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UK Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees



In collaboration with:



October, 2024
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About Tent UK

With the UK welcoming significant numbers of refugees, businesses have a critical role to play in helping them to integrate economically in their new communities. Tent UK is a network of over 70 major companies that are committed to hiring refugees across the country, and helping them become job-ready. Tent UK is the national coalition of the Tent Partnership for Refugees, which was founded in 2016 by Hamdi Ulukaya, the CEO and founder of Chobani – a multibillion dollar food company in the U.S. – to mobilise the world's largest employers to help refugees access local labour markets. In addition to the UK, Tent operates in 11 other countries across the Americas and Europe. Find out more at www.tent.org/uk.¹

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In collaboration with:



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

About The Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is a leading charity working with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. Founded in 1951 following the creation of the UN Refugee Convention, the Refugee Council exists to support and empower people who have fled conflict, violence, and persecution in order to rebuild their lives here in the UK. It provides crisis advice, mental health counselling, employment programmes, and other practical support to help people settle and integrate into their new community, and it works with refugees and partners to fight for improvements to the refugee protection system. Find out more at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk.²



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I. Introduction



The UK Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees is a manual for companies that are interested in hiring refugees, and have questions about the logistics and practicality of employing them in the UK.

Leading companies throughout the UK are committed to hiring refugees, playing a vital role in helping them to restart their lives, while at the same time benefiting from their talent, loyalty, and ingenuity. Refugees are highly motivated and resilient workers, and are known to have lower turnover rates than non-refugee employees.³ In addition, British consumers indicate not only that they are more likely to buy from companies hiring refugees, but also that they are more likely to work for them.⁴



Please note that this guide will use "refugee" as a catch-all term for all forcibly displaced people in the UK who are legally authorised to work.

This guide contains essential information about a variety of topics related to hiring refugees in the UK, including:

- A "factsheet" on refugees, including common countries of origin, immigration statuses and pathways, and an overview of their educational and professional backgrounds.
- The business benefits of hiring refugees.
- The logistics around hiring refugees.
- A list of organisations that companies interested in hiring refugees can connect with, and additional resources to support these hiring efforts.



Tent works closely with companies to build and implement effective refugee hiring programmes. For more information, get in touch – email info@tent.org.



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Tent UK

Tent UK is a coalition of more than 70 major companies from across the country stepping up to help refugees enter the labour market through job preparation and employment. By joining Tent UK, companies will have access to:

- *Tailored advice on how to set up successful refugee hiring programmes.*
- *Resources, trainings, and best practices, distilled from Tent's global network of companies, and tailored to the UK context.*
- *Peer-to-peer learning and regular convenings with member companies.*
- *Recommendations on best-in-class partners who can connect companies to refugee talent.*
- *Opportunities to coordinate with other companies to overcome structural challenges to hiring and integrating refugees.*
- *Tent's professional mentorship programmes, which pair employees with refugees.*
- *Communications guidance and opportunities to amplify companies' efforts.*

Visit the [Tent UK webpage](#)⁵ to learn more, and express your interest by getting in touch – email info@tent.org.





II.

Factsheet



The following factsheet offers key information in response to FAQs from employers about refugees arriving in the UK.

Refugees' immigration statuses and right to work



Please note that this guide will use "refugee" as a catch-all term for all forcibly displaced people in the UK who are legally authorised to work.

The UK currently hosts more than 600,000 refugees from all over the world. Refugees come to the UK via different immigration pathways. Each year, the number of refugees arriving in the UK varies depending on world events and UK government policies. The largest populations of refugees currently hosted in the UK come from Ukraine, Hong Kong, and Afghanistan. (For more information about these refugee populations, see below).

In the UK, a refugee will either have had their application for asylum accepted by the UK government; been relocated to the UK via a global United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) resettlement scheme; been brought to the UK by a partner or parent via the Family Reunion Scheme; or had their application for a country-specific scheme for individuals seeking protection accepted.

Claiming asylum in the UK

People who come to the UK and need to stay because they would be in danger in their country of origin, and who want the UK to grant them refugee status, may claim asylum. Some individuals do this immediately upon entering the UK (at the port at which they arrive). Individuals who do not claim asylum immediately on entering the UK may do so via the UK's Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon.⁶

The UK government's Home Office makes decisions on asylum applications in the UK. Asylum applicants – also known as asylum seekers – will have a meeting with an immigration officer as part of a "screening". At a later date, they will have an asylum interview with a caseworker. According to the UK government, a decision "will usually be made on straightforward claims within six months".⁷ By the end of June 2024, 64% of asylum seekers had been waiting for more than six months on an initial decision.⁸



What is the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker?

An asylum seeker is an individual who has applied for asylum, and is awaiting a decision on whether they will be granted refugee status. Asylum seekers are entitled to claim asylum support while they are waiting for their case to be decided – this takes the form of housing (asylum accommodation) and/or a cash allowance.⁹

In the year ending June 2024, more than 75,000 asylum applications were made in the UK (which relates to approximately 97,000 individuals, as more than one applicant can be included in a single application).¹⁰ In the year ending June 2023, there were more than 82,000 asylum applications (which relates to approximately 102,000 individuals). The top three countries of origin of people seeking asylum in the year ending June 2024 were Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.¹¹

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. However, if they have been waiting 12 months for a decision on their asylum application and are not considered responsible for the delay, they can apply for permission to work.¹² If granted, the individual will be allowed to take up a job on the UK's "Immigration Salary List" (formerly the "Shortage Occupation List"). According to the House of Commons Library, this "mostly restricts [asylum seekers] to highly skilled jobs that require formal qualifications (although social care is now on the list)".¹³

The possible outcomes of an asylum claim are:

- 1. Grant of refugee status:** a refugee is protected by international law and defined under the 1951 Refugee Convention as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion". Individuals granted refugee status are given permission to stay in the UK for a minimum of five years.¹⁴ After five years, they can apply for permission to stay in the UK indefinitely ("settlement"). Twelve months after securing settlement, they can apply for citizenship. Refugee status holders in the UK are legally authorised to work.
- 2. Grant of humanitarian protection:** Individuals who do not qualify as a refugee under the Refugee Convention but whom the Home Office deems are in need of international protection will be granted humanitarian protection. Individuals granted humanitarian protection are given permission to stay in the UK for a minimum of five years.¹⁵ After five years, they can apply for permission to stay in the UK indefinitely ("settlement"). Twelve months after securing settlement, they can apply for citizenship. Individuals granted humanitarian protection in the UK are legally authorised to work.
- 3. Grant of other leave:** Individuals who are not accepted as needing international protection but whom the Home Office deems have reason for being allowed to stay in the UK on a temporary basis will be granted limited

permission to stay, the duration for which varies.¹⁶ Individuals granted limited permission to stay in the UK are legally authorised to work.

4. **Refusal:** In 2023, one in three asylum applications were refused at initial decision (not counting applicant withdrawals).¹⁷ An asylum seeker whose application is refused at initial decision may appeal through an appeal process and, if successful, may be granted permission to remain. If a claim is refused and the applicant does not appeal or has exhausted any right of appeal, they must leave the UK.¹⁸

In the year ending June 2024, more than 67,000 people were granted refugee status or other protection in the UK.¹⁹ This includes approximately 62,000 individuals granted refugee status, and more than 4,000 individuals granted humanitarian protection. Between 2004 to 2021, around three in four applicants refused asylum at initial decision lodged an appeal, and almost one in three of these appeals were allowed.²⁰



As part of the UK government's Illegal Migration Act, which became law in 2023, the government is required to set a cap on the number of refugees who can come to the UK via "safe and legal routes" (i.e., those below) each year. It is currently unclear if and when the cap will be put in place.

Global UNHCR resettlement schemes

The UK government operates three resettlement schemes that are open to refugees from across the world. Under these schemes, UNHCR identifies refugees living in formal refugee camps, informal settlements, and countries of asylum, and then assesses and refers them to the UK based on a variety of needs and vulnerabilities. The schemes are:

- **The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS):** Under this scheme, eligible refugees are resettled in the UK once suitable accommodation has been identified for them. Refugees resettled under UKRS are given permission to stay in the UK indefinitely. After five years, they can apply for citizenship. Refugees resettled under UKRS are legally authorised to work. Between February 2021 (the scheme's launch) and Q3 2023, the UK has resettled approximately 2,400 refugees under UKRS.²¹
- **Community Sponsorship:** Under this scheme, civil society groups (e.g., friends, neighbours, charities, and faith groups) can directly support refugee families resettled in the UK via UKRS or the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). (For more information about ACRS, see below). Sponsor groups commit to providing integration support (e.g., support with accessing education, social services, and employment) for the refugee family's first year in the UK, and to find accommodation that will be available for at least two years. Between the beginning of 2021 and Q3 2023, the UK has resettled approximately 500 refugees under the Community Sponsorship scheme.²²

- **Mandate Scheme:** Launched in 1995, this scheme resettles refugees who have a close family member in the UK who is willing to accommodate and support them. Refugees resettled under the Mandate Scheme are given permission to stay in the UK indefinitely. After five years, they can apply for citizenship. Refugees resettled under the Mandate Scheme are legally authorised to work. Between the beginning of 2015 and Q3 2023, the UK has resettled approximately 100 refugees under the Mandate Scheme.²³

Family Reunion Scheme

Individuals granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK are allowed to sponsor their partner and children to join them under the Family Reunion Scheme. Partners and children who are approved to come to the UK are given permission to stay in line with their sponsor (e.g., for a minimum of five years; indefinitely). They can work in the UK subject to the same conditions as their sponsor. In the year ending June 2024, approximately 16,000 people were granted a family reunion visa – more than half of whom were children.²⁴

Country-specific schemes for individuals seeking protection



Please note that this guide will use the term “Ukrainian refugee” to refer to all people who have been displaced from Ukraine, including those who are not of Ukrainian nationality.

Ukraine protection schemes

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have fled their home country. This mass exodus of people is one of the fastest forced displacement crises in history, and the largest since the Second World War. More than two years later, European countries west of Ukraine host 4-5 million Ukrainian refugees, with Germany and Poland hosting the most, at approximately 1.2 million and 970,000 respectively. As of March 2024, the UK is hosting more than 250,000 Ukrainian refugees.

Because the UK is no longer a European Union (EU) member state, it has not adopted the EU’s Temporary Protection Directive, which was activated following Russia’s invasion, and grants Ukrainian refugees immediate protection, as well as access to housing, employment, medical care, education, and more for up to three years. Instead, the UK has implemented three alternative national protection schemes:

- **The Ukraine Family Scheme:**²⁵ Closed on 19 February 2024, this scheme allowed eligible Ukrainians to join family members or extend their stay in the UK. Individuals granted permission under the scheme can live, work, and access public funds in the UK for up to three years.

- **The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (“Homes for Ukraine”):**²⁶ Ukrainians not currently in the UK can apply for a sponsor, through which and with whom they and their families can come to the UK to live. Individuals granted permission under the scheme can live, work, and access public funds in the UK for up to 18 months.
- **The Ukraine Extension Scheme (closed on 16 May 2024):**²⁷ Ukrainians in the UK whose permission did not expire before 1 January 2022, or who had permission to be in the country on or between 18 March 2022 and 16 November 2023, could extend their visa or switch to the Ukraine Extension Scheme. Individuals granted permission under the scheme can live, work, and access public funds in the UK for up to three years.

Individuals who have been given permission to stay in the UK under one of its Ukraine protection schemes can apply for a further 18 months’ permission to stay under the country’s new **Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme**.²⁸ Eligible individuals can apply for the new scheme three months before their current visa expires. Applications open from early 2025.

As of April 2024, more than 250,000 visas have been issued to Ukrainians under the Ukraine Family (28%) and Ukraine Sponsorship (72%) schemes.²⁹ Around 30,000 individuals have been granted the application to extend their permission to stay in the UK.³⁰



To find out more about the UK’s Ukraine protection schemes, and the rights Ukrainian refugees have to work in the UK, see Tent’s “Guidance for European Companies on Hiring Refugees From Ukraine” resource, available via Tent’s [website](#).³¹





Who are Ukrainian refugees?

With Ukraine's general mobilisation order requiring men aged 18 to 60 to stay within the country, UNHCR estimates that 90% of Ukrainian refugees are women and children.³²

A 2023 survey by the EU Agency For Asylum (EUAA) of more than 4,250 Ukrainian refugees in Europe finds most respondents to be "highly educated". More than two in five have a master's degree (or equivalent), one in five have a bachelor's degree, and 4% have a PhD.³³ Around one in three respondents have lower levels of education, including secondary (10%), vocational (18%), and primary (1%).

In the UK, a 2024 Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey of Ukrainian refugees finds 69% of adults to be working as an employee or self-employed, while 36% (including those already

in employment) are actively looking for work.³⁴ Among employed Ukrainian refugee respondents, one in five (20%) are working in the hospitality sector.

Among unemployed respondents to the EUAA survey, more than one in two (53%) mention "limited knowledge of the local language" as the most important reason for their unemployment, while 20% cite "caring responsibilities".³⁵ Other barriers to entering the labour market among EUAA survey respondents include "issues in the recognition of their qualifications by the host countries" (16%) and "mismatches between the available jobs, and qualifications and work experiences" (14%).

According to the EUAA survey, the main languages spoken by Ukrainian refugees are Ukrainian (98%), Russian (88%), and English (50%), followed by German (16%) and Polish (15%).³⁶



For more background on Ukrainian culture as it relates to employment, and best practices for companies to ensure the successful integration of their Ukrainian employees, see Tent's "Creating a Culturally Inclusive Workplace for Ukrainian Refugees" resource, available only to Tent members via the [Members' Hub](#).³⁷ (For more information about becoming a member, visit Tent's [website](#)).³⁸

Hong Kong British National (Overseas) scheme

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 until its transfer to China in 1997. When the handover took place, an estimated 2.9 million Hong Kongers chose to retain their ties to the UK by taking up British National (Overseas) (“BN(O)”) status. When the Chinese government introduced a national security law restricting the rights and freedoms of Hong Kongers in June 2020, the UK government, deeming the law to have violated transfer agreements made between the two countries, created the Hong Kong BN(O) visa route on 31 January 2021 to provide BN(O) Hong Kongers with the ability to come to the UK to live, work, and study, on a pathway to citizenship. As of January 2024, the UK government estimates that more than 140,000 BN(O) Hong Kongers have arrived in the UK since the beginning of 2021.³⁹

The Hong Kong BN(O) scheme allows BN(O) Hong Kongers, and their dependent family members, to live, work, and study in the UK for up to five years. After five years, applicants can apply for permission to stay in the UK indefinitely (“settlement”). Twelve months after securing settlement, they can apply for citizenship. While BN(O) status holders may not work as a professional sportsperson or sports coach, there are otherwise no restrictions on their right to work.⁴⁰ The Hong Kong BN(O) visa has a “no recourse to public funds” (NRPF) condition attached, which means that visa-holders are not able to claim in-work or out-of-work benefits, or housing benefit (with some exceptions).





Who are BN(O) Hong Kongers?

According to a 2023 Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers (WC4HK) survey, there is an “equal gender balance” among BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK.⁴¹ The study, of more than 2,000 BN(O) Hong Kongers, finds them to be “more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK”, with 59% of respondents having a degree at graduate (36%) or postgraduate (23%) level, compared to 34% of the UK population as a whole.

The survey also finds that while the vast majority (92%) of BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK are aged between 25 and 64, only half are working, with 35% in full-time employment, 9% in part-time employment, and 6% in self-employment.⁴² Eighteen percent of respondents are unemployed. Women are less likely to be working full-time than men, at 28% to 41%. BN(O) Hong Kongers over the age of 55 are also less likely to be working.

When it comes to the sectors in which BN(O) Hong Kongers are most likely to work, 15% of employed WC4HK survey respondents work in wholesale and retail, 13% in the professional scientific and technical services sector, 11% in IT, 11% in education, and 11% in hospitality and food services.⁴³ Almost half of all respondents with a job say it does not match their skills and experience at all (27%), or “only a little” (20%).

Among unemployed WC4HK survey respondents, 41% cite a lack of confidence in speaking English as a barrier to employment, and 19% mention “recognition of professional qualifications”.⁴⁴ Other barriers to entering the labour market among unemployed survey respondents include needing a UK driver’s licence for a job (17%), “needing a criminal record check” (15%), “lack of information on finding a job” (12%), and childcare (10%).⁴⁵

More than half (53%) of WC4HK survey respondents rate their spoken English as good, 11% as very good, and 36% as poor.⁴⁶

Afghanistan protection schemes

On 15 August 2021, Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, was captured by the Taliban, marking the end of the War in Afghanistan, which began 20 years prior following an invasion by the U.S.-led international coalition including the UK. The fall of Kabul forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans and other foreign nationals. Through its own evacuation operation – Operation Pitting – the UK airlifted more than 8,000 Afghans who worked for or with the UK government in Afghanistan (e.g., as translators), including their family members, to safety. To resettle these Afghans, and others at risk of Taliban reprisals, the UK government launched the Afghan Citizens Replacement Scheme (ACRS) on 6 January 2022. This scheme built on the existing Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), which was launched on 1 April 2021:

- **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP):**⁴⁷ This scheme offers relocation to eligible Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK government in Afghanistan (e.g., as translators), as well as their family members. Many eligible Afghans were evacuated from Afghanistan during Operation Pitting following the fall of Kabul. Afghans resettled in the UK under ARAP are given permission to stay in the UK indefinitely. After five years, they can apply for citizenship. They are legally authorised to work.
- **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS):**⁴⁸ This scheme prioritises individuals “who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan, and stood up for values such as democracy, women’s rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law” (e.g., judges, women’s rights activists, academics, and

journalists), and other vulnerable people, such as women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (e.g., LGBTQ+). The UK government will resettle up to 20,000 individuals under the scheme. Afghans resettled in the UK under ACRS are given permission to stay in the UK indefinitely. After five years, they can apply for citizenship. They are legally authorised to work.

As of May 2024, more than 15,000 Afghans have been welcomed to the UK under ARAP, and more than 11,000 under ACRS.⁴⁹



The number of Afghans claiming asylum in the UK – including those crossing the Channel in “small boats” – has increased since the fall of Kabul. According to analysis by The Migration Observatory, between January 2022 and 30 June 2023, approximately 14,500 Afghans claimed asylum in the UK (not all by small boat).⁵⁰ In 2022, 98% of initial decisions on Afghans’ asylum applications were accepted.⁵¹



Who are Afghan refugees?

According to a 2023 survey by USPUK and More in Common of more than 280 Afghan refugees living in temporary "bridging" accommodation in the UK, 56% of respondents have a degree (25% postgraduate, and 31% undergraduate), 24% have a high school education, and 20% have less than a high school education.⁵²

The survey also finds 38% of respondents to be employed, while 61% say they are looking for employment.⁵³ One in two (51%) Afghan women say they are not looking for work.

Sixteen percent of respondents rate their English language proficiency as fluent, 14% as proficient, 26% as conversational, 25% as basic, and 19% say "none".⁵⁴

What kind of educational and professional backgrounds do refugees have?

Refugees, regardless of their country of origin, come to the UK with a wide variety of professional experiences, educational backgrounds, and skills, and can therefore provide tremendous value to a variety of employers. As the sections above note, there can be vast differences in refugees' education and employment backgrounds, which is often dependent on their country of origin. Education, experience, and English proficiency greatly influence the types of jobs a refugee is qualified for, though many highly-skilled refugees struggle to find employment that matches their education and experience levels. According to a 2024 survey by the Commission on the Integration of Refugees of more than 750 refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, 39% of respondents say they have had to "drop down" to an entry-level position compared to their previous role before arriving in the UK.⁵⁵ One in three (34%) respondents who have a qualification say they "never" get to use skills learned from it.

Some refugees come to the UK with high levels of education and strong work histories. According to the Commission on the Integration of Refugees survey, 33% of respondents have a bachelor's degree (or equivalent), 26% have a master's degree (or equivalent), and 2% have a doctorate degree.⁵⁶ (Ukrainian refugee respondents are significantly more likely to have a graduate level of education). These individuals may struggle with both unemployment and underemployment. They may also struggle with the processes and costs associated with validating any foreign education credentials needed to access certain industries for employment. In addition, their foreign credentials or

experience may not be familiar to HR teams reviewing their CVs, which can make it challenging to progress during the application and interview processes.

Other refugees come to the UK with "mid-level" education and/or skills – for example, some college or vocational training, and/or some work experience. The Commission on the Integration of Refugees' survey found 33% of respondents to have a high school diploma (or equivalent).⁵⁷ These individuals may face challenges in understanding available career paths, and how to build towards them. They may also seek to continue education (e.g., completing a degree or vocational training) to work in a certain field.

Some refugees enter the UK with little to no formal education, work history, or English language proficiency. According to the Commission on the Integration of Refugees survey, 12% of respondents have no education qualifications.⁵⁸ These individuals may be clustered in lower-paying jobs that do not have clear career ladders, or they may not yet have acquired the vocational or English language skills to progress. According to the Commission on the Integration of Refugees survey, 49% of respondents are learning English, and 6% have completed their learning.⁵⁹ One in 10 (11%) are not learning English but want to, while 9% are on a waiting list for classes. Nearly one in four (23%) already knew English before coming to the UK, while 1% of respondents do not want to learn English.



For more information about hiring and supporting refugees with limited English language proficiency, see Tent's "How to Overcome Language Barriers and Invest in Refugee Talent" resource, available only to Tent members via the [Members' Hub](#).⁶⁰ (For more information about becoming a member, visit Tent's [website](#)).⁶¹

What barriers to employment do refugees face?

Regardless of employment or education background, refugees face many barriers to securing employment in the UK. Among refugee respondents to the Commission on the Integration of Refugees' survey, 18% say they are in paid employment, and 21% say they are unemployed and actively looking for a job.⁶² Among respondents who are not currently in work but would like to be, 33% cite learning English as the "biggest barrier" to getting a job.⁶³ Respondents also reference "finding out about relevant job opportunities" (8%), a lack of skills and training (7%), travelling to job interviews (5%), and understanding the job application process in the UK (4%) as the biggest barrier to getting a job.

Given the diversity of backgrounds prior to arriving in the UK, as well as the diversity in living situations once in the UK, refugees will be seeking different outcomes. Some may be searching for a job that pays the bills and supports their family, while others may be seeking employment in a particular job function or career field. Still, others may be searching for a job with higher pay – a 2019 Centre on Migration, Policy and Society study finds that "asylum migrants" in the UK earn, on average, 55% less per week than UK-born workers, and 38% less per hour,⁶⁴ highlighting the need for job mobility.



Access to secure housing can also be a barrier to employment. An asylum seeker whose application is successful is granted just 28 days from the date they are notified to arrange their own housing (as well as apply for benefits and open a bank account).⁶⁵ According to the Refugee Council, a refugee's ability to access employment is affected if they do not know where they will be living in the long term.⁶⁶ Government statistics released in 2024 show a significant increase in individuals sleeping rough after leaving asylum accommodation – from 42 in July 2023 to 469 by December 2023.⁶⁷

What professional development support do refugees receive to find employment?

A range of non-governmental organisations, community organisations, staffing agencies, employment contractors, and other groups provide refugees with employment, integration, and other support. (For more information, see the **Connecting with Refugee Talent** chapter below).

The UK government funds and provides employment and integration support to refugees in England via the Refugee Employability Programme (REP).⁶⁸ The initiative, which runs until September 2025, provides three pillars of support:

1. Employment – e.g., career counselling; converting qualifications; job search and application support;

CV writing classes; interview practice; sector-specific and skills training.

2. English language – e.g., English language classes, including English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL); conversation clubs; literacy lessons.
3. Integration – e.g., signposting to childcare and healthcare services; accessing housing support; joining local community groups.

Refugees must apply for REP support, or be referred by a friend or organisation. Not all refugees are eligible; for example, Afghans resettled in England under ARAP and ACRS are eligible, but Ukrainian refugees are not. Eligible refugees can receive REP support for up to 18 months, including in-work support for up to six months after finding a job.



For a full list of who is eligible to apply for REP, and more information about the employment and integration support available to refugees in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, see the [UK government website](#).⁶⁹



III.

Why Hire Refugees?



Refugees are highly motivated and resilient workers. When they arrive in their new country, they typically look for opportunities that will allow them to provide for themselves and their families, and reinsert themselves into the labour market quickly. They embrace the opportunity to build a new life, and become key contributors to the country's economy and society.

There are several business benefits companies can realise by hiring refugees:

Refugees are known to have lower turnover rates

Reducing staff turnover is valuable to companies, and hiring refugees is an effective way for employers to increase employee retention rates. According to internal research by Glassdoor UK, the average cost of employee turnover is approximately £11,000 per person.⁷⁰ Once refugees find a welcoming work environment, they tend to stay longer. In research conducted by the Fiscal Policy Institute and commissioned by Tent, three in four companies (73%) surveyed report a higher retention rate for refugee employees than for non-refugee employees, with staff turnover rates among U.S. manufacturing companies almost three times higher among all workers (11%) compared with refugees (4%).⁷¹ Turnover rates are particularly low among refugees in sectors such as meatpacking and hospitality.⁷²

Hiring refugees can strengthen a company's brand

Hiring refugees can also strengthen a company's brand by demonstrating to consumers and the company's employees that it lives its values. Increasingly, consumers demand that companies

make a positive impact in their communities, and they are more loyal to brands that do. According to a 2023 survey commissioned by Tent of 800 adults in the UK, British consumers indicate by a wide margin that they are more likely to buy from companies hiring refugees, with 45% supporting this action, and only 11% opposing it.⁷³ British consumers of every age group indicate by a wide margin that they are more likely to buy from companies hiring refugees, as do British consumers of all political views.⁷⁴

Companies are more likely to attract talent by hiring refugees

Companies are better positioned to attract employees when hiring refugees. According to Tent's 2023 survey of British consumers, 41% of respondents say they are more likely to work at companies hiring refugees, while only 11% are less likely.⁷⁵ According to a 2024 Ipsos survey commissioned by Tent of more than 2,100 adults in the UK, 49% of employed respondents say they would support their employer taking action to help refugees find, apply for, and start roles at the company, while 17% would oppose this action.⁷⁶

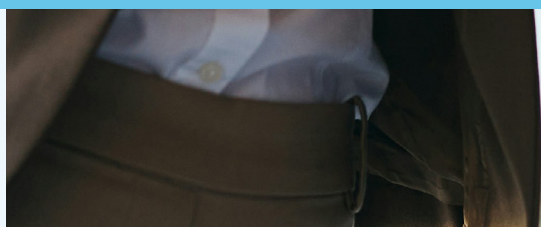
Having diverse staff improves financial performance

Research by McKinsey covering 15 countries has shown a positive, statistically significant correlation between company financial outperformance, and gender and ethnic diversity – particularly among executive teams.⁷⁷



IV.

How To Hire Refugees





All refugees are legally authorised to work in the UK. Employers do not need to sponsor work visas for refugees, as they receive work authorisation directly from the UK government. Since refugees arriving in the UK have different immigration statuses, they may present different and/or unfamiliar documents when companies offer them a job, and companies must complete pre-employment checks to confirm they have the right to work in the UK.

The documents refugee candidates may present will outline the individual's settlement status, and their right to work in the UK. Documentation may not necessarily state the individual's refugee status. Companies can expect refugees to present the following documentation:

- **National Insurance Number:** Refugees should receive a National Insurance Number shortly after receiving refugee status – however, there may be a delay. All refugees are entitled to apply and receive a National Insurance Number.

- **Biometric Residence Permit (BRP):*** The most common form of documentation is a BRP issued by the UK government's Home Office. The permit is issued to all migrants with the right to live in the UK longer than six months. All refugees will receive a BRP. The permit will include information about the owner's immigration status, and the conditions of their stay, including any entitlement to access public funds and the right to work. Depending on visa status and when the permit was issued, some BRPs may have a National Insurance Number printed on the back.



** All BRPs will be replaced by "eVisas" (electronic visas) on 31 December 2024. For more information, visit the [UK government website](#).⁷⁸*

DESIGN OF THE BIOMETRIC RESIDENCE PERMIT

The Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) is the size of a standard credit card, and looks similar to those issued by some other EU countries. The permit is made from polycarbonate, and contains a chip to make it more secure against forgery and abuse.

1. Holder's digital image

2. Holder's name

3. Valid until

The date the permit expires.

4. Place and date of issue

The UK, followed by the date the permit was issued.

5. Type of permit

The holder's immigration category.

6. Remarks

The immigration entitlements for the length of the holder's stay. (This may continue on the back of the permit).

7. ZW9005196

Unique permit number.

8. Holder's signature

9. Biometric chip

10. Holder's gender

11. Holder's date and place of birth

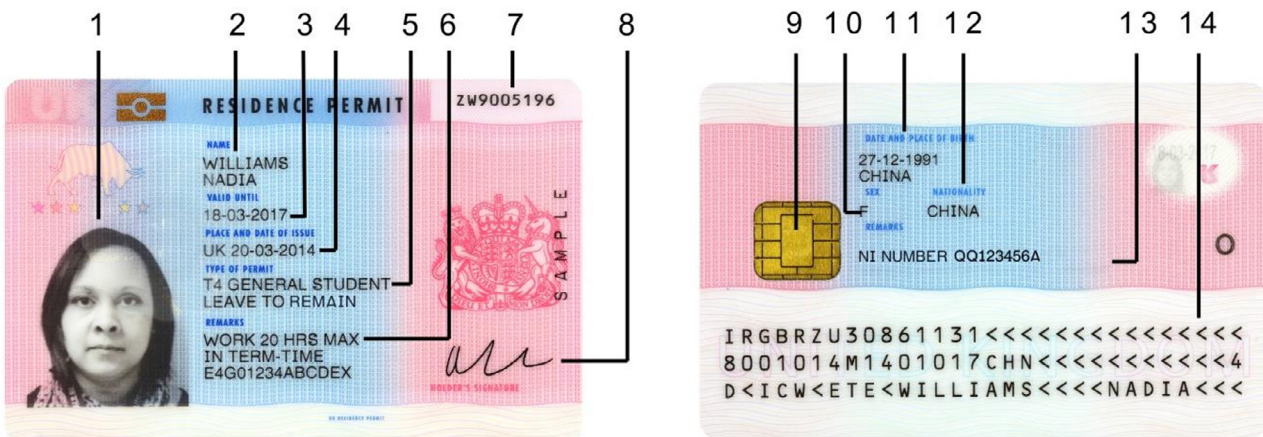
12. Holder's nationality

13. Remarks

A continuation of the immigration entitlements for the length of the holder's stay. If appropriate, the National Insurance Number will appear here.

14. Machine readable zone (MRZ)

This area allows information printed on the permit to be read quickly by machine.



Checking a refugee candidate's right to work

A share code is a unique nine-digit alphanumeric code provided by the UK government. It allows employers to verify a job candidate's right to work in the UK. It is therefore an important tool for non-UK nationals to prove their immigration status and employment eligibility. Share codes can only be generated by individuals, not companies, and are valid for 90 days.

Companies can access a candidate's share code (and therefore check their right to work) online via the [UK government website](#).⁷⁹



For more information about checking a job applicant's right to work, visit the [UK government website](#).⁸⁰

Other types of documents/visas

- **Family Reunion Visa:** This document is issued to the family members of an individual in the UK granted refugee status or humanitarian protection.
- **Resettlement Document:** This document is issued to refugees who have arrived in the UK as part of a resettlement scheme. Upon resettlement in the UK, individuals are issued a BRP.
- **Formal letter from the Home Office:** A refugee may own this for several reasons – for example, a letter may be issued if their refugee status was granted prior to 1984. This letter will state the owner's refugee status, and their right to live and work in the UK. When applying for further permission to stay in the UK, or permission to

stay indefinitely ("settlement"), an individual may be required to send their BRP or alternative documentation to the Home Office to verify their status. The letter temporarily issued in place will state that the individual's formal documents are unavailable, but that they retain the rights within them, including the right to work.



To check if a document allows an individual to work in the UK, visit the [UK government website](#).⁸¹

Will a refugee's right to work expire?

- Documents that show the owner is not subject to immigration control, or that show no restrictions on their stay in the UK, will state that the individual has permission to stay in the UK indefinitely ("settlement"). These individuals may work for companies for an indefinite period of time.
- Documents that show the owner has been granted permission to stay in the UK for a limited period of time will state the date on which the individual's permission expires. In this case, a follow-up check will be required at the end of the period for which the document is valid. Individuals applying for further permission to stay prior to the expiry of their existing leave will retain their right to work under the same terms and conditions while they are awaiting a decision on their application, even if their permission expires.
- Individuals who have been given permission to stay in the UK under one of its Ukraine protection schemes can apply for a further 18 months' permission to stay under the country's new Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme. Eligible

individuals can apply for the new scheme three months before their current visa expires. Applications open from early 2025.

- Individuals applying for permission to stay in the UK indefinitely ("settlement") following a time-limited period of permission to stay will retain their right to work while they are awaiting a decision on their application.

The hiring process

Even when a refugee candidate is a perfect fit for a role, they may struggle to stand out in a conventional hiring process. Refugees often face barriers when trying to find and secure work, which can lead to them appearing less competitive to employers. Common barriers to employment include a lack of credentials and documents, including references; a lack of or out-of-date skills; and/or limited language proficiency. Refugees may also have employment gaps on their CV due to displacement, or seem overqualified. However, by making some upfront investments, companies can adapt their application and interview processes to be more accessible for refugees.

Tent can educate your colleagues on the refugee hiring process, including best practices for interviewing refugee talent, and provide information to better understand the legal statuses of refugees, as well as the relevant work authorisation documentation. For more information, get in touch – email info@tent.org.



For more information about building an inclusive workplace for refugee employees, see Tent's "How to Integrate Refugee Employees into the Workforce" resource, available only to Tent members via the [Members' Hub](#).⁸² (For more information about becoming a member, visit Tent's [website](#)).⁸³



Refugees may apply (and be hired) for positions that require Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. However, companies should be aware that while some refugees will be able to provide the qualifying ID documents, and should therefore not experience significant barriers or delays to the DBS check process, others may not have the qualifying ID documents, and must undergo additional steps to complete it. For more information and guidance, get in touch – email info@tent.org.





V.

Connecting With Refugee Talent



Tent can connect companies looking to hire refugees with a range of organisations that can help to source refugee talent. Tent works with a network of non-governmental organisations, Refugee Employability Programme (REP) service providers, staffing agencies, and other groups that support refugees and can help companies to source and recruit refugee talent. Tent can also advise your company on how to source refugee candidates directly – for example, by encouraging employee referrals, hiring a specialised recruiter, utilising community referral pathways, and more. For more information, get in touch – email info@tent.org.



For more guidance on finding refugee candidates and adapting your hiring process, see Tent's "Recruiting Refugee Talent" resource, available only to Tent members via the [Members' Hub](#).⁸⁴ (For more information about becoming a member, visit Tent's [website](#)).⁸⁵



For more information about the benefits of hiring a specialised recruiter or refugees, and the important characteristics and skills one should have, see Tent's "Hiring a Refugee Recruiter" resource, available only to Tent members via the [Members' Hub](#).⁸⁶ (For more information about becoming a member, visit Tent's [website](#)).⁸⁷

The following organisations prepare refugees for work, help them to search for and apply for jobs, and connect them with employers:

- ACH⁸⁸
- Breaking Barriers⁸⁹
- Business In The Community⁹⁰
- Code Your Future⁹¹
- IRC⁹²
- Micro Rainbow⁹³
- Re:Coded⁹⁴
- Refugee Action⁹⁵
- Refugee Council⁹⁶
- REN⁹⁷
- Scottish Refugee Council⁹⁸
- TERN⁹⁹
- Universal Sponsorship Pathway UK¹⁰⁰
- Welsh Refugee Council¹⁰¹
- Women for Refugee Women¹⁰²
- World Jewish Relief¹⁰³

Refugee Employability Programme service providers:

- Get Skills Employment and Training Ltd¹⁰⁴
- International Rescue Committee¹⁰⁵
- Maximus¹⁰⁶
- Palladium¹⁰⁷
- Reed in Partnership¹⁰⁸
- The Growth Company¹⁰⁹
- Twin Training International Ltd¹¹⁰



VI. Conclusion



“The minute a refugee has a job, that’s the minute they stop being a refugee.”
Hamdi Ulukaya, founder, the Tent Partnership for Refugees

Gainful employment is a vital part of refugees becoming self-reliant, rebuilding their lives, and providing for themselves and their families. Along with economic security, a job creates feelings of belonging, and of being valued and recognised as an individual. While welcoming refugees into the workforce requires modest initial investments of time and resources, there is plenty of evidence to show that the dividends far outweigh the costs.

Refugees are too often depicted in the media as helpless individuals needing charity and benefits. Most are far from this perpetuated image and instead want to be given the chance to utilise their talent, skills, and experience to become key contributors to their new country’s economy and society.

Employment should be seen as more than just a job; it is an important means of strengthening communities throughout the UK. Companies involved in hiring refugees can help to make this happen.

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