

Avenues to employment

Employment provides a fantastic route to integration, helps people to improve their language skills and social networks, and of course provides greater financial independence.

However, refugees can face barriers to obtaining employment which you will need to help them overcome. It is important that both you and the refugees themselves are realistic about the time it may take to obtain employment, what sort of roles will be achievable in the first instance, and what steps they need to take to make themselves employable.

You may need to manage expectations of both the refugees and group members to avoid disappointment if finding work takes longer than anticipated. It is important that you help refugees to focus on the progress they have made towards employment, such as obtaining voluntary work or learning English, and help maintain their motivation and self-respect.

Barriers to Employment

There are various reasons why resettled refugees can struggle to secure employment:

- Language barrier and, in some cases, lack of literacy or numeracy skills.
- Lack of previous work experience.
- Lack of knowledge of the job market and recruitment processes such as completing job applications, writing CVs and attending interviews.
- Experience and qualifications from other countries not being recognised in the UK.
- Lack of digital and IT skills.
- Transport issues, such as not having their own car or infrequent public transport in rural areas.
- Individual barriers such as the refugee's level of confidence, health issues and other commitments including child care.

Employment support

There are several practical steps that your group can take towards helping refugees with employment support such as:

- Helping them to access ESOL classes and relevant training courses.

- Providing them with additional language support such as volunteers to practice with.
- Providing them with an employment mentor or coach.
- Carrying out an employment assessment and outline plans to find employment.
- Helping them to find volunteering opportunities.
- Accessing NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centre – <https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/>) to see if their qualifications from their home country are recognised in the UK, or see what steps they need to take for them to be recognised.
- Working with local employment & volunteering services.

Mentoring

You may wish to provide refugees with an employment mentor through your group, or you may be able to refer them to other organisations who can provide this. We have provided a list of organisations that provide employment support to refugees and some of these may be able to provide mentoring.

If you are providing a mentor yourself there are some key points to remember:

- It should be time-bound and goal-oriented. This keeps both parties focused on the specific task at hand. For example, the mentor could work with a refugee for one hour a week for 6 months, focused specifically on improving employment prospects.
- It should be person-centred but it is not befriending. This means that both the refugee and the mentor should see each other as equal partners and focus on identifying the needs of that individual and taking specific steps to meet them. It is different to befriending because at times the relationship may need to be more formal and involve both parties asking questions of each other.

Volunteering

Volunteering can provide invaluable work experience and enable people to build confidence and improve language skills. You may be able to find volunteering opportunities through local connections, but there are also larger agencies that help people to find voluntary work.

The [gov.uk page](#) on volunteering provides guidance, a list of organisations that can provide local volunteering opportunities and a link to [Do-it.org](#) which is an online database of UK volunteering opportunities.

The concept of volunteering may be new to some refugees, and you may have to work with them to help them understand the benefits it can bring such as gaining UK based experience, securing someone to act as a referee as well as gaining and using skills. If you are in contact with other refugees or migrants who have benefited from volunteering, and are willing to share their experience, this may be much more powerful than trying to explain yourself.

Employment Expectations

Refugee expectations

Refugees can have unrealistic expectations of finding employment in the UK. They may not have expected to face the barriers listed above or believed they would be easy to overcome. For example, some people may find it harder to learn English than they had expected.

You will probably need to work with refugees to explore their expectations around employment and help them to develop both short term and long term plans based on their skills, experience and current circumstances. It may be that their immediate priority is to focus on learning English, then they could explore volunteering opportunities to gain experience, and in the longer term they may be able to find work.

It can be helpful when working with refugees who have worked before coming to the UK, to ask them to tell you the stories of how they entered employment. The culture of recruitment in their countries can be very different to that of the UK and hearing their experience can shine a light on what gaps they have in their understanding of how people find work in the UK.

Sponsor Group expectations

You may also have your own expectations around how quickly refugees will find employment. It is important that you manage your expectations as well and empower refugees to make informed choices. You should always involve refugees in deciding what steps to take and what employment opportunities to follow. You may have connections with local potential employers, which is a great advantage, and you should present these options to the refugees, but it is their decision to take the offer or not.

If they accept a job that is not suitable for them, and leave the job as result, this could potentially cause financial difficulties when they reapply for benefits and have a negative impact on your relationship with them.

Employment Rights

Refugees have the same employment rights as British citizens. You will need to ensure that they understand this, and the kind of treatment that they are entitled to from employers, such as the minimum wage and notice periods. You may also need to ensure

that refugees understand what employers are entitled to expect from them, for example making sure that they understand the employer's absence and sickness policies. The ACAS website (<http://www.acas.org.uk/>) is a great source of information about employment rights.

Some refugees might want to start their own business and become self-employed. It is important that they understand the process of registering as a self-employed with Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC), paying their own tax and National Insurance contributions and any legal requirements for running that industry, such as receiving food safety training if they plan to run a catering business.

Starting employment

When refugees receive a job offer, there are a few things you may need to help them consider the offer. Some of these issues may affect their decision about whether they accept the job, but others may just require some additional planning and support to help them adjust.

- Is it legal – check it is not exploitative: will they receive the minimum wage or above, have full employee rights including holiday pay, maximum working hours, break time and receive health and safety training if required.
- Any practical and logistical issues – will the hours clash with other commitments such as childcare or English classes; help them to think through how they will travel to work and how long it will take.
- Impact on benefits – they will need to understand how taking a paid job will affect their benefits. If the work is infrequent or casual this can be particularly important. Where possible you should seek advice from specialist agencies such as your local Citizens Advice. If there are other working age family members in the house there could be an impact on their benefits, as household income may be taken in to account.

They must inform all the relevant agencies if they take up employment. If they fail to do so they could be committing a criminal offence and may be required to pay back any payments they were not entitled to.

In work benefits

Refugees working part-time or in low paid jobs may continue to receive benefits after they start work, this could be ongoing or for a limited period depending on their income. People who were receiving Jobseekers Allowance may be eligible for Working Tax Credit (<https://www.gov.uk/working-tax-credit>). People who were receiving Housing Benefit may be still be eligible to receive some, or all, of this depending on their income. Families with children under 16 will continue to receive Child Benefit.

You can do a quick online benefit calculation to see how much someone is likely to receive here: <https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk/AboutYou>. But we would advise you to seek specialist advice wherever possible, for example from your local Citizens Advice.

People affected by the benefit cap can become exempt if they work above a certain number of hours per week but may still receive money from benefits if they are eligible for them. Further guidance can be found at: <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Benefit-guides/Benefit-Cap/Am-I-affected-by-the-Benefit-Cap>.

Moving back to benefits

Refugees may need to return to benefits for a variety of reasons. They may have a short-term contract which has come to an end or be unable to continue employment due to health reasons or childcare commitments.

Wherever possible, it is advisable that people in this position seek benefits advice before leaving the job so that they fully understand their circumstances and can budget accordingly.

If they are reapplying for Jobseekers Allowance they could be prevented from receiving any payments on this benefit for 3 months, if the Jobcentre Plus decide that they left the job without a good reason.

They may experience delays while waiting for benefits to be reinstated. They may have to apply for different benefits than they previously received, for example if Universal Credit has been introduced to the area, or if they now have health problems which mean they should claim disability benefits.

If they have been receiving any in work benefits, they need to inform all the relevant agencies of their change of circumstances. Failure to do so could have legal implications.