



REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

Working with British Businesses to
Employ Refugees

2020



WHO WE ARE



Sona Circle is a networking and recruitment platform, enabling refugees in the UK to locate jobs and support services. Created in response to the 2015 global refugee crisis, Sona Circle addresses two significant issues faced by refugees in the UK:

- » **Securing employment opportunities**
- » **Locating support services**

In 2015, the world witnessed the worst forcible displacement of people since World War II. Four million Syrian people were displaced due to conflict in the region, as were an increasing number from Africa due to violence and political instability. In 2017, there were approximately 120,000 refugees in the UK and 37,453 people sought asylum in the UK in 2018.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

Sona Circle partners with companies in the UK to create employment opportunities for refugees within their organisations. Our service provides a valuable resource to organisations who not only wish to hire a diverse workforce, but are socially conscious and wish to make a positive impact within their communities.

Sona Circle also helps to prepare refugees for work in the UK through the Sona Circle 4-week refugee employment training programme, which is discussed further on the next page. Our process ensures refugees have the best opportunity to succeed in the UK job market.

BUSINESS BENEFITS OF HIRING REFUGEES

- » Access to a more diverse talent pipeline
- » Access to skilled and qualified candidates
- » Greater cultural awareness amongst hiring managers

BUSINESS BENEFITS OF TAKING ACTION

- » Build employee skills such as communication, empathy and coaching
- » Provide corporate volunteering opportunities for staff
- » Develop a talent pipeline to fill vacancies
- » Increase employee awareness of different cultures, helping to reduce unconscious bias
- » Introduce new and valuable skills, capacities and contributions

REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Sona Circle 4-week refugee employment training programme focuses on core areas to ensure refugees are fully prepared to enter the UK job market.

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

- » Language: gauging the level of English language refugees have and placing candidates into 3 groups (beginner, intermediate and proficient), and training them accordingly, working alongside ESOL language partners
- » Basic greetings and common words used in the professional workplace
- » Email writing
- » CV formulation

WEEK 2: LAWS AND ETHICS

- » Workplace ethics and laws
- » Laws against sexual harassment, theft, violence etc at the workplace
- » Workplace rights, and any unique rights refugees have at the workplace
- » Hierarchy of command at workplaces and conduct with other members of staff
- » Behaviours which are unique to the British workplace which employees should be aware of
- » Rules and regulations at the workplace

WEEK 3: CULTURAL INTEGRATION

- » Cultural immersion programme
- » Introduction to different regions of Britain and transportation
- » Introduction to the British government, politics and society
- » A basic introduction to British laws and regulations

WEEK 4: ROLE PREPARATION

- » Specific job requirements of the companies we are hiring for
- » Company background and role description
- » Company culture and values
- » Interview preparation

GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT



A person with refugee status in the UK has been recognised as a refugee in accordance with the legal definition outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Some refugees are recognised in the UK after applying for asylum here while others are resettled to the UK after being recognised as refugees in another country. Refugees are usually given five years' leave to remain, after which they can apply to stay in the UK permanently.

INTEGRATION THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

One of the key contributors to refugee integration is meaningful employment. Employment enables self-sufficiency and provides social connections as refugees are able to use their skills and experience in a new context. Yet many refugees in the UK struggle to gain employment, or find themselves in jobs that do not match their skills and experience.

UK businesses are beginning to respond to this, adopting refugee-friendly employment practices to address core business challenges including:

- » Recruitment and retention
- » Diversity
- » Skills gaps
- » Employee engagement
- » Purpose

HOW DOES THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION DEFINE A REFUGEE?

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. They cannot return home or are afraid to do so. In the UK, refugee status is given to anyone that can prove to the UK Government that they meet this definition.

85% of refugees live in developing countries

LEBANON

hosts the greatest number of refugees relative to its population size

1/4

people in Lebanon are refugees

VS

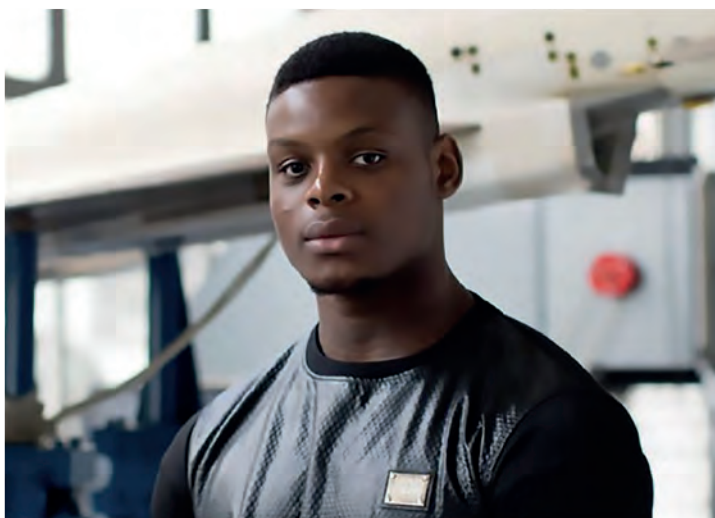
1.8/1000

people in the UK are refugees

This guide builds on the UNHCR and OECD global action plan to boost refugee employment, and research commissioned by the Refugee Employment Network in the UK.

It provides advice tailored to the UK context.

GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT



CAN REFUGEES WORK IN THE UK?

Anyone with refugee status in the UK has the legal right to work. Further guidance for human resources teams is provided at the end of this guide, including the different legal definitions, and rights and entitlements for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Like any group of people, refugees come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Some are highly educated and have worked in skilled professions before fleeing their home country, while others may have low levels of education.

Others will have experience in manual work, or a range of transferable skills – meaning businesses from all sectors can benefit from refugee- friendly employment.

One study amongst adult refugees in the UK found two thirds had previously been in employment, self-employment or study. Data from the UK Labour Force Survey also shows that:

31% of asylum-seekers in the UK left education after the age of 20 which compares with 23% of those born in the UK.

While 78% of UK nationals are in employment, only 56% of refugees have found work. There are similar differences in the unemployment rate which is estimated at 18% for refugees, three times higher than that of the UK-born.

A recent study amongst organisations supporting refugees into employment in the UK identified the top barriers refugees face.

- 1 English language
- 2 Employers' recognition of skills and experience
- 3 Personal circumstances (e.g. past trauma or low confidence)
- 4 Public and employer perceptions of refugees
- 5 A lack of support due to limited employment support infrastructure
- 6 Practical barriers (e.g. childcare, transport, accommodation)

As the Global Compact on Refugees sets out, a cross-society approach is needed to help refugees overcome these barriers in order to access employment and make a contribution to the UK's economy. Employers can play a vital role through refugee-friendly employment.

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Despite having the skills, the experience and qualifications, most refugees struggle to gain employment.

BUSINESS BENEFITS OF HIRING REFUGEES

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Due to high employment rates in the UK, vacancies are at a record high, with employers struggling to fill roles, particularly in sectors with large numbers of entry level jobs. Despite wanting to find work where they can use their skills and experience, many refugees struggle to find employment. By adopting principles of refugee-friendly employment your business can access a pipeline of diverse talent for roles at every skill level.

A survey of German employers found that 80% of those that had hired refugees were broadly or fully satisfied with their work. In the United States, 73% of employers surveyed reported a higher retention rate for refugees than for other employees.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is good for business. Teams that rate highly for ethnic and cultural diversity are 33% more likely to outperform competitors on profitability. It has also been shown that diversity leads to 57% better collaboration and 19% greater retention rates.

Refugees are not a homogenous group, representing a wide range of nationalities and cultural backgrounds that could help to diversify thinking and attract new talent within any business.

Deloitte surveyed 305 Syrian refugees in Europe and found 38% have university education and one third were previously employed in either skilled work or the professional services industry.

"Business has a responsibility to get involved and support refugees to integrate into society – to make a positive change, government, charity and business have to work together. Employment is a really important part of the picture and can bring business benefits such as increasing the diversity of your workforce and addressing skills gaps."

- Karen Higgins, Head of Sustainability, Grant Thornton UK LLP

Creating opportunities for employees to interact with refugees can also be beneficial both for reducing unconscious bias that can hamper workplace diversity, and can help to improve integration for a cohesive workforce.

ADDRESSING SKILLS GAPS

Refugees have a range of skills and experience, including proficiency in different languages. Research published by Nuffield Foundation shows that nearly half of the refugees surveyed (45%) already held a qualification before coming to the UK, and many have previous experience working as professionals. In addition to these professional skills, many refugees have overcome significant adversity and developed an adaptability beneficial for a range of roles.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Targeted initiatives to support refugees into employment can offer staff development opportunities, for example through participating in workplace 'buddying' schemes. Employees learn from those they are supporting, developing soft skills such as communication and empathy. Involving staff in these activities can also help employees to feel more engaged, which in turn has a positive impact on staff retention.

Business in the Community research amongst 40 companies running targeted employment programmes for disadvantaged groups found that 90% reported benefits to their existing workforce.

PURPOSE

More and more businesses are moving away from traditional philanthropy towards having a core purpose that addresses societal challenges. This is influenced by consumer and customer behaviour, as well as changing attitudes about the role of business in society. In an era of mistrust, citizens are looking to business to not only 'do less harm' but actively be a force for good in their communities.

60% of millennials want to join companies with a 'purpose' that is embedded in the business.

Responding to the challenges faced by refugees worldwide is unlikely to be the core purpose of your business. However, addressing refugee situations is widely considered to be one of the biggest social challenges of our time. There is a business case for the private sector to be involved in the solution and encouraging refugee-friendly employment is one way businesses can take action.

A GOOD PLACE TO START

As your business sets out to become a refugee-friendly employer, there is some important groundwork to be done which will help to enable change in your business.

1 UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE

Raise awareness amongst colleagues about refugees and the opportunity for your business to respond. Share this guide and consider organising a training workshop for colleagues to bust some myths and drive engagement.

2 ALIGN YOUR FOCUS TO YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS AND PURPOSE

Factors such as your business' size, sector and location will all determine where you should focus your efforts. You should also review any existing employability or employment programmes that your business offers and consider where adaptations may be needed to open these up to refugees.

3 FIND A PARTNER THAT CAN SUPPORT YOU TO ACHIEVE YOUR AIMS

Organisations supporting refugees have a great deal of expertise and knowledge of the people they support and their situation in the UK, and run a wide range of programmes to support refugees to gain employment. With the focus areas for your business identified, you will be better placed to identify the right organisation(s) for your business to work with. As a business you can also bring important expertise and understanding of the market to make your collaboration with refugee-supporting organisations more effective.

4 ENGAGE YOUR LEADERS TO CHAMPION THE WORK

Securing the support of a leader within the business early on – through events, training and impact reports – will be beneficial as you take action.

INSPIRE AND PREPARE REFUGEES FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK

Refugees have a range of valuable skills and experience, however many will be unfamiliar with UK culture and the labour market. Employers can provide stepping stones for refugees to move closer to employment.

DELIVER WORK PREPARATION ACTIVITIES

Refugees who have recently arrived in the UK are likely to have been out of work for some time. Those who have been here longer may have struggled for years to find employment in the UK despite having qualifications and experience in their home countries.

Activities can be delivered in partnership with organisations supporting refugees, and might include:

- » Confidence building
- » Interview preparation
- » Workplace visits
- » Training on workplace culture in the UK

TOP TIP

It is important to recognise the cultural differences many refugees entering the UK workplace for the first time will face. Allow time to discuss these and align expectations focusing on communication style, punctuality, and workers' rights and entitlements.

EMBED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

Research amongst refugees across Europe has shown that language ability is closely linked with employment outcomes. In the UK, refugees can access English language tuition, funded through the Adult Education Budget, if they are unemployed and looking for work.

Availability of courses can vary, and many refugees and providers report that practical and vocationally focused language learning opportunities are also important in the context of finding work.

84%

of Syrian refugees surveyed by Deloitte cited language ability as a barrier to employment.

Integrating formal ESOL training within work-preparation activities has been found to be very effective, but activities which allow for the development of conversational English can also help to build confidence.

- » Develop work-preparation activities for refugees which embed sector-based English language
- » Ensure existing work-preparation activities are accessible by embedding or adding an element of English language training
- » Engage business volunteers in mentoring to improve language skills through conversation

INSPIRE AND PREPARE REFUGEES FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK

PROVIDE GOOD QUALITY WORK PLACEMENTS

A lack of UK work experience is often cited by refugees as a barrier to gaining employment. Work placements, internships and training programmes can provide refugees, who may be disadvantaged by a standard application process, the opportunity to demonstrate the aptitude and attitude needed for a role.

TOP TIP

Your business may decide to develop a work placement programme targeting refugees, or make adjustments to existing programmes to ensure they are accessible for refugees.

- » Partner with organisations supporting refugees to create a referral pipeline for your work placements.
- » Organise induction training or appoint a buddy to help participants settle in quickly, making sure that important instructions are understood.
- » Ensure participants are given a variety of work for them to do, rather than simply shadowing.
- » De-brief participants once the placement has ended and support them to develop an employment action plan.

HIRING REFUGEES

CREATING A REFUGEE-FRIENDLY RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Standard recruitment processes can create barriers for many jobseekers. This section outlines principles of refugee-friendly recruitment that will help your business break down some of these barriers for refugees.

REVIEW THE LEVEL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIRED FOR ALL ROLES

Job descriptions which specify a 'good level' of English can be off-putting for refugees still developing their language skills. For some roles an ability to understand and communicate in English will be essential, but others may allow for a degree of flexibility.

- » Review the level of English needed for a role and be specific about this in the job description and advert.
- » Consider whether key instructions (such as health and safety) could be translated.
- » Be open to proposals from refugees to bring an interpreter or facilitator for the job interview.

MAKE USE OF TRAINEESHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships and traineeships which provide training on the job can also enable refugees to learn new skills and qualifications, or adapt their experience for a new sector. Unlike other migrants, refugees are not subject to the three-year residency requirement which often applies to apprenticeship eligibility.

- » Offer traineeships and apprenticeships and review entry requirements to ensure they are accessible to refugees.

SUPPORT REFUGEES TO TRANSFER QUALIFICATIONS GAINED IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY

A survey of Syrian refugees conducted by Deloitte found that a third of respondents had been employed in either skilled work or the professional service industry in Syria. Though wanting to find work that fits their existing skills, the majority of those in employment were working in manual or unskilled work.

- » Provide assistance to refugee applicants to verify their qualifications.
- » Work with your regulatory or industry body to identify and address the blockers for refugees seeking to translate their qualifications.

TOP TIP

NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centre) provides an official source of information on international education and training systems and wide-ranging international qualifications and skills attained from outside the UK.

<https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/>

GROW

ENABLE REFUGEES TO THRIVE IN THE WORKPLACE

The barriers refugees face gaining employment can continue to make it difficult to progress. Refugees are more likely to be in work below their formal education level and earn 59% less per hour than those born in the UK.

Building a working environment which enables refugees to thrive will help your business capitalise on the skills and experience refugees can offer.

BUSINESS BENEFITS FOR ADOPTING THESE PRINCIPLES

- » Reduce recruitment costs by providing progression pathways to retain staff
- » Improve employee engagement through mentoring opportunities
- » Upskill existing workforce to learn other languages

PROVIDE PROGRESSION PATHWAYS

It is important for your business to understand the career ambitions of any refugees you employ and provide additional support where needed.

- » Define and communicate progression pathways for all roles, with incremental progression steps where possible.
- » Develop an internal mentoring scheme for any refugees you recruit.
- » Ensure progression opportunities are equally accessible for part time and flexible workers.
- » Ensure that training is accessible for all employees regardless of shift patterns, travel and location.
- » Deliver a range of training, which could include bite-sized sessions and softer skills.

GROW

HELP REFUGEES TO IMPROVE THEIR ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

Low levels of English language can prevent refugees from progressing within the workplace, increasing the likelihood of becoming stuck in low-paid or low-skilled work.

- » Provide English language training for staff. You could arrange for a tutor to come into the workplace, or provide access to English language training online.
- » Run language lunch clubs for refugees to improve language skills through conversation and help other staff members to learn new languages.

PROMOTE INCLUSION AT ALL LEVELS, EMPHASISING THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS

Refugees represent a wide range of nationalities, cultures and religions. Ensuring everyone in your business values diversity and feels comfortable to bring their whole self to work will benefit everyone in your business and help refugees grow within the workplace and integrate in society.

TOP TIP

Some refugees may feel there is stigma attached to their refugee status, while others may not feel able to share information about their background with colleagues. This will vary from person to person, and is a decision that must be made by the individual.

The following pointers may be particularly helpful for helping refugees to integrate within your business:

- » Make sure internal communications are easy to understand.
- » Make accommodation for religious holidays or customs.
- » Set up an internal Cultural Awareness Network to celebrate and raise awareness of different cultures and faith backgrounds.
- » Deliver unconscious bias training for all employees, not only for hiring managers.
- » Engage senior management to ensure the rationale behind hiring refugees is understood and communicated.
- » Offer training to both supervisors and staff on how they can support refugees.
- » Provide incoming refugees with clear information on company policies and work habits.

There are many areas to consider here, and Business in the Community has a range of resources and can offer bespoke advice to employers on diversity in the workplace. For more information visit:

<https://race.bitc.org.uk>

FAQs

WHAT DOES THE HR TEAM NEED TO KNOW?

Anyone who is granted permission to remain in the UK as a refugee or who is granted humanitarian protection has unrestricted access to the labour market. A refugee may demonstrate their work entitlement through their Biometric Residence Permit or Immigration Status Document (an older form of document issued to refugees and certain other categories of migrant prior to the introduction of the Biometric Residence Permit).

A refugee can simply demonstrate their right to work in the same way as a non-EEA national. Full details are provided on Gov.uk in the Right to Work Checks – Employer Guidance <https://bit.ly/2175xmc>

All refugees issued with a Biometric Residence Permit are able to use the Home Office online checking service to evidence their right to work. <https://www.gov.uk/view-right-to-work>

Alternatively, you can check the refugee's documents in person. <https://bit.ly/1qtUfVh>

If the refugee cannot show you any documents because of an outstanding appeal, review or application with the Home Office you can use the Home Office Employer Checking Service to confirm their right to work. <https://bit.ly/1Aqa6h8>

Refugees and people with humanitarian protection may not find it easy to provide references because of the circumstances which brought them to the United Kingdom, and the qualifications they hold may not seem comparable to UK qualifications.

However, refugees are able to seek a "Statement of Comparability" for the qualifications that they hold from the UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC).

<https://www.naric.org.uk/naric>

CAN I PRIORITISE REFUGEES IN RECRUITMENT?

In any recruitment you should offer the job to whichever candidate is most suitable. If however you have two equally suitable candidates, you can choose a candidate who has a protected characteristic over one who does not if they're both suitable for the job and you think that people with that characteristic:

- » are under-represented in the workforce, profession or industry
- » suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic (for example people from a certain ethnic group are not often given jobs in your sector)

You cannot choose a candidate who is not as suitable for the job just because they have a protected characteristic.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH ORGANISATION MY BUSINESS SHOULD PARTNER WITH?

There are many different organisations supporting refugees throughout the UK beyond those referenced in this guide. At a local level, Jobcentres can help connect you with local partners working with employers.

SONA CIRCLE PARTNERS



The UK Refugee Council



Manchester Refugee
Support Network



Refugee Action



The Entrepreneurial
Refugee Network



Ashley Community
Housing



Breadwinners



Transitions London



Code Door



Code Your Future



UnLtd: The Foundation
for Social Entrepreneurs



Renaisi

ANNEX

Some types of immigration status in the UK and associated entitlements to work

STATUS	DESCRIPTION	CAN THIS PERSON WORK?
REFUGEE LEAVE	Refugee leave is a form of immigration status. Asylum-seekers who meet the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention are entitled to recognition as a refugee and a grant of refugee leave.	Yes
HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION	Humanitarian protection is a form of immigration status. It is granted to a person with a need for protection but who does not meet the criteria for refugee status.	Yes
ASYLUM-SEEKER	A person who has made a request to be recognised as a refugee in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and is waiting for a decision as to whether or not they are a refugee.	Not usually. After 12 months of waiting for a decision, and where that delay is through no fault of their own, asylum-seekers can apply for permission to work, which, if granted, allows them to apply for roles listed on the Government's Shortage Occupation List.
DISCRETIONARY LEAVE (DL)	DL is a form of immigration status granted to those whose situation falls outside the Immigration Rules, but the Home Office decides there are nonetheless exceptional and/or compassionate reasons for allowing them to remain here. Examples include victims of trafficking and those with serious medical conditions.	Usually. Discretionary leave would normally give the person legal right to live and work in the UK. Sometimes the condition of no recourse to public funds is attached to this status.
INDEFINITE LEAVE TO REMAIN/ ENTER (ILR/ILE)	ILR /ILE are both forms of immigration status granted which allow the person to permanently reside in the UK. ILR is granted to those who have been in the UK for a specified amount of time. Individuals with refugee leave or humanitarian protection are generally able to apply for ILR after they have held that status for 5 years. Some resettled refugees to the UK are granted ILR on arrival to the UK.	Yes
LEAVE OUTSIDE THE RULES (LOTR)	LOTR is leave outside the Immigration Rules, on the basis of compelling compassionate grounds (that are not related to family and private life, medical or protection matters).	Not usually. Most grants of LOTR will be for a single short period of limited leave to enter or remain. The conditions specified by the Home Office for such leave normally include no recourse to public funds, no work and no study.