

# **Career guidelines for helping migrants and refugees to enter the job market**

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## **Career guidelines for helping migrants and refugees to enter the job market**

### **- Main problems the target group face in the new country**

Migrants and refugees when entering the new country might face multiple issues that result in delaying their access to the job market and so contributing to the country's economy. Of course each individual case will be different therefore success or failure stories will vary from one to another. In this work I will focus on my experience of career guidance work with migrants and refugees in the UK although I assume that the issues will be similar in the other EU countries.

Bellow you will find the list of the most common barriers that migrants and refugees face in the UK.

#### **Language barrier**

This is one of the main barriers that majority of migrants and refugees face. Those who enter the country with low English skills are the most vulnerable as their employment options are very limited. This group of people would not be able to access personal development or functional skills training until they reach certain English knowledge level. Limited communication skills might lead to isolation or reliance on communities of their culture.

People with low English skills quite often will end up in working in low paid, insecure and fragmented jobs.

Another group of migrants and refugees with higher English skills might need more practicing and adaptation to the language in working environment therefore they might not always be ready to access professional employment until they develop the fluency, pass IELTS or other professional language tests.

#### **Lack of awareness in what support services are available**

Due to non-existent, discontinued outreach, information and interpretation services migrants and refugees are lacking awareness on support services available to access assistance in meeting various needs, information on education, employment rights, and information on housing, health or other public services. This quite often stops their progression and makes integration process longer.

#### **Lack of awareness in what employers are looking for and what are the work ethics and standards**

UK's Job market for those who are entering the world of work quite often is unfamiliar to migrants and refugees. Although they might assume that most of the things are functioning similar ways the reality appears to be different.

UK employers quite often would require UK based work experience or qualifications as well as the skills vital to compete in the job market. In career guidance practice I came across variety of groups:

- Migrants who did some research on the job market before coming in the UK therefore with realistic goals
- Migrants having unrealistic expectations in finding employment

- Migrants who rely on word of mouth information shared within their communities and therefore not fully understanding how their goals can be achieved

General good educational background as well as UK's cultural awareness would make migrants' journey into employment more successful.

### **Lack of qualification**

In the UK qualification obtained abroad can be compared with the UK's qualification framework by institution called UK NARIC. Service provided is not free and therefore not all migrants would use this unless it would be required by potential employers to provide comparability statement to pass through recruitment process.

Some sectors professional bodies and institutions would be able to provide such information too by confirming whether skilled workers are able to access professional roles in the UK. Each sector sets their own entry criteria therefore it is important to get familiar with them as soon as someone enters the country.

It might be very normal to work in education sector in Iran for someone who finished non education related degree, however the UK criteria in accessing work in education sector might be different and therefore will require additional training or professional development. This applied to many other roles such as engineering, medicine, health and social care, psychology etc.

### **Lack of or no work experience**

Lacking or not having any work experience might be a big barrier in accessing desirable employment in current competitive market. Employment agencies and recruitment consultants might not see such candidates as job ready. In a current selection process wins the one who has the most relevant skills and experience. It is essential to understand the ways how this can be overcome.

### **Health issues/emotional distress**

Some migrants and refugees might be under huge pressure in finding employment due to family commitments, homelessness and pressures from public services, however not all would feel ready and fit for work. It is important to identify this as a barrier at early stage and support individuals in accessing wellbeing services.

### **Cultural differences/stereotypes/prejudice**

We are all aware that different cultures not always perceive things the same way. It is common to hear generalisations about the person or group of people. This support the development of stereotypes and this happens when we are unable or unwilling to obtain all of the information we would need to make fair judgments about people or situations. Stereotyping quite often lead to unfair discrimination.

Mutual interest in getting to know cultures is vital in multicultural societies.

### **Limited access to the services (depending on immigration status)**

Migrants and refugees might have completely different rights in the UK according to their immigration statuses and this would determine their eligibility for support services. Some groups can

become more vulnerable than others. For example asylum seekers would not have rights to access employment and therefore would depend on limited support to maintain their daily needs provided by charities.

Also EU workers might not be able to access any social financial support unless they pass habitual residency test.

Different eligibility criteria for each group of migrants would apply also when accessing education and health services.

### **Lack of financial resources**

Financial situation and access to financial support can determine the progression of different migrants groups. Due to this the groups would take different career paths and some might be able to advance more than others.

For example there might be university scholarships available to refugees but other type of migrants would have to self-fund the course. Also could be a different situation when EU migrants would be able to get a loan to pay the course fees but refugee won't get one.

### **- How to support them and what instruments to use**

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned barriers we can conclude that different migrants groups have diverse and complex guidance needs. It is important to identify the barriers at early stage and support the groups accordingly.

I am going to list below the tools used in careers advice practice that I believe can be useful and effective.

### **Information, Advice and Guidance sessions**

IAG sessions can be very unfamiliar to some of the migrants and refugees. Quite often those with academic backgrounds would understand the service well, however, people with basic or no education would need more face to face interactions before they get to know the benefits of it.

IAG sessions are quite often used to get general or specific information on labour market, on UK's education or for further reading resources. Advisers do a lot of signposting, also act as mentors, teachers or coaches to support their customers' journeys into progression.

Such services can be provided by certain colleges, universities, job centres and organisations targeting specific groups of customers. It has been available to access for many years now over the phone, online and face to face.

The National Careers Service which is free has been available for several years now to all adults that are eligible to public funds.

Private careers advice services have been provided by freelance career coaches, employment consultants or careers service companies also over the phone, online and face to face.

## **ESOL/ESOL for Work/**

ESOL programmes are important in building the essential communication skills and in preparing for employment. They can be provided by private providers, non for profit organisations, community centres, colleges and schools. Eligibility criteria of who can access it at no cost would vary depending on immigration statuses.

ESOL for Work programmes are very specific and designed for those who will be actively seeking employment.

## **Pre-employment Programmes / Key skills/Functional skills development**

These programs support mainly low skilled migrants and aims to build or refresh their key functional skills such as communication, health and safety, hygiene, IT and employability skills (developing basic CVs, opening email accounts, practicing simple job interviews, telephone conversations etc.)

## **Accessing training (accredited and non-accredited)**

Various programmes are available to specific migrants/refugee groups: get into teaching, get back into engineering, get back into medicine, get back into journalism etc. Such programmes are good in building professional networks, getting updated information, skills and work experience before accessing paid employment.

There might be funding available to refugees and exceptionally skilled migrants to engage in master or PhD studies.

Professional sector bodies would be able to provide professional development courses when qualifications obtained abroad are not equivalent to the UK's standards (sectors such as law, finance, psychology, social work, teaching etc.)

It is important to make migrants aware on such options as it will help them to make informal decisions on their career choices.

## **Supporting with employability skills (CV, interview preparation, dress for success)**

Migrants who have higher skills quite often need to review their job search process to identify areas for improvement. To support this group there can be used such tools as one to one reflection on job search sessions with adviser/mentor or life coach as well as group workshops on different employability skills development topics such as communication, confidence building, assertiveness, team work and interview pitching, CV developing, job application writing, dressing for success.

Support services can be provided by charities, job centres, community centres, recruitment agencies etc.

## **Comparison of qualification**

As mentioned previously it could be useful to compare qualifications obtained abroad with the UK NARIC but it is not essential. Some charity organisations supporting refugees might have membership with UK NARIC and could provide access to comparison at no cost.

Professional sector councils and bodies would be able to provide detailed guidance on work entry criteria.

### **Information on work experience/Work shadowing programmes**

As lack of work experience can be a major barrier in accessing desirable employment it becomes important to inform migrants on work experience opportunities such as volunteering, work shadowing, formal work experience programmes and work trials.

### **Mentoring programs**

These programmes can be very effective when professional migrants are linked to the local professionals from the same sector. It gives them a better sector insight and helps develop the skills needed. Quite often it is the best tool in building confidence and communication skills.

### **Signposting practice**

IAG practitioners as well as other professionals working in supporting services apply signposting practice to increase awareness on what services are available to support migrants' journeys into progression. Therefore it is important for such practitioners to keep their knowledge up to date and research on regular basis to identify the most effective services for those who are in need.

Agencies and individuals supporting migrants should work together and network by having open discussions, researching and educating mainstream services.

### **Life coaching**

Although life coaching might have some similarities to mentoring it is a completely different tool to support migrants but also very effective. Life coaches aim to help and empower others to make, meet and exceed personal and professional goals. They work with customers helping them to become happier as well to explore the self, the world and ambitions.

### **Digital resources**

These type of resources (social media sites, apps and online resources) might be very effective to younger migrant groups as well as those who have digital communication skills.