

# ENGAGING WITH EMPLOYERS IN THE HIRING OF REFUGEES

A 10-point multi-stakeholder action plan  
for employers, refugees, governments  
and civil society



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## **ENGAGING WITH EMPLOYERS IN THE HIRING OF REFUGEES**

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## Foreword

The OECD and UNHCR have a longstanding and fruitful co-operation in many areas of mutual strategic interest, including enhancing pathways to protection and solutions for refugees, assessing and supporting their economic and social integration, and better programming and monitoring of official development assistance in the context of forced displacement.

The skills and attributes of refugees represent significant economic potential for receiving countries. However, for this to be fully realised, well-coordinated efforts by a range of actors and entities are required. Our Organisations are committed to supporting host countries and communities, as well as refugees themselves, to harness and maximise that potential. We work together in a range of ways to evaluate policies and disseminate good practice, to identify promising innovative approaches, and to counter xenophobia and prejudice by providing sound evidence of the challenges refugees face and the contributions they can make to host countries. We are committed to fostering dialogue amongst all stakeholders so that we can offer concrete and sustainable guidance on how to improve the livelihoods of people in host and refugee communities, and to contribute to better integration outcomes.

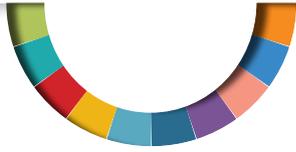
This Action Plan is a product of our joint endeavours in this area. It draws on extensive consultations with employers and others who play a key role in promoting the integration of refugees in local and national labour markets. The Action Plan also highlights the challenges, opportunities, and good practices identified through the consultation process, and sets out a clear way forward through a checklist of actions that can optimise the contributions of a range of actors to supporting successful refugee employment.

In addition, this Action Plan contributes to the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), annexed to the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016, which is already being applied in several countries. It demonstrates in a structured way how the ‘whole of society approach’ can support the labour market integration of refugees. Reflecting this holistic approach, the particular circumstances of refugee women and those with specific needs should be fully considered in its implementation.

We hope that the Action Plan will be instructive and that it will create momentum and synergies among all concerned to enable refugees and others in need of international protection to contribute economically and participate more fully in their host societies.

**Ángel Gurría**  
Secretary-General of the OECD

**Filippo Grandi**  
UN High Commissioner for Refugees



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## Introduction

There are now more than 65 million forcibly displaced persons in the world, including 22.5 million refugees, with the vast majority in developing countries. G20 and OECD countries currently host more than six million refugees, up from 2.4 million in 2010. A large part of this recent increase consists of people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries of Syria or crossing the Mediterranean to Europe. A number of countries also receive persons on resettlement and other complementary pathways of admission (see Box 1 for definitions). Countries receiving refugees face major challenges to integrate refugees in their economy and society. However, refugees also represent a significant opportunity for the host country, given the many skills and aptitudes that they bring.

During interviews undertaken by UNHCR with refugees, the latter identified employment, including training or re-training, as one of their two principal concerns, the other being housing. For most refugee respondents, when asked what makes them feel integrated, the first thing they think of is to have a job. When asked what the most valuable help to achieve this is, many respondents replied that it is to be introduced to different paths that will lead to employment. For governments, employment is equally key for the integration of refugees. Employment is also closely related to other areas of integration, such as access to housing, family reunification, language, healthcare, a driver's license, networks, childcare, and the asylum process itself.<sup>1</sup>

As part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) annexed to the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted at the UN General Assembly in 2016, host States have agreed to “take measures to enable refugees to make the best use of their skills and capacities, recognizing that empowered refugees are better able to contribute to their own and their communities’ well-being and to invest in building human capital, self-reliance and transferable skills as an essential step towards enabling long-term solutions” (§ 13 c & d).

While it is a State responsibility to create an appropriate legal framework, integration requires the close support and co-ordination of governing structures at the national, regional and municipal levels.<sup>2</sup> The public employment services have a particularly important role to play in this context. At the same time, private recruitment agencies have also been very active in supporting the employment of refugees. And in addition to employers themselves, employer associations have often supported their members in these efforts, and they also play a significant role in creating conditions for sustainable employment. Integration also requires coordination with all stakeholders on the ground. Specifically, the successful labour market integration of refugees can only be achieved through joint efforts of all relevant actors, i.e. employers and their associations, as well as trade unions, relevant civil society organisations, and refugees themselves. Employers can provide opportunities to refugees through internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training and, ultimately employment; chambers of commerce and employer associations can help navigate the legal framework; trade unions, together with employers, can work towards creating a welcoming environment for refugees in the workplace and ensuring that their rights and obligations as employees are clearly articulated and respected; civil society can support job matching and training of all parties; and academia can document what works and what does not. Critically, refugees must be made part of the process in identifying solutions to the obstacles they face and in replicating those good practices they identify.

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1. UNHCR (2013), *A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe*, p. 76, <https://bit.ly/2DZtDt9>.

2. OECD (2016), *Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of international protection*, <https://bit.ly/1nqcll8>.

In many countries, employers have made significant efforts to connect with, support and integrate refugees in their workplaces. This has been particularly noticeable in countries at the forefront of the recent upsurge in refugee arrivals in Europe, as well as in countries which have a long tradition in receiving resettled refugees. It builds on both corporate social responsibility and genuine economic gains from harnessing the refugee talent pool, demonstrating the business case for the employment of refugees.

## Methodology

Through a series of regional dialogues on “Employing Refugees”, the OECD and UNHCR have brought together employers and employer organisations to share lessons learned on how to promote refugee employment. These dialogues have taken place at the EU level (Brussels, June 2016, with the support of the Business and Industry Advisory Committee [BIAC] to the OECD); for Nordic countries (Copenhagen, September 2016); for German-speaking countries (Munich, December 2016, together with the Chamber of Commerce for Munich and Upper Bavaria, the Austrian Economic Chamber [WKÖ] and the Swiss Employers’ Association); and for North America (Toronto, May 2017, together with the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC]). Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) supported the facilitation of three of the four dialogues. In total, more than 150 employers participated and provided the basis for this Action Plan. The Plan has been further informed by subsequent consultations with refugees, governments, and civil society to validate the outcomes of the dialogues with employers and employer organisations.

The Action Plan is composed of 10 “action areas” identified as key to supporting the successful labour market integration of refugees. The action areas are illustrative of the process and issues faced by employers concerning the hiring of refugees. For each action area, the support that governments, civil society, employers and refugees can provide is highlighted. The Action Plan is structured as follows: As a starting point, employers must be in a position to navigate the administrative framework regarding work rights (Action 1) and have sufficient legal certainty on the length of stay of refugee workers (Action 2). Once these preconditions are met, the necessary first step in the labour market integration process is the initial assessment of refugees’ skills (Action 3). Some skills gaps may be identified in this process, and measures for re- and upskilling may be needed to increase refugee employability (Action 4). With this base, a proper matching can be done with employers’ skills needs (Action 5). For a fair recruitment process, equal opportunities are a precondition (Action 6), and the working environment must be prepared (Action 7). Enabling long-term employability requires specific attention (Action 8). To ensure that scalable models for refugee employment are sustained and championed by employers, building a real business case for employment is essential (Action 9). Finally, different stakeholders need to work effectively and efficiently together throughout the process (Action 10).

This Action Plan intends to inspire focused policy action and structural co-ordination among different stakeholders with the aim of facilitating the process of refugee employment for employers, governments, civil society actors and refugees, and thereby getting the most out of refugees’ skills to the benefit of all stakeholders. It is however important to acknowledge that, depending on the national context in question, not all specific actions proposed will necessarily apply.



### Box 1 • Terminology

**Beneficiaries of international protection:** The need for international protection arises when a person is outside their own country and unable to return home because they would be at risk due to their country being unable or unwilling to protect them. Refugees are, by definition, in need of international protection. In addition, persons who are outside their country of origin but who may not qualify as refugees, may, in certain circumstances, also require international protection on a temporary or longer-term basis via complementary protection mechanisms or temporary protection or stay arrangements.

**Refugees:** A refugee is any person who meets the eligibility criteria in the refugee definition provided by relevant international or regional refugee instruments, UNHCR's mandate, or national legislation, as appropriate. According to many of these instruments, a refugee is a person who cannot return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or, is compelled to leave their country of origin because of indiscriminate violence or other events seriously disturbing public order, or is experiencing a threat to life, safety or freedom as a result thereof.

**Resettled refugees:** Resettled refugees have been selected and transferred from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status. The status provided ensures protection against *refoulement*, whereby no person may be returned in any manner whatsoever to a country or territory where they may be at risk of persecution, torture, or other forms of serious or irreparable harm, and provides a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals.

**Asylum-seekers:** An asylum-seeker is a person who is seeking international protection, but whose status has not yet been determined. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on. It can also refer to someone who has not yet submitted an application but may be in need of international protection. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee in such countries is initially an asylum-seeker.

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**Note:** While some recommendations may also be relevant for asylum-seekers, the focus of this Action Plan is refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection.

# ACTION



## Navigate the administrative framework

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

While OECD countries, in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention related to the Status of Refugees, have granted full labour market access for refugees, this is not necessarily the case for those with complementary or temporary protection status or indeed asylum-seekers pending the determination of their asylum application. Also, some countries have specific rules for persons whose application has been denied but their deportation suspended (e.g. “tolerated status” in Germany) and who may be entitled to work under restricted conditions. This heterogeneity of working rights by status type presents inherent challenges for employers.

Employers and human resources departments often lack the knowledge and support needed in navigating the rules and regulations in this area. As a result, employers may overestimate the restrictions and obstacles, and simply disregard applications of asylum-seekers, refugees or other beneficiaries of international protection. For small and medium enterprises, in particular, which generally do not have their own or fully capacitated human resource departments, bureaucratic requirements and other obstacles are often perceived to be too complex and time-consuming.

Some employers’ associations and chambers of commerce have done a tremendous job in providing consolidated information for their members and also offer counselling services. However, it can often be difficult to know which source of information to trust and what information is the most up-to-date. Moreover, as individual applications always reflect unique situations, uncertainty remains high on the employer side – especially where decisions on relevant permits are made at the local level.

Asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection may themselves not be fully aware of the legal conditions and restrictions under which they can work. This may increase their risk of being in situations of exploitation or in a form of employment that is not law-abiding.

What is more, employment in certain types of jobs sometimes requires additional licences and certificates, which refugees do not necessarily possess upfront. While there is, in principle, often a lot of support available to tackle this issue, as well as other obstacles for refugees and employers willing to hire them, finding relevant and updated information regarding the available support is not always easy.

# Did you know?

While access to the labour market may be subject to certain administrative requirements (e.g. work permits), refugees have the legal right to work in all OECD countries. For asylum-seekers (that is, people awaiting the outcome of their asylum application), the rights and obligations differ widely across countries. Most countries, however, grant access to the labour market to some groups of applicants on certain conditions, such as labour market tests or a prior waiting period; the latter ranges from between 2 months in Italy to 12 months in the United Kingdom. In Australia, Canada, Chile, Greece, Mexico, Norway and Sweden, some groups of asylum-seekers have the right to work immediately, at least in principle.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Create streamlined procedures for work permits and other necessary certificates based on clear administrative rules
- Ensure that regulations are evenly implemented across the country and limit discretion at the local level
- If multiple agencies are involved in the process of granting work permits or licences, enhance the co-operation between employers, employment services and immigration authorities
- Provide up-to-date, comprehensive information to employers who want to hire asylum-seekers, refugees, and other beneficiaries of international protection, including step-by-step guidance and individually-tailored support, e.g. through telephone hotlines
- Provide training to human resources staff on the requirements and rights related to employing asylum-seekers and persons benefiting from international protection
- Offer legal information to employers, including through brochures, online information and dedicated “hotlines”



### For refugees

- Be aware of the conditions and scope of the right to work and demonstrate to employers an understanding of them, for example in the job application
- Become familiar with the administrative framework for employment in the host country



### For civil society organisations

- Establish information services for employers and compile knowledge databases on the administrative framework for refugee employment



**Providing employer guides** In **Canada**, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, in co-operation with various partners, compiled a guide for employers interested in hiring refugees. The guide includes a broad range of practical information, including the socio-economic characteristics of Syrian refugees, the Syrian education system and information about the security clearance that refugees underwent. The guide also explains available financial incentives and other support for employers who hire refugees. See <https://bit.ly/2HkFVje>.

# ACTIONS

## 2

## Provide employers with sufficient legal certainty

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Not only does confusion about the different work statuses and potential work entitlements exist, but also uncertainty regarding the length of stay in the host country of asylum-seekers, refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection, and this creates additional complexities with regard to employment. While refugees normally have a secure legal status, in some countries this status may be subject to renewal after several years. Furthermore, other beneficiaries of international protection may have a more precarious residence status and face additional uncertainties regarding the renewability of their permit, which is usually granted only on a year-to-year basis. Policy changes in the host country, clearly something beyond the control of employers, may alter the conditions under which refugees will be able to stay and thus work

This uncertainty may deter employers from considering persons with a more temporary status, including when considering investing in their upskilling and training. In practice, an insecure legal status can thus strongly impact upon the labour market chances of refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection.

This also pertains to vocational education and training of the apprenticeship type, which in many countries provides a promising path towards lasting employment for many refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection. However, given that training can take up to three years, accepting asylum-seekers, refugees or other beneficiaries of international protection with an insecure legal status as apprentices, poses a considerable risk for employers.

What is more, beneficiaries of international protection themselves may be less inclined to fully engage in learning the host country language, start a lengthy training, or acquire other types of country-specific skills if there is uncertainty as to their prospects of remaining.

# Did you know?

From January 2015 to June 2017, 1.3 million positive decisions were given in the first instance to asylum applications in the EU, Switzerland and Norway, among which: 766 400 received refugee status (58% of first instance positive decisions), 422 000 subsidiary protection status (32%), and 125 000 other humanitarian status (10%). The share of subsidiary protection holders has increased to 50% in the first half of 2017.

According to the EU Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU, a (renewable) permit of at least three years should be granted to refugees and at least one year for persons with subsidiary protection status.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Consider the potentially negative impact on labour market integration of issuing renewable residence permits for refugees and shorter residence permits for other beneficiaries of international protection
- Mitigate the risk for employers investing in the vocational training of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection with insecure or limited duration status by creating schemes that provide legal certainty during the period of training



### For employer associations

- Inform employers about the working rights of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection
- Make the case to governments on how legal uncertainty poses a barrier for the hiring of beneficiaries of international protection and for investing in further training



### For civil society organisations

- Assist refugees and employers with information about work rights



### Providing stable residence permits during vocational education and training

To increase legal certainty for employers, **Germany** implemented a new scheme in 2016 that allows asylum-seekers and “tolerated” persons – the latter are mostly those whose asylum applications have been rejected but who cannot be deported due to administrative and other obstacles – to take up an apprenticeship. The scheme guarantees that during vocational training, which usually takes three years, they can remain in the country, even if their asylum application has been denied. Furthermore, should they find employment after finishing their training, they have the right to remain in Germany for an additional two years. This regulation creates strong incentives to finish training and find subsequent employment. It also mitigates the risk of employers feeling that their investment into training apprenticeships does not pay off because those who obtained the training have to leave the country.

# ACTIONS

## 3

### Identify and verify refugees' skills

#### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Refugees have very diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Some are highly educated and worked as engineers, medical doctors or researchers before fleeing their home country. Some have managerial or entrepreneurial skills while others were employed in professional occupations or skilled trade jobs. Others again have not yet completed their education or have only a few years of schooling, if any. This diversity of profile is both a challenge and an opportunity. It requires, as a starting point, to identify the skills that refugees already possess at arrival by taking stock of their formal qualifications, previous professional experience and, more generally, of their abilities and motivation.

The need for this stocktaking exercise is mainly to reduce a number of uncertainties for employers who are considering employing refugees. Firstly, because refugees often do not speak the language of the host country on arrival, it is difficult for employers to assess their professional potential. Secondly, by virtue of their situation, refugees often lack documents to prove their educational attainment (especially when they have fled conflict areas) and they face challenges in providing references from previous employers. Thirdly, refugees tend to come from countries whose business environments and education systems are little known to potential employers. This can increase uncertainty about the professional abilities of candidates. Employers may thus underestimate refugees' skills and qualifications. Indeed, data from a 2014 special module of the European Labour Force Survey shows that tertiary-educated refugees in employment in Europe were three times more likely to be in jobs below their formal qualification level than the native-born (60% versus 21%) and twice more likely than other migrants (30%).

To reduce this level of uncertainty for employers, their involvement in the design and implementation of skills assessment tools is crucial, including for the acceptance of its results by other employers. The development of online self-assessment tools could also help refugees to identify qualification gaps and available up-skilling support services.

# Did you know?

In summer 2017, Talent Beyond Boundaries, an NGO working to match migrants and employers, undertook a mapping exercise of the skills and employability of a sample of almost 10 000 refugee profiles, the majority based in Lebanon and Jordan. More than one-third of participants self-reported having completed higher education; IT skills were the most frequently cited skills. Over one-third reported that they spoke a second language; the majority of those who listed a language other than Arabic spoke English. The top occupations were engineer, professor/lecturer, teacher, accountant, and information technology professional.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Provide support for employers regarding skills assessment (including occupational skills and prior work experience) and ensure that these services are widely available free of charge or for a minimal fee
- Improve processes and information on the recognition and assessment of foreign credentials/qualifications and of informal skills
- Identify and address specific barriers refugee women may experience in relation to skills assessment.
- Involve employers in the design and implementation of skills verification tools
- Encourage the use of online tools, such as the EU Skills Profile Tool for non-EU (third-country) nationals: <https://bit.ly/2lZEur0>.



### For employers

- Provide opportunities for refugees to demonstrate their skills and ask candidates to provide testimonials or character references, e.g. from social workers, sponsors or mentors
- Be aware that refugees cannot be expected to provide certain background information/ documents



### For employer associations

- Encourage employers who provide internships to provide references
- Facilitate experience-sharing among employers regarding skills verification tools



### For refugees

- Have qualifications and other relevant documents translated into the local language
- Identify opportunities to have both formal qualifications and informal skills certified
- Seek to convert or obtain through testing a national driving license as soon as possible



### For civil society organisations

- Provide background information on refugees' countries of origin, for example, data/fact files regarding the primary industries in that country, their work culture, etc.

**Assessing informal skills through computer-based testing** Many recent refugee arrivals do not have a formal vocational certification. To assess refugees' informal skills, the **German public employment service** has developed computer-based skills identification tests ("MYSKILLS"). To establish which skills can be transferred to the practical working environment, the tests use videos showing people performing standard tasks in the respective occupation. Candidates must then identify errors or put tasks into the right order. Developed in cooperation with employers' associations to ensure compatibility with job requirements, the assessment takes around four hours and is done under the supervision of an expert at the public employment service. Testing is currently available in six languages will be rolled out to a total of 30 professions. See <https://bit.ly/2G2GGMv> (in German).



# ACTION 4

## Developing skills for job-readiness

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Following the initial stocktaking of refugees' skills, their job readiness is contingent on a number of factors. Those who suffered trauma may require support from specialised health and social services prior to taking up employment. Insufficient knowledge of the host country language and differences in the skills required in countries of origin versus the host country may also mean that refugees need to develop certain skills or build on pre-existing ones. Refugees also need to be aware of local workforce customs. In cases where refugees have spent long periods out of the workforce, confidence and motivation as well as credibility with employers may be negatively affected.

Language is one of the most critical host country specific skills that refugees need support to develop. It is important that those opportunities available to improve language skills take into account refugee diversity with respect to specific needs (particularly for women and/or single or widowed parents with children), different levels of competency, and are available to refugees at all levels of literacy. Once refugees have obtained a basic knowledge of the host country language, this should be supplemented with vocation-specific language training. Evidence has shown that such training and support has been particularly effective for helping refugees to find a job, especially when provided in a workplace environment.

Refugees with previous professional experience may need to get some information on host country specific practices in their field (e.g. procedures and norms, organisation of the working day, specific electronic equipment and software, etc.). To enable this, refugees should have access to relevant professional training programmes, ideally provided in the workplace (e.g. internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training).

In addition, refugees should be supported to explore the labour market options relevant to their skills or for alternative careers, if needs be. In certain sectors, entry barriers, like licensing, may require short-term employment in a less relevant sector while the licensing process takes place.

# Did you know?

According to the 2014 EU Labour Force Survey, less than 30% of adult refugees in Europe having a basic knowledge of the host country language are employed.

In contrast, among refugees having an intermediary level, close to 60% are employed. For those who speak the host country language fluently, the employment rate reaches 67% and is comparable to that of nationals of that country.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Provide language training that is tailored to refugees' skills, backgrounds, and specific needs, with particular attention given to women and single or widowed parents
- Provide vocation-specific language training and targeted professional training, ideally in a workplace setting
- Provide financial support or loans for refugees who need to take driving lessons



### For employers

- Offer internships, mentorships and/or apprenticeships to give refugees the opportunity to get a first experience in the host country's labour market



### For refugees

- Seek to learn the local language and other relevant skills in order to accelerate integration into the workplace
- For asylum-seekers, where possible, do not wait to obtain a secured status to learn the language or to develop professional skills that would improve employability in the country
- Participate in mentorship, internship, and apprenticeship programmes where these are made available
- Try to identify paid internships or volunteering opportunities as entry points to the workplace and to establish networks
- Become familiar with the local job market, including its functioning (specificities regarding hiring practices, etc.) and the norms and customs in the workplace



### For civil society organisations

- Facilitate learning opportunities for refugees on local employment practices and the work etiquette that is expected once employed
- Establish referral systems among civil society organisations to exchange knowledge on other services available to improve refugees' work-readiness



**Building on previous work experience** In response to the large number of newly arrived refugees, **Sweden** introduced a "Fast Track" initiative to speed up the labour market integration of refugees with work experience in occupations with shortages of employees, such as health care professionals and teachers. The fast-track programme provides a comprehensive integration package for around 20 different occupations, including licensed professions such as teachers and physicians as well as less-qualified occupations, e.g. painters and professional drivers. The fast-track programme has been developed in close co-operation with trade unions and employer associations. The programme begins with an initial mapping and validation of skills. As a second step, refugees participate in bridging programmes for their respective occupation in their native language, while at the same time being enrolled in Swedish language courses. This allows them to strengthen their occupational skills from the very beginning without having to wait until they reach a sufficient level of fluency in Swedish. See <https://bit.ly/2U4OVVW>.

# ACTION 5



## Match refugee talent with employers' needs

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Once the existing skills of refugees have been identified and necessary additional skills attained, a key challenge in the employment of refugees is to match employers seeking to recruit candidates with specific skills to those refugees who possess them. Job matching, a challenge even in normal circumstances, is more complicated for refugee recruitment for a number of reasons. First, refugees often lack relevant social capital and networks. Second, officers in public or private employment services responsible for job placement may be unfamiliar with the specific situation of refugees, notably in countries with traditionally limited or lower numbers of arrivals. Third, and directly linked to this, recruitment specialists may therefore not have the experience or knowledge to suitably identify refugees with relevant profiles. Fourth, refugees themselves may not be aware of the channels via which vacancies are advertised and filled in their field of specialisation. Finally, refugees may be geographically too far removed from the jobs that would match with their skills.

In this context, an important element to take into account, where possible and appropriate, is the skills profile of both refugees and the local labour needs when refugees are placed in communities. This implies, as a prerequisite, that both are known beforehand.

Although this is not a job-matching exercise per se, it is useful to take employability criteria into account when identifying the communities in which refugees will live. Some refugee groups, for example, originate predominantly from rural areas and thus have skills that could potentially be more easily mobilised in the agricultural and fishery sectors.

More generally, employers should be aware of, and have access to, the talent pool of refugees. In order for employers to make contact with potential refugee employees, information about their profiles and their skills needs to be readily accessible (this whilst ensuring to respect relevant data-protection measures). One very practical measure to achieve this goal is through job fairs. Provided that refugees and employers are well prepared, these can be a powerful tool to bridge the information gap that usually separates potential candidates from job opportunities.

Online platforms dedicated to refugees' employment have also been successfully tested to match refugees within countries (e.g. Jobs4refugees in Germany) or across borders (e.g. Talent Beyond Boundaries), while some dedicated professional networks have been established (e.g. Science4refugees by the EU) and existing networks have opened their web-portal to refugees (e.g. Welcome Talent programme by LinkedIn).

# Did you know?

The majority of OECD countries have a policy to disperse asylum-seekers and/or refugees across the country but these rarely take local labour market conditions into account. Research suggests that accounting for local labour market conditions and labour needs in dispersal methods leads to significantly higher employment and earnings, as well as better integration prospects, including in the long-term.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Take into account refugees' skills and local labour market needs when deciding on placement
- Educate employment service staff to increase their awareness of refugee-specific issues and skills
- Guide refugees with potentially transferable skills towards related occupations or alternative careers
- Facilitate better matching of available job opportunities with refugee skills
- Organise job fairs to match employers and refugees



### For employers

- Reach out to refugees by going beyond the traditional forms of recruitment, for example, by contacting civil society organisations working with refugees and asylum-seekers
- Work more closely with public authorities as well as public and private employment services to better identify and maximise suitable work opportunities for refugees



### For refugees

- Actively seek employers who hire candidates with similar job profiles to your own, including through job fairs
- Use informal job networks through NGOs and become familiar with the primary recruitment channels



### For civil society organisations

- Develop or adapt online platforms to support employer access to the refugee pool of talent



**Organising refugee employment fairs** One way of bridging the gap between refugee candidates and potential employers are job fairs. "Chancen:reich", an NGO based in **Austria**, organised, in co-operation with the public employment service, the first Austrian career fair for refugees in Vienna in 2016. Ninety exhibitors informed 3 500 refugees and asylum-seekers about more than 1 000 job and training opportunities. On the spot, some 900 job interviews were held and more than 200 jobs were contracted. In addition to traditional exhibition stands, workshops on asylum law and integration training for companies were provided, as well as workshops for refugees about the essentials of finding work in Austria. Given the success of this event, a second fair was held in Innsbruck in 2017.

# ACTION 6



## Provide equal opportunities in recruitment and combat stereotypes

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

During the recruitment process, practices and requirements that may at first seem balanced/objective may, in fact, put refugees at a disadvantage and present particular challenges for them. Apart from language issues, refugees may lack knowledge of country-specific customs that govern the recruitment process. They may also have difficulties in compiling all the documents required by standard hiring procedures, and they may be less mobile or have specific constraints in making themselves available for interviews.

One issue that has repeatedly emerged in discussions with employers pertains to reference and security checks. Contacting previous employers of refugees in their country of origin is often impossible. Furthermore, with brief, or possibly no, employment history in the host country, background checks will often not yield the information employers are looking for. Extracts from police records may also be particularly hard to obtain, notably for those refugees who have recently arrived.

Furthermore, information on country-specific workplace customs and structures should be provided to refugees, allowing an easier transition for both refugees and employers and ensuring a better understanding of how the hiring process works. To ensure that refugees have equal opportunity in recruitment processes, public and private employment services and civil society actors can help refugees in preparing CVs and motivation letters, as well as in how to approach a recruitment interview. One particularly cost-efficient way of providing such support is through mentorship programmes.

Many jobs for refugees entail commuting to the place of work. Candidates whose mobility is limited due to financial or geographic constraints may not apply for such jobs and, if they do, may have limited prospects of being selected. As, upon arrival, refugees often do not possess a (valid) driver's license, this may also limit their access to certain types of jobs or curtail their job search to areas that are more easily accessible via public transportation. This problem is compounded in rural areas where public transport is often scarce and in certain occupational fields where work sites are mobile, e.g. in the construction sector.

Lastly, stereotypes about refugees can be a hurdle to obtaining employment. Stereotyping can include hiring discrimination and negative attitudes towards refugees but also unconscious bias – stereotypes that people are not aware that they have but that they still unconsciously act upon. Thus, employers' implicit biases can also negatively impact their recruitment decisions without their necessarily being aware of them.

# Did you know?

Testing with fictitious CVs for job vacancies in many countries has revealed that candidates' names matter. These studies have shown that in order to get invited to a job interview, it is not uncommon for a person with an "immigrant-sounding" name to have to write 3-4 times as many applications to get invited to a job interview as a person with a familiar-sounding name and an otherwise identical CV.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Offer support services (transportation, childcare, flexible hours, etc.) that increase opportunities for refugees in rural and remote areas to access jobs and training, with a particular focus on refugee women
- Raise awareness through campaigns, training programmes, etc., about discrimination, xenophobia, as well as conscious and unconscious stereotyping
- Put mechanisms in place to combat discrimination, including easily accessible recourse mechanisms for applicants who experience discrimination
- Remove administrative barriers to paid internships
- Limit liability risks for employers in case refugee employees lack documentation of employment history or credentials



### For employers

- Implement a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination and harassment in the workplace
- Provide short-term internships for opportunities to obtain recommendations and references
- Accept testimonials or character references, e.g. from social workers, sponsors or mentors
- Put refugees in contact with co-workers to facilitate social integration, such as carpools, in order to commute to work together
- Use specific electronic recruitment systems geared towards matching employers and refugees that have been created by various stakeholders, including private employment agencies
- Be open to proposals from refugees to bring an interpreter or facilitator for the job interview



### For employer associations

- Assess in which occupational fields mandatory background checks could be replaced by other evidence of character
- Demonstrate that beyond the ethical issue, unconscious bias can impede the recruitment of new talent and negatively impact on future business development



### For refugees

- Be well-informed about rights regarding labour market access and employment
- Follow the host country standards in applications for jobs
- Highlight any engagement in the local community in CV and motivation letters, for example, membership in associations and/or voluntary work
- Prepare CV in the local language and seek out services that can help with CV preparation
- Take an interpreter or facilitator to the job interview, if needed
- Ask for reference letters from case workers and previous employers, where applicable



### For civil society organisations

- Help refugees to prepare their CV and motivation letter, as well as to prepare for interviews

# ACTION 7



## Prepare the working environment

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

To welcome and integrate refugees into already established teams requires preparation and everybody – corporate leadership, supervisors, co-workers – needs to get on board. This can be a challenging undertaking. Some employees may initially be reluctant to work together with refugees or unsure of how to interact with them. This can be due to communication issues caused by language barriers but it may also be due to perceptions of cultural differences, of refugees receiving special treatment, stereotyping of refugees, or a general unease as regards working with people from different backgrounds.

In addition, managers and supervisors who have not worked with refugees before may not know what to expect, what kind of support to provide, or how to address sensitive issues such as cultural differences in workplace behaviours or communication styles.

By the same token, refugees often encounter working environments that differ from their previous professional experiences. Adjusting to different requirements and habits is challenging, even more so when language skills are still limited or when colleagues are hesitant to interact. If this is not addressed, it can lead to misunderstandings and discomfort, and may ultimately provoke tension.

# Did you know?

There is increasing evidence that being in contact with members from other ethnic groups reduces stereotypes, particularly when these encounters occur in a setting where people meet each other as equals and as part of a routine, e.g. in the workplace or at school.

This suggests that by facilitating direct contact and ensuring that refugees and host community members work closely together, initial negative attitudes or anxieties may be overcome.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Ensure that measures to support the labour market integration of refugees complement, and don't impinge upon, measures for the employment of the local population
- Develop a clear and balanced communication strategy with a focus on facts



### For employers

- Engage senior management in conveying to staff the rationale behind hiring refugees
- Provide staff with opportunities to get involved, by introducing, for instance, mentorship or "buddy" schemes between refugees and employees
- Offer training to both supervisors and staff on how they can support refugees
- Promote a professional and respectful workplace for all
- Provide incoming refugees with clear information on company policies and work habits
- Find practical ways to support language acquisition of recently arrived refugees
- Make sure that policies addressing discrimination and harassment in the workplace are fit for purpose
- Adopt diversity strategies that facilitate the working together of people with different cultural and religious backgrounds



### For employer associations

- Raise awareness about the importance of inter-cultural communication in the workplace
- Provide guidance to employers on preparing the workplace for recruitment of refugees



### For refugees

- Make efforts to understand and adapt to new work contexts, skills, and job sectors, where possible
- Actively reach out to co-workers and engage with them when possible



### For civil society organisations

- Facilitate dialogue between workers and refugees before and during the initial phase of recruitment
- Offer training courses on intercultural communication and different workplace cultures

# ACTION 8



## Enable long-term employability

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Employers need support not only when trying to hire refugees, but possibly also in the medium and longer-term. Many refugees may first connect to the labour market through temporary arrangements such as internships, subsidised employment schemes or temporary contracts. Transition to more stable employment and progressive career paths might require further support for employers and refugees as their adaptation to the new working environment may take time.

It is crucial to ensure that refugees, especially those who are low-skilled and have little prior education, acquire the skills required for employability in the long-term. In some cases, this may even come at the detriment of early employment. Certain low-skilled jobs may be quickly available, but these are often highly cyclical or are otherwise unstable. If refugees who lack basic skills then become unemployed after several years in the host country, it will be increasingly difficult to equip them with the necessary skills to re-enter the workforce.

Integration support thus clearly needs to go beyond the initial placement. Providing opportunities to combine education and work, as well as strengthened continuous training and education is essential to support access to skilled work and to avoid refugees being predominantly left with solely unskilled job opportunities. This also implies making part-time low-skilled jobs more attractive, for instance, through combining them with continuous training and ensuring that take-home pay is higher than social welfare benefits. For those refugees receiving benefits, the pay from a part-time job is often fully deducted from their financial support.

# Did you know?

Data from Sweden suggests that low-educated refugees take more than twice as long as medium-educated refugees to be in employment; even after more than ten years of residence, their employment rates remain 20 percentage points below those of the medium-educated.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Provide tailor-made, preferably individualised integration support, including for women and persons with specific needs that accounts for the fact that some refugees may have a long integration pathway
- Assist refugees in obtaining the basic skills – particularly language – to be able to contribute and be productive in the workplace
- Provide dedicated case-workers to support companies employing refugees for the first few months following their recruitment
- Provide opportunities for continuous training and upskilling, including for refugees already in a job
- Make sure that refugees' motivation to take on employment quickly does not conflict with the need to equip them with basic skills, and, in addition, align incentives accordingly for creation of sustainable employment



### For employers

- Support skills certification of employed refugees
- Support additional training and upskilling measures for refugees in employment, including through more flexible work schedules where necessary
- Inform supervisors on how they can support refugees and who supervisors themselves can approach if they need additional guidance



### For civil society organisations

- Raise awareness among low-skilled refugees of the need to strike a balance between working as soon as possible and acquiring the basic skills required for long-term employability
- Ensure that mentorship opportunities for refugees accompany them in the long-term



**Combining up-skilling programmes with work experience** The Step Model in **Denmark** is a long-term integration programme designed to ensure gradual labour market integration and provide support beyond the initial hiring phase. The Step Model targets new arrivals as well as settled immigrants from non-Western countries. The programme has been developed by the Danish government, together with municipalities and social partners, and seeks to provide targeted integration support taking into account refugees' and other eligible migrants' skills and qualifications. The programme combines language courses with initial work placements and traineeships in companies. It is also possible to participate in additional up-skilling and training, while gaining work experience in companies. If employers want to offer a job after the initial placement, they can be eligible for wage subsidies for up to a year. Employers can also receive financial support for mentorships between native-born employees and newcomers.

# ACTION 9

## Make the business case for hiring refugees

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Many employers put forward corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the main reason for hiring refugees. A joint survey by the OECD together with the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, interviewing some 2 200 German employers in early 2017, found that almost 80% of participating employers who hired asylum-seekers or refugees did so at least in part because of a sense of social responsibility.

This reflects the importance of CSR in human resource management, in branding/marketing, or for altruistic employers who wish to contribute positively to society and to local development. It also reflects that not all employers have pressing recruitment difficulties that would encourage them to look outside their usual pool of potential candidates. However, hiring refugees solely based on CSR objectives is unlikely to be a sufficient motivation for sustainable and broad-based employment, partly because when finances become more restricted, CSR may be one of the first things to be cut. Hence, as expressed by several employers, there is a need to make the business case for refugee employment. As a result of the current initial barriers, a short-term business case can be challenging to make for some employers. However, in the long term, there can be significant benefits.

Making a strong business case is more feasible when employers face immediate difficulties in filling positions in areas where refugees can contribute, or for employers who have an active diversity policy aimed at boosting innovation and productivity. Having a workforce that reflects their diverse customer base is also a strong incentive for many employers to hire refugees. In addition, employers have stressed that refugees are often a particularly motivated and committed workforce.

Removing initial barriers, and documenting and promoting the business case for refugee employment for different types of companies across various sectors and contexts, is critical to create sustainable employment opportunities for all refugees.

# Did you know?

Among the participating employers in a large joint survey conducted by the OECD, the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, and the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, three out of four employers who had hired refugees reported only few or no difficulties with them in daily work. Accordingly, in total, more than 80% of all employers who had hired refugees were broadly or fully satisfied with their work.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Lower the initial costs of hiring refugees where possible, including through temporary employment subsidies or tax breaks
- Ensure that low-cost upskilling measures for refugees are available
- Identify sectors that face or will face labour shortages in the future and outline how refugees can contribute to tackling these recruitment needs



### For employers

- Consider being a role model by communicating to other employers and to the public that there is a business case for hiring refugees
- Sign up for relevant initiatives, such as the European Commission's "Employers together for Integration", <https://bit.ly/2q5FC6I>
- For small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), explore options for collaboration with other SMEs to better achieve economies of scale in supporting refugee employment



### For employer associations

- Showcase positive examples, for example through testimonies of employers and refugees, and demonstrate how their specific skills have been used by companies
- Gather employers' experiences of how refugee employees have supported links to new customer bases or opened up new markets
- Gather evidence on the experiences of employers in recruiting and working with refugee employees, and show what lessons can be drawn from these experiences



### For refugees

- Demonstrate high commitment and motivation



### For civil society organisations

- Advocate for and liaise with governments and research organisations to develop measurable indicators to obtain a better understanding of refugees' contribution to the economy
- Facilitate employers' awareness that while hiring refugees can be challenging, they stand to gain a lot if they hire a workforce that is diverse, adaptable and willing to learn
- Establish referral systems among civil society organisations to exchange knowledge on other services available to improve refugees' work-readiness



**Labelling as a marketing tool** UNHCR Italy awards the "Welcome. Working for Refugee Integration" logo. This is a label for companies that distinguishes them as promoting the labour market integration of refugees and in supporting their integration process. The label can be used for communication purposes and is awarded based on UNHCR's due diligence requirements. See <https://bit.ly/2HYACVJ>.

# ACTION 10



## Coordinate actions between all stakeholders

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Given the multitude of stakeholders involved in assisting the labour market integration of refugees, it is sometimes difficult for employers to identify who the most relevant and best-placed interlocutors are. This may, in some cases, even generate contradictory messages to employers. What is more, employers may be approached in parallel by several stakeholders who have the same objective of finding jobs for refugees but who do so in an uncoordinated way. The role of NGOs, who are often service providers for public authorities but who may also act on their own, may in turn be difficult to ascertain for many employers.

Coordinating the actions of these different stakeholders is a challenge, not least because they may have different priorities and objectives. This challenge is particularly acute in countries where sub-national authorities have a strong role in integration, such as in some Scandinavian countries.

A lack of co-ordination can lead to the under- or over-provision of essential integration support for refugee employment, and also makes it difficult for both employers and refugees to identify who their possible counterpart or resource person is. Good coordination implies that different measures are well aligned, which is a particularly important issue for the integration of very low-educated refugees, as this often needs more time and involves many different stakeholders at different stages.

Good coordination is also a prerequisite for tailored integration support that accounts for the specific needs of each refugee and avoids employers and refugees having to knock on multiple doors to resolve issues. A key element in proper co-ordination is information sharing, with mapping the activities of each stakeholder an important first step in this process.

# Did you know?

A large proportion of integration services are provided by local authorities. To compensate them for this work, fiscal transfers to Sub-Central Governments (SCG) are common in OECD countries. Such transfers depend on the responsibilities assigned to SCGs and they usually co-fund social benefit expenditure, housing, integration programmes, language training and – where decentralised – labour market integration. Many transfers are based on the number of immigrants and refugees living in a jurisdiction. Other transfer systems feature indicators such as the local unemployment rate or the percentage of low-income households, which tend to be related to the cost of integrating refugees.



## PROPOSED ACTIONS

### For public authorities and employment services

- Improve information exchange, for example by creating co-ordination platforms, and share information widely
- Map the activities of different stakeholders
- Through regular consultation with all relevant stakeholders, ensure that there is neither an under- nor over-provision of support services Facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practice



### For employers

- Facilitate employer access to information about the respective roles of the different stakeholders and how best to engage with them



### For civil society organisations

- Advocate and understand that the best interests of refugees is not going to be met by any single organisation and that a coordinated effort is essential
- Cooperate and join forces by making coordinated integration offers



**Creating one-stop-shops for integration services** In 2004, the **Portuguese High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue** (ACIDI) created National Immigrant Support Centres (CNAI); currently operating in Lisbon, Porto and Faro. Their work is supported by smaller, local offices throughout the country. National CNAI centres host a variety of stakeholders that provide integration and reception services for immigrants, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Immigration and Borders Service as well as the Labour Inspectorate. In addition, the CNAI offers legal advice as well as employment support through a specialised agency. They have been closely working together with immigrant organisations which has allowed the streamlining of integration services, reduced red tape, and increased cooperation between different government agencies involved in the field of integration. In 2016, both national and local support services were adapted to better serve the needs of refugees. See <https://bit.ly/1RCMPPh>.





## Good practices for facilitating the employment of refugees

### Action 1 • NAVIGATE THE ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

#### Providing individualised information for employers

The main Danish employer association – the **Danish Confederation of Industry** – has established a phone hotline for its members to provide targeted advice on hiring refugees. Individual guidance is provided by specialists in the field of labour market and migration law, offering support on topics ranging from legal obligations and requirements, to the availability of wage subsidy and training schemes. In addition, the service offers information on how to get in contact with refugees and which government agencies can provide further support (e.g. employment services). Queries can also be sent by email and will be answered within 24 hours. See <https://bit.ly/2usfZiH> (in Danish).

#### Matching for internships while ensuring compliance with legislation

In the **United Kingdom**, the Bridges Programme is matching refugees with employers who offer short (around 12 days) work opportunities. Refugees are selected based on having previous work experience or training in the employer's sector. While placements are unpaid and there is no obligation to offer a job afterwards, many employers choose to keep refugees as employees. The involvement of the Bridges Programme also ensures that the placement (and possible continuation of work) does not violate immigration or labour law, depending on an individual's status or benefits. See <https://bit.ly/2GBah3f>.

### Action 3 • IDENTIFY AND VERIFY REFUGEES' SKILLS

#### Mapping of competences

In **Denmark**, mapping of competences (validation of education or informal competences) starts during the reception phase. The purpose is also to identify relevant municipalities for housing refugees according to local labour market demands. Mapping is carried out in interviews with individuals (and families), starting at asylum centres and at a range of other stakeholders licensed immigration authorities, e.g. the Red Cross and a number of municipalities. In January 2017, the new Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education opened a hotline that can advise those assessing refugees and asylum-seekers on their educational backgrounds and competences. This process is designed to be quick with case management taking only a few working days. In addition, the Danish Ministry of Education has developed "My Competence Portfolio" (*Min kompetencemappe*) that allows persons to create an overview of their educational background and professional training online. See <https://bit.ly/2Gbukpm>.

In **Sweden**, electronic portfolios can be used by asylum-seekers to generate a (preliminary) skills profile by way of a mobile app. A pilot project uses multi-lingual, online guides on different occupations in order to help refugees assess their own skills and qualifications against these occupations.

In **Norway**, a fast-track evaluation was developed for employers allowing them to quickly check the educational credentials of applicants. Employers are asked to fill in an online form, detailing candidates' educational background and within five working days feedback is provided by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) on whether qualifications are accredited and equivalent to a Norwegian degree. See <https://bit.ly/2GC12j9>.

The **European Commission** has launched a Skills Profile Tool as part of their New Skills Agenda for Europe. The online tool seeks to facilitate the skills mapping of third-country nationals, including refugees. It is free of charge and can be used by any service provider that supports refugee integration and seeks to gain a systematic overview of refugees' competences. The tool is available in multiple languages and allows showing two languages on the screen simultaneously in order to facilitate communication between refugees and service providers. See <https://bit.ly/2IZEur0>.

### **Recognising prior learning and vocational education**

In **Turkey**, UNHCR has signed the Letter of Understanding with the Vocational Qualifications Authority of Turkey in order to certify prior training and education completed in their country. UNHCR Turkey supports the translation of vocational qualifications and standards into Arabic in order to facilitate certification of skills. The certificates are internationally recognised. As for equivalency of diplomas, there is a co-operation with the Higher Education Council for facilitation.

In **Austria**, the public employment services conduct so-called “Competence Checks” for refugees. These checks assess refugees’ qualifications, professional skills and language skills and are used as a basis for deciding if any and what kind of upskilling measures are necessary. Competence Checks are available in a number of languages and take 5-7 weeks to complete. Since early 2016, they are available throughout the country. See <https://bit.ly/2DZw9j5>.

## **Action 4 • DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR JOB-READINESS**

### **Building practical IT skills**

The Migrants’ Help Association, an NGO based in Budapest, **Hungary**, offers practical job skills training activities as part of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) programme. These accredited lessons include basic computer courses, such as email platforms as well as more advanced courses in programming, data management and web design. In addition, MigHelp has provided beginner classes in Hungarian, German, French, and English, and also offer driving lessons and child care classes.

### **Training programmes to enhance employability**

In **Turkey**, UNHCR implements – in collaboration with government partners – various training programmes in line with the Development Plan and Industrial Strategy of the country to increase refugees’ employability. In order to emphasise the transition to self-reliance, the language and vocational training programmes are all supported by financial incentives to facilitate participation. Furthermore, the municipality of Ankara is currently building a centre for vocational training with support from the UNHCR. This vocational training centre will be open to both refugees and Turkish nationals.

## **Action 5 • MATCH REFUGEE TALENT WITH EMPLOYERS’ NEEDS**

### **Online matching tools for refugees and employers**

The NGO initiative “Action Emploi Réfugies” in **France** has set up an online portal where employers can post job openings, allowing refugee candidates to apply directly. Additionally, they also offer support with creating CVs. See <https://bit.ly/2pISZar>.

### **Connecting the matching process with opportunities for upskilling**

UpwardlyGlobal – a charity with multiple offices in the **United States** – supports employers in the recruitment process and connects them to recent arrivals, including refugees, who hold at least a Bachelor’s degree. Before being matched to a job opening, candidates participate in counselling and upskilling programs, leading them to be added to the recruitment database. See <https://bit.ly/1ql0d9t>.

## **Action 6 • PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN RECRUITMENT AND COMBAT STEREOTYPES**

### **The “Open Road Programme”**

The Open Road Programme in **New Zealand** supports refugees in learning how to drive and prepares them to pass a driver’s license test that holds certain restrictions. The license initially allows for independent driving, except during night-time. This can, however, be exchanged for a full license at a later stage. Over the course of two to three months, refugees receive two to three hours of driving lessons a week from volunteers who are qualified in providing driving instruction. Refugees are then expected to sit a mock exam. The programme is funded by the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment in collaboration with the Red Cross and specialised resettlement service providers in seven resettlement locations across the country. See <https://bit.ly/2HV6jPQ>.



### **Mentoring for migrant women**

The **Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Ethnicity (KVINFO)** draws on a network of 2 500 mentors and focuses on women from refugee families and other migrant groups. Mentors can be humanitarian migrants themselves and are matched with their mentees based on similar educational or occupational profiles. The mentorship programme has a clear focus on employment, with the aim to provide advice on career opportunities and job openings as well as offering support in the application process, e.g. with writing job applications and preparing for interviews. See <https://bit.ly/2pMB8i7> (in Danish).

## **Action 7 • PREPARE THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

### **The employer network “Businesses integrating refugees”**

The **Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry** has founded a network for its members who would like to or already have experience in hiring asylum-seekers and refugees. The network “Businesses integrating refugees” bundles information and provides practical guidance on a number of topics related to refugee employment, including how to prepare staff and line managers, and how they can support newcomers. The network also offers step-by-step guidance on diversity management and provides material on intercultural communication as well as “check-lists” on how to organise the first workday. In addition, the network provides short information sheets outlining successful strategies used by network members on how to make the workplace more inclusive. As of November 2017, around 1 500 German businesses are part of this network. See <https://bit.ly/2FX9hXC> (in German).

## **Action 9 • MAKE THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING REFUGEE**

### **Special incentives and support for companies hiring large numbers of refugees**

“100 Club” in **Sweden** is a Government Office of Sweden initiative and was founded to bring on board companies committed to hiring at least 100 newcomers during a period of three years. Special package solutions offered to bigger companies that commit to employing at least 100 new arrivals include placement services and wage subsidies. Placement services are tailored to the needs of individual companies and are provided by the public employment services. See <https://bit.ly/2GfGZnj>.

### **Networking and support**

In **Canada**, Regional Immigrant Employment Councils support companies to connect with talented refugees and other immigrants. They also provide networking opportunities for the companies involved. The largest of these is TRIEC, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, linking migrants with companies in the Greater Toronto Area. Rather than focusing on corporate social responsibility, they put the business case upfront, arguing that in a society that is as diverse as Canada, firms cannot afford to waste talent from abroad. TRIEC offers support to companies in the recruitment process, organises mentoring programmes, and provides e-learning material and courses on diversity management. See <https://bit.ly/1VUvJ45>.

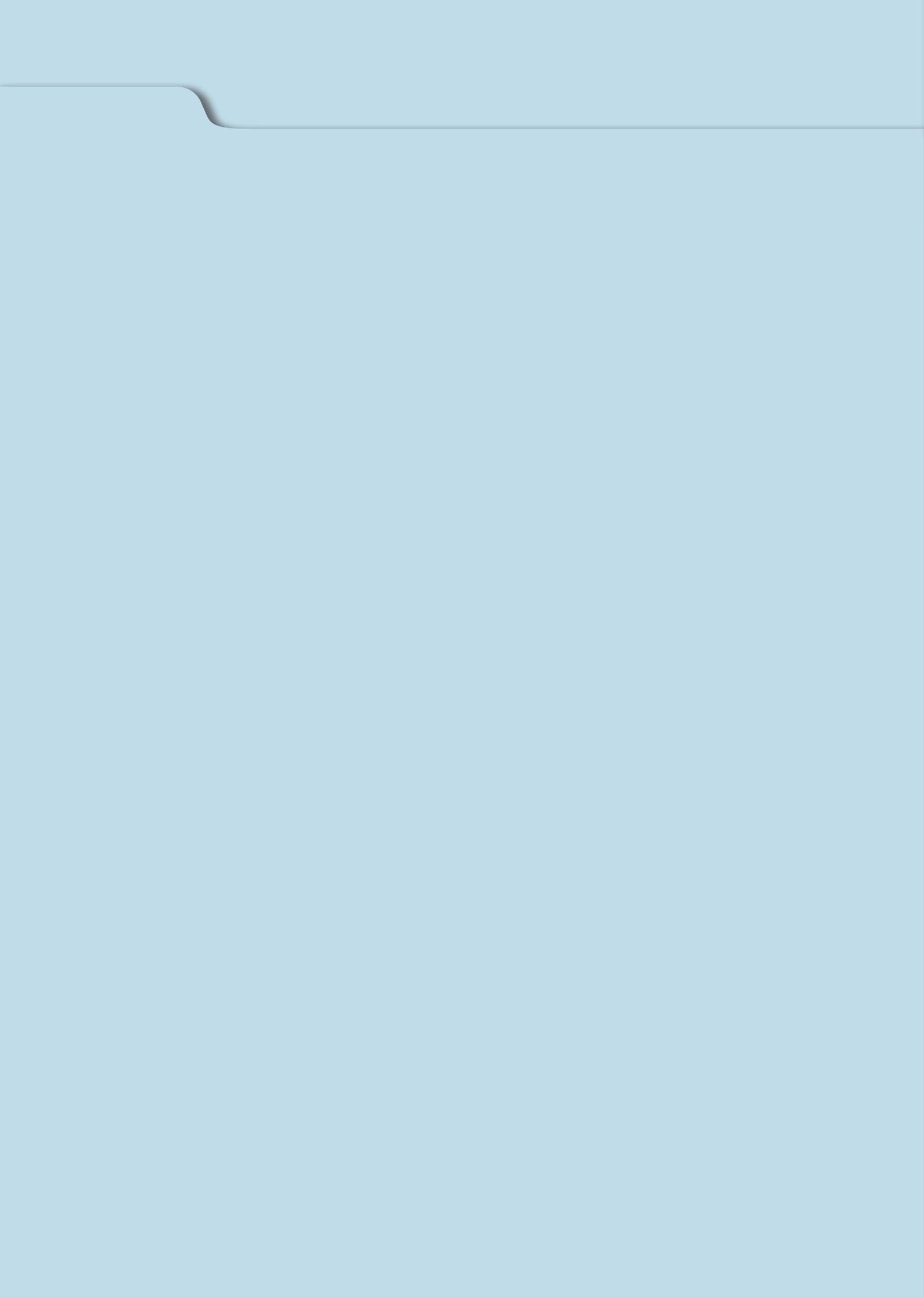
## **Action 10 • COORDINATE ACTIONS BETWEEN ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

### **Creating one-stop-shops for integration services**

To centralise services and enhance co-operation among different service providers, the **German state of North Rhine-Westphalia** has introduced Integration Points for asylum-seekers and refugees. These one-stop-shops seek to speed up labour market integration by streamlining services and bringing together different actors under the same roof, including public employment services, youth welfare offices, social welfare offices, local immigration authorities and municipal services. Depending on the local context, Integration Points may also include specialised services for the recognition of foreign qualifications and civil society initiatives.

### **Getting all stakeholders on board through common objectives**

In December 2017, the European Commission and the EU Social and Economic partners signed a “European Partnership for Integration”, laying down key principles and commitments to support and strengthen opportunities for refugees to integrate into the labour market, <https://bit.ly/2D3Aime>.



## Key stakeholders' action checklists



### Public authorities and employment services

- ✓ Create streamlined procedures for work permits and other necessary certificates based on clear administrative rules
- ✓ Ensure that regulations are evenly implemented across the country and limit discretion at the local level
- ✓ If multiple agencies are involved in the process of granting work permits or licences, enhance the co-operation between employers, employment services and immigration authorities
- ✓ Provide up-to-date, comprehensive information to employers who want to hire asylum-seekers, refugees, and other beneficiaries of international protection, including step-by-step guidance and individually-tailored support, e.g. through telephone hotlines
- ✓ Provide training to human resources staff on the requirements and rights related to employing asylum-seekers and persons benefiting from international protection
- ✓ Offer legal information to employers, including through brochures, online information and dedicated “hotlines”
- ✓ Consider the potentially negative impact on labour market integration of issuing renewable residence permits for refugees and shorter residence permits for other beneficiaries of international protection
- ✓ Mitigate the risk for employers investing in the vocational training of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection with insecure or limited duration status by creating schemes that provide legal certainty during the period of training
- ✓ Provide support for employers regarding skills assessment (including occupational skills and prior work experience) and ensure that these services are widely available free of charge or for a minimal fee
- ✓ Improve processes and information on the recognition and assessment of foreign credentials/ qualifications and of informal skills,
- ✓ Identify and address specific barriers refugee women may experience in relation to skills assessment
- ✓ Involve employers in the design and implementation of skills verification tools
- ✓ Encourage the use of online tools, such as the EU Skills Profile Tool for non-EU (third-country) nationals (<https://bit.ly/2IZEur0>)
- ✓ Provide language training that is tailored according to refugees' skills, backgrounds, and specific needs; with particular attention given to women and single or widowed parents
- ✓ Provide vocation-specific language training and targeted professional training, ideally in a workplace setting
- ✓ Provide financial support or loans for refugees who need to take driving lessons

...

- ✔ Take into account refugees' skills and local labour market needs when deciding on placement
- ✔ Educate employment service staff to increase their awareness of refugee-specific issues and skills
- ✔ Guide refugees with potentially transferable skills towards related occupations or alternative careers
- ✔ Facilitate better matching of available job opportunities with refugee skills
- ✔ Organise job fairs to match employers and refugees
- ✔ Offer support services (transportation, childcare, flexible hours, etc.) that increase opportunities for refugees in rural and remote areas to access jobs and training, with a particular focus on refugee women
- ✔ Raise awareness through campaigns, training programmes, etc., about discrimination, xenophobia, as well as conscious and unconscious stereotyping
- ✔ Put mechanisms in place to combat discrimination, including easily accessible recourse mechanisms for applicants who experience discrimination
- ✔ Remove administrative barriers to paid internships
- ✔ Limit liability risks for employers in case refugee employees lack documentation of employment history or credentials
- ✔ Ensure that measures to support the labour market integration of refugees complement, and do not impinge upon, measures for the employment of the local population
- ✔ Develop a clear and balanced communication strategy with a focus on facts
- ✔ Provide tailor-made, preferably individualised integration support, including for women and persons with specific needs, that accounts for the fact that some refugees may have a long integration pathway
- ✔ Assist refugees in obtaining the basic skills – particularly language – to be able to contribute and be productive in the workplace
- ✔ Provide dedicated case-workers to support companies employing refugees for the first few months following their recruitment
- ✔ Provide opportunities for continuous training and upskilling, including for refugees already in a job
- ✔ Make sure that refugees' motivation to take on employment quickly does not conflict with the need to equip them with basic skills, and, in addition, align incentives accordingly for creation of sustainable employment
- ✔ Lower the initial costs of hiring refugees where possible, including through temporary employment subsidies or tax breaks
- ✔ Ensure that low-cost upskilling measures for refugees are available
- ✔ Identify sectors that face or will face labour shortages in the future and outline how refugees can contribute to tackling these recruitment needs
- ✔ Improve information exchange, for example by creating co-ordination platforms, and share information widely
- ✔ Map the activities of different stakeholders
- ✔ Through regular consultation with all relevant stakeholders, ensure that there is neither an under- nor over-provision of support services. Facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practice





## Employers

- ✓ Provide opportunities for refugees to demonstrate their skills and ask candidates to provide testimonials or character references, e.g. from social workers, sponsors or mentors
- ✓ Be aware that refugees cannot be expected to provide certain background information/documents
- ✓ Offer internships, mentorships and/or apprenticeships to give refugees the opportunity to get a first experience in the host country's labour market
- ✓ Reach out to refugees by going beyond the traditional forms of recruitment, for example, by contacting civil society organisations working with refugees and asylum-seekers
- ✓ Work more closely with public authorities as well as public and private employment services to better identify and maximise suitable work opportunities for refugees
- ✓ Implement a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination and harassment in the workplace
- ✓ Provide short-term internships for opportunities to obtain recommendations and references
- ✓ Accept testimonials or character references, e.g., from social workers, sponsors or mentors
- ✓ Put refugees in contact with co-workers to facilitate social integration, such as carpools, in order to commute to work together
- ✓ Be open to proposals from refugees to bring an interpreter or facilitator for the job interview
- ✓ Use specific electronic recruitment systems geared towards matching employers and refugees that have been created by various stakeholders, including private employment agencies
- ✓ Engage senior management in conveying to staff the rationale behind hiring refugees
- ✓ Provide staff with opportunities to get involved, by introducing, for instance, mentorship or “buddy” schemes between refugees and employees
- ✓ Offer training to both supervisors and staff on how they can support refugees
- ✓ Promote a professional and respectful workplace for all
- ✓ Provide incoming refugees with clear information on company policies and work habits
- ✓ Find practical ways to support language acquisition of recently arrived refugees
- ✓ Make sure that policies addressing discrimination and harassment in the workplace are fit for purpose
- ✓ Adopt diversity strategies that facilitate the working together of people with different cultural and religious backgrounds
- ✓ Support skills certification of employed refugees
- ✓ Support additional training and upskilling measures for refugees in employment, including through more flexible work schedules where necessary
- ✓ Inform supervisors on how they can support refugees and who supervisors themselves can approach if they need additional guidance
- ✓ Consider being a role model by communicating to other employers and to the public that there is a business case for hiring refugees
- ✓ Sign up for relevant initiatives, such as the European Commission's “Employers together for Integration” (<https://bit.ly/2q5FC6l>)
- ✓ For small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), explore options for collaboration with other SMEs to better achieve economies of scale in supporting refugee employment

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## Employer associations

- ✓ Inform employers about the working rights of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection
- ✓ Make the case to governments on how legal uncertainty poses a barrier for the hiring of beneficiaries of international protection and for investing in further training
- ✓ Encourage employers who provide internships to provide references
- ✓ Facilitate experience-sharing among employers regarding skills verification tools
- ✓ Assess in which occupational fields mandatory background checks could be replaced by other evidence of character
- ✓ Demonstrate that beyond the ethical issue, unconscious bias can impede the recruitment of new talent and negatively impact on future business development
- ✓ Raise awareness about the importance of intercultural communication at the workplace
- ✓ Provide guidance to employers on preparing the workplace for recruitment of refugees
- ✓ Showcase positive examples, for example through testimonies of employers and refugees, and demonstrate how their specific skills have been used by companies
- ✓ Gather employers' experiences of how refugee employees have supported links to new customer bases or opened up new markets
- ✓ Gather evidence on the experiences of employers in recruiting and working with refugee employees, and show what lessons can be drawn from these experiences
- ✓ Facilitate employer access to information about the respective roles of the different stakeholders and how best to engage with them





## Refugees

- ✓ Be aware of the conditions and scope of the right to work and demonstrating to employers an understanding of them, for example in the job application
- ✓ Become familiar with the administrative framework for employment in the host country
- ✓ Have qualifications and other relevant documents translated into the local language
- ✓ Identify opportunities to have both formal qualifications and informal skills certified
- ✓ Seek to convert or obtain through testing a national driving license as soon as possible
- ✓ Seek to learn the local language and other relevant skills in order to accelerate integration into the workplace
- ✓ For asylum-seekers, where possible, do not wait to obtain a secured status to learn the language or to develop professional skills that would improve employability in the country
- ✓ Participate in mentorship, internship, and apprenticeship programmes where these are made available
- ✓ Try to identify paid internships or volunteering opportunities as entry points to the workplace and to establish networks
- ✓ Become familiar with the local job market, including its functioning (specificities regarding hiring practices, etc.) and the norms and customs in the workplace
- ✓ Actively seek employers who hire candidates with similar job profiles to your own, including through job fairs
- ✓ Use informal job networks through NGOs and become familiar with the primary recruitment channels
- ✓ Be well-informed about rights regarding labour market access and employment
- ✓ Follow the host country standards in applications for jobs
- ✓ Highlight any engagement in the local community in CV and motivation letters, for example, membership in associations and/or voluntary work
- ✓ Prepare CV in the local language and seek out services that can help with CV preparation
- ✓ Take an interpreter or facilitator to the job interview, if needed
- ✓ Ask for reference letters from case workers and previous employers, where applicable
- ✓ Make efforts to understand and adapt to new work contexts, skills, and job sectors, where possible
- ✓ Actively reach out to co-workers and engage with them when possible
- ✓ Demonstrate high commitment and motivation

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## Civil society organisations

- ✓ Establish information services for employers and compile knowledge databases on the administrative framework for refugee employment
- ✓ Assist refugees and employers with information about work rights
- ✓ Provide background information on refugees' countries of origin, for example, data/fact files regarding the primary industries in that country, their work culture, etc.
- ✓ Facilitate learning opportunities for refugees on local employment practices and the work etiquette that is expected once employed
- ✓ Establish referral systems among civil society organisations to exchange knowledge on other services available to improve refugees' work-readiness
- ✓ Develop or adapt online platforms to support employer access to the refugee pool of talent
- ✓ Help refugees to prepare their CV and motivation letter, as well as to prepare for interviews
- ✓ Facilitate dialogue between workers and refugees before and during the initial phase of recruitment
- ✓ Offer training courses on intercultural communication and different workplace cultures.
- ✓ Raise awareness among low-skilled refugees of the need to strike a balance between working as soon as possible and acquiring the basic skills required for long-term employability
- ✓ Ensure that mentorship opportunities for refugees accompany them in the long-term
- ✓ Advocate for and liaise with governments and research organisations to develop measurable indicators to obtain a better understanding of refugees' contribution to the economy
- ✓ Facilitate employers' awareness that while hiring refugees can be challenging, they stand to gain a lot if they hire a workforce that is diverse, adaptable and willing to learn
- ✓ Advocate and understand that the best interests of refugees is not going to be met by any single organisation and that a coordinated effort is essential
- ✓ Cooperate and join forces by making coordinated integration offers



# ENGAGING WITH EMPLOYERS IN THE HIRING OF REFUGEES

A 10-point multi-stakeholder action plan for employers, refugees, governments and civil society

- Action 1** • Navigate the administrative framework
- Action 2** • Provide employers with sufficient legal certainty
- Action 3** • Identify and verify refugees' skills
- Action 4** • Developing skills for job-readiness
- Action 5** • Match refugee talent with employers' needs
- Action 6** • Provide equal opportunities in recruitment and combat stereotypes
- Action 7** • Prepare the working environment
- Action 8** • Enable long-term employability
- Action 9** • Make the business case for hiring refugees
- Action 10** • Coordinate actions between all stakeholders