

# Investing in Refugee Talent

*Lessons Learned in Labour Market Integration*



**Hire Immigrants**



Cities of Migration

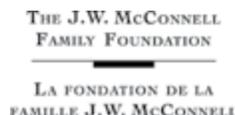
| Bertelsmann Stiftung

Hire Immigrants is a program at the Global Diversity Exchange (GDX), a 'think-and-do' tank based at Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Management (Toronto, Canada). Hire Immigrants is an international platform that supports employers to realize the benefits of immigrant skills, talents and experience. Hire Immigrants is a flagship program of the Maytree Foundation, previously known as ALLIES, Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies.

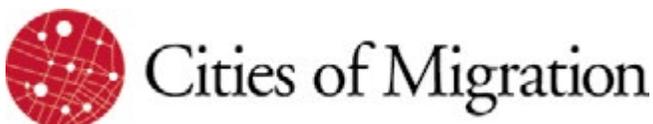
## About Hire Immigrants

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### Partners



### Collaborator



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# From Refugees to New Canadians: Lessons in Compassion from Canada

Mark Patterson, Executive Director, Hire Immigrants & Magnet at Ryerson University and Dr. Anver Saloojee, Assistant Vice President, Ryerson International

When the conflict in Syria erupted in 2015, Canada was presented with an opportunity to provide leadership in the face of a global crisis. Our government's humanitarian response was swift, but it was Canadian citizens that truly stepped up to respond to the crisis from their homes, workplaces and communities. Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program became a call to action for ordinary Canadians eager to help, give back and work alongside the Canadian government as nation builders and champions of our immigrant heritage. Today, PSR is being replicated through the Global Sponsorship of Refugees Initiative (GRSI) in countries around the world.

Canada's humanitarian response to the resettlement of the Syrian refugees demonstrates the nation's commitment to compassion. Since 2015, over 84,000 Syrian refugees have settled in communities and cities across Canada. While nowhere near the scale and generosity of the German response, Canadians across the country have succeeded in boosting their government's initial commitment by almost threefold, from 25,000 to over 84,000 Syrian refugees to date, many of them sponsored through Canada's unique private sponsorship program.

Like many of the communities across the country that resettled Syrian refugees, the Greater

Toronto Area (GTA) rallied local government, the business community and key partners to respond meaningfully to the challenges facing these newcomers. In the centre of the city of Toronto, Ryerson University has been a leader in providing institutional support to the local initiatives that catapulted swift action from key influencers and stakeholders.

In June 2015, Ratna Omidvar, Distinguished Visiting Professor, and today appointed to Senate of Canada, led the launch of Lifeline Syria, with the support of Ryerson VPRI Wendy Cukier, and other community leaders who had been part of Operation Lifeline, which had sponsored Indochinese refugees decades earlier. In July 2015, Dr. Cukier and her team in Ryerson's Diversity Institute launched the Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge (RULSC) to provide experiential and research opportunities for students and to leverage the resources of faculty, staff and partners to privately sponsor Syrian refugees. Initially targeting 10 families, it rapidly grew, eventually raising \$5m and sponsoring more than 400 refugees. More than 1,000 student, staff, faculty, alumni and community member volunteers have actively supported a new approach to building partnership between the university, community, private sector and government.

Governments moved quickly and Toronto City

Council moved swiftly to approve its Refugee Resettlement Program in October 2015, with Mayor John Tory personally sponsoring a family of Syrian refugees through RULSC. And in December 2015 the Syrian Refugee Employer Roundtable, led by Ratna Omidvar, convened local employers and business leaders to tap their expertise and desire to help these new Canadians access jobs and a promising future in their adopted country.

Ryerson University benefits from Toronto's pluralistic and multicultural society, and its ability to attract international partners, networks and collaborators who wish to learn from our experience.

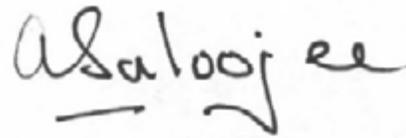
This is merely one of the numerous expressions of Ryerson's commitment to diversity, inclusion and its core mission of being an outward looking institution. The RULSC is a great example of how Ryerson is using social innovation to provide solutions to societal and economic challenges, while providing experiential learning opportunities to students.

Ryerson International connects the Ryerson community to an increasingly globalized world through action-oriented projects, international exchanges, research and visiting scholars. Initiatives like Hire Immigrants and Cities of Migration build bridges to community, and enhance the university's role in Canada and abroad in addressing global challenges. Diversity is a priority at Ryerson, and the focus of its efforts to build an inclusive campus and a student body of global citizens.

Speaking as a major public institution and one of Toronto's largest employers, the Investing in Refugee Talent report represents a timely and practical guide to galvanizing public and private sector response to the challenges faced by newcomers to local labour markets. Beyond private citizens, Canada's private sector has demonstrated leadership and significant capacity to support settlement needs and create pathways to employment. The strong and sincere desire to

welcome and integrate our newest Canadians is a shared national goal.

This volume of best practices from cities in Canada, Germany, Sweden and Australia, highlights the challenges we share, and importantly, the opportunities we can leverage as we navigate migration in the 21 st century, together.



*Dr. Anver Saloojee*



*Mr. Mark Patterson*

# Labour Market Integration of Refugees: Lessons from Germany

Claudia Walther and Matthias Mayer,  
Bertelsmann Stiftung

The refugee migration of 2015 and 2016 posed major challenges for Europe, partly because serious reforms of the Common European Asylum System were long overdue. It quickly became clear that the Member States of the European Union could not agree on a fair distribution system for refugees. Nevertheless, Germany tried to live up to its historical responsibility and kept its borders open for vulnerable people.

In 2015 and 2016, Germany saw around 1.2 million first time asylum applicants and just under 600,000 people received protection status. For a country of about 80 million inhabitants, this is not an insignificant number. Yet in 2015, there was initially a high level of public support on all sides: from politicians, municipalities and the invaluable commitment of many volunteers.

Many refugees will stay in Germany for the foreseeable future and must learn how to participate in German society. Integration into the labour market is central, but generally difficult. For example, a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that on average refugees in Europe need up to 20 years to reach an employment rate similar to their native counterparts. This is the result of a number of barriers - both local and in businesses - that make it difficult for refugees to find work commensurate with their skills and qualifications. In 2015 and 2016, the main obstacles included:

- The number and lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the municipality, employment agencies, job centers and volunteers;
- Lack of transparency and information on how many refugees arrived, their age, qualifications, where they were settled (city or county/regional centre) and how the exact procedures work;
- Lack of knowledge of German was and continues to be a real barrier to matching refugees with employers;
- Complex asylum procedures and long waiting times meant that it often takes months or even years to determine the legal status of the refugee applicant and whether he/she is entitled to asylum and thus fully available to the labour market;
- Due to the unusually high numbers of refugees for Germany, many people seeking shelter lived for months in temporary housing, gyms and other mass accommodations;
- Many asylum seekers with qualifications and work experience in their country of origin are not able to provide documentary proof of their credentials owing to the circumstances of their flight. Despite efforts to improve and standardize the recognition of non-formal

and informal skills and competences, in many cases it remains unclear which occupational competencies people have.

- Traumas from dramatic experiences of war, violence, and persecution, as well as the lack of opportunities for many to catch up with families, hamper integration into work, education, and society.

But it's not just these legal and technical challenges. In the meantime, the public mood has turned. The galvanizing tailwinds of 2015 are met with considerable resistance today. Increasing levels of skepticism and hesitation right through to racism and right-wing populism are replacing the former mainstream narrative of welcome. A growing ambivalence in attitude towards refugees and an increase in authoritarian aggression against

*“Labour market integration is more important than ever”*

Muslims and asylum seekers can be observed.

Thus, labour market integration is more important than ever. Only through its success will we be able to convince the skeptics in the “unsettled middle”, situated between those opposed to migration and advocates for integration.

### **A holistic overall process helps realize the potential of refugee talent**

Successful labour market integration of refugees requires effective action in a coordinated overall process. Only together will it be possible to overcome the barriers on the ground. Municipalities, government employment services, civil society and, above all, employers need round tables, community forums, facilitated processes and structures to enable the development and implementation of a coordinated strategy on the ground. This must be supported by the Federal Government and state governments [in Canada,

by federal and provincial governments].

Labour market integration as a holistic process means that individual strategies for language acquisition, skills assessment and career orientation need to be dovetailed with each other. This will reduce the negative impact of long waiting periods and lost time out of work. In addition, strategies for skills assessment, job search, workplace orientation and training should be flexibly tailored to individual needs. As primary stakeholders, employers need to be involved in the overall process. In addition to jobs, for labour market integration to succeed, legal and social integration must also be addressed, including fast and fair asylum procedures, adequate housing and family reunification. A holistic approach and coordinated strategies need to be continuously informed by advice and support from a broad range of stakeholders.

### **The Bertelsmann Stiftung is trying to make a contribution**

A whole series of refugee integration projects has been launched at the Bertelsmann Stiftung since the end of 2015, including:

- Studies on labour market integration of refugees.
- The project “Arriving in Germany” with 23 pilot cities and counties.
- The support and strengthening of volunteer helpers.
- The “My Skills” project on the assessment of refugee professional skills in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency.
- Program for the re-Qualification of Teachers for refugees who trained as teachers in Syria.

For example, the “Arriving in Germany” project (Ankommen in Deutschland) works to improve refugee integration by helping local authorities

develop and implement a multi-stakeholder approach. Developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung in cooperation with the IQ Network and the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, the strategic networking of different local stakeholders aims to create a common approach “from a single source”. Strategies of the project include for instance “one stop shops” as well as job fairs to match employers with refugees.

## Conclusion and Outlook: Integrate lessons learned into the system

One of the biggest challenges facing refugee labour market integration, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, is dealing with current labour shortages which show no signs of abatement in a context of rapid increasing demographic change. Employers’ demand for workers is therefore quite high. However, refugees are primarily people fleeing war and persecution; their inclusion, therefore, must follow a humanitarian rather than an economic logic. Nevertheless, refugees have great potential to work, and if they find work, that’s good, both for the refugees and the country of immigration. However, refugee job applicants may not have the “made in Germany” qualifications required by employers, or may not be able to provide proof of their competencies. Labour market integration, above all, takes time.

*“It is time to leave behind the crisis management mode of recent years”*

With fewer people seeking protection in Germany today, it is time to leave behind the crisis management mode of recent years. Effective methods and strategies were developed over the last few years at short notice. It’s time to recognize the good practices and lessons learned from these “special” programs and integrate them into sustainable local and national governance systems. In addition, the lessons learned from

working with refugee groups can be helpfully transferred to other target groups, such as young people or the long-term unemployed.

This report presents some projects and good practice examples as well as learning experiences. We hope that this will be a valuable resource, especially for employers and communities, to support their commitment to helping refugee newcomers settle, find employment and re-start their lives.

# The Business Case for Investing in Refugee Talent

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# The Business Case for Investing in Refugee Talent

Philippe Legrain

Founder, Open Political Economy Network (OPEN)

Mohammed had his own upholstery business in Damascus. But he and his family had to flee the Syrian capital during the brutal civil war that continues to devastate their country. Eventually he ended up in the German city of Kiel. And there as it turns out, his skills as a textile engineer were in high demand.

Christian Lübbe, the owner of Coastworxx, a company that makes sails for boats hadn't been able to find suitably skilled workers for years. So when he met Mohammed, he jumped at the opportunity to hire him. A part-time job soon became a full-time one. Now Mohammed is managing Coastworxx's new line of business: sun awnings.

Mohammed's sons are also training with the company. Ahmet works part-time while studying for a university degree in medical technology, while Yousef is doing an apprenticeship in sail-making. Thanks to Mohammed and his family, along with other refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, Coastworxx is finally able to expand capacity to meet demand after years of skills shortages.

Mohammed's contribution to Coastworxx highlights a crucial point for businesses. Investing in refugee talent isn't just a matter of corporate social responsibility (CSR); it also makes good business sense.

The CSR case for hiring refugees is compelling. Faced with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, many companies want to be seen to be doing their bit to help. Assisting refugees can earn goodwill from governments and consumers, and help attract, retain and motivate employees.

## Good for business

There is also a strong business case for investing in refugee talent. Refugees are typically hard-

*"Business investment in training refugees tends to be repaid in higher productivity"*

working and highly motivated. While it involves an initial cost that wage subsidies and other government support may help offset, business investment in training refugees tends to be repaid in higher productivity and reduced staff turnover. Skilled refugees like Mohammed can fill skills shortages. Less-skilled ones can fill jobs that locals no longer want to do. And having a more diverse workforce also tends to boost creativity and innovation, and can help tap new markets both domestically and abroad.

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

In Germany, the Boston Consulting Group calculates that whereas hiring and training a local worker costs €18,000 in the first year, recruiting and training a refugee costs €7,500 more – that is 40% extra. But thanks to government subsidies and the pay-off from increased productivity by filling jobs in shortage areas, the payback period for the initial investment is typically only a year.

Mohammed's example shows the value of hiring skilled refugees. Less-skilled refugees can make an important contribution too. The biggest employer in the small Australian town of Nhill, some 350 km from Melbourne, is Luv-A-Duck, a local poultry producer. It wanted to expand but couldn't find the workers it needed locally. So it contacted AMES Australia, the country's national settlement agency, which offers employers a free recruitment service and a wide range of job-ready workers. A group of Karen refugees from Myanmar came to visit the Luv-A-Duck plant and four were hired. Now there are more than 50 Karen working at Luv-A-Duck and on local farms, as Cities of Migration has [reported](#).

The value of a diverse workforce is also huge. Refugees in Canada are often rejected for jobs ostensibly because they lack Canadian work experience. But the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) takes the opposite approach: it tries to make the most of internationally trained talent, as Hire Immigrants [reports](#).

One recent BDC hire is Mustafa Fadel, an IT engineer with ten years' experience who came to Canada as a government-assisted refugee. Originally from Syria, Fadel spent three years in Jordan. With his IT background, he was able to continue to work remotely with companies in Dubai, keeping his skill set fresh. In BDC's view, Fadel brings much more to the bank than his technical skills. "I had different experience in the field, in terms of how I've worked with clients," Fadel explains. "By adding my experience to my team and their sharing with me we have improved our processes. Diversity makes our team stronger."

There is ample evidence that diversity is good for the bottom line. Consultants at McKinsey have looked at the performance of companies in the US, the UK, Canada and Latin America and they found that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have above-average financial returns. They concluded that "Diversity is probably a competitive differentiator that shifts market share towards

more diverse companies over time."

## Social stakes

The business case for hiring refugees is compelling. And getting refugees into work promptly is also a top priority for society as a whole. It fast-tracks their "integration" – their ability to fully participate in society. It helps neutralize the claim that they are a burden. And when refugees become colleagues and friends, they no longer seem like a threat.

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

Yet refugees face all sorts of hurdles to finding work – such as personal trauma, social discrimination and government bureaucracy – and in many countries they struggle. In Belgium, fewer than one in three refugees find a job within five years. There is huge scope for progress; in the Canadian province of Alberta, four in five refugees gain work within a year of arriving. While refugees' success in finding employment depends in part on their individual skills and attributes, the policies and programmes in the receiving country also make a huge difference – as do the efforts of local businesses.

## Business efforts

Coastworxx, the company where Mohammed works is a member of Wir Zusammen (We Together), a network of more than 200 German businesses, big and small, that recognize the value of refugees. By July 2017, they had provided internships for 3,500 refugees and apprenticeships for a further 800, and also created 2,130 permanent jobs.

However, businesses may face challenges in

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

To address information issues, websites and brochures can answer FAQs and provide concrete examples and practical guidance on hiring refugees. One-stop shops or hotlines, such as the Danish one to help businesses find suitable refugee employees, are particularly valuable for smaller businesses.

To find and help train suitable candidates, businesses can turn to NGOs in the US, public employment services in Europe, temporary employment agencies and new online job-matching services such as *Workeer* in Germany and *Action Emploi Réfugiés* in France. Since 2009, *Chipotle* has hired more than 100 refugees at its restaurants in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which evaluates how well candidates' skills and personality match the company's needs and culture. As a result, applicants sent by the IRC are seven times more likely to be qualified and hired – which is good for both the candidate and *Chipotle*.

*Starbucks* is partnering with the IRC and UNHCR to find suitable candidates and provide skills training. In response to President Trump's first executive order suspending the entry of refugees into the US, it announced plans to hire 10,000 refugees in its coffee shops worldwide. It aims to recruit 2,500 of those in Europe, which would represent 8% of its current European workforce of 30,000. In Canada, *Starbucks* is working in partnership with [Hire Immigrants](#) and *Magnet* to meet its target of hiring 1,000 refugees in stores across the country.

Language is consistently cited as a top barrier to labour market participation. However, language issues can be addressed in several ways. One option is to use interpreters initially; providing language classes can also be helpful. *Seatply*, a Montreal-based plywood company, offers free language lessons to newly arrived Syrian refugees who don't speak English or French. The company – which was founded by *Levon Afeyan*, who arrived in Canada forty years ago as a refugee from the civil war in Lebanon – has taken on a dozen Syrians, with plans to take on more.

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

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

*Starwood*, a hotel company, hires refugees for a variety of jobs from housekeeping to management. Its foundation is piloting new hospitality training centres in Dallas and San Diego, where refugees will be able to learn skills such as dealing with customers. "We do sometimes need to increase upfront training for our refugee recruits," says *Kristin Meyer*, *Starwood's* Associate Director of Community Partnerships and Global Citizenship. "But the dedication and passion they bring to the job definitely outweighs that investment."

Cultural orientation programmes for both refugees and local employees can help address integration issues. IKEA Switzerland is offering 108 paid six-month internships to refugees over three years from June 2016 in its nine furniture stores across the country. These include cultural awareness training for both refugees and their co-workers provided by external experts. HR departments work with local authorities to recruit the right candidates.

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

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

Efforts to do good can also end up being good business. The Magdas Hotel in Vienna was set

up in 2015 by a charity called Caritas to provide employment for refugees, who make up 20 of its 30 staff. Two years on, the Austrian hotel is on track

*"Efforts to do good can also end up being good business"*

to break even and has received very high reviews through online platforms. Its multilingual staff from 16 countries are an added benefit. Many come from countries with a culture of hospitality and are well-suited to the hotel business. The hotel has overcome its teething troubles. Some employees had been too traumatized to work effectively. Training is time-consuming; many staff lack formal work experience. Applicants are now picked for their attitude, rather than experience; while a social worker visits weekly, employees need to be able to cope with anything a shift throws at them.

Some governments seek to recognize (and thus encourage) businesses' efforts. Denmark awards annual integration prizes to companies that assist refugees and other migrants. Canada rewards firms that help refugees to find a first job with a national Refugee Employment Award.

That is a good example for other countries too. There is a compelling case for businesses to invest in refugee talent. We all need to spread the word.

## About the Author



Philippe Legrain is the founder of [Open Political Economy Network \(OPEN\)](#), an internationally networked think-tank and a senior visiting fellow at the London School of Economics' European Institute. He was previously an economic adviser to the President of the European Commission, special adviser to the Director-General of the World Trade Organization and a journalist for *The Economist*. Philippe is the author of four books, notably *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them* (2007), which was shortlisted for the Financial Times Business Book of the Year award. He is the also author of [Refugees Work: A Humanitarian Investment that Yields Economic Dividends](#) (2016) and [Step Up: How to Get Refugees into Work Quickly](#) (2017), both of which were co-published by OPEN and the Tent Foundation.

## BDC Internships: Breaking Down the Barriers to Refugee

### Canada

What can an employer do to create opportunities for former refugees? The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) already knows how important diversity and inclusion is to expand and reach entrepreneurs in new markets and communities. BDC recently expanded its strategic diversity imperative to include the talent of former refugees in Canada. As refugee talent arrives, employers have an important role to play in recognizing them as talent first, and refugees second.

It takes time and commitment for employers to see newcomer talent as a strategic opportunity. They must commit to it. Once they do, they'll only benefit, says Ellen Austin, BDC HR Business Partner. She says that both recruiters and hiring managers have a responsibility to expand their knowledge and understand international talent. A number of years ago, BDC recognized they were missing out on potential talent because they couldn't properly assess newcomer credentials. The company educated staff who now understand international resumes, international experience and unconscious bias.

BDC became more open to international education, experience, and to a greater talent pool. The perception of risk shifted. Instead of perceiving international experience as an unknown risk, BDC now makes sure it does not miss out on internationally trained talent. Having a diverse employee base with international experience already at BDC has also helped to evaluate specific credentials, institutions and companies.

Even in this context however, it was hard to know what an employer could do to support Syrian refugees in Canada.

Collaborating with other employers and community partners helped BDC see the value of starting small. The company created an interview and presentation skills workshop for a few well screened refugees. Starting small and incrementally, gave BDC an opportunity to build the internal competence and confidence they needed to work with refugees. It was also important for corporate buy-in.

After an intensive, practical day of information and support in the workshop, participants are able to apply for paid internships at BDC. The workshop is useful not only for the refugees, but for BDC as well. As part of BDC's leadership development program, employees deliver the session, building the company's internal leaders. Success was immediate. Four interns were hired. And departments across BDC expressed interest in hosting refugee talent.

Austin says employers can provide opportunities, but also need to offer support and accommodation when it comes to hiring former refugees. Benefits are offered to BDC interns, such as access to the corporate Employee Assistance Program (EAP), to complement community settlement services. BDC also works with a local community organization that created an entrepreneurship program for them, offered in Arabic. BDC's four new interns volunteered to help deliver the program. For them, volunteering was a way to give back to new refugees.

BDC gained knowledge, community connections, and access to a previously untapped talent pool. The Bank provides an example of how employers can create opportunities for refugees. In so doing, they create opportunities for their own company as well.



## Accenture: Using Technology to Turn Refugees into Employees

### Germany

In 2015, the leadership team at Accenture had two competing demands: employees already helping refugees wanted the company to play a greater role in the crisis and; hiring managers needed to fill 400 technology specialist positions throughout Germany.

Accenture quickly realized that these demands were connected.

Accenture created a specific pathway for refugees to access employment opportunities at their Kronberg site near Frankfurt. Their Jump Start Refugees program targeted refugees who had a Bachelor's degree from their home country and an affinity for technology. After a six-week training program, and passing a final exam, trainees would be guaranteed a job as Accenture Software Engineer Associates.

Accenture quickly recognized training alone was not enough. Enthusiastic Accenture employees prepared and supported trainees to work on client projects. The company recognized that their new trainees were in precarious situations. They needed permanent housing and a welcoming environment to truly thrive. Participants were paid, provided one-room flats in Frankfurt close to the Accenture office, and lunch at work throughout the six-week training program.

In early 2017, the first cohort of eight participants graduated from the program and were offered full-time positions at Accenture. Given the success of the pilot, and adoption of the program into regular HR operations, the next cohort doubled, from 8 to 16 participants. The company also

expanded the program beyond Kronberg.

Starting a small pilot was key to the program's success. Once the company was able to demonstrate the skills trainees brought to the workplace, Accenture shared the positive results across the company. The Human Resources Department integrated Jump Start Refugees into regular recruitment operations. The success of the pilot, and well documented practices for implementation, meant corporate HR could easily scale up at other Accenture sites.

Accenture took their learning into local communities. It recognized the need to support other companies, to find refugee talent to meet their labour market needs. In Frankfurt and Hamburg, Accenture employees partnered with local refugee-serving, non-profits to deliver resume sessions, cultural awareness training and job fairs. Accenture employees helped translate refugees' work experience into the transferable skills needed by German employers.

Small and medium size businesses were interested to meet refugees in-person to learn more about their skills and experience. In October 2016, Accenture organized a career fair in Frankfurt connecting 300 refugees with 15 local businesses. This led to a larger event, where over 1,000 job seekers met with over 50 Frankfurt businesses.

While initially focusing on their own employment needs, Accenture quickly created a collaborative community development model to help refugees and improve local labour market conditions for all.



## Luv-A-Duck: Small Towns, Big Returns

### Australia

In 2010, unable to recruit the poultry workers needed to facilitate a plant expansion from the local population in the small town of Nhill, Luv-A-Duck's General Manager, John Millington, turned to AMES Australia, the country's national settlement agency. Millington made arrangements for a group of Karen refugees to visit the Luv-A-Duck plant in Nhill, Australia and hired four workers.

Today there are more than 50 Karen working at Luv-A-Duck and on local farms serving the plant. Over 170 Karen and their families have now settled in Nhill. Through a well-planned recruitment and resettlement process, the Karen now comprise almost 12% of the local population, including significant numbers of working age adults and families with young children.

The Karen found jobs and a refuge, while the town received an economic and social transfusion, reinvigorating the community. The Karen provided an important local employer with a much needed workforce. This in turn spurred further job growth in the region, stimulating the local economy, feeding back into services and retail shops at the community level.

The impact of the Karen settlement on Nhill goes even further. Over five years, 70.5 full time jobs were created, representing a 3% increase in total employment across the district, and \$41.5 million was added to the regional economy. Significant social outcomes include the arrest of population decline in the region, revitalized local services, increased government funding, and an increase in social capital.

As a result, Hindmarsh Shire Council (which governs the region) has made the resettlement and integration of the Karen part of their overall economic development strategy. The Council plans to lead by example by ensuring it employs Karen in municipal administration.

While employers like Luv-A-Duck are the driving force in attracting and recruiting immigrants to small communities, they need the entire community's involvement to help make small towns welcoming places for the newcomers, encouraging them to stay.

Preparing the wider host community for the newcomers was an important step. Millington reached out to an older neighbour for help connecting the Karen with the local community. That senior resident became a lifeline to the newcomers, looking out for them on a daily basis and connecting them to neighbours and community members.

Luv-A-Duck worked to ensure there was a positive environment in which to facilitate relationship-building between the locals and newcomers. Management provided background information on the Karen and their refugee experience. They explained the company's recruitment challenges while reassuring people that local Nhill workers would have first option on the jobs. Luv-A-Duck staff were included in discussions about the proposed resettlement.

On the other side of the equation, Karen families were supported through local community programs that made sure the partners and kids of the workers were looked after.

The situation has been a win-win both for the Nhill locals and the Karen newcomers who have so successfully embraced their new environment.



## Gewobag: Firm Meets Labour Needs through Refugee Traineeship Program

### Germany

Like many German employers, Berlin real estate company Gewobag was having trouble finding skilled talent to fill labour shortages. The situation has become even more critical as the company grows. With an increasingly diverse workforce and tenants (40% of its tenants are foreign-born), there was an incentive for Gewobag to invest in educating its current workforce and look at immigrant talent when meeting its labour market needs.

The company struggled initially with an intercultural training program for current staff. They were resistant, concerned that they were being accused of being racist. However, this changed when Gewobag implemented a refugee-hiring project. Staff realized that the training benefited everyone and participated enthusiastically.

The refugee population represented a new talent pool for Gewobag. In Germany, trainees are expected to arrive prepared to apply the theoretical knowledge learned in school. The company found that the refugees did not have the same formal education as local students; they were unprepared to begin a standard vocational training program. In October 2016, the company launched a pre-vocational training program with its first 10 refugee participants. Modelled after German apprenticeship programs, Gewobag's program bridges the gap in their knowledge of the theoretical requirements needed to complete their vocational training. Refugee trainees learn theory while applying the concepts on-the-job.

Martina Hartig, Human Resources Director at Gewobag, says that it was important to provide additional supports to the refugee trainees to ensure their success. A dedicated staff member to work with the new refugee trainees was essential for success. The coordinator meets with them each week, facilitates their connection to a staff mentor, the internal socio-cultural program, and assists them to complete all necessary legal and employment paperwork. This role is key to successfully integrate refugees into their workforce. Hartig says, "it is important to accompany people and not just leave them alone, they need mentoring and support programs". Trainees are paid for the duration of the program, which vary from 6 months to three years, with wages partially subsidized by the Federal government.

Hartig says it is a worthwhile investment for the company and its workforce. For example, pre-vocational training provided former refugee Al Ali with insight integral to being effective at Gewobag. He learned vocabulary that would not have been taught in traditional language courses. The program set him up for success. Hartig says that workforce inclusion is happening as well. Refugees have become colleagues, and the process of integration for both the newcomers and the local workers was normalized.

Each group of trainees is capped at 10 refugees a year. Hartig says that by keeping the numbers small, and surrounding them with supports, allows Gewobag to fully integrate each new hire into the workforce and ensure high employee retention rates.

The company has won two international HR awards and the Berlin mayor brings international groups to learn about the Gewobag model. Beyond the benefit to the workforce, the program adds to the company's positive image and excellent reputation in the community.



# The Power of the Multi-Stakeholder Approach

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# The Power of the Multi-Stakeholder Approach

Nava Hinrichs

Managing Director, The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration (THP)

With many countries experiencing an increase in refugee flows in recent years, there has been a surge in new and innovative initiatives to support the settlement and integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Whereas historically migration and settlement has been the business of national governments, in recent times new actors, including local government, civil society organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, particularly as it pertains to labour market integration, have assumed an increasingly important role.

Effective integration of refugees has to be tackled from all dimensions: social, cultural, legal, political and economic. Of these, labour market integration is the area in which “cities and businesses find the most obvious and direct benefits of integration”.<sup>1</sup> Businesses search for talent and the right skills for their companies, whilst cities compete to attract businesses for wealth creation and growth in a climate that increasingly depends on the labour market integration of immigrant skill and experience. Similarly, refugees are eager to find work in order to earn money, provide for their families, normalize their situation and become contributors to their host societies.

The labour market integration of refugees can be of great benefit for cities and businesses alike. Both businesses and local governments have an important role to play. Local governments have the capacity to evaluate their local context, the

opportunities and challenges facing refugees, and are in the position to foster social cohesion through the provision of services. Through removing barriers to refugee employment, local authorities minimize (potential) welfare costs and other indirect costs due to unemployment.<sup>2</sup> Employment also accelerates the acquisition of other core competencies, such as language, communication and culture, and helps build social networks and foster a sense of inclusion.

Likewise, businesses that have labour and/or skills shortages can tap into the pool of talent offered by refugees while providing gainful employment for the newly arrived. This win-win scenario continues to expand when businesses provide leadership and funding for dedicated services and projects to assist refugee communities, or when business models have a positive social impact on their local community, including the refugee population.<sup>3</sup>

With over 20 years of experience in this field, The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration (THP) has identified the immense potential of public-private partnerships to provide critical pathways of cooperation for the effective labour market integration of refugees. Building on that experience, in 2016 we founded a new social venture called M-Capital that brings cities and businesses together in partnership to identify local action on refugee employment through our Migrant Training and Placement Programme.<sup>4</sup>

1 Hinrichs, N., Juzwiak, T., 2017

2 Legrain, 2016

3 Juzwiak, T., McGregor, E., Siegel, M., 2014

4 M-Capital. (n.d.). Placing Talent.

Organizations like M-Capital that create public private partnerships are representative of a new generation of civic and corporate engagement on one of the most pressing issues of our time. While efforts to support the labour market integration of refugees using a multi-stakeholder approach are still relatively young, a number of international initiatives have already shown positive results. These partnerships recognize the complexity and interconnected factors that contribute to the successful integration of refugees and why a holistic approach is essential for long-term, sustainable benefit to the wider community. In other words, this is an approach that realizes the potential of refugee skill and experience while answering to the needs of all stakeholders.

## Understanding the value of a multi-stakeholder approach

Most refugees settle in cities. This places local governments in a pivotal position to realize effective integration of refugees into their host societies. Research shows that access to the labour market is the fastest way for refugees to integrate and form a part of their new communities.<sup>5</sup> By being part of the work force, refugees not only find a means through which to earn money and contribute to the economy, they also gain new skills in the context of their host society, interact with the local population, build networks, and are better able to acquire knowledge of the new language.

Labour market integration of refugees is most effective when the bureaucratic procedures limiting access to work are minimized, such as mechanisms that allow refugees to work soon after they arrive in their host country. In countries like The Netherlands and Germany, policies and budgets for refugee integration have been decentralized to local or regional governments, facilitating ready access to local employers and employment services.

Elsewhere, in cities like Chicago (US) and São Paulo (BR), for example, local authorities are stepping in to help migrants and refugees enter the labour market in the face of limited or restrictive policies from the central government. Overall, the scale of integration initiatives implemented by cities varies greatly depending on jurisdiction, the number of refugees, local conditions, available funding and the local authorities' level of experience in dealing with refugee issues. Flexible models that are responsive both to local needs and refugees themselves are increasingly recognized as more effective than a one-size-fits-all approach.

## A learning curve for employers

The role of the private sector in the labour market integration of refugees has gained more attention in recent times. Refugees represent a potential new talent pool that can help meet the needs of businesses. However, private sector knowledge and understanding of refugee issues is limited and misperceptions persist as to who refugees are, what they can offer, how their qualifications can be translated to the local context, and the legal requirements for refugees to work. Business forums like the Toronto Syrian Refugee Employer Roundtable create a safe space in which local business leaders can come together to develop strategies for action on refugee employment while educating themselves about the challenges and opportunities that this entails.

Businesses that offer internships or jobs as good corporate citizens or to increase their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) footprint may be missing out on the long-term benefits of refugee employment by failing to recognize an untapped source of talent and experience. For others, myths and misperceptions about refugees can make employing refugees seem risky or irrelevant to their core business.<sup>6</sup> These

5 Regina KONLE-SEIDL and Georg Bolits (2016). Labourmarket integration of refugees: Strategies and good practices. Europe an Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, 2016.

6 THP, 2015, 2014

businesses will miss out on a potentially valuable talent pool but also on the opportunity to model leadership to the wider community and influence a more positive public narrative about refugees. Initiatives such as [#rethinkrefugee](#) from the UK's Ashley Community Housing (Bristol) aim to change these misconceptions to promote their clients' interests and demonstrate what studies have already shown: capitalizing on refugee skills often brings innovation and new market opportunities, resulting in benefits to the business, the region, as well as the refugee.<sup>7</sup>

In the city of Erlangen (Germany), Siemens AG, a multinational technology engineering firm with headquarters in Berlin and Munich partnered with the local government to support its city-wide campaign to improve integration of newcomers by countering misconceptions about refugees. As a major employer, Siemens had a big role to play: the company employs roughly a quarter of the local workforce. Today, Siemens is bridging the gap between arrival and employment through a successful pilot internship program for refugees through its ongoing partnership with the city.

The educational qualifications, professional credentials and work experience of refugees are often poorly understood by employers in their new host country. Documentation may be incomplete, and credentials difficult to assess or verify from institutions in regions of conflict or political instability. Sometimes the employer's lack of knowledge or recognition of cultural differences gets in the way: unconscious bias can be as persistent a barrier as overt discrimination.

In Canada, WES partnered with immigrant-service organizations in Toronto, Ottawa and Calgary to fill in the gaps by developing and testing successfully [a Refugee Pilot Project to assess the credentials of Syrian refugees](#) who do not have adequate academic documentation. Other approaches include computer-assisted self-assessment like the [My Skills](#)

tool developed by the Bertelsman Foundation with the German Federal Employment Agency (BA). My Skills helps make relevant occupational skills visible to the employer, validating third party assessments by employment agencies and the job center.

Like other migrants, most refugees also benefit from training, particularly in soft skills, to give them a boost in finding and retaining a job. Guidance on how to write CVs, submit a job application and prepare for an interview in the format and cultural idiom of the host country are core components of employment services at COSTI, one of Canada's oldest and most highly regarded immigrant serving agencies. The COSTI Syrian Refugee Professional Internship Program also includes the preparation of an 'anonymous' CV designed to challenge employer unconscious bias by emphasizing education and skills over names and places.

From the businesses perspective, employers need help identifying available refugee talent pools and guidance in the recruitment and management of a diverse workforce. Cross sectoral partnerships with local authorities and immigrant serving NGOs play a vital role in helping employers interpret and contextualize skills and qualifications that refugees hold.

## Partnering for efficiency, effectiveness and success

Local governments and businesses can play important roles in the labour market integration of refugees as mentioned above. However, when they work in partnership, they share their specialized areas of knowledge and expertise with one another leading to more coordinated efforts and thus better results. Local governments benefit from knowing what businesses are looking for, trends in the labour market, and how recruitment decisions are made. Likewise, businesses benefit from knowledge of how to access refugees and their needs.

Given the overlapping area of needs from cities

(labour market integration of refugees), businesses (access to talent), and refugees (access to jobs), a multi-stakeholder approach to labour market integration recognizes the complex and interconnected challenges of refugee employment and works to leverage the collective resources available to the task. A diversity of viewpoints and strategies allows for a more flexible or customized response, incites innovation and new ideas. A coordinated multi-stakeholder approach also makes more efficient use of resources, avoids duplication and champions best practices. Partnerships are able to maximize the positive effects of labour integration of refugees whilst meeting some of the core needs of all stakeholders.

Most initiatives for refugee integration use a one-size-fits-all approach with little or no room for taking into account the extremely varying needs and realities of each individual refugee. In reality, integration of any form is a process that is lengthy and has no tangible end point. Quick-fix solutions are not realistic or effective. A customized approach is needed which looks at each refugee community vis-à-vis their country of origin and how it relates to the culture of their new host country.

At M-Capital, we have developed a customized approach for the labour market integration of migrants, including refugees, which has yielded great results in the pilot phase. Our model is as follows: we first meet with businesses to discuss their specific job and skills needs. Those businesses that are interested in our approach, sign an agreement to hire migrants via our programme. On the basis of this information, M-Capital then works with city authorities to identify migrants or refugees who are a possible match for the vacancies but are in need of further training in order to be job ready. We subsequently conduct a thorough intake of each candidate to take into account their skills, educational background as well as cultural background. With this information in mind, we design a flexible soft skills programme for them. The programme is customized at three levels: according to the sector and specific job that

the refugee will enter; the starting skill level of the refugee; and their cultural background. Finally, after the refugee has gone through the training programme, they are placed into paid work with the businesses that have partnered with M-Capital.

In our experience, we have seen that our so-called triple tailor-made approach is crucial to ensure long-term effectiveness. For example, a group of Syrian refugees can differ from a group of Eritrean refugees when it comes to training them on a soft skill such as communication. This is due to the cultural norms that are acceptable in these two different cultures regarding what is considered polite, effective, and acceptable communication techniques. Therefore, the starting point and training techniques for a soft skills programme on communication is different for these two groups. Needless to say, this approach is more time consuming and requires greater upfront investment but it ensures continuity and more effective results.

Initiatives that use a multi-stakeholder approach are still nascent. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that this is an effective way to tackle the complexity of refugee labour market integration. However, it will be some time before we are able to conduct in-depth evaluations of the medium-long term effects of these initiatives. In the meantime, there is still much that can be done by cities and businesses for refugee integration both separately and in partnership. Given their fluctuating concerns in both the political and economic arenas in which they operate, partnerships between them and a third actor, such as an NGO or social enterprise, could help provide a steady influence that can safeguard the interests of all and ensure the longevity of the integration initiatives.

## What's at stake?

Studies show that early labour market integration of vulnerable groups, such as refugees, facilitates their acceptance into their host society and helps

to minimize exclusion at a later stage by allowing contact between the refugee and their society.<sup>8</sup> In addition, being out of the labour market for long periods of time can have negative consequences on the refugee as well as on the second generation which can face added obstacles for accessing work.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, refugees may develop psycho-social challenges later in the integration process if they are not given opportunities to grow, learn, and contribute to their wellbeing and their host society.

From the perspective of cities, the fewer refugees are in work, the higher the costs on welfare as well as other challenges linked to unemployment. For businesses, the ageing population trends (particularly in Europe) will mean that companies will have to look at new sources of talent if they want to remain profitable. In addition, given the changes in the labour market due to automation and sectoral shifts, businesses will not survive if they do not have a more diverse workforce that can answer to the needs of the new market and their respective clientele.

## Recommendations for policy makers & businesses

- Cities and businesses would benefit from adopting a standpoint of considering refugees primarily as a potential source of human capital with skills that can be of benefit to all and not only from a humanitarian or CSR perspective. This would allow all stakeholders, including

refugees, to maximize the benefits of labour market integration.

- All stakeholders should steer away from quick-fix solutions and short-term planning; a medium-long term perspective that is relatively independent of political and economic fluctuations will ensure that labour market integration initiatives are properly implemented and evaluated.
- Cities will witness better results if they adopt a customized approach whilst accompanying refugees in their process of integrating into the labour market.
- Businesses and cities that work together in partnership will avoid re-inventing the wheel and find more effective solutions for refugee labour market integration. To do this, they need to understand each other's perspectives which may be made easier by the participation of a third actor, such as an NGO or a social enterprise.
- For businesses that are skeptical about the suitability of a refugee in their workforce, they could consider offering the refugee an initial internship or trial period as the refugee navigates their new job environment; numerous cases show that this initial upfront investment often pays off in multiple ways.

8 Gowricharn, 2002

9 Crul and Doornik, 2003

## About the Author



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## Bertelsmann Stiftung: Cities Collaborating for Refugee Integration

### Germany

In 2015, German cities were overwhelmed with the sudden influx of refugees. With the challenges posed to receptor cities, and a lack of pre-existing coordination to address these challenges, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation recognized it had a role to play, and previous experience to leverage, to support cities.

Bertelsmann started a pilot project with thirteen cities, later expanding into ten more. The labour market integration of refugees was the common key focus, but cities also faced challenges in education integration, language acquisition, social participation, and housing the refugees.

According to Claudia Walther, Bertelsmann Senior Project Manager, a multi-stakeholder approach was crucial to develop goals and objectives, and to have a common understanding of the situation facing both refugees and the cities themselves. Bertelsmann saw their role as a convenor and moderator of a strategic process undertaken within each city.

Identifying and engaging the right mix of local stakeholders was important. A wide net was cast to involve labour market organizations, chambers of commerce, migrant-serving groups, civil society groups, municipal staff and politicians, economists and others interested in refugee integration efforts. For labour market efforts, it was essential to have employers at the table.

The projects brought to the forefront the myriad of challenges stakeholders faced at the city level. For example, the sheer number of refugees, along with a lack of adequate data and information sharing about refugees meant that cities

sometimes didn't know how many refugees were arriving. It was important that cities conducted a proper analysis to fully understand the refugees and what their needs were. Bertelsmann worked with a local steering committee in each city to create a vision, analyzing their local situation. They collaborated on identifying key stakeholders and refugee data, establishing a clear structure, defining responsibilities, goals, objectives and measures, and building in an evaluation and learning cycle.

Developing a common vision and mission was crucial to focus the group. The strategy developed needed to have clear objectives, measures and a road map that all stakeholders understood and accepted.

Bertelsmann created a structured model and process to support each city. It took at least nine months in most cities to coordinate, build a strategy and start collaborating effectively with the diverse mix of stakeholders.

Walther says, a key goal for Bertelsmann was for the cities to continue the work when the Foundation left; to have sustainable and self-sufficient strategies and initiatives. Each city they worked with was better organized, had support networks in place and was bringing employers on board when the Bertelsmann pilots ended.

Bertelsmann created an [online bank of good practices](#) to share what cities are doing. They are also working on a guidebook to share their experiences and best practices with the broader public.



## COSTI Syrian Refugee Professional Internship Program

### Canada

Over 25,000 refugees began their journey from Syria to Canada in 2015. COSTI Immigrant Services is the lead agency helping Government Sponsored Refugees (GSRs) in Toronto. Many Syrians arrived with extensive training and skills, only to face numerous challenges accessing the employment, starting with a lack of Canadian workplace experience. Like all newcomers, the faster refugees find employment, the quicker they will engage and become self-sufficient members of the community.

In 2016, La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso approached COSTI. The Foundation wanted to provide funding to support paid internships for at least 15 highly skilled Syrians. The idea was to give the Syrian newcomers jumpstart in their search for employment. COSTI provided orientation and employment services to prepare the Syrians for the paid workplace internships that would provide the “Canadian experience” that many employers require. The COSTI Syrian Refugee Professional Internship Program was born.

COSTI screened refugee candidates for their English skills and professional backgrounds. Twenty-seven clients entered internship program. They represented a wide range of professional backgrounds, including architects, engineers, accountants, social workers, IT and business specialists, software developers, and more. COSTI’s existing employment approach for internationally trained individuals formed the backbone the program.

A two week compressed workshop provided information about adapting to workplace culture and preparing a professional portfolio. COSTI specialists worked with

each client to guide them through the job application and interview process.

As the Syrian professionals were taking their crash course in Canadian employment, COSTI was reaching out to its extensive employer network. COSTI found employers who were willing to host workers for the full 10 week internships. Many were willing to top up their interns’ wages in recognition of the applicant’s skills and experience.

Pinpoint GPS Solutions, a fleet management business that has partnered with COSTI for over 20 years, was quick to respond to COSTI’s new internship program. COSTI had no trouble providing three applicants for a general accounting position they needed to support a challenging systems implementation, involving an integrated financial and accounting module. Today, one of them is fully employed and a valued team member at Pinpoint.

Out of the twenty-seven initial candidates selected, 20 completed internships and 18 went on to full time employment. The majority were hired by the companies where they interned (two started their own businesses). Another seven decided to go back to school. One was encouraged by his employer to seek upgrading. A job waits for him when he returns.

COSTI is sharing the success of the paid internship project and its partnership with La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso in the hopes the success of the model will lead to more engagement from employers and better outcomes for the next cohort of refugees. As Canadians in cities across the country continue to receive and settle refugees, COSTI’s lesson is that a paid internship model should be part of the welcome.



## Entry Hub: Integration is Local

### Sweden

In a time of apps, websites and automation, connecting in-person can seem like a thing of the past. But for job-seeking refugees, it can be the key to their success. Starting small, but already spreading across the country, We Link Sweden's Entry Hub project is playing an important role as a broker between refugee job seekers and the companies that want to hire them.

The Entry Hub champions close relationships with local city governments, non-government organizations, employers, researchers, and the refugees themselves to craft local, customized solutions that meet all their needs. Their approach emphasizes the direct involvement of refugees in identifying needs and creating solutions. Success only comes because of the power of local partnerships.

Swedish company PostNord expressed interest in hiring part-time workers in early 2017 and partnered with We Link Sweden to hold a recruitment event. Given the specific needs of the employer, We Link Sweden decided to pre-filter job candidates using tools such as online psychometric self-assessments. This narrowed the pool of candidates to twenty-five newcomers who attended the event. We Link Sweden's Hugo Ortíz Dubón says the self-assessment allowed newcomers to evaluate job requirements to determine whether they had the skills and interest in the work.

This proved to be a successful method to ensure the employer received well-suited candidates; all twenty-five were offered interviews. Twenty of them accepted the interviews; all were hired at PostNord.

A flexible approach proved essential for their success. The refugees were hired on a part-time basis, so they were able to continue their language studies. The combination of work and language training significantly increased their Swedish language ability. In a country where language acquisition has been a significant barrier, Dubón says that the combination of work and study is crucial and effective to provide newcomers with more opportunities to practice and become proficient in Swedish.

We Link Sweden opened their first physical Entry Hub location in Umeå in October 2017. Another will open in the Stockholm suburb of Botkyrk in early 2018. Opening a physical location for Entry Hub provides a space for newcomers and employers to meet. It's also a place where newcomers can quickly learn what they need to know about the job market and how to match their skills with existing opportunities.

Dubón says an Entry Hub model can be set up and active within three months in any city, in any country. Their recipe for success is simple: map everyone's needs, develop custom solutions to meet those needs, and coordinate everyone. Once you know your stakeholders and create solutions that meets their needs, Dubón says it becomes easy to put everything into practice quickly.

The Entry Hub model has illustrated the importance local hands-on collaboration and building a physical space where newcomers and employers can interact directly. It has also shown how building on a human capital, not deficiency, model is essential when working with refugees.



## Employers Taking Action: Syrian Refugees Jobs Agenda

### Canada

In a competitive job market and being new to Canada, many Syrian refugees, like other skilled newcomer professionals, find it difficult to secure a good job and connect to employers that are hiring. This was the catalyst for the creation of the Syrian Refugees Jobs Agenda in December 2015, a roundtable convened by Senator Ratna Omidvar, then Executive Director of the Global Diversity Exchange (GDx) at Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Management.

According to Senator Omidvar: "There has been an outpouring of support to welcome Syrian newcomers from all sectors, public and private. But missing was a clear focus on helping them find the right employment to match their skills and capabilities. Skilled immigrants and refugees present a great opportunity for our economy and for employers. As years go by a great many jobs could go unfilled across the country because of a lack of qualified candidates. I believe the effectiveness of immigration depends on attracting skilled immigrants and ensuring they find work that is consistent with their education and ability. Smart immigration combined with maximizing potential – that's a powerful combination."

Roundtable members are representatives from over 40 business, government and non-profit organizations in the Greater Toronto Area, all focusing on identifying employment opportunities for Syrian newcomers and matching their talent to the needs of employers.

Since the roundtable first convened it has had many positive and measurable impacts on identifying and creating employment opportunities for Syrian newcomers that arrived as refugees.

A job fair that included 24 employers with pre-identified vacant positions provided many of the Syrian newcomers who participated with their very first job opportunities in Canada.

Roundtable members ACCES Employment, in partnership with the Labourers' International Union of North America (LIUNA!) and Jumpstart - Refugee Talent created an initiative to support Syrian job-seekers' entry in construction-related occupations. Participants receive sector-specific language training, pre-apprenticeship opportunities, and direct access to jobs in the construction industry.

A Syrian Refugee Fund Project Grant was created by members of the roundtable: Magnet, ACCES Employment, TRIEC and the United Way of Toronto and York Region (UWTY). The project includes the creation of an employment network hub for Syrian refugees, and developing online tools to support the integration of Syrian refugees into the Canadian workplace.

Their Kick-Starting Employer Action guide is a simple, easy to follow resource to help other communities start similar initiatives. The guide outlines a community engagement partnership model, roles and responsibilities, desired outcomes and ingredients for success. There is also a snapshot of how newcomers can address labour market needs in key sectors – with quotes from participating members. Employment focused and action oriented, the roundtable is a successful strategic effort and is still going strong.



# Thinking Outside the Box

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# Thinking Outside the Box

Mustafa Alio

Co-Founder/Development Director, Jumpstart - Refugee Talent

Experiencing the perils of refugee status myself, set my life on a trajectory that I would never have previously conceived: tackling the countless uphill battles of establishing a non-profit in Canada to support refugees struggling to find work. This remarkable journey has allowed me the chance to work closely with a variety of stakeholders that hold the refugee cause close to their hearts: activists, volunteers, businesses, policy makers and government officials. I am always so impressed by how much knowledge and information they have about refugees: statistics, data and stories. Less impressive, disappointing even, is how few answers there are when I ask these same stakeholders what they know about how refugees can contribute to the economy and the benefits they can bring to countries, especially amidst declining populations in North America and Europe.

This poverty of knowledge about who refugees are and what they contribute provides a partial explanation of why there is a widespread belief that refugees are a burden on the economy.

Nearly every discourse on refugees refers to the issue through a humanitarian lens; what is overlooked is the perception of refugees as sources of talent and opportunity. For refugees are builders, farmers, labourers, entrepreneurs and professionals.

What do we repeatedly hear about refugees?

UNHCR reports on the unprecedented numbers of refugees globally have become common knowledge. A shocking **68.5 million** people around the world have been forced from their homes. Among them are nearly **22.5 million refugees**, over half of whom are **under the age of 18**. We now live in a world where nearly **20 people are forcibly displaced every minute** as a result of conflict or persecution.<sup>1</sup>

While the above information has become commonplace, less known facts include:

- Investing one dollar in helping refugees get started can yield nearly two dollars in economic benefits within five years.<sup>2</sup>
- Many refugees are well-educated – for example, it is estimated that nearly half of all Syrian refugees to enter Europe since 2015 have a university degree.<sup>3</sup>
- In the U.K., training a doctor from scratch costs roughly €340,000, whereas certifying a refugee doctor is estimated to cost only €34,000 – one-tenth of the cost.<sup>4</sup>

Like other newcomers, refugees are also trying to integrate into new job markets but the support they need in doing so differs; it must match their needs, skills, education, and circumstances. Often organizations and governments mistakenly

1 UNHCR. (2017, June 19). [Figures at a Glance](#).

2 Legrain, P. (2017, February 01). [Refugees Work: A humanitarian investment that yields economic dividends](#).

3 Ritchie, E., & Barder, O. (2018, January 15). [Spending Money on Refugees is an Investment, Not a Cost](#).

4 Ritchie, E., & Barder, O. (2018, January 15). [Spending Money on Refugees is an Investment, Not a Cost](#).

implement and use existing projects and training programs to support refugees entering the job market. I have seen many of those projects fall short.

For a long time, the most common way for settling newcomers and refugees has been a top-to-bottom approach, such as creating integration projects or training programs and then marketing and delivering them to clients. However, the most effective approach I have seen is bottom-up. This entails working with refugees to build sufficient levels of support, listening to them and learning about their work experiences in both home and host countries.

## Changing the discourse

Research shows us that refugees are a benefit to the economy, yet refugee advocates caution us about narrowing the discussion to economic opportunity – the simplistic flip-side of the ‘burden’ of refugee reception. Advocates want discussions that focus on (politically-fraught) humanitarianism and burden-sharing primarily. Rightfully so – as a refugee myself, I absolutely agree that we cannot dehumanize nor depoliticize the discussion. However, I do want stakeholders to incorporate the economic case for refugee integration into the discussion.

Refugees are far more skilled and talented than we give them credit for. Unlocking their potential and harnessing their talent can boost our economies while empowering their integration as contributing members of society. However, we won’t find this potential by simply unlocking the box, we must think outside of it! In the face of this unprecedented refugee movement, the same old answers to the same old questions won’t work anymore. We need new and innovative ideas, grassroots initiatives and forward-thinking leaders to realize the refugee movement is not just a challenge, it is an opportunity to invest in our future.

Time is of the essence. The humanitarian and

political drivers behind decisions on refugee issues do not quickly manifest into action in the international arena. Can we afford to wait? Investing in refugee talent is an effective way of putting that potential to work and demonstrating the powerful contribution to world economies that refugees have to offer. The case for refugee contribution, and its positive economic, social, cultural, and political impact, can help bring together decision-makers and accelerate broader solutions to address refugee crises.

Given the challenges I experienced as a refugee, I knew I wanted to help when Canada opened its doors to Syrian refugees in late 2015. For weeks on end I haunted the hotels where refugees were temporarily housed, looking for ways to support their settlement. But I knew that a new home was not the only necessity for a new life; I wanted to move beyond simply settling these newcomers, and move toward true integration. To realize integration and inclusion, work and employment giving people self-worth and a sense of purpose. I scoured the market for programs that helped refugees find meaningful work; I was overwhelmed trying to navigate the system and surprised to find no employment programs exclusively aimed at refugees.

This experience led me to co-create [\*Jumpstart - Refugee Talent\*](#), an organization dedicated to supporting the integration of refugees through employment and economic empowerment. Starting at the grassroots level, we focused on Canada’s largest job market, the greater Toronto area. Our approach was to apply innovative new ideas, bridge gaps in the market, and build collaborative partnerships. Fast-forward two years and we have achieved tremendous results with limited resources. A few highlights include:

In partnership with a number of local stakeholders in settlement services and education, we developed a first-of-its-kind pilot project, where English-language training was integrated into job-training programs for the construction industry. Of the 94 participants to date, 60% have found

employment, the majority being full-time jobs.

In partnership with LinkedIn Canada, we developed the Welcome Talent Canada initiative, a mentorship program that leverages professional networks to support refugees in finding work in their respective fields. Of the initial 50 participants, all Syrian refugees, 22 found work within six months. The program is now being expanded to serve 2,400 refugees from all backgrounds, in multiple cities across Canada.

Through these and other programs, Jumpstart - Refugee Talent has been able to deliver a \$7.50 social return on investment for every one dollar invested. These outstanding results caught the interest of key decision-makers, and Jumpstart - Refugee Talent was invited to share its thought leadership on the economic contributions of refugees at the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) in March, 2018.

These experiences are not unique to Canada. Numerous examples exist where forward-thinking organizations are working to empower refugees economically, by incorporating the following three key principles espoused by Jumpstart - Refugee Talent.

## 1. Be open-minded to new ideas

Given the myriad of challenges many refugees face when accessing the labour market, including differences in cultural and workplace norms, language barriers, and translating foreign experience and skills, labour-market integration requires unique and innovative approaches. Through creative thinking and open-mindedness, the municipality of Skovde in Sweden was able to create meaningful pathways to employment, while also addressing integration needs of its new refugee youth. The influx of refugees to the city, meant the school system was unprepared to effectively welcome and integrate its new refugee students. At the same time, the city was struggling to find employment opportunities for its refugee job-seekers, many of which were

educated in their home countries as teachers. Through collaboration, the city and the school board were able to fast-track integration of both new students and former teachers through creating a new assistant role in the school system. This unique program transformed refugees from dependents to contributing members of the city, and empowered them with language skills and the pathway to re-certification to pursue teaching careers in their new home country.

This is an excellent example of how open-mindedness to the skills and experience refugees bring to their new communities can be leveraged if communities are willing to break down barriers to employment.

## 2. Bridging the Gap

Building trust and establishing a detailed, useful, and innovative data collection system is the corner stone of any successful refugee employment integration system. While capturing refugees' skills, experiences, and education backgrounds is important, so is determining their aspirations. The economic empowerment of refugees and effective planning for refugee labour-market integration needs to include refugee perspectives. Refugee representation at the decision-making level is the main ingredient to successfully connect refugees to their full potential in their new communities. This is emulated in the global initiative, [the Network for Refugee Voices](#), and other projects in refugee-receiving countries, like Germany's [Migrant Hire](#), [Refugee Talent](#) in Australia, and [Jumpstart Refugee Talent](#) in Canada, all placing refugees at the centre of the approach.

Another leading example of a project that effectively builds bridges between refugees (specifically entrepreneurs) and the market is [PLAC in France](#). PLAC espouses neither a top-to-bottom nor a bottom-to-top approach; instead entrepreneurship training is provided to refugees that meets them half-way, a "middle-point" kind of approach if you will. This attracts refugee entrepreneurs to come and meet experts

and potential partners at a space that is called a business lab. Here they examine, develop, and create useful and market standard business plans, connect with socially responsible angel investors, and get the proper training on starting a business. The Paris pilot, its first full-scale experiment, involved 9 months, 6 labs, 40 innovators, a vibrant community and many inspiring stories to learn from.

### 3. Take it step by step

Investing in refugee talent might seem overwhelming and it is often funded through government and donors who rush the money out the door to put programs in place. This means funded projects tend to be under-researched, -developed, and -executed. I have seen many projects and organizations fall into this trap, failing to integrate refugees into the job market. A better strategy is for government, donors, and organizations to use a step-by-step approach and build collaborative partnerships.

A good example of creating step-by-step processes and effective collaborations is that of [The City of Wuppertal](#), which introduced an intensive job-readiness project to help asylum seekers find long-term employment: [Participation, the Wuppertal Network](#). This network is a multi-sector initiative led by the city of Wuppertal with local NGOs as operational partners. Its systematic and proactive approach includes door-to-door recruitment of clients. Beyond the engagement of multi-stakeholders, a step-by-step approach was

implemented through having newcomers meet face-to-face with social workers and then develop a work plan to guide their next steps in the job search. The pilot project outcome included 157 people finding work, including 78 full-time jobs.

While investing in refugee talent requires a unique approach, out-of-the-box thinking and more hands-on tactics, the outcome is deeply rewarding, and even inspirational. Stakeholders should keep in mind that when they work together, they need to go beyond talks and discussions, and develop ideas and projects that are concrete and tangible. The best results come from engaging and working with refugees on the ground, where outcomes for refugees materialize and intrinsic rewards for stakeholders are realized.

I hope my story has inspired you to look at refugees differently, to realize that new ideas and out-of-the-box approaches can turn challenges into opportunities. Working with refugees, instead of for refugees, can not only empower them but also boost our collective economic prosperity.

## About the Author



*Mustafa Alio was born in Latakia, Syria and came to Canada in 2007 for his studies. His own experiences of refuge, integration and inclusion have been the foundation of his work. He received his Bachelor degree in Business Administration, and completed a post-graduate degree in Marketing Management and Financial Services. Mustafa is the Co-Founder, and currently the Development Director, for Jumpstart - Refugee Talent. In addition, he is the Co-Founder and active Board Member of the Syrian Canadian Foundation, and a proud member of the Network for Refugee Voices. Mustafa has contributed a number of articles on refugees' issues for board and international public audiences. His most recent articles can be read in the [New York Times](#), [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), and [The Globe & Mail](#).*

## #rethinkingrefugee Ashley Community Housing

United Kingdom

The #rethinkingrefugee campaign started as a response to the negative portrayals of refugees in the mainstream media. But the campaign has had an even larger impact.

Ashley Community Housing (ACH) in Bristol, England, provides refugees and vulnerable homeless people affordable housing. A stable home is the first step for refugees. But it is not enough. Integration is not a moment in time, but a long-term process that takes investment. Moving towards integration requires additional supports, especially around employment and enterprise, or entrepreneur skills.

ACH applies a five-stage Innovation Model to help refugees become self-sufficient contributors to the local economy and community. In their experience, refugees quickly become independent and self-reliant with a limited amount of targeted support. Employment supports and economic opportunity are at the core of the model.

The entire community benefits when refugees successfully integrate. That success is challenged when misinformation and language is used to marginalize an already precarious population. #rethinkingrefugee sought to shift the media conversation. Refugees were already in the spotlight. 'Rethinking Refugee' was chosen specifically to be singular (refugee not refugees) to reinforce the point that each of these migrants are individuals with their own set of skills and their own dreams and aspirations.

Social media was key to building, sharing and spreading the campaign. ACH focused on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, all popular social media channels in the UK. The

initial campaign encouraged people to post a photograph on social media showing that they were #rethinkingrefugee. This encouraged people to get personally involved in the campaign and to also raise awareness among their own social networks and connections.

As the #rethinkingrefugee campaign found success, ACH shifted the campaign. They focused on employment, aligning #rethinkingrefugee with the UK skills agenda. In 2017 ACH asked local authorities, employers and education providers to recognize refugees as community assets. While this third campaign evolution has only recently begun, the results are promising. ACH has built partnerships with employers looking to diversify their organizations and hire refugees. They have encouraged employers to offer refugees opportunities, from work experience positions to full-time paid roles.

They're already working with Starbucks, which has pledged to support refugee employment globally and plans to hire 2,500 refugees to work at its coffee shops in Europe. ACH is providing pre-employment training and one-to-one support to selected candidates followed by guaranteed job interviews for Barista roles at Starbucks stores across Bristol and Birmingham.

ACH has set an ambitious goal, which is to get 25,000 refugees into median salary jobs by 2028. Challenges still exist, especially with Brexit post-referendum uncertainty, and lingering negative opinion of refugees. However, the campaign has had an impact. Employers are on board. Community awareness and perception have been raised. Most importantly to ACH, however, are the refugees expressing that they themselves feel welcome.



## ALiGN: From Youth to Refugees, Replicating for Employment Success

### Canada

Many potential workers from vulnerable groups are not recognized as a fit by employers simply because they lacked the tools to fully evaluate the job seeker's potential. As employers struggle to fill entry-level positions, traditional HR approaches are not working. The [ALiGN Network Model](#) introduces an alternative approach to traditional recruitment, screening and hiring practices.

Initially piloted with unemployed youth, ALiGN is being rolled out to connect new refugees in Ontario, Canada, with employment opportunities.

O TEC, a sector-specific training, consulting, and workforce development organization, teamed up with Magnet to launch ALiGN. Adam Morrison, O TEC V.P, Projects & Partnerships [says that](#) "businesses have been telling us for years that, if candidates are the right fit, they will hire them and train them for advancement."

O TEC and Magnet looked at models that were working for larger, well resourced employers, but were out of reach for smaller companies. In one approach, "peak performers" were interviewed to look not only at skills, but at the behavioural and personality attributes that made them successful. O TEC's worked scaled this approach and created employee benchmarks for the tourism and hospitality sector. They combined this with Lumina Learning's psychometric assessment tool to establish job fit characteristics, such as introversion vs. extroversion and people- vs. outcome-focused traits.

The [ALiGN Network Model](#) is a "psychometric-based talent-to-role fit assessment and job-matching model." O TEC worked with Magnet to bring the model online.

Clients are assessed by community and education partners trained with the psychometric tool. Once they are determined to be a fit for a particular job, clients are moved directly into work, or supported through training, certification and other help, on the path to a job.

According to Magnet's Executive Director, Mark Patterson, and echoed by Morrison, the model was always envisioned to work with other client groups and labour market segments. Refugees were a logical next group. ALiGN creates pathways to employment for refugees who do not have traditional "good fit" credentials for success or even participation in the labour market, such as academic accreditation, language proficiency, and "Canadian experience."

Refugees only have to complete the psychometric assessment tool once. It becomes part of their profile on ALiGN and part of their personal employment portfolio on the broader Magnet site. With the ALiGN profile integrated on Magnet, refugees will be able to also access opportunities across the whole platform, exposing them to more employment opportunities as they gain new skills and experiences.

Employers have indicated that they are willing to adapt their recruitment practices to work with ALiGN, and access the new talent pool. With hundreds of thousands of unfilled jobs projected in the hospitality and tourism sector, employers simply need new ways of finding and hiring potential workers. Through ALiGN, employers now have access to a recruiting system and new talent pools if they are willing to commit to hiring from underemployed and vulnerable groups.



## Volkswagen: Supporting Refugee Employment and SMEs

### Germany

Volkswagen (VW) is at the centre of Wolfsburg, Germany's economic life. Most companies and businesses are in some way connected to VW. When local small and medium size companies (SMEs) struggled to fill skill gaps, and the city's large refugee population struggled to find employment, Volkswagen was motivated to step-in, and did so in a number of ways.

While there was interest among local SMEs to hire refugees, they didn't know how to adapt their existing training programs to be inclusive of refugees. VW's goal was to help prepare refugees to enter the workforce, as well as support the companies who could hire them. VW trained refugees in the skills needed, and provided them with financial assistance to complete the qualifications necessary for the vacant jobs. Working closely with the Chamber of Commerce and the Federal Employment Agency, VW was able to connect skilled refugees with companies searching for new employees or apprentices.

The importance of learning German to successfully integrate was well known by VW. So when the sudden influx of refugees overwhelmed the language training system, VW stepped in. Where the government was struggling to respond, VW was able to finance additional language classes and pre-qualification workshops, to help prospective refugee employees "catch-up" with locals. To date, over 2,600 refugees have received classes supported by VW.

Support was strong within the VW workforce. VW's Refugee

Aid program gave employees opportunities to volunteer to address specific refugee needs in the community. This employee engagement program also strengthened the company's ties in the city.

Through these ties, VW discovered additional areas where it could help. It provided software engineers to develop and implement IT systems to support efficient registration and tracking of refugees in the camp close to company headquarters. When it opened, the camp had received over 1,000 refugees but did not have a working kitchen. VW cooked meals for every refugee during the 4 days the kitchen was under construction. VW also lent company cars to refugees who needed to travel to appointments, and other settlement needs.

Beyond direct employment and settlement support, VW recognized the need to invest in refugee youth. In 2015, VW's Union foundation introduced a 2.5-Million-Euro program in Wolfsburg for school-age refugee children. In response to the sudden influx of school-age children in the public-school system, the program brought more teachers into classrooms. It also provided social workers to support refugee children through episodes of trauma and the healing process.

With each challenge, VW responded quickly and brought all its resources to the table to provide solutions. What started as an employment-focused program to support refugees and company suppliers expanded throughout the company and into the community.



## Municipality of Skövde – identifying opportunity in a crisis

### Sweden

In November 2015 Sweden, like much of Europe, received a sudden influx of refugees. While housing was the initial crisis, the country soon recognized that integration needed to be a priority. Many non-Swedish speaking refugee children would soon be entering the school system, which was not ready for them.

When the Municipality of Skövde discovered refugees with teaching backgrounds, a new project was born. Together with the Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES), the city organized a “speed networking” event. Principals of all schools in the Municipality of Skövde met individuals with a foreign teaching degree and/or teaching experience from their native country. Upon meeting the teachers, five placements turned into 24; Principals were so impressed, they wanted to hire them all!

The twenty-four eventually increased to thirty people; all were placed in schools for two years as Service Assistants. The new Service Assistant role meant foreign-trained teachers could immediately apply their skills in the Swedish labour market. The Municipality and SPES worked closely with the schools to determine how to use the refugees’ skills and knowledge effectively. In most schools they worked directly in the classroom as teacher assistants, helping students from Syria and Afghanistan. They also became important cultural mediators, acting as a bridge between the school and refugee parents.

It was an important investment in the school system. The sudden influx of non-Swedish speaking children, many of whom arrived with cultural and post-traumatic

challenges, was overwhelming. Some schools received up to sixty refugee students, including children who arrived without families. Creating the Service Assistant positions for newcomer teachers became a solution for the refugee teachers, the schools and teachers, and ultimately refugee children adapting to a new school system.

Another success has been the language improvement among the Service Assistants. Mixing classroom and workplace language learning accelerated their progress. After two years of workplace immersion, their Swedish is fluent. They have labour market experience and language skills, and can now find work more easily.

Twelve of the original refugees have jobs in the school system. The Municipality expects that six more will find jobs in the schools where they have been working.

The project has already been replicated locally, becoming a model for other departments in the city. Other municipal services, such as health, care for elderly, and pre-school are piloting the Service Assistant model. So far, ninety Service Assistants, 75% who are newcomers, have been hired in these departments.

As the first pilot project ends, project partners realize they have created a successful integration model. Almost all the schools want new Service Assistants.



## Re-Thinking Competency: Using Visuals to Break-Down Barriers to Employment

### Germany

Critical labour shortages create conditions for employers to think more creatively about how they recruit and hire talent. Germany anticipates skilled labour shortages to increase by 30% between 2015 and 2020. Given this outlook, employers are opening up to new ideas about how to assess worker skills and credentials, in particular among migrant groups.

Learning by doing is becoming an important source of competence for working people. However, illustrating skills developed from informal learning is a challenge. While large employers such as Ernst and Young and Google have shifted to competence tests in their initial recruitment and hiring practices 80% of Germans work in SMEs which don't have the HR and personnel department capacities of these big companies. They hire looking at formal education achievement, with the hope that workers have the skills.

In 2013, the Bertelsmann Stiftung foundation began working on the informal learning challenged. They focused on providing employment and migration counsellors tools to assess immigrant and refugee clients' workplace competencies. They created Competence Cards which identified transversal or "21st Century skills", and provided employment counsellors with an easy to use visual tool to determine their clients' social, technical and methodological competencies. Clients could easily assess and indicate whether or not they had specific skills, regardless of their formal education and training.

The Competence Cards were immediately popular. Counsellors found the tool effective, quick and easy to use with clients. Bertelsmann originally anticipated giving out

800 sets to migration counsellors across Germany. To date, they have distributed over 10,000 across a variety of sectors. Bertelsmann saw an opportunity to do more. They consulted their employment counselling partner organizations and created Career Cards. Career Cards illustrate specific job tasks to show a newcomer what the profession looks like in Germany.

Using the cards, a worker can identify all of their client's job-specific skills, whether gained through formal education, on the job, through volunteer work, or through life experience. After a quick initial assessment, they are directed to the required upgrading and education to access a specific employment opportunity.

In December 2017, Bertelsmann created an [online self-assessment](#) of vocational skills, scaling up their analog of Competence and Career Cards. Eight occupations (with 22 more in development) are available in six languages, with 20 to 40 images per occupation, each representing a specific job task or competency.

Those who work with employment counsellors can use the assessment as a stepping stone to the more formal and rigorous [My Skills](#) test which says has greater credibility with employers.

Employers experiencing critical shortages cannot wait until they have fully qualified workers, but they can assess and hire people who are partially qualified. Bertelsmann's competency-based approach offers a way for employers to reduce hiring risk. Once they know a worker's competencies, they can provide the on-the-job training needed, or work with education providers to quickly get their workforce up to speed and fully qualified.



# Conclusion

## Why Does Employer Leadership Matter?

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## Why Does Employer Leadership Matter?

Accenture, Germany

Qualified refugees represent a great potential for the German labor market. In order to seize opportunities, employers must work with public institutions and employer associations to integrate refugees, which often requires new programs or the adaptation of existing programs.

Operational integration is only possible via the human resources department. Therefore, it must act as a strategic partner together with the company management. It takes a clear commitment and the will of management to integrate the newcomers in a sustainable way. This is the only way to harness the potential of refugees. "Without the support of top management, HR can hardly be effective in integrating refugees into internal labor markets", says Frank Riemensperger, CEO of Accenture in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Russia.

The globally active consulting and technology company supports refugees with a bundle of programs that go far beyond pure volunteering measures. In addition to application coaching and the development of a digital placement platform, Accenture takes on refugees in its "Jump Start" trainee program. Within eight weeks, participants learn how to work in teams on IT projects in a practical manner and how to promote the development and implementation of forward-looking technologies for customers. Trainee programs are offered on various topics and after successful examination, the graduates are assigned to suitable customer projects. More importantly, Accenture has combined its growth strategy with social responsibility, without reducing employment standards and requirements.

The success is evident: all former participants of

the Jump Start program are experts in customer projects and highly regarded. The new employees themselves, are also enthusiastic. "The education at Accenture changed my life," says Abel from Ethiopia. As the organizer of the pilot program, Eva Buch-Erkens appreciates the efforts of the participants: "The IT training is really hard, and yet all the candidates show full commitment. Of course, we as a company also had a learning curve in integrating the refugees, but the challenges can be managed with a certain flexibility". Word has got around that Accenture trains and integrates refugees un-bureaucratically and pragmatically. "Meanwhile, the job centers are calling us on their own initiative, our efforts have become a real competitive advantage," says Buch-Erkens. "We still have 400 vacancies and far too few IT candidates."

In addition to the establishment of fast-track training and development programs, employer-supported mentor programs form an essential component of internal integration at Accenture. This can only be successful if employees introduce the newcomers to the corporate culture bilaterally. It is up to managers and employees to ensure that they have the freedom and flexibility to participate voluntarily in such programs. A clear expectation from management of all participants in the integration process is crucial.

Based on the experience gained, Accenture and the DIHK (Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag) will offer four employer workshops throughout Germany in 2018. The goal is to work together with other companies to identify opportunities for new pathways to employment and new approaches so that refugees

can not only be integrated but also deliver real added value.

### Overcoming challenges: employers as agents of change

Labor law challenges can also pose a major obstacle to the recruitment of refugees. Municipal offices from the public sector, as well as nationwide initiatives such as the "Network Businesses Integrate Refugees", can be a great asset to overcoming these challenges. Often the municipalities offer individual legal support, which relieves companies tremendously. Cooperation with the Employment Agency and the job centers is just as important as cooperation with interest groups from industry and commerce. One example, is the Frankfurt Chamber of Industry and Commerce, which conducts further training measures and examinations. Bringing all stakeholders together creates synergy effects, avoids duplication and works in a more targeted, group-focused manner. Whether in industry or in the service sector, in medium-sized businesses or in large corporations, a culture of willingness to change and program promotion is and remains the most important success factor. The experts agree that this must be demanded of refugees as well as of the respective specialist areas.

Importantly, new processes will not only benefit the refugee population, but can also create employment pathways for other vulnerable groups. Testing these new processes can give evidence to how other population groups can also benefit from training and integration into the labor market. In the end, all employees benefit from greater diversity on teams, and improved training and education.

What needs to be done to ensure that all these efforts are successful against the background of the large number of refugees? The fact that young refugees who have an existing training relationship are being deported, does not make sense economically and also sends a fatal signal to companies willing to integrate. To ensure

the sustainability of integration measures, clear targets and their continuous measurement of success are of great strategic importance. At the same time, the general conditions must be right: integration into the labor market will only succeed if the legislator - together with training providers, employers' and employees' associations - swiftly prescribe a binding legal framework.

## Be nimble and flexible

- **Identify skills and employment gaps in your various departments.** Determine which areas of your company need, or will need new employees and target your refugee training programs to meet those specific needs. Read how [Accenture](#) met its daunting employment needs through tapping into refugee talent, well suited for the roles it needed to fill.
- **Decide whether you can take on the costs of a refugee coordinator.** Considering refugees can have specific difficulties while adapting to the workforce, such as language barriers, cultural norms, and the troubles of adapting to a new environment, it can be particularly valuable to have an employee within the HR department dedicated to integrating them into the company. This is especially applicable for companies looking for long-term retention in their new hires. For more on the benefits of a dedicated coordinator, read the feature on [Gewobag](#).
- **Learn.** Employers need to constantly evolve in order to be inclusive. [BDC employees](#) have gone through a process to address unconscious bias. Moving beyond your biases means looking at skills, competencies and potential, not focusing on where someone is from, or their name. The result is access to a larger potential pool of talent.
- **Think big but start local.** [#rethinkingrefugee](#) addresses global issues, but it started locally, focusing on Bristol. With success, they're looking nationally. Learning from other cities was a key part of the [model Bertelsmann developed](#). By connecting cities working on refugee integration, the Foundation sought to create a process for knowledge sharing and exchange among city leaders and peers. Consider your local context, and be prepared to adapt to the shifting needs and priorities of all stakeholders involved.
- **Capitalize on your core functions.** Identify your company's competitive edge, and meet with the human resources, research and development, and corporate social responsibility departments (if applicable); consider how the different departments can build a comprehensive refugee assistance program, and how to best foster employee engagement. Learn from the [leadership shown by Volkswagen](#), leveraging its capacity to support the different needs of refugees in local communities.



*“Dubón says an Entry Hub model can be set up and active within three months in any city, in any country. His recipe for success is simple: map everyone’s needs, develop custom solutions to meet those needs, and coordinate everyone. Once you know your stakeholders and create solutions that meets their needs, Dubón says it becomes easy to put everything into practice quickly.”*

## Collaborate – better together

- **Partnering for success.** Building a partnership to support refugee integration means you can leverage your individual strengths and resources to create

- something bigger, with more impact. Success in [Skövde](#) came from taking the time to look at the strengths and opportunities every partner and stakeholder brings to the project and leveraging those to be innovative. At the same time, it is essential to regularly check-in, being flexible and adaptable to change and refocus when necessary.
- **Beyond direct hires, consider other ways to support.** If your company is not in a position to hire directly, consider how your organization can support community efforts. Communities have existing organizations that assist in the different aspects of accessing employment. Consider what your company can contribute, and reach out to these existing organizations to lend your support. [Accenture](#) was able to provide a technology solution that effectively fostered collaboration across different employment support organizations; what does your organization have to offer?
- **Build structure, anticipate flexibility.** No single group can do everything, especially when integration has been difficult for refugees who are new to a city or new employers [Bertelsmann](#) created a structured, highly collaborative process to work within cities. It also required a high level of flexibility, to address local conditions, political and bureaucratic challenges, and information gaps.
- **Walk the talk.** Organizations can get wrapped up in their 'good ideas' and not actually put them into practice themselves. Ashley Community Housing took its [#rethinkingrefugee campaign](#) to heart, resulting in changes in the way it does business and runs its programs internally.



*“As cities connect and share in the knowledge transfer model Bertelsmann helped establish, the landscape for ideas and promising practices means they don’t have to reinvent, but can learn from each other.”*

## Build in supports

- **Be active.** Recognize that you may need to tweak your onboarding plan for former refugees. You need to be thoughtful and open to additional supports, including transitioning, and extending an internship or probationary period.
- **Support the supporters.** Highlight the employees in your company who have already been assisting refugees, either by volunteering their time externally or by pushing for your company to create programs and raise them as champions of your efforts. They will help get other employees on board and explain the value of the programs to the company.
- **Bring simplicity to complex issues.** [Bertelsmann](#) found a simple way to introduce competence-based assessment tools for employment counsellors, while surveying and working with employers to identify how the recruitment and hiring landscape needs to shift. With an expansive stakeholder analysis, they were able to craft a simple solution to meet a variety of needs.

- **Be clear with your involvement timeline.** Evaluate if you can hire refugees for the long-term, or only provide short-term internships or skills trainings. It can be especially alienating to the refugee community and tarnish your image as a company, if you provide internships (or similar programs) with the false hope of later employment.



*“This is not a sprint, it’s a marathon. You need time, engagement and enthusiasm.” Ms. Martina Hartig, Gewobag Human Resources Director*

### Refugees are assets

- **Demonstrate value.** Piloting the Jump Start Refugees program with a small cohort, demonstrating the success of the program and articulating the added value that the refugee trainees bring to the [Accenture](#) workforce was critical for buy-in from corporate HR. Start small, demonstrate the value to the larger team, and then scale the initiative.
- **Training youth.** Be open to assisting the young, especially if you’re a larger company. While they will most likely not be able to work for your company immediately, providing additional assistance for refugee children in school districts where your company operates can help identify candidates in the long run

and build a sustainable and qualified workforce for your supply chain over generations. Positive spillover effects include building lifelong loyalty to your firm, as they will be familiar with your brand, and become customers in the future.

- **Build on your success.** [COSTI’s](#) success with internships confirms the importance of refugees being paid. They provide that first Canadian work experience. and help them showcase their previous work and experience.
- **Acknowledge the local political climate.** Ultimately, all city residents are part of the target audience that will make integration initiatives successful. [Bertelsman](#) learned that crafting a positive and inclusive narrative both anticipates potential negative and toxic messages, but also helps support the need for integration, for all in the community.



*“Migrants have such a strong engagement, are such good workers – they only need the opportunity to demonstrate their potential.” Ms. Martina Hartig, Gewobag Human Resources Director*

## Acknowledgements

Hire Immigrants is a committed network of employers, innovative thinkers and international thought leaders that advocate for diversity in the workplace. We strive to support companies' ability and readiness in becoming welcoming and inclusive workplaces that benefit from the diverse talent and skills of immigrants. When companies and organizations are knowledgeable about the benefits of hiring immigrants, employers are empowered to pro-actively integrate practices that enable them to access, hire and promote immigrants within their workforce.

Through the Hire Immigrants platform, employers are equipped with: international recruitment practices, onboarding tools and resources that work, and successful retention strategies. Importantly, by focusing on the role of employers in addressing unemployment and underemployment of immigrants, Hire Immigrants provides employers with the resources needed to recognize and leverage immigrant talent to meet business needs. Our international network provides a platform for exchanging best practices and models for immigrant employment, and raises-up employer champions on a global stage.

In this report, *Investing in Refugee Talent: Lessons Learned in Labour Market Integration*, we share 13 international best practices from Canada, Germany, Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. These best practices represent the pivotal role of employment in the integration of refugees, and the private sector as a key stakeholder in receiving communities. Beyond corporate social responsibility, many employers recognize the experience, talents and skills refugees bring to the workforce, and realize that their companies will be in a greater position to

meet and respond to growing labour market needs by incorporating them. The creation of meaningful partnerships between employers and community organizations has facilitated collaborative solutions to addressing refugee and industry needs alike.

We would like to acknowledge the businesses, municipal departments, agencies and community partners whose leadership and commitment to meaningful refugee integration are reflected in these pages. We thank them for sharing their action-oriented initiatives, expertise and for challenging us to reimagine traditional models and programs of integration.

We are indebted to our partners for their international perspective and contribution. This report reminds us that we are more similar than different, and together, we can shape meaningful inclusion of immigrants in our workforces, our communities and our countries.

A special thanks to colleagues at Cities of Migration for their unwavering support and dedication to bring together this collection of innovative best practices: Kim Turner for her writing and editorial prowess, and Evelyn Siu for sharing her insights and expertise.

These best practices of employer leadership and action are available online and can be reviewed in full at [www.hireimmigrants.ca](http://www.hireimmigrants.ca).

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