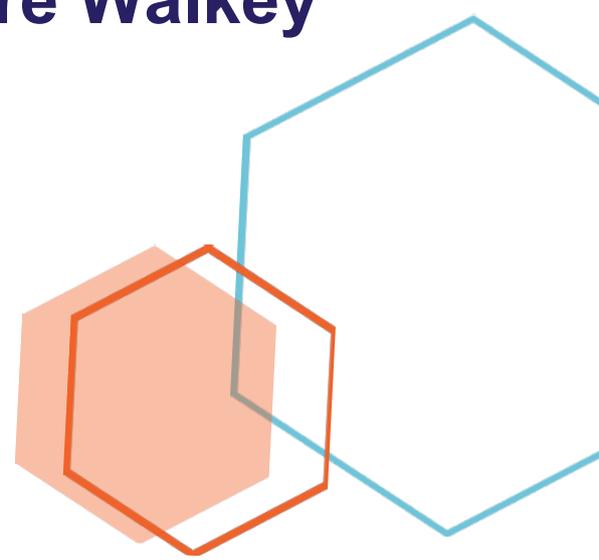


# Refugee employment dynamics in Yorkshire and the Humber:

## An information guide

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**Refugee Integration**  
Yorkshire and Humber



This project is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Making management of migration flows more efficient across the European Union.

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# Introduction

Refugees come to the UK because they are fleeing persecution and conflict. They want to build a new life for themselves but often face particular difficulties finding employment. The UK currently has no national strategy to support refugees into employment. Employers therefore have a crucial role to play in supporting refugees and responding to the global refugee crisis. This guide, written in December 2020, sets out the actions that employers in Yorkshire and the Humber can take, the difference they can make and the support available.

## The Benefits

### Employers

Supporting refugees into employment offers employers a range of business and commercial benefits. It can help develop a talent pipeline to fill vacancies. It can also create a more diverse workforce that is likely to be more dynamic and innovative. Hiring refugees may also help ensure retention; a study of employers in the US, for example, showed that 73% reported a higher retention rate for their refugee employees.<sup>i</sup>

Engaging employees in activities that support refugees may also have positive impacts on staff development. Employees learn from those they are supporting, strengthening inter-personal skills, and feel more engaged with the company and its values.

Supporting refugees also shows a company's commitment to making a difference in their community. It helps employers to meet corporate social responsibility targets, demonstrate their commitments to being a purposeful values-driven organisation and inclusive employer.

### Refugees

For refugees, finding employment is often a crucial part of integration. It allows refugees to support themselves and their families, and ensures their independence, sense of security and confidence. Employment can also assist refugees to improve their English language skills, build social connections and feel a part of their community.

### Who is a refugee?

A refugee is an individual who has been granted leave to remain in the UK because they have a 'well-founded fear of persecution', as defined in UK and international law. Refugees may enter the UK as asylum-seekers or through government resettlement schemes. Refugees are a highly diverse group and have differing employment histories and skills.

Refugees, and those with similar legal statuses, such as humanitarian protection and discretionary leave, have the legal **right to work** in the UK. All refugees should have a biometric residency permit which proves their right to work. After five years, nearly all refugees gain indefinite leave to remain and then British citizenship. Refugees who have applied for indefinite leave still have the right to work, despite the fact that documents may need to be sent to the Home Office. Further guidance is available through:

- [Employer Checking Service](#)
- [Right to work check: An employer's guide \(Home Office\)](#)

### **Refugees in Yorkshire and the Humber**

In the UK, 133,094 individuals have been granted refugee status in the last ten years. Around 12% are located in Yorkshire and Humber.

Most refugees reside in Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield but there are families in all local authority areas.

# The Opportunity

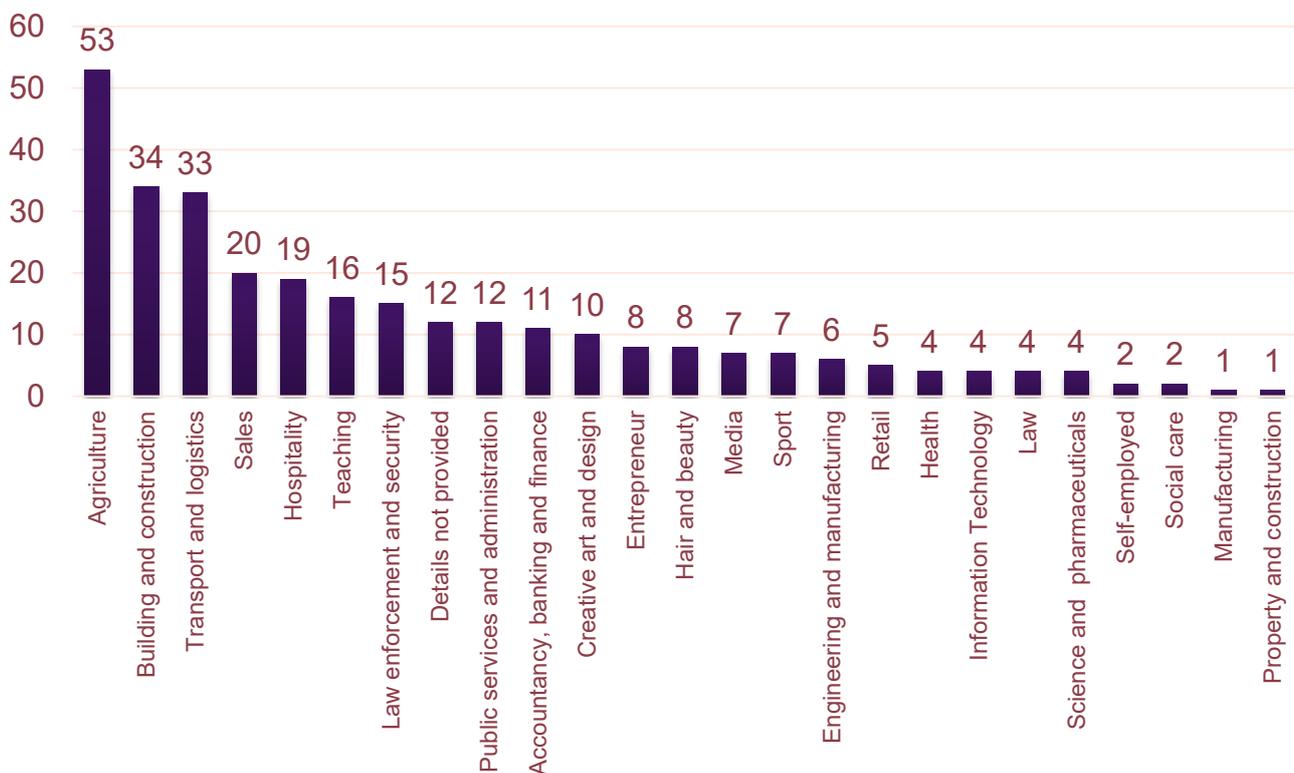
Evidence shows that refugees struggle to secure employment. Unemployment rates are above the national average with only 56% of working age people who came to the UK to claim asylum in employment, compared with 78% of UK nationals.<sup>ii</sup> In Yorkshire and Humber, three months after receiving refugee status, 74% of refugees are unemployed.<sup>iii</sup> Refugees particularly struggle to find secure employment that is compatible with their skills and education level. Refugees often work part-time, on zero hour or other precarious contracts.

The current under- or unemployment rates show the difference that employers can make in this sector.

Despite what the statistics might suggest, refugees have wide range of skills to offer an employer. Refugees have ‘soft’ skills – perseverance, commitment, work ethic, maturity - borne out of their complex and extremely challenging life experiences.

Some refugees are also highly skilled and hold formal qualifications. Data from the UK Labour Force Survey shows that 31% refugees are highly educated, which is higher than the UK average.<sup>iv</sup> Figure 2 shows the experience refugees gained prior to arriving in the UK according to sector.<sup>v</sup> The graph shows that the main professional sectors where refugees have existing experience is: building and construction, transport and logistics, sales and hospitality. Many refugees are also willing retrain and gain experience in new sectors.

**Figure 1: Refugees' employment experience in country of origin**



# Overcoming Barriers

Several employers have become actively involved in the refugee sector in the UK. Most activity is, however, concentrated in London. There are therefore extensive opportunities for employer engagement in the Yorkshire and the Humber to assist refugees to overcome barriers to employment. This section outlines various forms of engagement, which can be adapted to suit a wide variety of employers.

## Career and recruitment advice

Refugees have access to mainstream employability services, such as those provided by Jobcentre. These are not however often accessible or suitable to refugees because of language barriers and a lack of understanding in the sector of refugees' experiences.

Providing **career advice** can help refugees learn more about how to find work and increase their commercial awareness. Employers can run information and awareness sessions about career pathways within their organisation or sector. Visits to work places and training sessions about workplace culture in the UK will also help refugees adapt their experience to the UK and demonstrate their transferable skills.

Another barrier can be **knowledge and experience of recruitment practices** in the UK. Workshops and information sessions can assist refugees to write a CV and tailor it to a particular sector. Moreover, information about interviews and practice interviews can help refugees gain the know-how to successfully find employment.

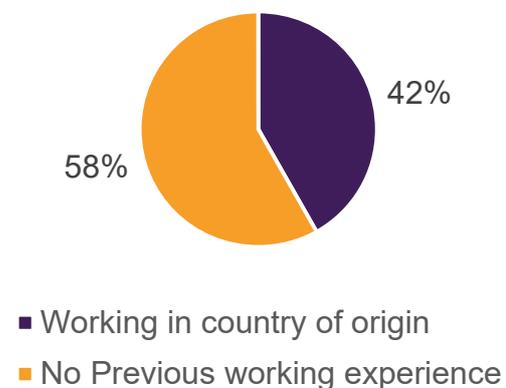
**Professional mentoring** is another way to help increase refugees' commercial awareness, sector-based knowledge and career aspirations. Volunteers can be recruited from the employer's workforce and mentor refugees as a group or through one-to-one sessions. Mentors share their skills, knowledge and experience of a particular sector and their professional journey.

## Training opportunities and work placements

Some refugees may not be work-ready and require additional support to enable them to find employment.

Some refugees lack work experience. Figure 2 shows that, while 42% of a sample of refugees in Yorkshire and the Humber have previous work experience, the majority do not. This is primarily because of caring responsibilities and a lack of formal work opportunities during displacement, such as while living in a refugee camp.

Figure 2: Work experience in country of origin



Employers can offer a crucial range of **pre-employment training** opportunities to assist refugees to gain the skills they need to find employment. This can include vocational or on-the-job training courses, apprenticeships and work placements, ideally followed by guaranteed interview.

## English language support

A major barrier to finding employment for refugees is sufficient English language skills. Refugees can access language classes (ESOL) as part of adult education programmes and through the voluntary sector. Employers can work with a partner organisation to provide **sector-based English language courses** to improve refugees' English skills relevant to a particular sector and confidence speaking English in professional settings.

## Fair recruitment practices

Employers have an important role in ensuring recruitment practices do not unfairly exclude refugees. Refugees have **the right to work** and any uncertainty on the part of the employer should be addressed through a right to work check. Moreover, **unconscious bias training** may help ensure refugees are fairly considered alongside other candidates.

Recruiters should consider the unavoidable circumstances that may have caused gaps in employment history. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work while they wait for a decision on their application for refugee status, which can take years. Resettled refugees may also have gaps in employment because of years of displacement in refugee camps before arriving in the UK.

Similarly, focusing on refugees' **transferable skills and strength-based interviews** can help to identify talented refugees who might otherwise be overlooked. For example, highly-skilled refugees who may not have UK-based references and may be unable to convert their qualifications to be recognised in the UK.

## **Case Study: DLA Piper Know Your Rights course**

In February-March 2020, global business law firm DLA Piper, ran 'Know Your Rights', a legal education and empowerment programme for refugees. Forty two refugees, from across Yorkshire and the Humber, participated in the course for one day a week over seven weeks.

The programme supported refugees and asylum seekers to understand their legal rights and access opportunities. It also provided an opportunity for refugees to meet new people and network with professionals from different backgrounds.

The course covered: public speaking and advocacy skills; rights related to welfare, employment, education, housing and health; and knowledge about the legal and judicial system.

DLA Piper recruited volunteer solicitors within their workforce to prepare and lead the course. It was delivered in partnership with Refugee Council and Migration Yorkshire who inputted their knowledge to tailor the scheme to the region and helped recruit participants.

The programme is a signature element of DLA Piper's pro bono practice. The company is committed to continuing the course in the region as part of demonstrating the company's core values.

Feedback from refugee participants was very positive with one stating:

"I feel very happy to join this course. It is not just because the course provides us with knowledge about the UK law and makes me feel confident, but also because I can meet a lot of lovely people here and receive support! Thank you!"

## Next steps

Taking action to support refugees can be fully supported through partnerships with the active voluntary sector in Yorkshire and the Humber. Partner organisations can provide support every step of the way and assist in designing, delivering and evaluating projects. They can particularly help in identifying refugees and adapting activities to their particular needs and skills.

To discuss next steps, contact:

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<sup>i</sup> Dyssegaard, D., and Roldan, K. C. (2018) 'Refugees as Employers: Good retention, strong recruitment' Tent and Fiscal Policy Institute'. Available from:

[www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TENT\\_FPI-Refugees-as-Employees-Report](http://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TENT_FPI-Refugees-as-Employees-Report)

<sup>ii</sup> Ruiz, I. and Vargas-Silva, C., (2018) 'Differences in labour market outcomes between natives, refugees and other migrants in the UK', *Journal of Economic Geography* 18, p. 863.

<sup>iii</sup> The finding is based on a sample of nearly 700 refugees living in the region collected through the Refugee Integration Yorkshire and Humber project, Migration Yorkshire.

<sup>iv</sup> UNHCR (2019) Tapping Potential: Guidelines to Help British Businesses Employ Refugees. Available from:

[www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/help-british-businesses-employ-refugees](http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/help-british-businesses-employ-refugees), p.7.

<sup>v</sup> The findings is based on a sample of 298 refugees living in the region collected through the Refugee Integration Yorkshire and Humber project, Migration Yorkshire.

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This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the University of Huddersfield and Migration Yorkshire and in no way reflect the views of the funder, the European Commission or the United Kingdom Responsible Authority (UKRA). Neither the European Commission nor UKRA is liable for any use that may be made of the information in this publication.

Document published April 2021.