

EMPLOYERS GUIDE TO REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT

A collaborative
approach



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We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

Australian employers who want to hire refugees often do not know where to start. This guide is based on opportunities and challenges identified by employers and the types of support they found most useful to hire and integrate refugees into their organisations successfully.

Previous research found that successful hiring processes are often based on a collaborative approach. Employers derive support and inspiration from refugee employment experts, training providers, and industry peers, capitalising on available resources across sectors¹. A collaborative approach is, therefore, what this guide advocates.

While every employer is different, this guide is a short and practical, quick-start reference with general information for employers interested in hiring refugees.

¹Szkudlarek, B. (2019). *Engaging business in refugee employment: The employer's perspective*. Sydney: The University of Sydney Business School.

WHY HIRE REFUGEES?

Each year thousands of humanitarian migrants are granted visas to start a new life in Australia. These individuals continue to represent a growing portion of the talent pool in Australia's labour market.

Refugees bring a wide diversity of skills and expertise to the local labour market, but refugee talent is much under-explored. Beyond accessing skills and expertise, by recruiting refugees, employers are able to expand their customer base and supply chains with access to new local and international markets. They can also increase their innovation capability through fresh perspectives of refugee workers. Additionally, a culturally diverse workplace that is inclusive to refugees fosters a sense of purpose within the organisation. Most importantly, by hiring refugees, employers help them and their families to rebuild their lives in their new home countries.

Hiring refugees is a win for the organisations, refugees and their families, and the Australian multicultural society.



DID YOU KNOW?

“What can I expect when hiring refugees?”

Australian employers that participated in a study on refugee employment found that refugees had high productivity and low turnover rates. Employers emphasised the benefits of an inclusive workplace that is open to refugee jobseekers.

HOW TO FIND THE 'RIGHT' REFUGEE JOB CANDIDATES

There are several ways to go about finding the 'right' refugee job candidate. Most employers prefer a collaborative approach, working with a service provider who takes over a big part of the recruitment process. Some use online databases that provide access to shortlisted jobseekers with a refugee background. Yet others, especially those with a critical shortage of labour and skills within their business line, collaborate with training organisations to train refugee jobseekers for these specific business needs.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Our company is open to hire candidates from any background. Why not recruit refugees through our existing hiring processes?”

Refugee candidates often get screened out before getting to the interview phase. This could be because of biases, resumes that do not match traditional Australian templates, or qualifications attained in another country that hiring managers are not familiar with or do not understand.

Working with service providers

Teaming up with service providers specialised in refugee recruitment is an effective way to find suitable refugee job candidates. These service providers are often not-for-profits or social enterprises whose core mission is to place refugees or other jobseekers from culturally diverse backgrounds into appropriate employment. They can support employers with customised solutions and guide them through one or multiple aspects of recruitment and onboarding. Some service providers might have funding to provide their services for free, while others may charge a small fee.

Many employers seeking to hire refugees rely on service providers in areas of pre-screening, skills matching, and pre-employment training. Some employers seek ongoing support throughout job placement and the first several months of employment.

DID YOU KNOW?

“How do I select a service provider?”

Look for a service provider vested in understanding your business. The most successful collaborations between employers and service providers tend to be with service providers dedicating time and effort to understanding the employer's business needs and proposing candidates that are a good fit. Many providers list employers they worked with on their website, which could provide you with insights about the industries they have experience with.

Certain service providers specialise in supported job placements. Others focus on internships that will ideally lead to long-term employment. Service providers often provide training to refugees and could support employers in cross-cultural and inclusive workplace programs. Some operate Australia-wide, while others focus on a specific region.

Utilising digital databases

For employers that prefer a do-it-yourself approach to find refugee candidates, digital databases are an alternative option. Digital databases tend to offer access to jobseeker profiles Australia-wide, but also could provide employers with an opportunity to post their vacancies.

Filling the skills gap with training providers

When a critical shortage of labour and skills is the main driver to employ refugees, employers can work with a training provider. A training provider can offer customised training to equip refugee hires with the specific skillset and/or qualifications they need to effectively function in the predefined roles.

The refugee talent pool could be a solution for sectors struggling to fill vacancies. There is a role industry associations could play in sectors with skills shortage. In the case of engineering, even though skilled migration could alleviate the shortage, because of lack of overseas skills recognition, most refugees do not apply for engineering roles. On the other hand, Australian employers tend not to consider refugees due to the perceived risks and importance of local credentialing. To address these barriers, [Engineers Australia](#) work with a service provider (Community Corporate) to design solutions to help get qualifications verified. They are also facilitating training to refugees in areas such as Australian standards and context of engineering.

Both Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are training providers that deliver Vocational Education and Training (VET). Many have vast experience working with refugees. Employers should particularly consider reaching out to TAFE and other RTOs that deliver the Adult Migrant English Program, as these specialise in working with jobseekers, who could benefit from additional job-specific language training.

[TAFE NSW](#) is the largest training provider in NSW. TAFE NSW collaborates with various stakeholders to create programs that align with the specific needs of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity groups and the labour market. They deliver customised courses designed to meet business needs and prepare refugees for employment. Courses may include training in communication and language skills for the workplace, Australian workplace standards and culture, specific industry and technical skills, preparation for employment and work experience. They utilise the community networks to engage with large cohorts of refugees providing employers with a diverse choice of eligible candidates.



HOW TO SUCCEED IN REFUGEE RECRUITMENT

Training and ongoing support

Pre-employment training is used to prepare refugee hires with job-specific knowledge. It is often used to help refugee hires become familiar with the workplace culture. Good service providers are vested in placement success and continue to provide support to refugees and employers for the first period of employment (up to 12 months). This could include further upskilling or assistance with successful workforce integration.



DID YOU KNOW?

“I am new to refugee employment. Could I start offering an apprenticeship or internship?”

Trainee programs are used widely by employers. These programs are often part of the onboarding process. They enable employers to equip refugees with the relevant skills and experience needed to gain permanent employment within the organisation. Most employers use those temporary workplace solutions as transitory to full-time, permanent employment.

Mentorship or buddy systems

Mentorship or buddy systems are commonly used methods for facilitating refugee workplace integration. An ideal mentor or buddy is someone the refugee can feel comfortable with asking questions, who is not a direct manager. Some companies use a “reverse mentoring” program in which refugees mentor local employees about their cultural background and work experience gained abroad.

DID YOU KNOW?

“What can I do to help a refugee employee feel part of the team and thrive?”

Combining professional and cultural support is a good way to go. You can pair a refugee employee with an experienced colleague who can provide professional advice and help refugees advance their careers. A buddy would be someone a refugee can ask questions related to social and cultural aspects of being part of the team.

Staff training and professional development

HR or diversity-and-inclusion staff play an important role in the refugees’ workplace integration. They often maintain contact with the refugee and the supervisor, making sure refugees feel included in the team. Several service providers offer in-company programs for HR or diversity-and-inclusion staff as well as supervisors and co-workers to help employers achieve their diversity and inclusion goals. Examples of training areas include inclusive leadership, cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication.

Deakin CREATE runs a series of career clinics programs, based on a mentee-mentor model, that support graduates with a refugee background to enter the Australian workforce. Through supporting a clinic, corporates can gain access to a pool of skilled graduates, whilst providing a learning opportunity for their staff to mentor and interact with potential hires for their organisation.

Glow Up Careers provides training and accreditation in career coaching and mentoring that includes support for refugees and new migrants. Attendees are trained to become diversity and inclusion advocates within their organisations and support refugee employment initiatives. Every aspiring coach gets to mentor a refugee jobseeker.

Additionally, some service providers offer accreditations to promote diversity within Australian workplaces.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Do refugees have working rights in Australia?”

All people who come to Australia on a permanent protection visa have full rights to work. If a person is in the process of seeking asylum, and currently on a bridging visa, their working rights will depend on their visa conditions. Service providers work with those refugees who are legally allowed to work in Australia.

Celebrating diversity and inclusion

Social inclusion means everyone values diversity and recognises the unique circumstances of each individual. Activities and events that focus on bridging newly hired refugees with their teammates provide opportunities for interaction, bonding and building social and professional networks. Service providers organise many social events throughout the year. HR and diversity-and-inclusion staff, as well as refugees’ supervisors and co-workers, can attend these social events together, building greater awareness around refugee (employment) issues in Australia.

Peer Support Networks

Networking with other employers who hire refugees is an excellent way to share experiences and lessons learnt. Learning from peers is an opportunity to get access to invaluable insights and share best practices.

The Australian Employer Network for Refugee Inclusion (ENRI) is an initiative to bring together like-minded industry leaders in the domain of refugee recruitment. It connects those who successfully hire refugees and those who consider doing it. ENRI organises events and shares resources providing an opportunity to exchange know-how amongst industry leaders to promote refugee employment.

“No matter where you are in your journey to employ refugees, ENRI has benefits for everyone in attendance. For me, getting to measure up our current practises, staying on top of current issues effecting refugees, and learning about other strategies and approaches are the main benefits I gain from being involved.”

Kate McConnell, Social Inclusion Specialist, Metro Trains

COLLABORATIVE CASE STUDIES

Many employers hiring refugees attribute success to collaboration with service providers. This collaboration could assume different formats, from finding candidates for a specific position to setting up large-scale employment programs. The corporate cases below showcase a small subset of examples of how these collaborations could operate.



Community Corporate is a certified social enterprise helping employers across Australia create and implement inclusion strategies. It helps companies interested in hiring refugees with activities ranging from finding and screening job candidates, to pre-employment training, mentoring and cultural awareness training. Community Corporate works with employers of all sizes, to recruit for entry level roles to skilled positions. A customised refugee recruitment plan, based on an employer's unique needs and hiring aspirations, aims to provide systemic solutions that match an employer's strategy and corporate context.

WOOLWORTHS GROUP

Motivation: Woolworths wants to put into action its strong commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace with a workforce that reflects the diversity in the community it serves. It also wants to contribute to a better world.

Challenges and solutions: Acknowledging that its recruitment practices were not bringing about enough diversity within the business, Woolworths partnered with Community Corporate to launch a refugee employment program. Community Corporate used a rigorous assessment and screening process to ensure a good company fit and job performance. Additionally, Community Corporate offered pre-employment training that helped to equip candidates with the skills, knowledge, and experiences required for available roles and positions.

Project scope: In partnership with Community Corporate, Woolworths Group has successfully placed more than 200 refugees from over 18 different countries in roles in Woolworths supermarkets, Metro stores and customer fulfilment centres across Australia.

Benefits: Woolworths expanded its team with highly motivated individuals. Additionally, Woolworths achieved positive community reputation and business gains through engaging a diverse customer base.

"A rigorous screening process along with pre-employment training, and on-the-job work experience, has resulted in team member retention rates consistently exceeding 90% after six months."

Ben Commins, Head of Culture & People at Woolworths Supermarkets

BGIS

Motivation: BGIS wants to reflect its strong commitment to diversity and inclusion through hiring practices that help bring refugee hires into their workforce.

Challenges and solutions: Understanding that local work experience tends to be a barrier to employment for refugee jobseekers, BGIS partnered with Community Corporate to help them find refugees who would ordinarily not apply for BGIS jobs due to their lack of local experience in Australia. Community Corporate identified a refugee job candidate, provided him with pre-employment coaching support to identify the transferability of his skills, and assisted him in applying for the role in a way that was aligned with BGIS' recruitment processes.

Project scope: One-position trial in partnership with Community Corporate for a skilled role.

Benefits: BGIS expanded its team with a highly skilled employee. Additionally, by opening a job opportunity for a refugee candidate, BGIS made a positive impact in the life of a refugee.

"We were able to tap into the talent among refugees who would typically not get these job opportunities."

Sophie Clark, Head of Talent Acquisition, BGIS, APAC



Motivation: IKEA Australia wants to drive social change by shifting the narrative around refugees and create opportunities to support their integration into the Australian workforce.

Challenges and solutions: IKEA Australia believes that refugees and asylum seekers bring a lot of knowledge and experience, but lack of local experience tends to be a barrier to obtaining employment. IKEA Australia partnered with Community Corporate to help create and deliver the IKEA Skills for Employment Program, a program designed to kickstart careers for refugees. The program supports the development of core skills for individuals who demonstrate an alignment with IKEA's values and have a genuine interest in the roles IKEA Australia offers.

Project scope: Eight-week paid work placement program in partnership with Community Corporate in eleven locations across Australia, with the goal to support 180 refugees and asylum seekers by mid-2023.

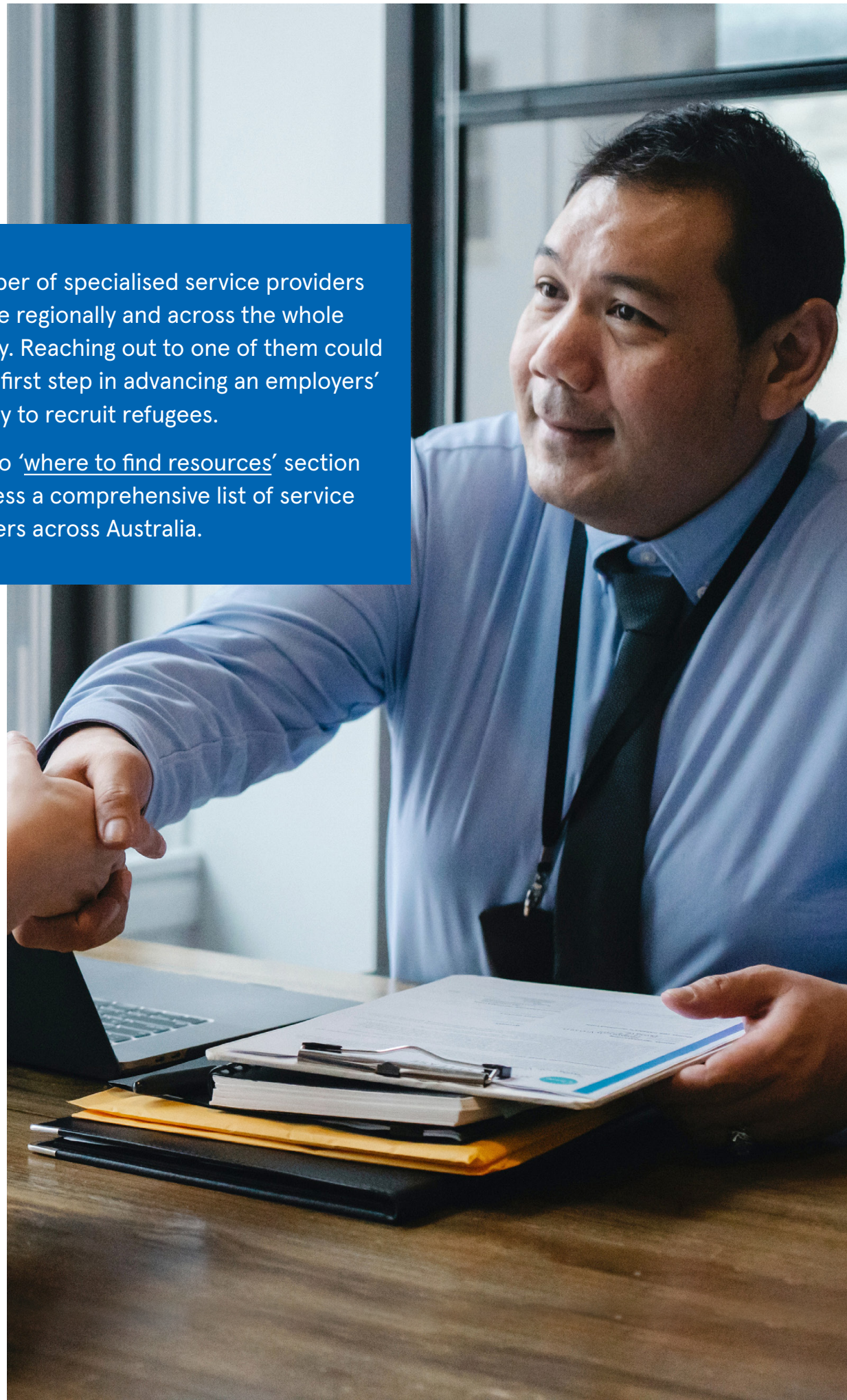
Benefits: IKEA Australia gained access to motivated individuals to fill existing vacancies. Increased employee engagement was also a benefit, with staff developing new mentorship skills and taking pride in IKEA Australia's inclusive culture.

"Having a collaborative partner who worked with us to co-design the program and was intimately involved in all aspects of the implementation, helped us make this program a success."

Harriet Pope, Skills for Employment Project Leader, IKEA

A number of specialised service providers operate regionally and across the whole country. Reaching out to one of them could be the first step in advancing an employers' strategy to recruit refugees.

Refer to '[where to find resources](#)' section to access a comprehensive list of service providers across Australia.



PITFALLS TO AVOID



DID YOU KNOW?

In a study conducted among Australian employers, most employers who successfully hire refugees consider them an important talent pool. The same study revealed the following main pitfalls.

Over-emphasising governmental support and wage subsidies: For most employers with experience in hiring refugees, wage subsidies to offset hiring costs were considered of lesser importance than the effort to match the skills of the refugee hire with the business needs. Notwithstanding, wage subsidies and other governmental support schemes can be helpful. Good service providers can help employers navigate the available options.

Not taking advantage of available support: Support of service providers in job-matching or workplace integration was identified by employers as a key to quick success. While some employers use the full spectrum of support from service providers, others selectively focus on skill-matching and identification of suitable candidates.

Skimping on the job- or skill-matching efforts: Australian employers identified finding the right person for the job as one of the most critical activities in ensuring hiring success. Accessing the support of reputable service providers, who understand the employers' needs, is a quick and effective means to find the right candidates.

Focussing only on refugee training: Employers that successfully hire refugees give equal importance to training refugee employees as they give to the training of the staff. Failing to recognise the importance of preparing the staff to work in a culturally-diverse environment and to welcome refugees makes integration and retention more challenging.

WHERE TO FIND RESOURCES

Service providers and digital databases

For a comprehensive list of service providers across Australia and digital databases to connect to refugee jobseekers, please visit the page [Refugee employment services directory](#) on the website Humans Like Us.

Peer support networks

[The Australian Employer Network for Refugee Inclusion](#) is a community of practice that connects those who successfully hire refugees and those who are considering doing it.

Funding support

A list of governmental incentives and refugee-specific programs can be found on the web page [Government programs and subsidies](#), on the website Humans Like Us.

Refugee training and upskilling

Details on job-specific training options for refugee hires are available on the [TAFE NSW](#) website, or the national register, [training.gov.au](#), which maintains a complete list of RTOs.

Publications

A few comprehensive publications on best practices for hiring refugees include [Australian Employers' guide to hiring refugees](#), [A Guide for Employers](#) and [Engaging Business in Refugee Employment](#).

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Please note this guide provides general information and is not intended to and does not constitute legal advice regarding the employment of those with a refugee or asylum-seeking background.

The law, particularly in relation to employment and the legal status of refugees in Australia and overseas, is complex and subject to change based on government policy and legislation. The particular circumstances must be considered in every case, and for that reason legal advice should be sought.

The authors disclaim any and all liability arising from reliance on the contents of this report however caused.

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