, access to a range of employment preparation workshops, assistance with CVs and interviews, and access to work experience opportunities.

Learn more at: [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/refugee\\_services](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/refugee_services)

### **REFUGEE EDUCATION TRAINING SERVICE**

Refugee Education Training Service's (RETAS) provides assistance with access to education, re-qualification, training and employment to assist refugees to integrate into the community in Leeds. They offer employability workshops that focus on work placement, managing basic skills to university applications and volunteering. Furthermore, they offer language classes and preparation classes for the IELTS (International English Training System).

Learn more at: <http://retasleeds.weebly.com/>

## **REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT AND TRAINING**

The REST project aims to create a comprehensive training and support system for enterprises and organisations that want to employ and integrate refugees at their workplaces. Their activities are clustered into three main phases; firstly, conducting analysis on to find out which barriers enterprises face in their attempt to employ refugees and which training and other integration measures are necessary, secondly, REST creates a tailored support system with sessions, coaching support and an online platform and thirdly, they help enterprises implement the changes.

Learn more at: <https://rest-eu.org/>

## **REMPLOY**

Remploy is a provider of specialist employment and skills support for disabled people and those with health conditions. Their Work and Health Programme in Wales offers tailored, community-based employment support for people, amongst them refugees, to help them develop their skills and enter work.

Learn more at: <https://www.remploy.co.uk/>

## **SCOTTISH REFUGEE COUNCIL**

The Scottish Refugee Council provides essential information and advice to people seeking asylum and refugees in Scotland. Their services include an employability programme that addresses the difficulties refugees face in finding employment. The programme assists refugees in understanding the UK job market, identifying transferable skills, creating CVs, and in honing interview skills. Their work also involves campaigning for political change, raising awareness about issues that affect refugees, and working closely with local communities and organisations.

Learn more at: <http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/>

## **SHELTER SCOTLAND**

Shelter Scotland runs the Refugee Integration Service (RIS) programme which offers advice and support to refugees who've recently been granted leave to remain in the UK. The programme includes help with accessing benefits and securing housing, employment, and education.

Learn more at: <https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/>

## **ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH RADFORD**

St. Francis of Assisi is a Church in Radford that helps refugees and asylum seekers find work and offers free English classes.

Learn more at: <https://www.stfranciscoventry.com/>

### **THE RENEWAL PROGRAMME**

The Newham Community Renewal Programme works with the community in Newham to empower people to change their lives through advocacy, education, temporary accommodation and a wide range of positive activities. Their Refugee and Migrant Project (RAMP) supports migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who are destitute or facing destitution and are based in Newham. Refugees can get meetings with a caseworker who will support and advise them in their job search.

Learn more at: <https://www.renewalprogramme.org.uk/>

### **TRANSITIONS**

Transitions is a social enterprise in London aimed at finding employment for highly-skilled, fully-screened refugee professionals with industry-standard qualifications, untapped skills and experience. All of their candidates are refugees with UK equivalent qualifications. Transitions specialises in engineering positions such as engineers, architects, data scientists, and accountants.

Learn more at: <https://transitions-london.co.uk/>

### **WELSH REFUGEE COUNCIL**

The Welsh Refugee Council works to empower asylum seekers and refugees to build new futures in Wales and help create a society where respect and equality for all are paramount. The organisation provides a wide range of education and training opportunities that work to enhance the knowledge and skills base of asylum seekers and refugees, volunteers, and external organisations.

Learn more at: <https://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/>



# **ANNEX II:** **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION**



## IF YOU WISH TO TAKE THE NEXT STEPS TOWARDS HIRING A REFUGEE, OR ARE INTERESTED IN THE WIDER LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES, YOU MAY FIND THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES HELPFUL.

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**These will give you more detailed information about government support available for refugees, the rules around how to ensure your hiring process is non-discriminatory and actions which can be taken by wider society to improve employment outcomes for refugees. If you need further advice, we recommend contacting a partner organisation with experience in the sector.**

OECD and the UNHCR have published 'Engaging With Employers in the Hiring of Refugees: A 10-point multi-stakeholder action plan for employers, refugees, governments and civil society'. This document details 10 actions which can be taken by public authorities and employment services, employers, employer associations, refugees and civil society organisations to improve the labour market integration of refugees.

Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5adde9904>

The government have published guidance on preventing discrimination during the hiring process. This includes questions you can and cannot ask during recruitment and when you are able to prioritise a person who has a protected characteristic over one who doesn't.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination/recruitment>

The guidance given to individuals when they are granted refugee status is available for anyone to read online. This includes what happens after refugee status is granted, which benefits can be claimed and what support is available from the government.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/refugees-guidance-about-benefits-and-pensions>

You must carry out a right to work check before employing any staff member in the UK. You can check if a document grants someone the right to work by using a straightforward, step-by-step online tool on the government website.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk>

# ANNEX III: BREAKING BARRIERS

At Breaking Barriers, we believe that everyone is entitled to the same opportunities, regardless of where they come from or the multiple challenges they might face. That's why we are offering an entirely new way for refugees in the UK to rebuild their lives through meaningful employment.

We enable refugees to acquire the knowledge, confidence and experience they need to secure stable and fulfilling employment. We offer bespoke, intensive and flexible employment support to assist individual integration journeys and create more fulfilling lives.

To achieve our vision, we give a central role to businesses, involving them directly in finding employment solutions for refugees. Here's how we can help your business hire refugees:

- We offer tailored English language classes and IT courses specifically designed for preparing refugees for the workplace. We recognise the varied needs of refugees so ensure that we are offering support to clients with a diverse range of abilities and language levels.
- We provide unique training and workshops that raise the client's awareness of working in our society and the culture of our workplaces.
- We partner directly with businesses who provide work experience placements and deliver skills-based workshops for refugees to gain vital work experience and develop the skills they need to secure long-term employment. We recognise the complexity of refugee integration and offer support for refugee employees throughout the process
- We screen all our clients and assess their skills, levels of English, and career ambitions. We can provide candidates for interview that are most suitable to the needs of your company and the specifics of the role.
- Our trained caseworkers continue to work closely with each client to develop their skills and experience even once they are in full-time work or internships. Within this, they manage our work placement opportunities, only recommending refugees to an employer when they are educationally and emotionally prepared to benefit from it. Our caseworkers remain a point of contact for both the employer and employee and provides the necessary pastoral care that can be essential to ensuring employment is sustainable.



WE HAVE PARTNERED WITH:

Bank of America • Merrill Lynch • IKEA • WeWork • Mayer Brown  
Allen & Overy Mishcon de Reya • Western Union • Deutsche Bank • Fox Rodney Search  
Grant Thornton • The Big Yellow Self Storage Company • Thomson Reuters  
Herbert Smith Freehills • Wells Fargo • Apex Partners



TENT