



# STEP UP

## HOW TO GET REFUGEES INTO WORK QUICKLY

PHILIPPE LEGRAIN  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PHILIPPE LEGRAIN IS THE FOUNDER OF OPEN POLITICAL ECONOMY NETWORK (OPEN), A PLATFORM FOR PROGRESS – A NEW KIND OF CAMPAIGNING, NETWORKED INTERNATIONAL THINK-TANK – ON OPENNESS ISSUES. HE IS ALSO A SENIOR VISITING FELLOW AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS' EUROPEAN INSTITUTE AND A COLUMNIST FOR PROJECT SYNDICATE AND *FOREIGN POLICY*.

FROM 2011 TO 2014 HE WAS ECONOMIC ADVISER AND HEAD OF THE TEAM PROVIDING STRATEGIC POLICY ADVICE TO EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENT JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO. PREVIOUSLY, HE WAS SPECIAL ADVISER TO WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION DIRECTOR-GENERAL MIKE MOORE AND TRADE AND ECONOMICS CORRESPONDENT FOR *THE ECONOMIST*.

PHILIPPE IS THE AUTHOR OF FOUR CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED BOOKS, NOTABLY *IMMIGRANTS: YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS THEM*, WHICH WAS SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2007 FINANCIAL TIMES BUSINESS BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD. HIS FIRST STUDY FOR TENT AND OPEN, *REFUGEES WORK: A HUMANITARIAN INVESTMENT THAT YIELDS ECONOMIC DIVIDENDS*, WAS PUBLISHED IN MAY 2016.

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# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
SECTION 1	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
SECTION 2	
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>13</b>
SECTION 3	
<b>THE RIGHT TO WORK</b>	<b>17</b>
SECTION 4	
<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>22</b>
SECTION 5	
<b>JOB OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>33</b>
SECTION 6	
<b>OPPORTUNITIES &amp; CHALLENGES FOR BUSINESSES</b>	<b>42</b>
SECTION 7	
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>NOTES</b>	<b>49</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## THIS REPORT SETS OUT HOW BEST TO GET REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO WORK QUICKLY, WITH A FOCUS ON ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS.

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Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and businesses provide many different schemes to help refugees get jobs, often without knowing how effective they are. However, there is plenty that they can learn from what works well elsewhere. From research, analysis and evidence from 22 advanced economies that receive substantial numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, this study sets out 16 key policy recommendations, and highlights best practices and promising new approaches.

Getting refugees promptly into work is a top priority. It fast-tracks their “integration” – their ability to participate in society fully. It helps neutralise the claim that they are a burden. Moreover, when refugees become colleagues and friends, they no longer seem like a threat.

As well as being good for society, working benefits refugees themselves. While they have suffered immensely, they typically do not want to be treated as victims or charity cases. They want to start rebuilding their lives and become self-reliant again. In addition to providing an income, work makes refugees feel valued and proud that they are giving something back. An entry-level job can also be a stepping stone to better things.

However, refugees face all sorts of hurdles to finding work – such as personal trauma, social discrimination and government bureaucracy – and in many countries, they struggle. In Belgium, fewer than one in three refugees find a job within five years. There is enormous

scope for progress; in the Canadian province of Alberta, four in five refugees gain work within a year of arriving. While refugees’ success in finding employment depends in part on their skills and attributes, the policies and programmes in the receiving country also make a huge difference.

To start working, refugees and asylum seekers need three things: the right to work, appropriate skills and job opportunities. While resettled refugees have the right to work immediately, those who claim asylum on arrival in the country in which they are seeking protection typically do not. Such is the backlog of asylum cases in many European countries and the United States that many asylum seekers are left in limbo for a lengthy period, allowing their skills to rust, depressing their motivation and deterring future employers.

It would be both cost-efficient and humane to invest in creating a speedy and fair asylum process, as Germany has done, and to allow asylum seekers with non-frivolous claims to work immediately, as in Canada, Sweden and Norway. To limit uncertainty and disruption, long-term or permanent residence and work permits should be granted immediately to those who obtain refugee status, as is done in Spain.

With a minimum of training, advice and support, most refugees can readily find work in countries with flexible labour markets, such as Canada and the US, in which entry-level jobs with few skill requirements are abundant. In the US, 71% of those completing the Matching Grant programme provided by voluntary agencies became self-sufficient within 120 to 180 days. Further training and job opportunities are necessary to enable refugees to progress over time.

In European countries with highly regulated labour markets, such as Germany and Sweden, in which even menial jobs require qualifications and the cost and risk of hiring unproven newcomers with initially low productivity can be prohibitive, much greater efforts are needed. Whereas a construction worker in the US can often learn on the job, a bricklayer requires a three-year qualification to start work in Germany. Even though Sweden has a very generous welcome programme for refugees, only 44% of those who had arrived there in the past five years were in work in 2014.

While the challenges are greater in Europe, there is plenty of scope for countries to emulate best practices. Early intervention is crucial. As soon as possible – before resettlement in the case of refugees due to be resettled and on arrival in reception centres in the case of asylum seekers – people's skills should be assessed and language lessons started, along with the cultural orientation classes that already take place.

While refugees who do not speak the local language may be able to find jobs – as cleaners, farm workers or in ethnic businesses, for instance – language skills open up many more opportunities. Whereas refugees in the EU who speak the local language at beginner level or less have an employment rate of only 27%, this more than doubles to 59% for those with intermediate language skills.

Language training should focus initially on workplace needs. While this is costly and requires the cooperation of employers, the most successful language training happens on the job. In Denmark, a promising new government-funded programme combines work, on-site language classes and on-the-job training.

For refugees who have smartphones, as most now do, apps also provide a cheap, flexible, interactive means for refugees to learn the local language, at their own pace

and at a time that suits them; many companies offer free use to refugees.

Because refugees' skills and needs vary widely – for instance, some have postgraduate degrees, while others are illiterate – job training needs to be tailored to their circumstances, combined with a strategy to get them to work quickly. Training programmes should also take account of local labour-market needs. In Colorado, Refugee Services training programmes – which cover occupations from pharmacy technician to barista – are continued only if at least 70% of participants find work within six months.

Since local work experience is crucial, work placements, internships and apprenticeships should be encouraged. In Germany, Wir Zusammen (We Together), a coalition of more than 190 companies, has already provided internships for 3,500 refugees and apprenticeships for a further 800 and created 2,130 permanent jobs.

Digital technologies can also be a significant help. In the US, HigherAdvantage, a programme of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, provides online training modules on issues such as how to find and keep a job, how to prepare for a job interview, and what to expect in the US workplace.

Refugees often lack contacts who can advise them on how to learn job-related skills, find work and pursue a particular career. Well-designed mentoring programmes can make a remarkable difference. In Britain, TimeBank, a charity, trains volunteer mentors to help refugees integrate into society. While the Time Together mentoring programme is not specifically oriented towards finding a job, employment among mentees rose from 5% to 47%.

In addition to appropriate skills, refugees need employment opportunities. Many governments disperse them around the country without considering the

availability of local jobs. It would make better sense not to disperse refugees, as Spain does, or else to factor in local job opportunities, as Sweden does, while allowing refugees who have been relocated and can't find jobs locally to move to other areas.

Discrimination is another salient issue, exacerbated by politicians who demonise refugees in general and Muslim ones in particular. Field experiments in many countries show that people with foreign-sounding names are less likely to get a job interview than identical candidates with local names. Anti-discrimination laws need more vigorous enforcement. Practical measures, such as standardised job applications and anonymised CVs (resumes), may also help.

Labour markets that privilege insiders at the expense of outsiders – not only refugees but also young locals – are neither fair nor efficient. One solution is to open up the labour market, as President Emmanuel Macron is doing in France. If not, temporary wage subsidies have been found to be particularly effective at boosting employment in both Europe and the US.

Refugees often lack information about job opportunities, while employers are often unaware of refugees' potential. While ethnic networks, NGOs and employment services can help match refugees to jobs, temporary employment agencies and technology platforms such as LinkedIn are also very useful. In many countries, volunteers have set up online services specifically to match refugees and asylum seekers to jobs, such as Worker in Germany, Refugees Work in Austria and Action Emploi Réfugiés in France. These should be encouraged to scale up.

While there is much for governments and refugees themselves to do, businesses also need to take the initiative, not just for corporate social responsibility (CSR) reasons, but also because it makes good business

sense. Companies want to be seen doing their part to help with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Assisting refugees can earn goodwill from governments and consumers, and help attract, retain and motivate employees. However, the demonisation of refugees may make businesses reluctant to engage, and they may need reassurance that they are doing the right thing.

There is also a strong business case for hiring refugees. Refugees are typically hard-working and highly motivated. Skilled refugees can fill skills shortages, while less-skilled ones can fill jobs that locals no longer want to do. A more diverse workforce tends to boost creativity and innovation and can help tap new markets both domestically and abroad.

Businesses may face challenges in hiring refugees, but there are many ways to overcome them. Websites, brochures and hotlines can provide information about refugees' right to work and how to hire them. Partnerships with NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) can help identify suitable candidates. Orientation classes can help both refugees and local workers address cultural barriers. Language classes and interpreters can help with communication issues.

While recruiting refugees may involve additional costs, this investment tends to yield a return quickly. In Germany, the Boston Consulting Group calculates that while hiring and training a refugee costs 40% more than recruiting a local worker, the payback period for the initial investment is typically only a year thanks to government subsidies and increased productivity.

Refugees have a huge amount to contribute to the society that welcomes them and to the organisations that employ them. It is in everyone's interests to make the most of their talents. Governments, non-profits and businesses need to step up.

▲ SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION



**GETTING REFUGEES PROMPTLY INTO WORK IS A TOP PRIORITY. EMPLOYMENT FAST-TRACKS THEIR “INTEGRATION” — THEIR ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY FULLY.**

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It enables them to contribute to the society that has welcomed them, start paying taxes and end their reliance on welfare — all of which neutralise the claim that they are a burden. Working with local colleagues also fosters trust and empathy, leads to friendships, improves language skills and helps refugees learn local norms — all of which dispel perceptions that refugees are a threat.

As well as being good for society, working benefits refugees themselves — and it is what they want to do. While they have suffered greatly, they typically do not want to be forever treated as victims or charity cases. They want to start rebuilding their lives and become self-reliant again. In addition to generating income, work makes refugees feel valued and proud to be giving something back to the society that has welcomed them. When asked “what makes you feel integrated?” most refugees respond: “to have a job.”<sup>1</sup>

Our initial report on the economics of refugee integration, *Refugees Work: A humanitarian investment that yields economic dividends*, established that welcoming refugees ought to be viewed as an opportunity, rather than as a burden or a threat.<sup>2</sup> From International Monetary Fund (IMF) data, it found that investing one euro (or dollar) in assisting refugees can yield nearly twice that in economic benefits within just five years (see Box 1). The initial outlay on newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers boosts demand for locally supplied goods and services — such as food, shelter, teaching and translating — acting as a fiscal stimulus. The returns from this investment in human capital grow as refugees start working and establish businesses. However, making the most of refugees’ potential requires sound government policies and a welcoming environment. That includes supportive civil-society groups and businesses willing to hire refugees — out of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and because they tend to be hard-working and highly motivated employees.



## ▲ BOX 1

### REFUGEES WORK: A HUMANITARIAN INVESTMENT THAT YIELDS ECONOMIC DIVIDENDS

When nearly a million Vietnamese “boat people” fled their country in the late 1970s and sought refuge elsewhere, they were typically seen as a burden and often turned away. Eventually, many were allowed to settle in the United States and other countries. Most arrived speaking little or no English, with few assets or relevant job skills, and facing a substantial political backlash. Yet refugees from Vietnam now have a higher employment rate and greater average incomes than people born in the US, and they have played a key role in promoting trade and investment links with Vietnam – a clear win-win for both the refugees and the society that accepted them.<sup>3</sup>

Refugees can contribute economically in many ways: as workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, taxpayers, consumers and investors. Their efforts can help create jobs, raise the productivity and wages of local workers, lift capital returns, stimulate international trade and investment, and boost innovation, enterprise and growth.

Welcoming refugees requires an initial investment, typically of public funds, and can yield eight big dividends.

- **Demand.** Spending on refugees boosts demand for local goods and services.
- **4D.** Some refugees do dirty, difficult, (relatively) dangerous and dull (4D) jobs that locals spurn, such as cleaning offices, farm work and caring for the elderly, and this enables locals to do higher-skilled and better-paid jobs that they prefer.
- **Deftness.** Higher-skilled refugees (and refugees’ highly skilled children) can fill gaps in the labour market and enhance locals’ productivity.
- **Dynamism.** Enterprising refugees start new businesses that create wealth, employ locals, make the economy more dynamic and adaptable, and boost international trade and investment.
- **Diversity.** Refugees and their children can help spark new ideas and technologies. People who have been uprooted from one culture and exposed to another tend to be more creative, and diverse groups tend to outperform like-minded experts at problem-solving.
- **Demography.** Ageing societies with a shrinking working-age population benefit from the arrival of younger refugees who complement older, more-experienced workers and help pay for the swelling ranks of pensioners. In countries such as Germany where the population is falling, they help support population numbers – and thus investment and growth.
- **Debt.** Migrants, in general, tend to be net contributors to public finances; in Australia, refugees become so after 12 years (which is sooner than children born there). The taxes that refugees pay can help service and repay the massive public debts that have been incurred in many countries to provide benefits for the existing population.
- **Development.** Refugees enhance both their prospects and those of their children, while they also send money back to their country of origin.

To capitalise on refugees’ potential, they need to start working quickly, which this report addresses.

Rightly, getting refugees quickly into work is a central goal of resettlement programmes in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. All the evidence points to the merits of speeding the entry of refugees into the workforce, yet many policies and practical hurdles – such as government bureaucracy and language barriers – tend to impede this.<sup>4</sup> Those who claim asylum on arrival in Europe or North America face particularly significant challenges.

This report focuses on how to improve refugees' access to entry-level jobs in advanced economies. It surveys the economic literature and evidence on the obstacles to getting refugees into work and how best to overcome them. It sets out evidence-based policy recommendations – best practices, promising ones and in some cases a menu of options, because there is not always a one-size-fits-all solution. It presents case studies of government and private-sector initiatives considered successful, as well as stories of individual refugees' experiences that bring the evidence to life. Moreover, it highlights new approaches, such as using digital technologies to match refugees to jobs.

This report serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, practitioners, civil-society campaigners and the wider public seeking better outcomes for refugees and society. Subsequent studies from the author will examine how to encourage refugee entrepreneurship, how to enable refugees with skills and qualifications to make the most of their abilities and how to ensure that all refugees progress economically over time.

Entry-level jobs that may seem undesirable to North Americans, Europeans and Australians can be a crucial stepping stone. One study found that refugees deemed finding and keeping a first job in a fast-food restaurant or delivering pizzas as a success.<sup>5</sup> Such a job is better than languishing unemployed, let alone being stuck in a refugee camp or living in fear in their country of origin. Even the most menial work provides an income, local work experience and potential contacts that can lead to better things, while training and job opportunities can also help refugees progress over time.

This report does not argue that countries should admit refugees for economic reasons, to be clear. Governments that are signatories to the United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees have a legal duty to assist those fleeing their country out of fear of persecution or death, and all countries have a humanitarian obligation towards those who desperately need protection (see Box 2). And once refugees are admitted for humanitarian reasons, it is in both their interests and those of the receiving society that they start working as soon as possible, feel like they are contributing to society and are seen to be doing so.

## ▲ BOX 2 | DEFINITIONS

**The terms migrant, refugee and asylum seeker are often jumbled together, but they have precise meanings that this report will use.**

- **An international migrant** (also known as a migrant or immigrant) is someone living outside their country of birth for an extended period, often defined as a year or more. For simplicity, non-migrants (people who live in the country in which they were born) are called locals in this study; academics tend to refer to locals as native-born.
- **A refugee** is a particular type of migrant: one granted the right to stay in a country because of fear of persecution or death in their country of origin. Legally, the UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone located outside their country of nationality or habitual residence; with a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group; and unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their country or to return there for fear of persecution.<sup>6</sup>
- Some refugees apply for asylum from abroad and are resettled once their claim is accepted; they are known as **resettled refugees**. Others claim asylum once they arrive in the country in which they are seeking humanitarian protection; they are known as **asylum seekers**. If their claim is accepted, they become refugees. Some asylum seekers whose claims are not accepted are nonetheless granted subsidiary protection: the legal right to stay under domestic law, albeit typically with fewer rights than refugees.
- **For simplicity, the report sometimes refers to “refugees” as shorthand for “refugees and asylum seekers”. Where the issues they face are different, this is made clear in the text.**

## OBJECTIVES, METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This report aims to establish how best to get refugees and asylum seekers into work quickly. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and businesses provide many different schemes, often without knowing how well they work.<sup>7</sup> Problems abound. Data on refugee outcomes tends to be patchy. Evaluations of particular policies and programmes are rarely rigorous. Indeed, measuring “success” can be tricky. For instance, is it the average time that refugees take to find a job, or their employment rate at x or y years? Does the quality of the job that they obtain matter? Is the point of comparison other migrants, local workers, the unemployed or other labour-market newcomers, such as young people?

Better data and more research are urgently needed. At the same time, there is already plenty of evidence about how best to get migrants and job seekers in general into work. While refugees and asylum seekers may face additional hurdles – such as overcoming mental and physical trauma – many of their challenges, such as a lack of work experience or a scarcity of local jobs, are similar to those faced by other migrants and job seekers. So, in areas where rigorous evaluations of refugee programmes are lacking, it seems reasonable (with caveats) to draw inferences from the broader economic literature.

This brief highlights best practices, in cases where the evidence is compelling, and promising ones, in cases where the evidence is suggestive but not conclusive.

In some cases, it argues that countries with different local conditions need different policies; for instance, refugees typically require more training to find a job in Sweden’s highly regulated labour market than they do in the US’s much less regulated one. There is also plenty of scope for experimentation, especially at a local level, so the brief also presents promising innovative approaches.

Getting refugees into jobs is not only a task for governments and refugees themselves; it is also both a challenge and an opportunity for businesses. NGOs, churches and affiliated groups, educational establishments, international organisations such as UNHCR, foundations, European Union (EU) institutions and agencies, volunteer groups and others have an important role to play as well.

This report covers 22 advanced economies that receive substantial numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. Within Europe, it focuses on Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Outside Europe, it looks at Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US. Since Japan receives hardly any refugees, this report does not consider its integration policies. However, this report’s policy recommendations are also applicable to countries that have so far received few refugees.



▲ SECTION 2

# OUTCOMES



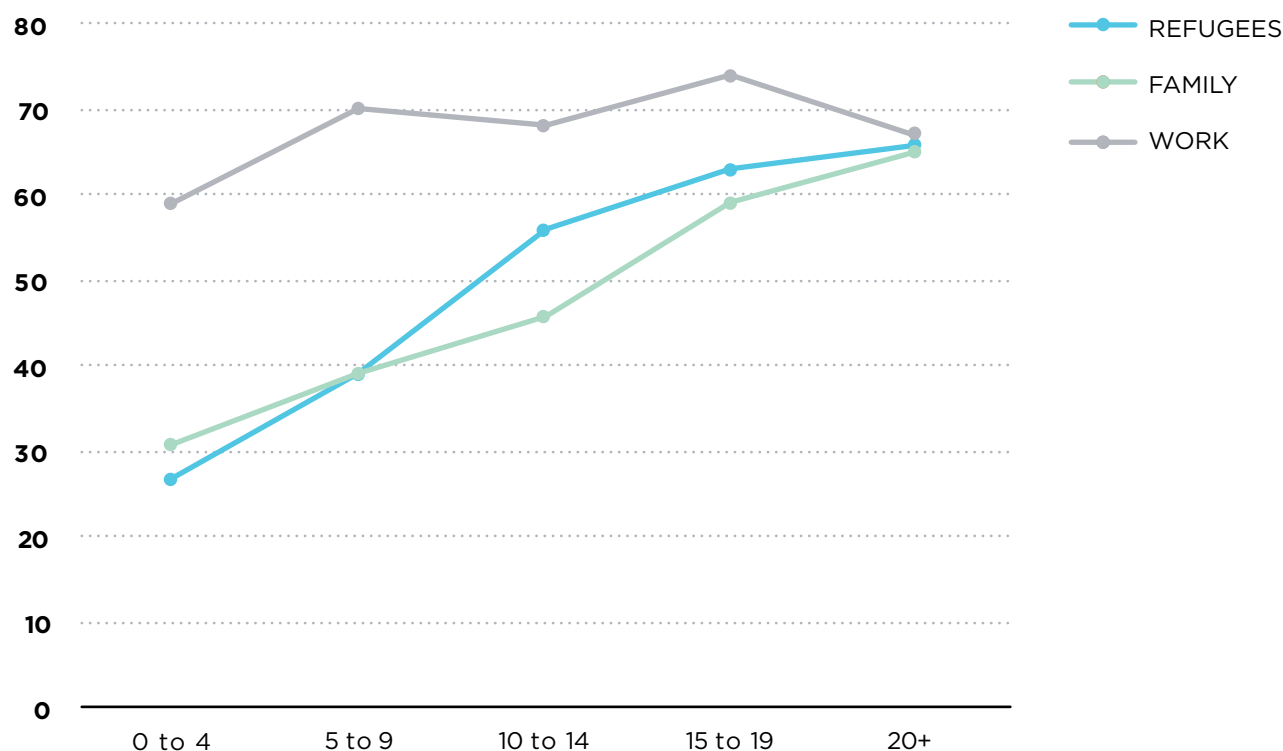
# OUTCOMES



**REFUGEES OFTEN TAKE TIME TO FIND A JOB. THAT IS NOT SURPRISING SINCE THEIR ADMITTANCE IS FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS, NOT ECONOMIC ONES.**

They may also face all sorts of barriers, not least labour-market bureaucracy. In the EU,<sup>8</sup> only 27% of refugees find work within five years of arrival, according to 2014 data.<sup>9</sup> Within 10-15 years, 56% are employed; after 20 years or more, 65% are (see Chart 1). Overall, 56% of refugees in the EU are employed, compared with 65% of locals.<sup>10</sup>

▲ **CHART 1** | EMPLOYMENT RATE (%), AGED 20-64, BY REASON FOR MIGRATION AND YEARS OF RESIDENCE IN THE EU, 2014

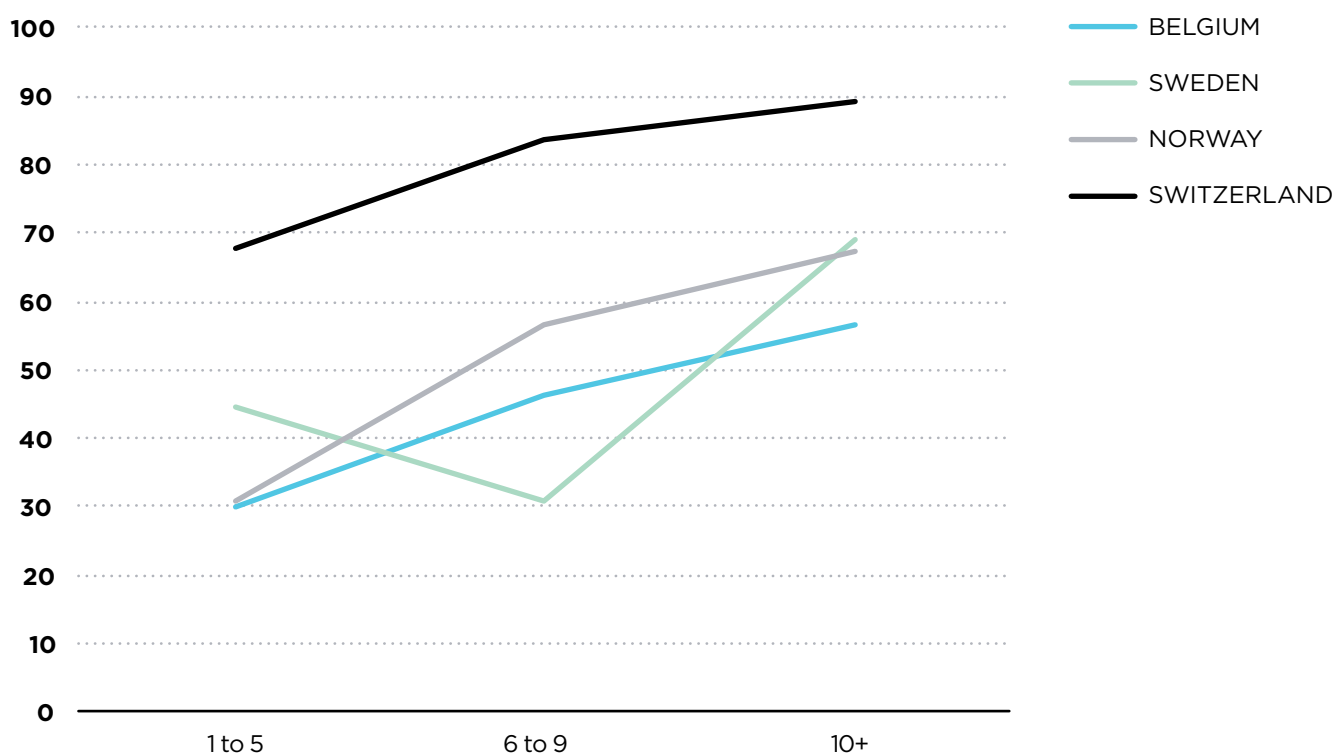


Source: European Commission/OECD<sup>11</sup>

However, refugees' success in quickly finding work varies widely across (and within) countries. In Belgium, the employment rate of refugees who had been in the country for five years or less was less than one in three in 2014; in the Netherlands, the rate was one-half;<sup>12</sup> in

Switzerland, two-thirds were employed (see Chart 2).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, refugees who have been in Switzerland for six or more years are more likely to be employed than the overall population.<sup>14</sup> That sets a benchmark towards which other European countries ought to aim.

▲ **CHART 2** | REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT RATE (%), AGED 20-64, BY YEARS OF RESIDENCE, 2014



Source: Eurostat<sup>15</sup>

Outside Europe, the US and Canada do even better. In the US, the proportion of refugees assisted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement who entered employment in the fiscal year 2014 varies between 20% in Maine and South Carolina and 100% in West Virginia.<sup>16</sup> Among those assisted by the Matching Grant programme provided by voluntary agencies, 71% of those completing the 120-to-180-day programme became self-sufficient in fiscal year 2012.<sup>17</sup>

In Canada, three in five refugees who had applied for asylum upon arrival find work within a year of arriving.<sup>18</sup> Within five years, 57% of government-assisted refugees, 65% of refugees who had obtained asylum once in Canada and 70% of privately sponsored refugees report employment income. In the province of Alberta, four in five refugees find work within a year of arriving.<sup>19</sup> (In Australia, around 40% of humanitarian migrants found work within four years.<sup>20</sup>)

Refugees' success in finding work quickly in Canada, the US and Switzerland shows that it is possible to get significantly more refugees into work, much faster – even in Europe, with its often highly regulated labour markets.

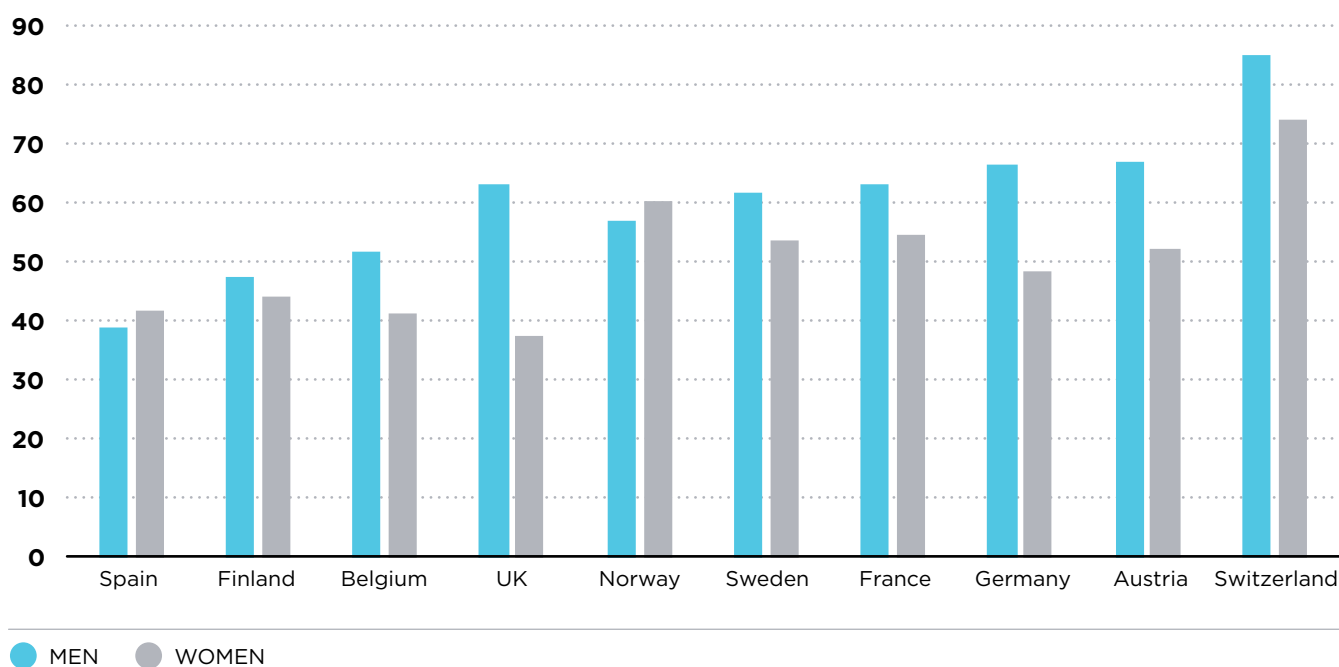
### GENDER GAP

In general, female refugees are less likely to start working than men are.<sup>21</sup> In Switzerland, the only European country for which such data is available, 62% of female refugees find work within five years of arrival, compared with 74% of males.<sup>22</sup> Overall, 45% of female refugees in the EU work, compared with 62% of male ones.<sup>23</sup> In part, this is because fewer female refugees are economically active (that is, they are looking for work); only 57% are, compared to 77% of male refugees. In the US, 54% of female refugees work, the same proportion as women born in the US.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly, while only 30% of low-educated refugee women in the EU are employed, 69% of highly educated ones are – compared with 66% of highly educated male refugees. Female refugees also have a higher employment rate than males in Norway, while refugee women in Switzerland are more likely to be employed than refugee men in other European countries (see Chart 3). So there is enormous potential for progress.

Refugees typically find work quickly in Canada and the US, but often take much longer to get a job in European countries. The next three sections consider why that is and how best to improve matters.

▲ **CHART 3** | REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT RATE (%), BY GENDER, 2014



Source: Eurostat<sup>25</sup>



▲ SECTION 3

# THE RIGHT TO WORK

# THE RIGHT TO WORK



## REFUGEES ENTER ADVANCED ECONOMIES IN TWO DIFFERENT WAYS: THROUGH RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES AND BY CLAIMING ASYLUM ON ARRIVAL.

For resettled refugees, obtaining the right to work tends to be automatic. In Australia and Canada, a refugee visa gives the holder the permanent right to live and work there. In the US, resettled refugees have the immediate right to work and can apply for permanent residence (a “green card”) a year after arrival. In Sweden, they are given permanent residence documents before their relocation.<sup>26</sup> Norway allows refugees to convert 3-year residence permits into permanent residency provided the refugee has completed the introductory course for newcomers to Norway.<sup>27</sup>

For asylum seekers, obtaining the right to work tends to be much more arduous. Most governments ban them from working initially, while often taking a long time to register and process their claims. EU law suggests that asylum claims should be processed within six months, and the US has a similar 180-day target, but in practice, it often takes much longer.<sup>28</sup> In many countries, there is a massive backlog of pending asylum cases, including 587,300 at the end of 2016 in Germany, 542,600 in the US, 99,900 in Italy, 83,100 in Sweden, 76,400 in Austria and 62,800 in France.<sup>29</sup> Even once asylum seekers gain the right to work, this is often hedged with conditions and constraints. Businesses may also be unaware that asylum seekers are allowed to work. So in practice, very few asylum seekers work, while others resort to working informally.

▲ **TABLE 1** | RESETTLED REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER ARRIVALS

COUNTRY	REFUGEES RESETTLED, 2016
US	96,900
CANADA	46,700
AUSTRALIA	27,600
NORWAY	3,120
SWEDEN	1,900

Source: UNHCR<sup>30</sup>

COUNTRY	NEW ASYLUM APPLICATIONS, 2016
GERMANY	722,400
US <sup>31</sup>	262,000
ITALY	123,000
FRANCE	78,400
GREECE	49,800
AUSTRIA	39,900
UK	38,500
CANADA	23,895

Source: UNHCR<sup>32</sup>

This practice is harmful to asylum seekers and costly for governments. Being out of work for a long time is painful and makes finding a job harder. As asylum seekers' skills rust and their motivation wanes, employers may become reluctant to hire them. Worse, prolonged unemployment can harm future pay, career and employment prospects. There is ample evidence that long-term unemployment is damaging to workers, particularly to young people just entering the labour market.<sup>33</sup> Unsurprisingly, the same goes for asylum seekers.<sup>34</sup> One study found that in Switzerland an additional year of waiting for a decision on their asylum claim reduced refugees' likelihood of subsequent employment by 16–23%.<sup>35</sup>

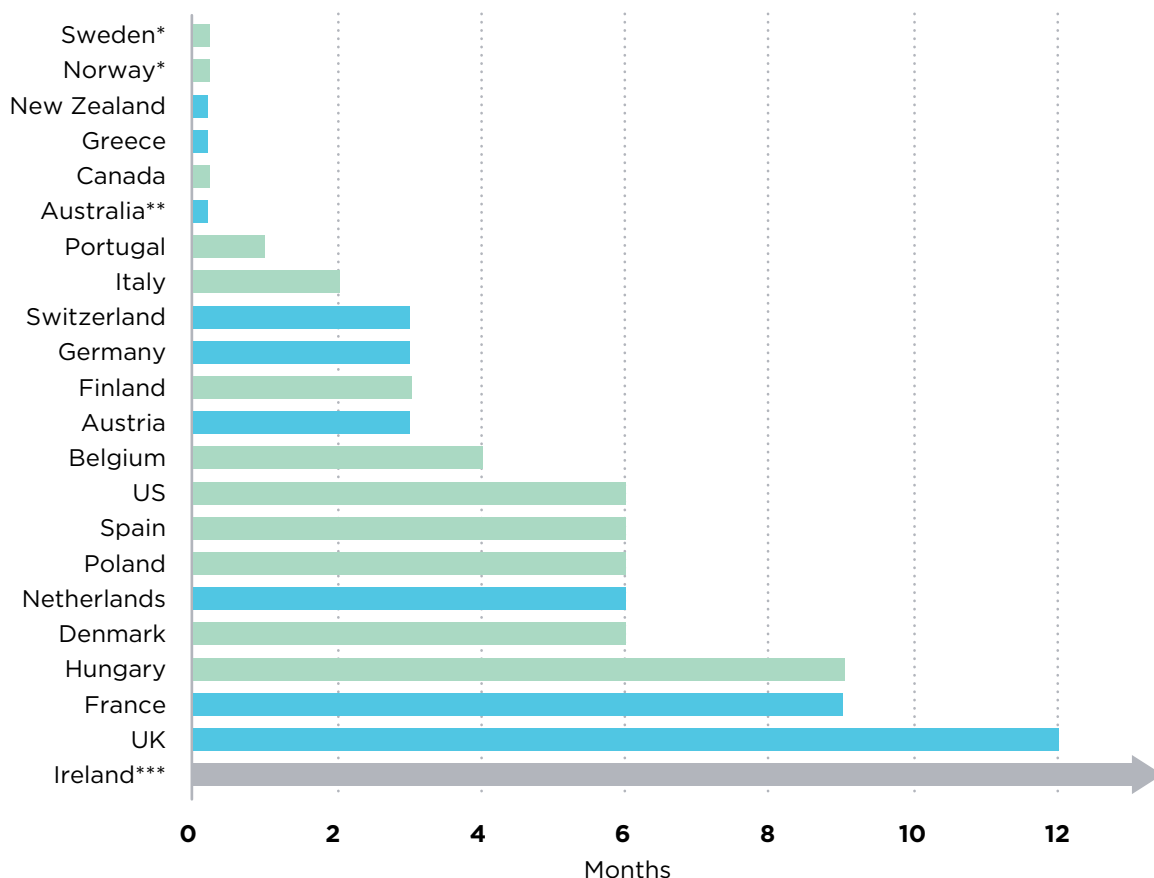
**▲ RECOMMENDATION 1**  
**TO CUT COSTS AND LIMIT THE TIME**  
**THAT ASYLUM SEEKERS SPEND IN LIMBO,**  
**GOVERNMENTS SHOULD INVEST IN CREATING**  
**SPEEDY AND FAIR ASYLUM PROCEDURES.**

Since leaving asylum seekers stuck in limbo for an extended period increases welfare costs and depresses tax revenues, it would be both cost-effective and humane for governments to invest in streamlining asylum procedures. In 2016, Germany introduced a new system of “integrated refugee management”.<sup>36</sup> This method involves the creation of arrival centres for asylum seekers, with all relevant public authorities under one roof. On arrival, asylum seekers register, and their data is entered into a personal file in a country-wide IT system accessible to all relevant authorities and regularly updated. The German government clusters asylum seekers into four groups to speed processing: those from countries with high approval rates, those from countries with low approval rates, those with complex

profiles or situations, and “Dublin cases” (where the EU country of first arrival is responsible for the asylum procedure). The asylum process itself involves a structured template to ensure speedy and fair decision-making. There are dedicated experts for complex cases, such as those where asylum seekers lack proper documents. The new system has reduced the average wait for an asylum decision from five months to three; some decisions are made within 48 hours. While there have been some criticisms of the new system,<sup>37</sup> the McKinsey Global Institute calculates that these steps to accelerate the asylum procedure can help the German government avoid roughly €5 billion–€6 billion (\$5.7 billion–\$6.8 billion) in future expenditures.<sup>38</sup>

While some countries allow asylum seekers to work almost immediately, others impose long delays and other constraints (see Chart 4). The US does not permit asylum seekers to work for 180 days, which the government may extend if it determines the applicant has delayed proceedings; in practice, this prevents almost all asylum seekers from working.<sup>39</sup> EU law requires member governments to grant asylum seekers the right to work within nine months of making their asylum claim; the UK and Ireland have an opt-out from this.<sup>40</sup> France bans asylum seekers from working for nine months, and then allows them to fill only jobs in shortage sectors that locals cannot. In the UK, asylum seekers must wait 12 months and then can work only in the few occupations on the government's shortage list. Ireland does not allow them to work at all; unsurprisingly, this harms their future employment prospects too.<sup>41</sup>

▲ CHART 4 | WAITING PERIOD BEFORE ASYLUM SEEKERS CAN WORK (MONTHS)



Countries in which asylum seekers' right to work is subject to further conditions are in blue  
Asylum seekers cannot work in Ireland - this is shown with a grey arrow.

Source: OECD<sup>42</sup>

\* Asylum seekers can work immediately in Sweden, and following their asylum interview in Norway, provided they have valid ID.

\*\* Only asylum seekers with a bridging visa type E can work \*\*\* Asylum seekers cannot work in Ireland

Governments deny asylum seekers the right to work for two main reasons: to deter “economic migrants” who might masquerade as humanitarian ones and to appease fears that asylum seekers will harm local workers. Yet there is no evidence that the poor treatment of asylum seekers – in violation of the UN Refugee Convention and Protocol – discourages other migrants from coming;

if people are willing to risk death to reach a country, denying them the right to work is scarcely a deterrent. Nor do asylum seekers – or, indeed, refugees – tend to harm the prospects of local workers, as *Refugees Work* showed.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, they tend to enable local workers to fill higher-paid, better-skilled jobs.<sup>44</sup>



**▲ RECOMMENDATION 2**  
**TO GET ASYLUM SEEKERS OFF WELFARE AND INTO WORK FASTER, GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PROVIDE ASYLUM SEEKERS WITH PLAUSIBLE CLAIMS THE RIGHT TO WORK FREELY AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.**

In the face of a big influx of asylum seekers since 2014 and an ensuing backlog of applications, some EU governments have allowed asylum seekers to work sooner. In Germany, they are now authorised to work after three months, albeit subject to a labour-market test (that the job cannot be filled by a local) for the subsequent 12 months. Better still, Sweden<sup>45</sup> and Norway<sup>46</sup> both permit asylum seekers to work immediately, provided they have a valid passport or other identification documents. Canada also allows asylum seekers to work straight away if they can prove that they need to work to support themselves or would otherwise rely on social assistance.<sup>47</sup>

Once asylum seekers obtain refugee status, they are in principle legally entitled to work (except in jobs reserved for citizens in some countries, such as the police). EU law stipulates that refugees have the right to work “immediately after protection has been granted” and that “as soon as possible” they should be given a residence permit that is valid for at least three years.<sup>48</sup>

However, in practice obtaining a residence permit – and in some cases, a work permit too – takes time: several weeks in some countries, several months in others.

Many countries initially grant refugees temporary residence permits, a precarious status that deters employers from hiring and training them. In France, refugees are often granted successive three-month residence permits while waiting – sometimes for more than a year – for their ten-year permit. Temporary permits prevent refugees from being able to work, however. “I still didn’t have my leave to remain, I only had my temporary permit, and even though it was written that I was allowed to work, my [job] application was refused for that reason,” said one Sudanese refugee.<sup>49</sup>

**▲ RECOMMENDATION 3**  
**TO REDUCE UNCERTAINTY AND DISRUPTION, ASYLUM SEEKERS SHOULD BE PROMPTLY GRANTED LONG-TERM – IDEALLY PERMANENT – RESIDENCE AND WORK PERMITS WHEN THEY RECEIVE REFUGEE STATUS.**

Asylum seekers who obtain refugee status in Canada and the US have the immediate right to work, but have to apply for permanent residence. Spain provides permanent work and residence permits in a single procedure to both refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.<sup>50</sup>

Speeding up the asylum process and extending the right to work as quickly as possible should be priorities. Once refugees have the right to work, they also need to become employable, which the next section will consider.

▲ SECTION 4

# SKILLS



# SKILLS



## THE SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES THAT REFUGEES NEED TO FIND THEIR FIRST JOB VARY WIDELY ACROSS COUNTRIES.

In less regulated labour markets, such as the US and the UK, they may require few or no qualifications to fill positions that require extensive formal qualifications in more regulated labour markets, such as France, Germany and Sweden. For example, in Britain, many bricklayers learn on the job, whereas in Germany they require a qualification that takes three years of education.<sup>51</sup> Refugees will therefore typically need much more training in countries like Germany and Sweden than in countries like Britain and the US.

The skills and attributes that refugees possess also vary immensely. Some have postgraduate degrees; others are illiterate. Some have readily transferable skills, such as computer programming or cooking; others have language-specific skills – as journalists or secretaries, for instance; or country-specific ones, as lawyers or public officials, for example. Some may already speak the local language; most don't. It therefore makes sense to assess refugees' skills and provide necessary training tailored to their individual needs.

All countries provide some language and job training to refugees, but its availability, methods and effectiveness vary hugely. To accelerate the transition into work, refugee employment schemes should assess skills promptly, and quickly provide tailored training, including to asylum seekers. Language lessons are a priority,

preferably with a work focus. Ideally, programs would combine language and job training with work experience that can lead to a job. Well-designed mentoring schemes can also be a big help.

### EARLY INTERVENTION

#### ▲ RECOMMENDATION 4

BECAUSE GETTING REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO WORK QUICKLY OUGHT TO BE A PRIORITY, ASSESSING SKILLS AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, AS WELL AS PROVIDING JOB TRAINING, SHOULD TAKE PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

For refugees approved for resettlement, this could start in refugee camps, along with the cultural orientation classes that are often already provided. For asylum seekers, this could begin in reception centres, again along with initial orientation sessions. Countries such as Germany, Denmark and Norway already assess their skills.<sup>52</sup> Many countries – including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the US – provide some language training.<sup>53</sup>

This initial assistance need not be costly. In Germany, the Ankommen (Arrival) app produced by the federal government and the Goethe Institute provides valuable advice on training opportunities and how to find a job in Arabic, English and German.<sup>54</sup> More in-depth language and job training can be offered to those with plausible asylum claims. Spain assesses asylum seekers' skills and offers them language classes, adult-education courses and job-related training. By speeding asylum seekers' progress into work, such an investment can pay for itself.

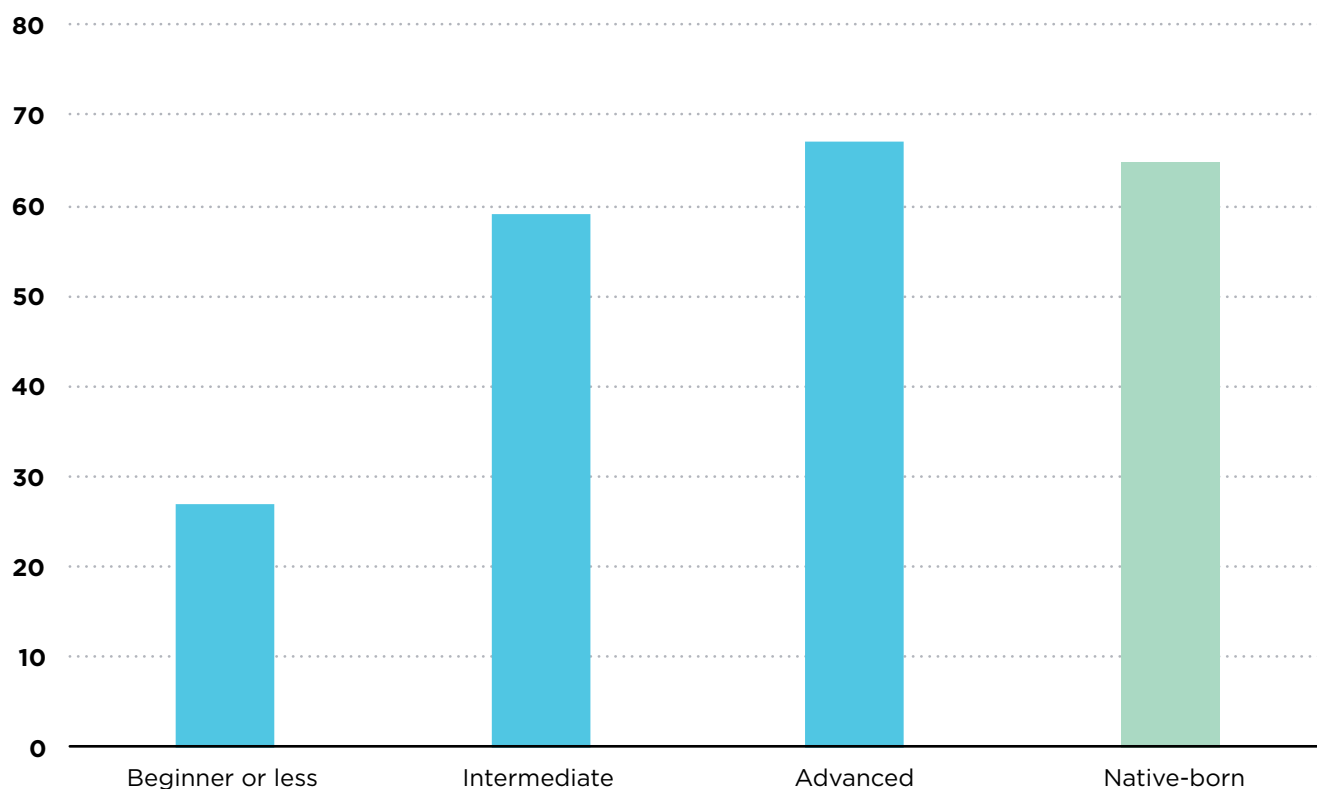
## LANGUAGE

Refugees often don't speak the local language, which is a prerequisite for most jobs. In 2014, only 9% of refugees who had arrived in Germany in the past ten years could speak German at an advanced level. Across the EU only 24% of such recently arrived refugees could speak the local language at a high level.<sup>55</sup>

While refugees in the EU who speak the local language at beginner level or less have an employment rate of only 27%, this leaps to 59% for those with intermediate

language skills (see Chart 5). Refugees who speak the local language at an advanced level have a higher employment rate (67%) than locals do (65%). In the US, Canada and Australia, refugees with stronger language skills tend to have better-paid jobs.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, there tends to be a virtuous circle between language proficiency and employment; while better language skills make it easier to find work, having a job tends to improve language skills.

▲ **CHART 5** | REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT RATE (%), BY LOCAL LANGUAGE SKILLS, 2014



Source: European Commission/OECD<sup>57</sup>



One option to get refugees quickly into work is jobs that don't require language proficiency. Some lower-skill jobs, such as cleaning or picking berries, as well as some higher-skill ones, such as computer programming, can be done by refugees with little or no knowledge of the local language. Jobs in ethnic businesses are another option for refugees who speak the language used by the business owner or its customers. Yet many countries require both spoken and written language skills for jobs even when this is not strictly necessary to perform the work properly.

**▲ RECOMMENDATION 5**  
IN COUNTRIES WHERE LANGUAGE SKILLS ARE FORMALLY REQUIRED FOR JOBS BUT ARE NOT NECESSARY TO DO THE JOB, GOVERNMENTS SHOULD RELAX LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR REFUGEES (AND ARGUABLY MORE GENERALLY).

Speaking the local language opens up many more job opportunities and is vital for integration into society, yet many countries fail to provide timely, effective language training to all refugees. In Hungary, where the government prides itself on demonising refugees, very few have access to language classes. In France, many don't start language classes for up to a year after getting refugee status.

While many countries do provide language lessons to all refugees, studies find that language training as part of two-to-three-year general introduction programmes is less efficient, because it delays looking for work.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the content of classes is often not relevant to the occupations in which migrants work or aspire to work.<sup>59</sup> While speaking the local language well is necessary for social mobility, a grasp of the basics required in a workplace is enough to get refugees into a job – which, in turn, tends to boost language skills.

**▲ RECOMMENDATION 6**  
SINCE LANGUAGE SKILLS GREATLY INCREASE JOB OPPORTUNITIES, TRAINING SHOULD BE PROVIDED PROMPTLY, TAILORED INITIALLY TO REFUGEES' WORKPLACE NEEDS, IDEALLY TOGETHER WITH PART-TIME WORK.<sup>60</sup>

In Sweden, refugees following the “Swedish for Immigrants” language course can combine this with part-time employment. “It’s a good combination to study and learn at school and then practise my language skills at work,” says a refugee from Eritrea with a part-time job in a canteen. “This combination of working and learning at the same time makes learning much easier.”<sup>61</sup>

On-the-job language training – which is costly and requires the cooperation of employers – is the most effective.<sup>62</sup> According to the OECD, “By linking language learning to vocational training and labour market experience, on-the-job training has been found to facilitate entry into employment greatly.” Australia,<sup>63</sup> Canada, Denmark (see Box 3), Finland,<sup>64</sup> Germany, New Zealand, Norway,<sup>65</sup> Spain, Switzerland and the US provide on-the-job language training to some refugees.

### ▲ BOX 3 | DENMARK CLEANS UP

Ibrahim Toto arrived in Denmark as a refugee from Syria in 2014.<sup>66</sup> He had not previously been to school, but was offered the opportunity to work in a hospital laundry on a paid internship that consists of work, on-site Danish language classes and on-the-job training. “When I arrived, I could not speak Danish, or read,” he says. “I received six months’ training, and now I am employed. And I read English and Danish.”

“We were one of the first companies in Denmark where the refugee could go directly into work – three hours working and then three hours Danish at school, also here at our company,” explains Pernille Lundvang, the CEO of MidtVask, the country’s biggest hospital-laundry company. “And they have really been racing!”

Under a government-funded programme introduced last year known as New Basic Integration (IGU) that was devised by the social partners – the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) – businesses that hire and train a refugee receive

a bonus of up to 40,000 Danish kroner (€5,380, \$6,110), half after six months, the rest after two years.<sup>67</sup> Before the programme, only 3% of refugees were considered available for immediate employment. Now, the proportion is 60%, and DA expects it to continue to rise.<sup>68</sup>

“People say I have a good heart for employing refugees and that I have a very strong CSR profile,” says Lundvang. “Yes – but it’s business. People with different nationalities and different backgrounds create this dynamic that makes us better.” Since starting the programme, the company has seen significant improvements in the workspace and a 5% increase in output. Other Danish companies are now following MidtVask’s lead.

For refugees, the benefits are enormous. They gain work experience, a network of colleagues, better Danish and a salary. Most go on to get jobs. “It’s a win-win-win,” says Lundvang, “for the individual, for the company and for society.”

### ▲ RECOMMENDATION 7 REFUGEES SHOULD BE INFORMED ABOUT AND ENCOURAGED TO MAKE MORE USE OF ONLINE LEARNING TECHNIQUES.

Traditional, classroom-based language training can be helpful, but also has its disadvantages. Teachers and facilities may be costly. Students progress at different speeds. Teachers are of varying quality and can devote only a fraction of their time to each student’s needs. The fixed class times may not suit everyone; parents (and women in particular) may not be able to get childcare. And so on.

For refugees who have smartphones, as most now do, apps provide a cheap, flexible, interactive means for refugees to learn the local language, at their own pace and at a time that suits them. WhatsGerman provides free basic language lessons to new arrivals in Germany via WhatsApp, the smartphone-messaging service.<sup>69</sup> Refugees simply add a number to their contacts and each day they receive a language lesson. Duolingo provides a special version of its German app for Arabic speakers that Osama Haggag, a computer linguist who came to Germany from Egypt two years earlier, designed.<sup>70</sup> Babbel, whose app helps users to learn 14

different languages from Spanish to Swedish, provides special support for refugees (see Box 4).

Many offline organisations offer free interactive online language courses for refugees. The European Commission provides courses in 18 European languages for refugees through the Erasmus+ programme.<sup>71</sup> The

British Council offers free English lessons online to refugees worldwide.<sup>72</sup> The Goethe Institute provides free online German courses to refugees.<sup>73</sup>

While online language learning seems highly promising – on its own and as a complement to classroom lessons – further evaluation of its effectiveness is needed.

#### ▲ BOX 4 | BABBEL

In early 2015, before refugee arrivals in Germany soared, refugee support groups in Berlin contacted Babbel for free access to its web-app language courses. Babbel is now providing German refugee projects with €1 million (\$1.1 million) worth of language courses.<sup>74</sup> The company has provided some 15,000 free courses to partners. As well, Babbel staff have volunteered in refugee centres to distribute courses and to tutor refugees in German. Babbel linguists, professional language teachers, translators and education specialists have trained some 200

volunteer teachers who deliver face-to-face lessons in the centres.

An unexpected bonus of Babbel's initiatives to help refugees has been a dramatic increase in employee pride in the company, according to Christian Hillemeyer, its director of communications. "Compared to a day at the office it gave us the feeling to have accomplished something meaningful," he said. "Something that really helps people and touches their lives."<sup>75</sup>

## JOB TRAINING

In addition to lacking language competency, refugees often lack other attributes needed to find a job, including vocational skills, knowledge of where to look for work and how to apply, local employment experience and knowledge of local work norms.

Filling that gap is crucial – and because refugees are very diverse, a one-size-fits-all approach is rarely appropriate. Illiterate refugees may need basic literacy and numeracy training; university graduates can start learning at a much higher level. Those who have no experience of the formal job market will require more preparation. Mothers with small children may need childcare to attend training classes. Even within broad categories, people may have very different needs.

To be as effective as possible, training needs to be tailored to individual circumstances – particularly in Europe's more regulated labour markets where entry-level jobs with few skill requirements are scarce.

EU law requires member governments to provide refugees with training and other assistance in accessing the labour market on conditions equivalent to those provided for citizens. But while refugees have the right to access the vocational training programmes and other support given to all unemployed people, in practice, this requires sufficient knowledge of the local language and a minimum level of education. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, loans for vocational training are available.

A trickier issue is whether refugees deserve special favours. They need some initial help until they start working. Further investment in their training is also likely to yield significant dividends. However, especially when times are tough and government budgets tight, being too generous towards refugees can create resentment among locals, including historically marginalised and disenfranchised groups.

In practice, governments provide help to refugees in different ways. Some governments, such as the UK, “mainstream” such assistance – meaning they provide support through general programmes for all jobseekers. Most countries, including Germany, Spain, France, Sweden and the Netherlands, combine mainstream assistance with targeted support for refugees. Others, notably Italy, have separate programmes for refugees. Many countries have announced exceptional measures to deal with the recent influx of refugees to Europe. In the US, non-profit organisations are often contracted by public authorities to provide refugees with training, counselling, support and help in finding a job.

The format of introductory training varies too. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, have wide-ranging integration programmes that include language training, labour-market orientation and civic education. Others, such as France and Germany, require refugees to sign an “integration contract”. In Germany, this stipulates the efforts that a refugee must make to secure a job, such as attending an integration course, on which welfare benefits may be conditional. Belgium, Finland, Italy, Spain and Sweden design a personalised integration plan for each refugee.

Research shows that assessing refugees’ skills and providing appropriate training help them find jobs. An assessment of Germany’s integration contract found that aptitude tests that assess refugees’ suitability for specific occupations (regarding skills, capabilities and labour-market opportunities) boosted employment rates as did skill provision (practical training in techniques for finding a job, together with vocational training in subjects such as computing).<sup>76</sup> Australia, Austria, Greece, Hungary, Poland and the US do not systematically assess refugees’ skills,<sup>67</sup> while France, Hungary, Italy and Poland do not provide job-related training to refugees.<sup>78</sup>

Personalised integration plans are particularly effective. In 1999, Finland introduced individual integration plans for newly arrived migrants. These involve a meeting with a caseworker to determine the sequence of training and other measures most suitable to help each migrant find a job, given their skills and circumstances. A study concluded that the reform raised migrants’ cumulative income over the subsequent decade by 47% and reduced their cumulative receipts of social benefits by 13%, compared to those arriving just before the reform. This reform involved no additional spending on integration, nor any increase in the overall provision of training, but merely better-targeted training and other assistance.<sup>79</sup> In Sweden, which introduced a similar reform for refugees in December 2010, this was found to raise refugees’ employment rate by 7.5 percentage points, and their earnings by 22%, after three years, compared with those who benefited from the range of schemes provided by Swedish municipalities before the reform.<sup>80</sup>

#### ▲ RECOMMENDATION 8

SINCE REFUGEES ARE VERY DIVERSE, GOVERNMENTS SHOULD SYSTEMATICALLY ASSESS THEIR SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES, AND FOR EACH DEVELOP AN INDIVIDUAL STRATEGY FOR FINDING A JOB THAT INCLUDES THE PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE TRAINING.

Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK do so.<sup>81</sup> In Sweden, this begins with an introductory interview with the public employment service (Arbetsförmedlingen) in which the refugee's skills and competencies, professional and educational background, personal preferences and ability to participate in integration activities are mapped out. The program then prepares an introduction plan. This practice sets out the refugee's best path to find a job and may include counselling on whether they should undertake work or studies.

It is important to tailor training to local employment needs too. In the US, the Colorado Refugee Services Program promotes and funds training programmes – for occupations from pharmacy technician to barista – that respond to local labour-market needs. These are continued only if at least 70% of participants find a job within six months of the programme beginning.<sup>82</sup>

#### ▲ RECOMMENDATION 9

SINCE LOCAL WORK EXPERIENCE IS CRUCIAL, WORK PLACEMENTS, INTERNSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED.

Employers typically value local work experience highly, so work placements and internships can be a stepping stone to finding a job. In Sweden, studies conclude that early job experience boosts refugee employment, in part because employers value Swedish work experience more than vocational training.<sup>83</sup> In the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, some resettled refugees benefit from Immigration Services' successful long-standing work-placement programme. This programme involves six-week unpaid positions that provide Canadian work experience, local references and professional contacts and that also boost refugees' confidence. Some 68% of refugees were subsequently hired, and a further 10% took further education or started their own business.<sup>84</sup>

Studies show that apprenticeships that combine vocational learning with practical job experience are particularly effective at getting young people into work; high-quality ones that provide longer, more intense training that is general rather than firm-specific are particularly valuable.<sup>85</sup> Apprenticeships are crucial in highly regulated labour markets such as Germany where learning on the job is not an option (see Box 5).



## ▲ BOX 5 | INTERNSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS FOR REFUGEES IN GERMANY

Germany is well-known for its apprenticeship system that combines classwork with high-quality on-the-job training in a wide variety of skilled trades, from metalwork to nursing. With fewer and fewer young Germans applying, refugees can help fill the gaps. Some 3,000 refugees took up an apprenticeship in the 12 months to January 2017, according to Germany's Federal Labour Office.<sup>86</sup>

Since many refugees do not yet meet the requirements to start an apprenticeship, many companies provide internships that help refugees to acquire the requisite skills, often together with language classes. More than 190 businesses have joined Wir Zusammen (We Together), an initiative that seeks to integrate refugees into the labour market.<sup>87</sup> By July 2017, it had provided internships for 3,500 refugees and apprenticeships for a further 800 and also created 2,130 permanent jobs.

Together with giants such as Daimler (which makes Mercedes cars), many smaller companies are providing opportunities for refugees. Mohammed had his own upholstery business in Damascus before he fled the Syrian capital to Germany with his family.<sup>88</sup>

He ended up in Kiel and thanks to his skills as a textile engineer, Christian Lübke, the owner of Coastworxx, a company that makes sails for boats, offered him a part-time job that soon became a full-time one. Now Mohammed is managing Coastworxx's new line of business: sun awnings. His sons are also training with the company. Ahmet works part-time while doing a university degree in medical technology; Yousef is doing an apprenticeship in sail-making. Thanks to Mohammed and his family, as well as other refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, Coastworxx is finally able to expand capacity to meet demand after years of skills shortages.

The German federal government and the Chambers of Crafts, the umbrella body for trade associations, have also launched a scheme to train 10,000 young refugees and asylum seekers so that they can start a formal apprenticeship. Through the Perspectives for Young Refugees programme, the federal government funds regional vocational centres to provide a six-month preparatory programme that includes basic training in particular trades, as well as language and integration classes.

As with language training, digital technologies can also help refugees with their broader training needs. In the US, HigherAdvantage, a programme of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, offers online training modules on issues such as how to find and keep a job, how to prepare for a job interview, and what to expect in the US workplace.<sup>89</sup> In Germany, Bazar provides an online time bank for sharing skills.<sup>90</sup> For example, Mustafa helps Anna fixing her bike, which takes one hour.

Anna pays Mustafa one Time-Coin, with which Mustafa can receive one hour of German lessons from Gustav.

Kiron offers online training programmes for refugees and asylum seekers that they can convert into credit towards full university programmes once they have received protection.<sup>91</sup> It now has 41 partner universities in four countries, with 400 volunteers supporting 2,300 students. Kiron's aim is for refugees to start their studies

right away with online courses and finish their degree later offline at one of their partner universities.

Other initiatives focus on teaching refugees computer-programming skills. In Amsterdam, HackYourFuture provides coding classes. Of the 20 initial participants, 13 found developer jobs, according to Gijs Corstens, one of the group's founders.<sup>92</sup> In London, CodeYourFuture similarly provides a six-month intensive training course for ten refugees. Applicants were not required to have any coding experience but had to demonstrate intermediate English and complete a coding exercise before being accepted. Participants meet every Sunday for several hours and must work 20 to 30 hours a week on their assignments. At the end of the course, CodeYourFuture does its best to place the students in full-time employment, but as it the program launched recently, in October 2016, its success still requires more rigorous evaluation.

## MENTORING

Refugees often lack contacts who can advise them on how to learn job-related skills, find work and pursue a particular career. Counselling and providing information can increase refugees' chances of finding work.<sup>93</sup> Many countries provide job-search counselling and career guidance, with targeted help for refugees in Austria, Italy, Netherlands and Sweden. Information about local recruitment processes, job application procedures and work culture is particularly useful.

Better still, studies show that well-designed mentoring programmes tend to boost mentees' career and income.<sup>94</sup> Such programmes can make a big difference to refugees.<sup>95</sup> According to the OECD, these need to set clear aims toward getting mentees into work, and mentors need to be adequately trained and regularly monitored.

## ▲ RECOMMENDATION 10 WELL-DESIGNED MENTORING SCHEMES SHOULD BE DEVELOPED FOR ALL REFUGEES.

Mentoring schemes often target specifically skilled refugees, whose challenges a subsequent report will cover. However, some schemes provide broader assistance or target those seeking vocational work. Wir Zusammen, the coalition of German companies highlighted in Box 5, provides over 18,000 mentors to refugees in internships, apprenticeships and jobs with its affiliates. In the UK, TimeBank, a volunteering charity, trains volunteer mentors to help refugees and asylum seekers integrate into society. While the Time Together mentoring programme is not specifically oriented towards finding a job, employment among mentees rose from 5% at the beginning of their mentoring relationship to 47% at the end of it.<sup>96</sup>

Between 2010 and 2012, the Swedish government funded nine NGOs to develop vocational mentoring for refugees, with the aim of getting them into work. Mentees were matched to mentors based on the refugee's previous occupation, education and experience. A rigorous evaluation found that male mentees were subsequently more likely to be employed at higher salaries than otherwise.<sup>97</sup>

The Danish Centre for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity (KVINFO) runs a mentoring programme that connects mentors to female refugees and migrants, based on their education, professional experience or vocation.<sup>98</sup> The aim is to help mentees broaden their professional network, find jobs and develop their personal goals. Mentors and mentees set goals in their first meeting and work together for six to 12 months to meet them. KVINFO staff track progress and provide additional support where necessary. The programme, which has matched more than 8,000



mentoring pairs, is funded by the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration.<sup>99</sup>

In Australia, refugees themselves act as mentors to new arrivals. The Adult Multicultural Education Services' community guides programme provides settlement support to newly arrived refugees in their mother tongue. It is often mentors' first job in Australia.

The timely provision of bespoke, job-focused language and skills training, ideally on the job, and mentoring can equip refugees to start working. Readily employable refugees then need job opportunities, which the next section will consider.





▲ SECTION 5

# JOB OPPORTUNITIES

# JOB OPPORTUNITIES



## TOGETHER WITH THE RIGHT TO WORK AND APPROPRIATE SKILLS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS NEED JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

In loosely regulated, flexible labour markets, such as those in Canada and the US, where entry-level jobs are readily available, this is not generally a problem. However, in more highly regulated labour markets that privilege insiders at the expense of outsiders, this is a much bigger issue. If there is not the political will to open up the labour market, special measures may be needed to get refugees into work. However, this too may be politically controversial if refugees are seen to be getting special favours, and local workers fear wages will decrease. Dispersal policies, discrimination and job matching, are also significant issues.

### DISPERSAL

Governments often disperse refugees and asylum seekers across a country without taking account of the availability of local jobs.<sup>100</sup> They may wish to share the “burden” across the country. They may seek to avoid segregation (or conversely try to place refugees in ethnic clusters). They often put refugees where housing is cheap. However, studies show that refugees relocated based on the availability of local housing are less likely to be employed, tend to earn less and are more likely to be dependent on welfare than refugees who were not relocated.<sup>101</sup> Refugees who are free to move are more likely to find jobs.<sup>102</sup> And while segregation may be problematic, access to ethnic networks can boost employment.<sup>103</sup>

Australia, Austria, Canada (for government-assisted refugees), Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK

and the US disperse refugees without considering local employment conditions. Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Switzerland and the UK do the same for asylum seekers.<sup>104</sup>

### ▲ RECOMMENDATION 11

IF GOVERNMENTS DISPERSE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, THE AVAILABILITY OF LOCAL JOBS OUGHT TO BE A FACTOR IN WHERE THEY ARE RELOCATED – AND THOSE WHO CANNOT FIND WORK LOCALLY SHOULD BE FREE TO MOVE WITHOUT LOSING ACCESS TO TRAINING AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES.

Greece and Spain do not disperse refugees or asylum seekers. Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Portugal and Sweden factor job opportunities into their dispersal policies for refugees; Portugal and Sweden do so for asylum seekers. In Sweden, the government allocates refugees to various municipalities based mostly on job opportunities.<sup>105</sup> When they receive their residence permit, they are informed about job availabilities in a meeting with the public employment service. Refugees then move to localities that match their profile, based on their education level and work experience, local employment rates, the locality’s size, its concentrations of foreign-born people and the availability of housing.

### DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination against immigrants, people of different races and religions, and refugees in particular exists in all countries. While this takes many forms and is hard to measure, let alone compare across countries, there is plenty of evidence that it affects employment prospects. In Belgium, for instance, more than 60% of the agencies that provide cleaning and household services (and often employ racial minorities and migrants) were found to be receptive to discriminatory demands from clients.<sup>106</sup>



Field experiments in many countries show that people with foreign-sounding names are less likely to get a job interview than identical candidates with local names.<sup>107</sup> The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has gone further by coaching candidates with near-identical profiles, one a national and the other an immigrant or person of immigrant origin, to minimise differences in behaviour and attitudes that might affect employers' willingness to hire them. The candidates submit near-identical CVs and written applications and are coached to provide similar first impressions and performance in job interviews. Overall, ethnic-minority candidates faced discrimination a third of the time in Denmark and nearly half of the time in the Netherlands. Studies using the ILO methodology have found discrimination in many other countries too.<sup>108</sup>

Other ways of measuring discrimination include attitude surveys and discrimination complaints.<sup>109</sup> However, perceptions of discrimination vary, as does the willingness to report it. The number of complaints may be only the tip of the iceberg, and an increase may not necessarily signal a worsened climate, but rather an improved climate in which migrants feel more comfortable complaining. One can also try to draw inferences based on differential outcomes for locals and refugees, but this is tricky as many other factors may be involved, and critics may claim that differences are due to the (poor) unobserved characteristics of refugees.

Non-white, Muslim refugees may suffer more than most from discrimination since they are often singled out as targets in political discourse in many countries.

While all the countries covered in this report have laws prohibiting ethnic, racial and religious discrimination, these are not always equally enforced. A 2007 study

by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights of the then-25 EU member countries found that 12 applied no sanctions for breaching anti-discrimination laws. In countries that did, sanctions varied. The Netherlands saw one successful anti-discrimination case, where the employer faced a fine of €500 (\$570) and the complainant was awarded €250 (\$285), while the UK saw 95 such cases, with a maximum award to the complainant of £128,898 (\$166,4278) and a median award of £7,000 (\$9,030).<sup>110</sup>

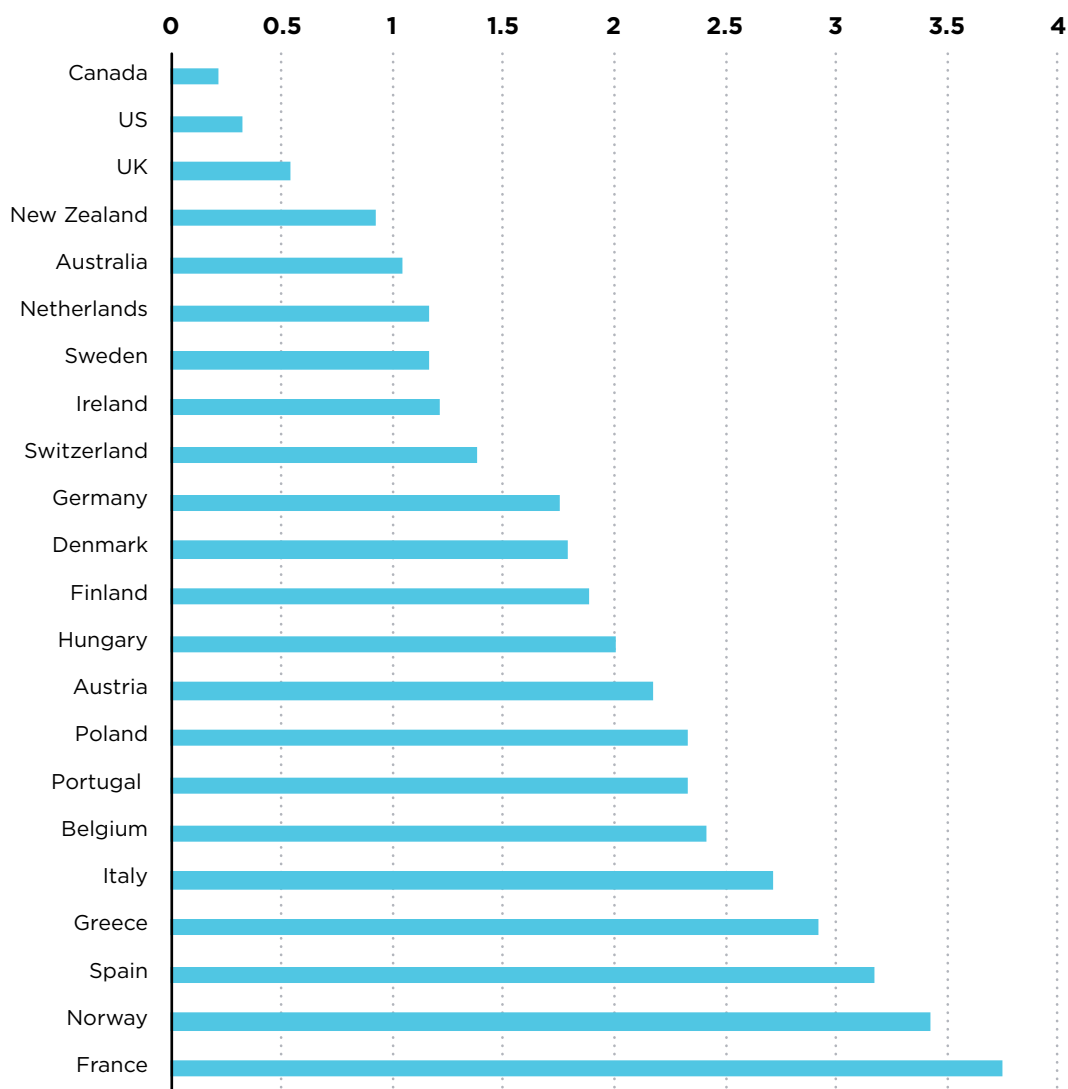
#### ▲ RECOMMENDATION 12 GOVERNMENTS NEED TO VIGOROUSLY ENFORCE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS AND INCREASE SANCTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS THAT BREACH THE LAW.

Practical measures, such as standardised job applications and anonymised CVs, may also help. Employers may also need more information about the benefits (and challenges) of hiring refugees and greater reassurance that they do not pose a threat. However, there is no silver bullet to tackle discrimination against refugees.

#### LABOUR-MARKET RULES

While some countries have job markets that are readily accessible to refugees, others have labour-market regulations and institutions that benefit insiders at the expense of outsiders, such as refugees, other migrants and young people. It is striking that even though the US provides very little help to newly arrived refugees, they tend to find jobs much faster there than in Norway, where support is very generous. The regulation of temporary employment, which often provides the first step into the labour market for refugees, is least restrictive in Canada and the US and most restrictive in Norway and France (see Chart 6).

▲ **CHART 6** | RESTRICTIVENESS OF REGULATION OF TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT\*



Source: OECD<sup>111</sup>

\*OECD index of regulatory restrictiveness, 0 is minimum, 6 is maximum

Broader research on the impact of excessively high minimum wages (or wage floors), excessive employment protection and other labour-market restrictions highlight their harmful impact on labour-market outsiders, as well as on the economy as a whole. Migrants' employment

rates tend to be higher in countries with low entry-level wages, lower employment protection and a less dualistic labour market.<sup>112</sup> Excessive employment protection makes it harder to find a job, especially for workers whose productivity is uncertain.<sup>113</sup>

**▲ RECOMMENDATION 13**  
**THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE REFUGEES’ ACCESS TO JOBS WOULD BE ECONOMY-WIDE REFORMS TO OPEN UP THE LABOUR MARKET, WHICH WOULD HELP ALL OUTSIDERS, INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE.**

In France, Emmanuel Macron was elected president in May 2017 with a mandate to open up the labour market. While his main stated aim is to lower youth unemployment, his proposed reforms could also benefit refugees. Labour-market reform need not require emulating US-style deregulated markets, which also have downsides such as insecurity and poverty pay, and for which Europe has little political appetite. The Danish “flexicurity” model provides little protection for specific jobs but involves yearly training to help workers bolster their skills and improve their future employability, as well as generous unemployment benefits.

**▲ RECOMMENDATION 14**  
**IN COUNTRIES WHERE THERE IS NO POLITICAL WILL TO REFORM LABOUR MARKETS IN GENERAL, GOVERNMENTS OUGHT TO TAKE SPECIFIC MEASURES TO LOWER THE COST OF HIRING REFUGEES, SUCH AS WAGE SUBSIDIES.**

In European countries where both refugee unemployment and the minimum wage are high, one option may be for governments to set a lower minimum wage for newly arrived refugees, as typically exists for young people, while they are undergoing training. In effect, this would be a temporarily lower minimum wage for new entrants to the labour market who are less productive and require more training. The German government is considering allowing employers to pay refugees who lack professional qualifications less than the minimum wage during a temporary internship period; the German employers association believes this option should be available for local workers too.<sup>114</sup> In Sweden, where there is no legal minimum wage but the wage floor set by collective bargaining between employers and

trade unions is among the highest in the world, LO, an umbrella body for blue-collar trade unions, has indicated that it would accept lower wages for unskilled workers for a short time if they were also given the equivalent of a high-school education.<sup>115</sup>

A better option is wage subsidies. These have been found to be particularly effective in boosting employment in Europe.<sup>116</sup> In the US – where, in 2009 and 2010, states provided a variety of subsidised employment programmes that targeted the unemployed with funding from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Fund – these tended to boost employment rates, more durably when they closely involved the private sector and in particular for women.<sup>117</sup> Looking more specifically at migrants, a meta-analysis of 33 empirical studies of active labour-market policies designed to boosted immigrants’ employment in various European countries concluded that wage subsidies were the most effective.<sup>118</sup>

Studies looking at refugees in particular confirm this. In Denmark, wage subsidies to private employers have been found to be the most successful means of boosting refugee employment.<sup>119</sup> Subsidising private-sector jobs for refugees reduced time on social assistance by ten months for women and 15 months for men.<sup>120</sup> In Norway too, wage subsidies provide the biggest boost to immigrant employment rates.<sup>121</sup>

In Sweden, newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers (and the long-term unemployed) can take up subsidised “new-start jobs”. These are typically low-skilled jobs in sectors such as hotels and restaurants, retail and healthcare. Beneficiaries are more likely to enter the labour market within three years, although the scheme may attract the most resourceful migrants in the beginning.<sup>122</sup>

Lowering the taxes and social-security contributions imposed on low-wage workers in general can also boost employment.<sup>123</sup> Decreasing welfare benefits may also speed job finding, though it can also cause hardship. In Denmark, the lowering of income transfers to refugees raised their employment rate after two years but made little difference to the least-employable refugees.<sup>124</sup> A San Diego study found that refugees assigned to the Wilson-Fish programme, who received lower cash transfers than those allocated to the Refugee Social Services programme, found jobs faster and more often.<sup>125</sup>

## JOB MATCHING

In all countries, matching refugees to jobs is a big issue. Refugees often lack information about job opportunities, while employers are often unaware of refugees' potential. Refugees tend to have more limited social and work networks than other migrants, let alone locals. As a Chadian refugee in France said, "I'm a journalist. But in this field, what matters most is the network.

Here it's dead; I can't work in journalism."<sup>126</sup> While ethnic networks may help those located in areas with an established immigrant community, refugees are often reliant on public employment services.

Private companies that make the most of digital technologies can often do a better job at matching people to jobs. Employment agencies such as Manpower and Adecco, job-listings sites such as Monster.co.uk and professional social-networking sites such as LinkedIn are among the many options for jobseekers in general. Studies find that temporary-agency employment programmes in Denmark are especially beneficial for migrants.<sup>127</sup>

In many countries – but not, as far as we know, the US – volunteers have also set up online services specifically to match refugees and asylum seekers to jobs (see Table 2). These are inexpensive to run, fast and easy to use, and much more flexible than traditional employment services.

▲ **TABLE 2** | DIGITAL PLATFORMS THAT CONNECT REFUGEES AND EMPLOYERS

	WEBSITE	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>			
Refugee Talent	<a href="http://www.refugeetalent.com">www.refugeetalent.com</a>	Job-matching platform	100 employers 300+ candidates
<b>AUSTRIA</b>			
Chancen Reich	<a href="http://www.chancenreich.org">www.chancenreich.org</a>	Careers fair for refugees	70 exhibitors, 3,500 visitors, 1,000+ job and training opportunities
RefugeesWork	<a href="http://www.refugeeswork.at">www.refugeeswork.at</a>	Job-matching platform	300 employers 6,000 candidates
Impact Hub Vienna, found!	<a href="https://vienna.impacthub.net/program/found/">https://vienna.impacthub.net/program/found/</a>	Incubator for ideas and initiatives to help refugees find jobs	
<b>CANADA</b>			
BC Refugees JobConnect	<a href="https://bcrefugeesjobconnect.ca">https://bcrefugeesjobconnect.ca</a>	Job-matching platform	Just started
<b>FINLAND</b>			
HBL Recommend a Refugee	<a href="https://welcome.hbl.fi/language/en/recommend-a-refugee/">https://welcome.hbl.fi/language/en/recommend-a-refugee/</a>	Job-matching platform	
<b>FRANCE</b>			
Action Emploi Réfugiés	<a href="http://www.actionemploirefugies.com">www.actionemploirefugies.com</a>	Job-matching platform	100 employers 2,500 candidates
<b>GERMANY</b>			
Hire Social	<a href="http://www.hire.social">www.hire.social</a>	Job-matching and mentoring platform	
Migrant Hire	<a href="http://www.migranthire.com">www.migranthire.com</a>	Job-matching and training platform	4,000 jobs 6,000 candidates
Workeer	<a href="http://www.workeer.de">www.workeer.de</a>	Job-matching platform	2,425 employers 3,547 candidates
<b>UK</b>			
Breaking Barriers	<a href="http://www.breaking-barriers.co.uk">www.breaking-barriers.co.uk</a>	Job training workshops, work placements	

Source: own research, organisation websites



**▲ RECOMMENDATION 15**  
**PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, NGOS AND**  
**OTHERS SHOULD ENCOURAGE REFUGEES**  
**AND EMPLOYERS TO MAKE MORE USE**  
**OF ONLINE JOB-MATCHING SITES.**

Probably the first and largest job-matching site for refugees is Workeer, which was founded in Germany in 2015. Refugees create a profile, which they can use to apply directly for vacancies advertised on the site, and which allow them to be contacted by employers. This process is much simpler and faster than filling in forms and waiting for weeks to hear from traditional employment services. Sending a link to a profile is also simpler than writing CVs and application letters, a process with which many refugees are not familiar. Workeer's platform links to other initiatives supporting refugees across the country, which has helped increase its reach. It has also hired a refugee intern to develop a relationship with the refugee community and promote the service with refugee groups and on social media.

Migrant Hire, another job-matching site in Germany, was co-founded by Hussein Shaker, a refugee from Syria

with an IT background who knew firsthand the frustration of trying to find a job.<sup>128</sup> His community networking mustered 1,000 sign-ups at launch. Initially focused on the IT sector, it soon expanded to all occupations and sectors. More than 6,000 refugees now use it. Migrant Hire found that many companies wanted to hire refugees, but couldn't find them. German job centres could not deliver the right people to them; the system was overwhelmed with demands from both companies and refugees. Having determined that most refugees were not ready yet for the job market, Migrant Hire now also connects refugees to proper education and non-profit partners.

There is plenty that governments can do to increase job opportunities for refugees: change dispersal policies, tackle discrimination, open up labour markets and provide temporary wage subsidies. Online job-matching sites can complement the efforts of public employment services. But businesses also need to step up to the plate.

## ▲ BOX 6 | FROM RAGS TO HAUTE COUTURE

Suleiman (not his real name) was thrown out of his home in Ghazni, Afghanistan at the age of 11 because his father could not afford to support him.<sup>129</sup> Forced to work for a living, he learned how to sew. “My head did not even reach the cutting board when I started working,” he recalls. As a Hazara, a persecuted Persian-speaking minority in Afghanistan, life became too dangerous for him living alone with no adult protection. At the age of 17, he moved to Iran where he worked as a tailor in his uncle’s shop. There he learned to make patterns, fit suits, make adjustments and embroider. But having no stability and knowing that he could not return to Afghanistan, he went to Norway and then to France in early 2015. In Paris, he was homeless for six months until he received his refugee status.

Fortunately, a social assistant at one of France’s refugee agencies contacted Action Emploi Réfugiés (AER), a social enterprise whose online platform matches refugees with employers. AER was looking for people to work with a small fashion label and they took on Suleiman straight away. He worked making patterns for individual clients as well as embroidering shirts. In 2016 the Welcome collection hired Suleiman for their first collection, which gained a lot of press and interest from the fashion industry. Shortly afterwards, he was contacted by an haute couture

label to work for them full-time. He is on an indefinite contract, and that has enabled him to rent stable accommodation in Paris.

Suleiman’s success story is one of many at AER, which matches refugees with employers in three ways. Anyone can post job ads on its Facebook page, which has around 2,000 users. Jobs posted there are usually short-term and one-off, and these get the highest response rate.

Refugees can also post their CVs on its website. They are matched with employers typically offering shorter-term jobs by key words. AER has a database of around 400 refugees’ CVs and 50 businesses, mostly smaller ones that find it hard to fill vacancies in areas such as care for the elderly and young children, restaurant work, agricultural work and factory work. AER also provides a recruitment service for larger businesses (10-12 so far) seeking specialised skills and expertise. They have around 200 refugees’ CVs so far.

Overall, 2,500 refugees and 100 employers have registered with AER. In a bit over a year, they have matched refugees to 150 jobs. Sectors include (in descending order): outreach workers for NGOs, interpreters, care workers, architects, farm workers, fashion, interior design, massage and physiotherapy.

▲ SECTION 6

# OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES FOR BUSINESSES

# OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES FOR BUSINESSES



**WHILE GOVERNMENTS NEED TO ALLOW BUSINESSES TO HIRE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, AND SHOULD ALSO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE TRAINING AND SUPPORT, BUSINESSES THEMSELVES CAN TAKE THE INITIATIVE – NOT JUST FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REASONS, BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE.**

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**▲ RECOMMENDATION 16**  
FOR BOTH CSR AND BUSINESS REASONS, COMPANIES OUGHT TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN RECRUITING REFUGEES.

The CSR case for hiring refugees is simple. Companies want to be seen playing a role in responding to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Assisting refugees can earn goodwill from governments and consumers, and help attract, retain and motivate employees, as the Babbel case in Box 4 illustrated.

However, there may also be hostility to perceived special treatment for refugees from local workers. Starbucks has faced criticism for seeking to hire refugees rather than US veterans, even though it continues its long-running programme to hire veterans. Businesses may need reassurance that they are doing the right thing.

There is also a strong business case for hiring refugees. Refugees are typically hard-working and highly motivated. Skilled refugees can fill skills shortages, while less-skilled ones can fill jobs that locals no longer want to do. A more diverse workforce tends to boost creativity

and innovation and can help tap new markets both domestically and abroad.

The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration, a non-profit in the Netherlands, has worked with businesses to calculate a return on investment from hiring refugees and other migrants. While in one case this was negative, in the other three cases the return was highly positive: 44%, 110% and 706%.<sup>130</sup>

However, businesses may face challenges in hiring refugees. They may lack information about refugees' right to work and be uncertain about whether asylum seekers and refugees granted temporary protection will be allowed to stay. They may not know how and where to recruit suitable candidates. They may be reluctant to hire refugees who lack local work experience and local qualifications. Language and cultural barriers are a further issue. They may also worry about the psychological and health problems faced by traumatised refugees.

This report has highlighted ways in which governments and NGOs can help address these issues – and partnerships with, and among, businesses have a crucial role. Websites and brochures can answer FAQs and provide concrete examples and practical guidance on hiring refugees to address information deficits. One-stop shops or hotlines, such as the Danish one to help businesses find suitable refugee employees, are particularly valuable for smaller firms.<sup>131</sup>

Businesses can turn to NGOs in the US, public employment services in Europe, temporary employment agencies and new online job-matching services to find and help train suitable candidates. Since 2009, Chipotle has hired more than 100 refugees at its restaurants in

partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which evaluates how well candidates' skills and personality match the company's needs and culture.<sup>132</sup> Applicants selected by the IRC are seven times more likely to be qualified and hired – which is good for both the candidate and Chipotle.

Starbucks is partnering with the IRC and UNHCR to find suitable candidates and provide skills training.<sup>133</sup> In response to President Trump's first executive order suspending the entry of refugees into the US, it announced plans to hire 10,000 refugees in its coffee shops worldwide.<sup>134</sup> It aims to recruit 2,500 of those in Europe, which would represent 8% of its current European workforce of 30,000.<sup>135</sup>

There are several ways of addressing language issues. One option is to use interpreters initially; providing language classes can also be helpful. Seatply, a Montreal-based plywood company, offers free language lessons to newly arrived Syrian refugees who do not speak English or French. The company – which was founded by Levon Afeyan, who arrived in Canada forty years ago as a refugee from the civil war in Lebanon – has taken on a dozen Syrians, with plans to take on more.<sup>136</sup>

L&R Pallet, a Denver-based producer and recycler of wooden shipping pallets, came up with an innovative solution to its communication issues.<sup>137</sup> Eighty-five of its 130 employees are refugees, mostly Burmese, Congolese and Nepalese. "We discovered that the workers spoke 17 different dialects and none of them could talk to each other," says owner and CEO James Ruder. "So we made a huge flow chart and found that we had three common dialects, and we put coloured labels on people's hard hats, so we knew what languages they spoke. We also figured out how to communicate with

drawings and pictures." The company now also offers free English lessons after work. L&R previously had a low employee retention rate, but since it started hiring refugees in 2013 annual staff turnover has fallen from 300% (that is, the average employee remained on the job for only four months) to 15%. Profits have soared, and the quality of their products has improved, according to Mr Ruder.

While there is an initial cost that wage subsidies and other government support may help offset, business investment in training refugees tends to be repaid through higher productivity and reduced staff turnover. In Germany, the Boston Consulting Group calculates that whereas hiring and training local workers costs €18,000 in the first year, recruiting and training a refugee costs €7,500 more – that is 40% extra.<sup>138</sup> But thanks to government subsidies and increased productivity from filling jobs in shortage areas, the payback period for the initial investment is typically only a year.

Starwood, a hotel company, hires refugees for a variety of jobs, from housekeeping to management. Its foundation is piloting new hospitality training centres in Dallas and San Diego, where refugees will be able to learn skills such as dealing with customers. "We do sometimes need to increase upfront training for our refugee recruits," says Kristin Meyer, Starwood's associate director of community partnerships and global citizenship. "But the dedication and passion they bring to the job definitely outweighs that investment."<sup>139</sup>

Cultural orientation programmes for both refugees and local employees can help address integration issues. IKEA Switzerland is offering 108 paid six-month internships to refugees over three years from June 2016 in its nine furniture stores in the country. These include cultural awareness training for both refugees



and their co-workers provided by external experts. HR departments work with local authorities to recruit the right candidates.

Through their internship, refugees gain familiarity with Swiss working culture, make contact with local colleagues, improve their language skills and receive a reference letter that helps them to apply for jobs in Switzerland. Among the first 18 interns, six found a job at IKEA by applying for vacant posts. In response to interest from other companies and stakeholders, IKEA has also compiled a toolkit on how the project was set up, lessons so far and tips on employing refugees.

Sometimes companies gain by taking a risk. Overstockart, an online store based in Kansas City, learned about the IRC programme when a refugee from Eritrea applied for a warehouse job. “It was a little bit of a leap of faith,” says CEO David Sasson; there were no references to call. After a difficult start – the refugee had not worked for years and did not initially understand the pace of work expected – he became a great employee, and the company decided to recruit more refugees. Of the business’s 15 employees, five are now refugees.<sup>140</sup>

Efforts to do good can also end up being good business.

The Magdas Hotel in Vienna was set up in 2015 by a charity called Caritas to employ refugees, who make up 20 of its 30 staff.<sup>141</sup> Two years on, the Austrian hotel is on track to break even and has received very high reviews through online platforms.<sup>142</sup> Its multilingual staff from 16 countries are an added benefit. Many come from countries with a culture of hospitality and are well-suited to the hotel business. The hotel has overcome its teething troubles. Some employees had been too traumatised to work effectively. Training is time-consuming; many staff lack formal work experience. Selection criteria now emphasise applicants’ attitude, rather than experience. While a social worker visits weekly, employees need to be able to cope with anything a shift throws at them.

Some governments seek to recognise (and thus encourage) businesses’ efforts. Denmark awards annual integration prizes to companies that assist refugees and other migrants. Canada rewards firms that help refugees to find a first job with a national Refugee Employment Award. That is a good example for other countries.

▲ SECTION 7

# CONCLUSION



# CONCLUSION



**THIS REPORT HAS PRESENTED A WEALTH OF INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE ON THE CHALLENGES THAT REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FACE IN FINDING WORK AND 16 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW THOSE CAN BEST BE OVERCOME, TOGETHER WITH BEST PRACTICES AND PROMISING APPROACHES. HOWEVER, MUCH MORE DATA AND RESEARCH ARE NEEDED ON HOW BEST TO GET REFUGEES INTO WORK.**

Canada is most successful in getting refugees into work quickly, with the US close behind. Canada allows refugees and asylum seekers to work immediately, provides adequate training and proper work-placement schemes through its decentralised settlement services, and has a flexible labour market that provides plenty of entry-level jobs for refugees. It also has a welcoming culture for refugees, with bold leadership from the top from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

European countries that have highly regulated labour markets need to work harder to get refugees into jobs. Asylum seekers often languish in limbo for years, while refugees tend to need much more training than elsewhere to obtain entry-level jobs. They may also struggle against discrimination and a labour market that is hostile to unproven newcomers whose productivity is initially low. Leaving refugees and asylum seekers

languishing unemployed is a waste of their potential, an unnecessary welfare burden and a source of political resentment.

Within Europe, there are plenty of good practices to emulate, however. Germany has made admirable efforts to speed up its asylum process; Sweden and Norway allow asylum seekers to work during the process; Spain assesses their skills and provides training quickly. Sweden systematically assesses refugees' skills and provides them with an individually tailored strategy for finding a job. On-the-job language and vocational training tend to be most effective; Denmark's IGU programme looks particularly promising. The Wir Zusammen initiative by German companies is providing much-needed internships, apprenticeships, mentoring and jobs. Britain is doing more than most to tackle discrimination, while Sweden is making job availability a key factor of its refugee-dispersal policies. France's proposed labour-market reforms are likely to benefit refugees as well as locals, while temporary wage subsidies are effective at getting refugees into work in both Europe and North America.

In many countries technology companies are stepping into the breach, providing free or tailored language courses and broader training online, while volunteers' apps are helping to match refugees to jobs and assist with their training needs. There is scope to expand their activities and indeed for government agencies to make better use of digital technologies to deliver services faster, with greater flexibility and more cost-effectively.

Many businesses are also stepping up. While many are primarily motivated by CSR reasons, the business case

for recruiting refugees is equally strong. In partnership with governments and NGOs, challenges can be overcome and opportunities seized.

Refugees have a huge amount to contribute to the society that welcomes them and the organisations that hire them. It is in everyone's interests to make the most of their talents.



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