

Reaping the rewards: retraining refugee healthcare professionals for the NHS

It is important for the NHS to continually strive to be a truly world-class system, not only renowned for its health and technological credentials but also for its investment in its staff and their advancement. This becomes even more salient when we consider the larger domestic and international landscape and the need to address issues such as workforce planning, corporate social responsibility and equality and diversity.

This *Briefing* looks at how supporting and employing refugee healthcare professionals can have a multitude of benefits for the NHS and the wider community.

Key points

- Many refugee healthcare professionals are not working in their profession. With the right support, many will be able to requalify and contribute to the NHS.
- Refugees are able to work in the UK without any restrictions or the need for work permits, and are legally protected from discrimination.
- The employment of refugee healthcare professionals has many benefits for NHS organisations including workforce supply, meeting equality and diversity requirements and corporate social responsibility.
- NHS Employers has developed a 'framework for engagement' for trusts to choose their level of engagement with this agenda.


Background

The Refugee Healthcare Professionals Programme aims to take a coordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of services to support refugee healthcare professionals back into employment. The programme is hosted by NHS Employers and receives funding from the European Refugee Fund and a number of strategic health authorities. There are now approximately 50 million people worldwide who have been uprooted as a result of civil unrest, war, persecution and environmental disaster.



European Refugee Fund



A part of the NHS Confederation
working on behalf of the 

Most refugees in the world cross the border into a neighbouring country or become internally displaced within their own country. According to 2007 figures, the UK hosts 3 per cent of the world's refugees and asylum seekers¹.

Refugees have significantly lower levels of employment and wages than the UK-born population. Linked to this is the issue of refugee underemployment (being employed below one's skills level). Research has shown that employed refugees mainly work in catering and hospitality, interpreting, retail, cleaning, security, factory, administrative and clerical jobs². Despite their qualifications and experience, refugee healthcare professionals are not immune to being unemployed or underemployed in this way. See the case study below as an example of this.

Helping the NHS to meet its needs

Refugee healthcare professionals are part of the domestic workforce, and employment is a key part of their integration in the UK. Refugee healthcare professionals bring years of significant experience when they settle in the UK. There are refugee healthcare professionals throughout the country who, with the right support, can make a valuable contribution to the NHS and the wider community. Additionally the refugee healthcare workforce can, in part, help NHS organisations to meet their requirements in a number of areas.

Corporate social responsibility

Barack Obama recently remarked that "in a world rife with conflict, one of our

most important obligations is to look after the innocent victims". As a public body and the largest employer in Europe, the NHS has a responsibility to reduce unemployment in refugee communities and open up both professional and non-professional employment. In addition, employing refugee professionals in public-facing roles provides role models for the refugee community.

Increasing access to healthcare for refugee communities

Recruiting refugee healthcare professionals goes beyond the individual and reaches into the community. They can help you understand your refugee and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) community better by helping to identify particular health cultures and expectations, specific health problems and barriers to accessing services.

Recruitment and retention

Refugee healthcare professionals are working as health professionals throughout the country. Reache North West, a unique training centre based at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, has supported over 300 refugee healthcare professionals since 2003. Reache has assisted over 100 of these clients enter paid employment in the NHS.

Case study

W is a nurse with 13 years' experience from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has been living in Birmingham since 2004. Since arriving he has been working in stock control at Tesco to support his family. He misses working in a health environment and said, "I want to be back working in the health system and give my best because I have a lot of experience to offer". He has worked hard to improve his English and he plans to sit the advanced English language test to prove to employers that he is ready. Once he gets his test results he would like to actively start looking for work in the NHS or further study. Ideally he would work part time in the NHS while he continues his study.

Key facts

- An asylum seeker is a person who has made a claim for asylum under Article 1 of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention). The right to claim asylum is a universal human right for all.
- Refugee status is granted to those asylum seekers who have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons outlined in Article 1 of the Refugee Convention. Refugees are forced to flee their countries because of a fear of persecution, often as a result of direct state action.
- Refugees include people with refugee status as well as those with international protection needs who have been granted humanitarian protection, indefinite and discretionary leave to remain. Refugee status is used to refer only to asylum seekers granted status under the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- Individuals who do not meet the Refugee Convention's criteria for Refugee Status may qualify either for Humanitarian Protection (granted for five years) or Discretionary Leave to Remain (granted for up to three years).
- Refugees are able to work in the UK without any restrictions and are legally protected from discrimination.
- A refugee healthcare professional is someone who qualified as a doctor, dentist, nurse, midwife, pharmacist, allied health professional or healthcare scientist in their country of origin before seeking asylum in the UK.

Similarly, the London Deanery has assisted 44 refugee doctors return to working as GPs.

To be an 'employer of choice' it is important that the NHS recruits, develops and retains a workforce that mirrors the population that its organisations serve. Refugees are dispersed throughout the country and are not confined only to big cities.

Equality and diversity requirements

The NHS has a responsibility to be a leading example of good practice in equality and

diversity. In 2000, the Race Relations Act was amended to give public authorities a new statutory duty to promote racial equality and good race relations.

For further information on how refugee healthcare professionals can help you meet your equality and diversity requirements, please see *The case for working with refugee healthcare professionals: an equality and diversity perspective*, which is available at www.nhsemployers.org/refugee

Cost of training a refugee healthcare professional

The training required to enable a refugee to return to practice takes less time and costs less than training a new healthcare worker. It is estimated that it costs on average £25,000 and around two-and-a-half years to support a refugee doctor back to practice³, as opposed to training a doctor where, in the period between entry to medical school and full registration, it is estimated to cost between £200,000 and £250,000⁴.

Employing refugees

It is a common misunderstanding that refugees need work permits or have restrictions on their right to work in the UK. This is not the case and refugees should be considered differently from economic migrants. Refugees have been forced to leave their countries due to a fear of persecution. They are able to work in the UK without any restrictions and are legally protected from discrimination. The Refugee Council and the Equality and Human Rights Commission have produced the *Employing Refugees* guide which provides employers with important information about employing a refugee and what documents need to be checked.

| Definitions of refugee status | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Status | What does this mean? | What should employers look for? | Other information |
| Refugee status with indefinite leave to remain | No restrictions on their stay in the UK. | An Immigration Status Document (ISD) or travel document issued by the Home Office with an endorsement to show that the holder is exempt from immigration control. | This was the most common form of refugee status. However, from 30 August 2005, refugees have been granted five years leave to remain (see below). |
| Refugee status with limited leave to remain | Granted for five years. | An ISD or travel document issued by the Home Office with an endorsement indicating that the person named in it can stay in the UK and is allowed to do the type of work in question. | Refugees with this protection are entitled to apply for further leave before their current leave expires. Entitlements to employment and training continue during this period of waiting for a decision on their application. |
| Humanitarian protection | Granted for five years. | An ISD or travel document issued by the Home Office with an endorsement indicating that the person named in it can stay in the UK and is allowed to do the type of work in question. | Holders of humanitarian protection are entitled to apply for further leave before their current leave expires. Entitlements to employment and training continue during this period of waiting for a decision on their application. |

| Status | What does this mean? | What should employers look for? | Other information |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Discretionary leave to remain | Granted for up to three years. | An ISD or travel document issued by the Home Office with an endorsement indicating that the person named in it can stay in the UK and is allowed to do the type of work in question. | <p> Holders of discretionary leave to remain are entitled to apply for further leave before their current leave expires.</p> <p> Entitlements to employment and training continue during this period of waiting for a decision on their application.</p> |
| Gateway Protection Programme | Indefinite leave to enter. | An ISD or travel document issued by the Home Office with an endorsement to show that the holder is exempt from immigration control and is allowed to stay indefinitely in the UK. | The Gateway Protection Programme is operated by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The programme offers a legal route for up to 750 refugees to settle in the UK each year, and is completely separate from the standard procedure for claiming asylum in the UK. |
| Asylum seeker | An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for recognition as a refugee under the Refugee Convention and is awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. | Asylum seekers are issued with an Application Registration Card (ARC). This document confirms the cardholder's identity and that he or she has been admitted into the asylum determination procedure. The ARC also states whether the person is permitted to work in the UK. | |

Good practice

NHS Tower Hamlets

NHS Tower Hamlets trained 32 refugee and overseas health professionals to work as healthcare assistants in primary care, most of whom were subsequently employed by local practices. The community dental service at NHS Tower Hamlets also employed eight refugee dentists as dental link workers.

"I manage 100 people and have worked in this PCT for 15 years and I will say it is rare to work with this level of consistent self-motivation, enthusiasm and dedication – they never seemed to lose that momentum, were filled with ideas and were always looking at how they could improve the service. Not only that, but because of their unique background and range of experiences they tended to bring solutions to problems that had a unique flavour. Our project was very successful anyway but having this workforce to draw on meant the difference between bronze and gold."

Ursula Bennett
Head of Dentistry at NHS Tower Hamlets

Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT

Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT identified a number of refugee healthcare professionals in their surrounding area. They decided to provide work placements within the trust to assist this potential healthcare workforce in breaking through the barriers being encountered. Five paid placements were taken up by refugee healthcare professionals. Two are now working and the others are in, or applying for, further training in the NHS.

"Our rationale was:

- to provide these professionals with appropriate gainful employment and allow them access to necessary experience within the NHS
- to capitalise on the abundance of skills and expertise currently being overlooked
- to help the trust address the imminent GP retirement issues (long term)."

Claire Blevins
Primary Care Education and Training Manager at Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT

Case study

X is a doctor from Eritrea who has lived in England since 2006. He is registered with the General Medical Council (GMC) and has moved from Leeds to Exeter to start his FY1 (Foundation Year 1) post. He noted that "it is a barrier not having access to clinical skills centre. I was lucky because in Leeds refugee doctors are welcome to practise in the clinical skills centre in the Leeds General Infirmary. It is free to go and practise and feel confident about it. For some doctors this facility isn't available."

Employing refugee healthcare professionals: a framework for engagement

NHS Employers has developed a framework in consultation with employers to encourage them to engage with the refugee programme. The four levels of engagement will help trusts to identify their current position and benchmark for future improvement.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Level 0 - Interest | An individual within a trust signs up to receive regular information updates about the Refugee Healthcare Professionals Programme. |
| Level 1 - Involvement | An individual within a trust plays an active role by sitting on a regional steering group or attending events and/or is available in an advisory capacity. |
| Level 2 - Support | A trust supports the training of refugee healthcare professionals through local or regional projects, such as work placements, clinical attachments and mentoring. The organisation is willing to talk about their experience as a model of good practice. |
| Level 3 - Champion | A board has noted how a trust can support refugee healthcare professionals. The trust has a designated person leading on the area of work. Refugee healthcare professionals are identified in the trust's single equalities scheme and/or workforce strategy and there is evidence of action. |

Refugee Healthcare Professionals Programme

The Refugee Healthcare Professionals Programme (ARRIVE) is made up of Building Bridges London, Building Bridges West Midlands, Reache North West, Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service (RETAS) Leeds and Refugee Health Professionals North East. NHS Employers plays a coordinating and commissioning role to ensure services meet both the needs of refugees and employers. NHS Employers also offers advice, assistance and support to NHS organisations to develop their work with the refugee healthcare professional workforce. The Refugee Healthcare Professionals Programme is funded by the European Refugee Fund Phase III and the following strategic health authorities: North West, North East, West Midlands, London, Yorkshire and Humber and East Midlands.

References

1. Refugee Action (2008), *Mobiles, Money and Mayhem: The facts and fibs about asylum*. www.refugee-action.org.uk
2. Department for Work and Pensions (2002), *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*, www.research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep179.pdf
3. Keaney, Dr M (2007) 'Why the NHS should support refugee healthcare professionals', Health Service Journal. www.hsj.co.uk/why-the-nhs-should-support-refugee-healthcare-professionals/54675.article
4. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmhansrd/vo001117/text/01117w09.htm

Further information

NHS Employers: www.nhsemployers.org/refugee or RefugeeEmployment@nhsemployers.org

ROSE is an online information portal for refugee healthcare professionals, the agencies supporting them and employers. www.rose.nhs.uk

For further information on Reache North West: www.reache.wordpress.com

For further information on Building Bridges West Midlands:
www.midlandshealthacademy.org.uk/page.php?page_id=2

For further information on RETAS Leeds: www.retasleeds.org.uk

Refugee Council Employing Refugees guide:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/employersguides/employing_refugees.htm

UK Border Agency: www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk

NHS Employers

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NHS Employers represents trusts in England on workforce issues and helps employers to ensure the NHS is a place where people want to work. The NHS workforce is at the heart of quality patient care and we believe that employers must drive the workforce agenda. We work with employers to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

NHS Employers is part of the NHS Confederation.

Contact us

For more information on how to become involved in our work, email getinvolved@nhsemployers.org
www.nhsemployers.org or enquiries@nhsemployers.org

NHS Employers
29 Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DD

2 Brewery Wharf
Kendell Street
Leeds LS10 1JR

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