



EU-PASSWORLD

WIDENING COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS LINKED TO  
COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP



# How Are Communities Supporting Employers Hiring Displaced Workers?



Co-funded by the European  
Union's Asylum, Migration and  
Integration Fund

# Introduction

## Refugees are an untapped pool of global talent

Today, more than 120 million people are forcibly displaced<sup>1</sup> and 71 per cent of them live in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>2</sup>

Millions of refugees face legal and practical barriers to access the labour market, both at home and abroad. In many countries refugees are only allowed to work in certain professions or sectors, and they are also locked out of skilled migration systems.<sup>3</sup>

**At least 55 % of refugees live in a country which significantly restricts their work rights in practice.<sup>1</sup>**

As a result, people living in displacement see their talent get wasted and their potential go unrealized, while host societies miss out on incalculable economic, social and cultural wealth.

This reality coexists with a global economy where skills shortages are threatening not only prosperity, competitiveness and productivity, but also the wellbeing of entire societies. Around the world, 60 per cent of companies face skills gaps they cannot address locally.<sup>4</sup> The demographic, green and digital transitions are only accelerating this trend. In the European Union, for instance, 35 million workers will have left the labour market by 2050,<sup>5</sup> while at the same time more than 1 million workers will be needed by 2030 in the field of renewable energy.<sup>6</sup>

## Refugee labour mobility is a win-win solution

Since 2015, an unlikely coalition of humanitarians, philanthropists, government champions and corporate visionaries has been working non-stop to remove the barriers that displaced people face to access international labour mobility.

Thanks to this multi-stakeholder effort, at least a dozen countries are testing or exploring the possibility of labour pathways for displaced workers, and more than 2,500 refugees have been able to rebuild their lives thanks to a work opportunity in another country.<sup>7</sup>

“

*I don't want to be dramatic, but I had no life before. No job, nothing to do. Now I'm living my dream. I can be me.*

Nurse working in the UK thanks to a refugee labour mobility initiative

These pathways are not only transformative for refugees. The hundreds of employers who have embarked in this innovative journey are extremely satisfied with their recruits. In addition to attracting new talent and filling urgent skills gaps, they report a wide variety of positive results, such as high retention rates and improved employee morale.

**94.6% of employers say they are likely to hire refugee candidates again.<sup>11</sup>**



## Feeling welcome in a new community is crucial for talent retention – and this is particularly true for displaced people

*Talents may come for the job – but they stay because of the social environment.<sup>III</sup>*

Social inclusion of international workers and their families is crucial to attract and retain talent. Unless they truly feel that they belong, most professionals end up leaving, no matter how good the job is.<sup>8</sup> Fostering a welcoming environment and promoting openness and effective integration in the local community is essential for newly arrived professionals to feel connected to their new workplaces and neighbourhoods.

This is particularly true in the case of displaced workers, who are likely to have experienced exclusion and discrimination before arrival and have specific needs that must be addressed for them to feel at home.

## Employers sourcing displaced talent internationally are partnering with local actors to make their new hires feel welcome and help them flourish in their new homes

Effective solutions to forced displacement require all hands on deck. As in any labour relationship, the employer and worker are the two main actors, but numerous organizations and individuals stand ready to accompany both of them at every step of the way, setting them up for success.

The case studies below are examples of successful partnerships among employers, local community volunteers and civil society organizations with a track record of welcoming and supporting the settlement of newcomers.

“

*With international recruitment you are on your own more or less... I found the process of hiring displaced workers through a labour pathway more beneficial than just the normal international recruitment.*

NHS Trust Manager, United Kingdom<sup>IV</sup>

These country examples show how employers stepping into new territory and hiring displaced workers for the first time have found a key ally in local communities. Civil society actors and volunteers are giving them and their new employees the confidence they need, supporting them in a variety of ways.

## Come with us in a quick trip around the world to hear the stories of these employers and learn more about their partners!



# Australia

## Community volunteers offer a ‘big hug’ and friendship to displaced workers, making them feel that they belong

The Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot offers a pathway for 500 displaced individuals and their families to live and work in Australia. The programme started in July 2021 and is operational until 30 June 2025, although the Australian government is considering transitioning the pilot into a permanent scheme.<sup>9</sup>



Under this pathway, Australian businesses can sponsor displaced candidates on a temporary or permanent basis under more than 900 different occupations. Displaced workers can access three types of employer-sponsored visa thanks to specific concessions that lift the barriers they face to meet standard eligibility requirements.<sup>10</sup>

The Australian government manages the pilot in partnership with the civil society organization Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB). TBB endorses and connects employers and candidates, also supporting the immigration and relocation process when they meet each other independently.<sup>11</sup>

Displaced workers arriving to Australia under the pilot are not automatically eligible for the same settlement support services offered to beneficiaries of humanitarian programmes. Sponsoring employers are thus responsible to ensure this support is provided, with help from TBB and other partners. Typically TBB develops a settlement plan with candidates and connects families to local services upon arrival. TBB also organizes cultural awareness trainings for the workplace and follows up with both employer and candidate for twelve months to ensure a good settlement experience.

Community-led welcome and integration support is not a core feature of Australia’s labour pathway. However, as the programme started operating in 2021, in an innovative experiment, the civil society organization Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) helped match some refugee households arriving through the TBB-led labour pathway with ‘sponsor groups’ keen to support their settlement.<sup>12</sup>

CRSA worked with TBB to connect a handful of displaced workers with some of these groups. This partnership offered much-needed reassurance to employers that their employees would be socially and emotionally supported in their new environments, as sponsors provided crucial financial and in-kind assistance to help displaced workers settle in.

One of these employers is Animal Logic, a leading independent creative studio based in Sydney, Vancouver and Los Angeles.<sup>13</sup> The company recruited two Afghan female candidates in 2022 for their Sydney location. One candidate had a spouse and two children and the other was a 21-year-old single woman.

Animal Logic had a clear goal: offering their new hires the best experience possible, including a successful and culturally sensitive transition not only into their new workplace, but also into Australia – a country they were hoping to soon call home. However, this was the first time that the company sourced displaced talent, so they looked for external support. Their partnership with CRSA – an organization with year-long experience in welcoming refugee newcomers – and with several groups of volunteer sponsors made a great difference.

“

*It's been a wonderful experience, but we would not have been able to do all of that on our own as an employer. Community support was a crucial part of the pathway. It felt like a big hug for our new employees and made them feel connected inside and outside of the workplace.*

Karen Bennett, Global Head of Human Resources, Animal Logic<sup>v</sup>

As an employer, Animal Logic offered:

- **Financial and relocation assistance** (visa fees, travel costs, rent for the first month, guarantor letter for rental lease, support to long term accommodation set up costs).
- **On-the-job support** (more meetings with managers and team, shorter work hours for at least the first month, longer onboarding timeline).
- **Additional workplace assistance** (humanitarian diversity training for new managers and peers to be responsive and confident when interacting with the new hires, team chat groups with colleagues from the same country, weekly meetings with human resources counterparts).
- **Connection to settlement case manager** (Animal Logic outsourced specific supports to a local settlement agency, which provided case management and assistance to the candidates on arrival. This included airport transfers, temporary accommodation, help with opening bank accounts, access to health care and search for permanent accommodation).



In addition to assistance provided by the employer, a group of around twenty community sponsors welcomed the two newcomers. Group members offered local orientation, checked in with the workers daily, and were always available to answer any questions over WhatsApp. They met with the candidates at work, in town or at home; showed them around; took them swimming; went on camping and picnic trips; and shared insights on Australia's society, culture, and written and unwritten rules and customs. These are all crucial social supports that neither employers nor civil society organizations have capacity to provide.

The group also connected the workers to other Afghan families early on; helped them find long term housing; sourced furniture; showed them how to set up electricity, internet and other services at home; and explained how to access government services or file taxes.

“

***Having a job lined up when they landed in Australia made a big difference for the two newcomers. It has been truly rewarding to watch these families flourish, and it has been wonderful to share their daily life and big milestones. One of the key things we have provided is friendship. They describe us as extended family.***

Julie Moriarty, member of community sponsorship group 'The North Sydney Friends of Refugees', Sydney<sup>VI</sup>

Thanks to this partnership between their employer, an expert civil society organization and community volunteers, candidates felt safe and cared for. Sponsor groups supported the employees and family members as whole persons, offering deep human connection on a daily basis. The fact that sponsors managed to find an apartment for a family of four within two weeks is remarkable, especially because having a permanent home represented the true start of a new life in Australia for the worker and her family.

“

***Our two new hires could not speak highly enough of CRSA and the volunteer group in making them feel settled and welcome in Australia. They are very grateful for the support. Volunteers have played a crucial role in their transition, making them feel that we really want them to be here.***

Karen Bennett, Global Head of Human Resources, Animal Logic<sup>VII</sup>

Some of the drivers of success of this collaboration between Animal Logic and the sponsor group are:

- **Clear communication and definition of roles and responsibilities:** Early communication before arrival between the employer, the sponsor group, the civil society organizations involved, and the displaced worker was crucial to agree on which settlement supports each actor was going to provide and for how long, avoiding overlaps and building trust.
- **Training:** CRSA offered learnings and resources that allowed sponsor groups to confidently support the displaced workers as independent, self-directed partners. CRSA also coached the sponsors in cultural sensitivity and refugee agency, helping them to develop their own ways of working (such as regular meetings to share updates about the needs of each family and to keep track of who can do what). In general, it was important that all decisions, both big and small, were taken as a group.
- **Different roles depending on location:** In rural contexts with no physical presence of resettlement organizations, volunteers were all part of the same community, and the support provided by the sponsor group was much more significant (for instance, facilitating access to language classes). In big cities, volunteers knew which neighbourhoods could be a best fit for displaced workers.
- **Specific needs of displaced workers:** Differently to other refugees resettled to Australia, newcomers had an income and spoke English (although this was often not the case for their family). Groups focused on advising other members of the household and getting candidates ready to start work (supporting with clothing, transport, furniture, tips about what is acceptable and not at the workplace, etc.). Although this was not part of the assistance sponsors had agreed to provide, one of the groups was able to raise AU\$20,000 to set up the new home of one of the workers.

- **Diverse sponsor group membership:** The fact that groups were diverse by design was very positive. Older people had more time, while younger volunteers contributed specific skills, so everybody could add their bit. Sponsors managed to find a job for the husband of one of the workers thanks to the varied personal and professional networks of group members. Volunteers did not all live in the same neighbourhood, but visited the newcomer household often.
- **Groups grounded in the local community:** Employers can act as a catalyst to mobilize sponsor groups and get community buy-in, but it was advantageous that most group members were not directly connected to the workplace. This provided a safe space to seek advice from the sponsor group with respect to any work-related issues.
- **Flexible support through changing circumstances:** Displaced workers had different salary levels and sponsor groups had to adapt their support accordingly. Some groups engaged with workers for six months and then stayed connected, while others engaged for longer periods of time. When a worker moved from Sydney to Melbourne to get married, volunteers connected her with another group based in Melbourne who provided local orientation, introduced her to their networks, and helped her find a new job. Another Sydney-based group managed to secure a job offer for an acquaintance of the displaced worker they were supporting, raising enough funds so an employer could hire him through the labour pathway to Australia.

“

*This was a good opportunity for people interested in supporting refugees to get involved in a less intensive way, because the responsibility was shared across the employer, civil society organizations and the sponsor group.*

*The value add of community welcome is the depth of the support provided and the fact of feeling like you belong from the beginning. It helps newcomers thrive – both as workers and human beings – and opens the door to opportunities for meaningful connection and all of the benefits of a rich social network.*

Nicole Watkins, National Manager - Community Learning and Development, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA)



# Canada

## Workplace sponsorship groups help young refugees working in British Columbia's hospitality and tourism industry feel at home in their new communities

Between 2019 and 2023, the pilot project HIRES offered 60 young refugees residing in Kenya training and entry-level employment opportunities in the hospitality and tourism industry in British Columbia.<sup>14</sup> The civil society organization World University Service of Canada (WUSC) managed the programme from end to end.

The 24 participating employers faced significant labour shortages, but were also proud of their welcoming workplace culture and the openness of their communities. For some of them the community building dimension of the programme and the opportunity to gain exposure to the reality of forced displacement was an added value proposition.

“

*What started out as a labour solution has developed into a success story of collaboration and growth for our team. It has been a special opportunity together as an organization, and has contributed to vitality within our day to day. We have been lucky to work with many supportive and helpful champions throughout the process.*

GM, Long Beach Lodge Resort<sup>VIII</sup>

*It's just such a great match between keen young people who would love to have a future in Canada and the desperate labour need in our industry.*

HIRES employer<sup>IX</sup>

*It's been so clearly positive to our community, to our business, to myself.*

Jon McKeon, GM, Tofino Resort and Marina<sup>X</sup>





HIRES participants brought with them a diversity of skills that allowed them to excel at their workplaces, particularly transferable soft skills such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, problem solving and patience. All had graduated secondary school and had extensive experience of community engagement, as well as some informal work experience.

Employers described participants as highly motivated, personable,<sup>15</sup> hardworking and committed, and they demonstrated these characteristics more so than their Canadian counterparts.<sup>16</sup> Participants had a positive impact on their companies and were often asked to remain in their positions beyond the initial one year placement. Some were also offered promotions and salary increases.<sup>17</sup>

“

***We are trying to create managers, general managers, people who can grow in this industry. Yes, short term it helps us with housekeeping, with front desk, with filling those positions, but getting young people to [...] become the next generation of leaders is what I hope I will help accomplish.***

Jon McKeon, GM, Tofino Resort and Marina<sup>XI</sup>

Participants arrived under Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme.<sup>18</sup> This humanitarian pathway was more costly than an economic migration channel, but it offered a staff engagement opportunity and encouraged workplaces to provide wrap-around support that enriched the welcoming workplace and team environment.

As part of the PSR, employers were required to organize Workplace Sponsorship Groups to provide settlement support to their new hires during the twelve months of the placement. WUSC trained workplace volunteers and community members to accompany HIRES participants.



Coworkers and local community volunteers undertook a wide range of activities. Group sponsors welcomed and picked up participants on arrival, identified accommodation, purchased household items, coordinated lifts to do affordable grocery shopping, showed new hires around, took them hiking and skiing, explained how settlement and other services such as hospitals and banks worked, introduced them to colleagues and local community members, and helped them file taxes.

Employers and workplace sponsors fundraised together to provide start-up allowances and income support to HIRES participants during post-arrival training and as they transitioned to employment earnings. Employers hosted community barbeques or garage sales of old hotel appliances, while workplace volunteers offered their time to run fundraising events and contributed to in-kind donation drives.



The more active and engaged groups organized welcome dinners and social outings; arranged for shipments of halal food to rural locations; outfitted accommodations with necessary items; organized trips to local tourist attractions; and oriented participants to their communities. Other groups acted primarily as friendly colleagues, checking in with participants throughout the day and answering questions as necessary.<sup>19</sup>



WUSC and workplace sponsors advocated with local hospitals unfamiliar with refugee health coverage and liaised with settlement agencies to offer virtual workshops to workers in rural areas, also setting up an emergency health fund for unexpected incidents or injuries at work. Sponsors also helped secure time off and free venues for HIREs participants to celebrate special occasions and offered gift cards to grocery stores and phone discounts through corporate accounts.

HIREs participants did not require significantly more support than other international recruits, although some of the roles played by workplace sponsors proved crucial, particularly in terms of social connection.

Avoiding isolation is key to prevent mental health challenges, and this was particularly true for participants in smaller and more remote communities, where integration was challenging due to the lack of diaspora populations, relevant religious institutions, adequate public transportation, community infrastructure and newcomer settlement services such as psychosocial support, financial advisory, career development or educational opportunities.

HIREs participants felt that support from sponsors was most important during the beginning of the work placement and during the off-season, when the demands of work were limited, feelings of isolation were at a high and mental health at its lowest.<sup>20</sup>

Interest in sponsorship by community members and coworkers – many of them international staff – was generally high. WUSC recommended that groups were embedded in the workplace but also included local volunteers. Sponsor groups started out strong and were an important resource as participants were getting settled into their workplaces and communities.<sup>21</sup> However, the hospitality and tourism sector is a transient industry, so commitment tended to wane over time. Employers had to sustain volunteer engagement to ensure a consistent level of support.

“

*A lot of people knew that we were coming and they wanted us to be there, so they made our living smooth by anything that they could do for us. We could be walking on the street and meet people that knew us but we didn't know them. For us, it was a new place, but the people were all committed to helping us out to like and enjoy this small city.*

HIREs participant placed in Tofino<sup>xii</sup>



Another challenge was the management of the funds that sponsor groups had raised in addition to in-kind contributions to cover travel, food, basic household items and other settlement needs for HIRES participants. Employers and workplace volunteers did not feel comfortable with the personal responsibility and potential liability linked to activities such as opening a bank account, dispersing the funds at the beginning of the sponsorship period, and building the financial literacy of participants. To mitigate these concerns, WUSC encouraged community members to play this role.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, finding housing was challenging for employers who didn't offer on-site accommodation, particularly because HIRES

participants had no rental history.<sup>23</sup> However, partners were generally well placed to offer creative solutions, such as securing temporary stays in guest rooms; providing reference letters for potential landlords; and having volunteer staff members accompany their new hires to rental viewings.

HIRES has helped inform WUSC's work as part of Canada's Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot (EMPP). The organization became an EMPP implementing partner in 2023 and has since facilitated ten arrivals to Canada (with 24 more awaiting immigration). WUSC is building on the partnerships and repeat involvement of HIRES employer champions to continue to expand employment opportunities for young refugees throughout Canada.



# Ireland

## Leveraging Ireland's rich experience of community welcome to offer friendship to newly arrived workers

Since 2023, a pathway for displaced workers is being piloted using Ireland's Critical Skills Employment Permit, while other existing routes are also being tested.<sup>24</sup>

Employers hiring under the programme must only cover immigration fees (employment permit, entry visa and residence permit), travel costs and the first month of accommodation, although they can provide a more comprehensive relocation package if they wish to do so.

Khaled Akar and Mohammad Shamma arrived in Ireland in April 2023 thanks to the new pathway. Both work as network field technicians for a telecommunications technology company.



Khaled and Mohammad agree that starting a new life and a new job in a different culture and country is difficult at first, and it is normal to feel lonely. This is the “hardest part of the journey”, and “just having one good friend to have coffee with over the weekend can make a huge difference in the beginning and help you feel connected to the local community.” It is

also important that co-workers and neighbours are patient with newcomers and show understanding for the fact that English is not their mother tongue and their customs and traditions are different.

On his own initiative, Khaled started playing football in a local club to meet Irish people and better understand their lifestyle and way of thinking. He also started listening to podcasts to familiarize himself with the Irish accent and colloquial language. Mohammad also sees sport in public parks as a way to “relax, calm down and make the right decisions.”

“

***When I first arrived, I could only talk about technical issues at work, but once I became comfortable with the language, my colleagues and I started sharing more about our personal lives, experiences and common interests. Participating in the customs and culture of the country where you live is important to feel welcome.***

Khaled Akar

Khaled's and Mohammad's new managers and colleagues have been very helpful, and the company's human resources team has been highly supportive.

“

***Hanging out with my friends from work makes me feel welcome. They come and take me out for a drive on the weekend. We listen to music and talk about our day. That makes me feel I'm not alone.***

Mohammad Shamma

***I can't stop talking about the kindness of people here and the way they treat me, especially my team at work. I feel at home in Ireland. It's a very beautiful country where I can build a safe future. Being here is a dream come true.***

Mohammad Shamma

However, both newcomers would have loved to have somebody to reach out to with questions about paperwork, bank accounts, housing, transportation and food.

***I wish there was a support team who visits newly arrived workers weekly for a month after their arrival. This would make them feel safe and give them a general idea about the nature of the country.***

Mohammad Shamma

To fill this gap and provide more structured social supports, the programme **Welcome at Work** has been designed and will be piloted in the coming months. This initiative will offer different options to employers recruiting displaced workers who are willing to engage their employees and the local community in ensuring a soft landing for their new hires and their families. The programme's approach is solidly grounded in Ireland's rich experience of welcoming Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian families through community-based responses.

***We at Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre, designed the 'Welcome at Work' programme with both the needs of the refugee employee and the needs of the employers in mind. Using the extensive experience we had of community sponsorship in Ireland, we created a sister programme to suit the Irish workplace. The employers that we have engaged with to date see a huge value in including their employees in this type of community welcome. Often, some aspects are already in place, such as pro-bono or volunteering hours.***

Tessa Cornally, Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

As the experience of Khaled and Mohammad shows, community engagement can be key to manage expectations of new hires; provide a safe space to discuss work-related issues; identify mental health support needs; find long-term accommodation through informal networks and word-of-mouth information; and accompany adult family members while they rebuild their lives on their own terms.



The level of engagement of employees will depend on the relocation support that the employer provides to displaced workers, as well as further considerations, such as the employer's size, human resources capacity, and their commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives (e.g. workplace volunteering programmes; affinity groups; buddy schemes).

In workplaces with a high degree of employee engagement, the programme will be structured as follows:

- The employer will ask newly recruited displaced workers if they, and their families where relevant, would like to benefit from Welcome at Work. This will only happen once the candidate has accepted the job offer, although general information about the programme could be shared with all candidates during the application process.
- Upon informed consent from the new hire, the employer will identify a Welcome at Work company champion. This could be a human resources manager or a staff member in charge of, or interested in, CSR or EDI issues. The employer should inform all employees about the opportunity to take part in the programme; make available a physical space for them to meet; and allow employees to engage in Welcome at Work-related activities during working hours (although engagement will also happen outside of work). Employers are thus encouraged to offer in-kind contributions through employee time, but no financial commitment is required.
- Once identified, the company champion will convene a group of between four and seven volunteers. The group, which will be anchored in the employer, will coordinate welcome and integration supports for one or several displaced workers. Civil society partners will provide guidance to each champion to form a group (focusing on issues such as

membership; values; boundaries; confidentiality and autonomy), also equipping them to lead the delivery of an online training to group members and the development of a 'welcome booklet' ahead of the displaced worker's arrival.

- Bespoke online training for group members will include background information about how to offer practical advice to displaced workers (accessing healthcare; finding housing; using transportation; joining social activities; cultural norms; community resources available to family members; understanding racism and bias; and where to seek free or affordable psychosocial support). Ideally, needs and priorities should be identified in advance thanks to early contact with displaced workers ahead of their arrival in Ireland. This would allow the Welcome at Work group to plan ahead and focus their training on the individual circumstances of the new hire.



- After completing the training, the group will develop a 'welcome booklet' with the help of guiding questions and a simple template. Civil society partners will be available to provide feedback and address any queries from the group.
- The group will commit to providing support to displaced workers and their families for a total of six months, including two months of pre-departure preparation and four months of post-arrival accompaniment. This could include orientation about rights, responsibilities and life in Ireland and in the worker's new neighbourhood; expectation setting; support with administrative errands;<sup>25</sup> interpretation and translation; car rides; assistance with finding long-term accommodation; orientation about sports, social activities and local community life; help with accessing local services (school, childcare, GP, public transport, English lessons, mental health assistance); and support to pass the test needed to obtain an Irish driving license – a must-have in many jobs, particularly in rural areas with limited access to public transport.<sup>26</sup>
- Governance of the Welcome at Work programme will only require a light oversight structure.

“

*We know that communities all across Ireland are very willing to welcome newcomers. We have seen that evidenced by the huge numbers of people who have welcomed those displaced by the war in Ukraine, as well as many others who supported those arriving from Afghanistan in recent years. We plan to further develop Welcome at Work in the coming years, and from our discussions with corporate partners, we know there is real appetite to engage with the programme, and that it presents an ideal way for communities and employers to offer invaluable support to displaced workers coming to Ireland.*

Colm O'Gorman, The Open Community



# Italy

## Local civil society accompanies employers and Afghan professionals

In 2023, Caritas Italiana piloted a labour pathway for Afghan professionals who had fled to Pakistan with their families after the Taliban takeover in August 2021.<sup>27</sup> Over nine months, the civil society organization Consorzio Communitas facilitated online Italian language classes and career coaching while the workers were still in Pakistan. The organization also validated their skills and qualifications and shared their resumes with several Italian employers, who hired some of the displaced candidates.

After traveling from Pakistan to Italy, the workers were welcomed in different local communities and housed in accommodations provided by Caritas Diocesana in Firenze, Milano, Novara, and Cantù. They also took part

in capacity development activities and in-person language classes for six hours a week.

This community support is proving crucial for the displaced workers to perform as expected in their new professional roles. A safety net is also in place for those who need more time to find a job or want to focus on upskilling or reskilling. This accompaniment is a key reassurance for employers, who know that the needs of their new employees are being addressed.

**Hamed Alkozay**, a civil engineer by training, was hired by Nencini,<sup>28</sup> a valve manufacturer in Tuscany. Vittorio Filippi, Nencini's director, immediately saw that Hamed's engineering background and knowledge of hydraulics perfectly matched the company's core business. Caritas Firenze is investing time and resources in supporting the integration of Hamed and his family.<sup>29</sup>







Thanks to the online training programme Ready for IT<sup>30</sup> and her proactive attitude, **Safia Poya** has now a full-time permanent contract at Ernst and Young and works with corporate finance clients as cybersecurity consultant specialized in identity and access management. She would not have come this far without the opportunity to complete the first module of Ready for IT while she was still in Pakistan, and she can now perform at her best thanks to the housing, legal and psychosocial support provided by Consorzio Communitas. The possibility to speak Italian at the office with coworkers has proven key to improve her language skills.

“

***My colleagues are wonderful. They are waiting for me when I speak Italian, they are friendly, and they help me when I have a problem at work. They are super supportive.***<sup>XIII</sup>

Safia Poya, cybersecurity consultant,  
Ernst and Young

**Mustafa Sultani** was offered a three-month internship at Belron that was extended. He was then hired under a fixed term contract. This opportunity has allowed Mustafa to quickly improve his Italian language skills and knowledge of Italian work culture. Consorzio Communitas not only introduced the candidate to the company, but also provided legal support and has been available at all times when an issue came up. The support provided by this civil society organization has enabled Mustafa to be completely autonomous, and has proven crucial for him to successfully navigate the work-from-home policy of the company. Having an English-speaking buddy to mentor him has also been of great help.

“

***This has been an opportunity for the team to work with somebody who has a very different story. It has also improved team dynamics. Co-workers have come together to support Mustafa. He has given them an additional purpose.***

Paola Massa, Talent Manager, Belron Italia

# United Kingdom

## Local neighbours offer a warm welcome to displaced nurses employed by the National Health Service

The Department of Health and Social Care (a governmental department of the United Kingdom), the National Health Service (NHS), and the civil society organization Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) launched the Displaced Healthcare Pilot in late 2020 and the Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot in July 2021.<sup>31</sup>

More than 290 displaced nurses, paralegals, engineers, software developers and other professionals have started a new life in the UK thanks to these labour pathways. Under the Healthcare Pilot, candidates enter the country under the UK's Skilled Worker Visa<sup>32</sup> and work as healthcare assistants while they prepare to register as nurses with the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Most NHS Trusts have a lot of experience with international recruitment and offered training, pastoral support and initial accommodation to the displaced nurses arriving under the pathway. However, there was some nervousness about their potential vulnerabilities as refugees.

That's why 98 of the nurses arriving under the pilot received community-led welcome through the programme Neighbours for Newcomers (N4N).<sup>33</sup> N4N reassured NHS staff that nurses would be looked after outside of work and supported to successfully integrate into their new communities.<sup>34</sup>

The programme was designed and implemented by Reset,<sup>35</sup> an organization established to train and support groups welcoming refugees as part of the UK's Community Sponsorship Programme. Reset recruited, trained and accompanied groups of local volunteers in 25 different locations across the UK, equipping them with the knowledge and skills they needed to offer a smooth landing to the nurses over six months. Small groups of between four and eight volunteers supported between two and four nurses each.

“

*We believe that everyone is an expert in their local area and can provide a warm welcome to those arriving there.*

Reset

In October 2021, N4N volunteers welcomed and supported the first nurses in Dewsbury, Great Yarmouth, Hillingdon, North London, Norwich, Oldham, Portsmouth.

In February 2022, nurses arrived in Bristol, Cambridge, Chorley, Doncaster, Preston, South London and Warrington.

In April 2022, volunteers welcomed nurses to Ashton-under-Lyne, Bury St Edmunds, four new areas in London, Chester, Colchester, Derby, Lincoln and Stoke-on-Trent.



Volunteers were a source of information, practical support and advice for the nurses, helping them navigate their life in the UK, and empowering them to settle into their new communities through mentoring, local orientation and introduction to activities based on their interests.

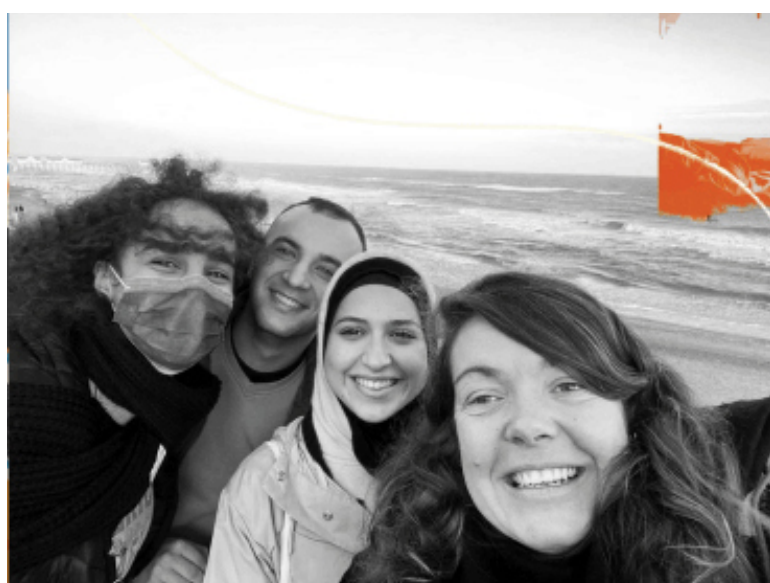
### What steps did volunteers have to take?

- Fill in an application.
- Attend an online training session with Reset and read a toolkit with resources and good practices to learn about cultural awareness; trauma informed approaches; volunteering and safeguarding policies; and boundaries and empowerment.<sup>XIV</sup>
- Participate in an online session facilitated by Reset to meet the nurses.
- Meet as a group prior to the nurses' arrival to get to know each other; choose a team leader; delegate tasks; and agree on boundaries and communication standards.
- Provide a warm and friendly welcome to the nurses, sharing local customs and knowledge and organizing specific activities based on needs and interests.
- Regularly contacting the nurses to offer support, ask what they would like to do, and propose low-cost activities to undertake together (always giving them an opportunity to decline the invitation).
- Feeding back to Reset on a weekly basis about what is working well, as well as sharing any concerns.

“

*Volunteers are the loveliest people that you can come across, so very quickly they built this mini communities in different parts of the UK where they were welcoming nurses. For many of them this was the first time they engaged with refugees, so our training to prep them was really valuable to them.*

Reset<sup>XV</sup>



By committing one or two hours a week, volunteers offered support to displaced nurses to open bank accounts, register at the police station and GP, get to know their new neighbourhoods, navigate local transport, practice conversational English, go shopping, meet people in their area, and find social activities or events that matched their interests. Nurses and neighbours played badminton together; went to the movies and on bike rides, fishing and picnic trips; did DIY; and volunteered in their local communities.

“ “

***We are a friend to the refugees rather than giving advice or doing things for them. For example, when the nurses needed to find a GP, we got the forms but they filled them in; we told them where it was, but they went there themselves. It's a supporting role.***

Della Anverali, N4N Volunteer<sup>XVI</sup>

Volunteers also helped nurses navigate the local rental market and look for quality and affordable long term accommodation after the first three months provided by the NHS Trusts. Reset trained volunteers to provide local information on housing options available.

Crucially, volunteers also offered a safe space outside of work to speak about issues nurses would not feel comfortable discussing with their employer or co-workers, and to address cultural sensitivities. When nurses had arrived with family, volunteers helped spouses look for a job and register children in school. Volunteers were not allowed to offer immigration advice, act as guarantors on property, loan money, or provide childcare services.

The type of support needed by the nurses changed over the six-month period of volunteer engagement. Initially nurses needed a warm welcome, orientation and help finding long term accommodation. After that, they needed support with family reunification (if they had family moving to the UK), as well as help setting up their new homes and practicing English. At a later stage, they needed in-person English practice sessions (ideally weekly). Lastly, as they got more settled, they started exploring hobbies and interests.

***Working in partnership with Reset on the Neighbours for Newcomers scheme had a massive positive impact on the success of the displaced talent programme for both NHS organisations and the nurses arriving in the UK.***

***Whilst NHS Trusts were relatively used to international recruitment, the displaced talent pathway was very new, and the nurses experienced more complex and isolated journeys to the UK. Reset's recruitment, training and support of volunteers in each area gave confidence, compassion and practical help to all parties. Reset worked with NHS England to develop a sustainable set of training modules for managers and colleagues to support future cohorts.***

***I'd recommend the role of community sponsorship again and again.***

Kim Doherty, Head of the Refugee Nursing Programme, NHS England (2021-2024)

Whilst long term funding for community-led sponsorship was not available, the project team worked with Reset to develop a sustainable integration offer for employers through a series of online workshops aimed at building knowledge and confidence for managers and colleagues. This is now an integral part of the welcome and settlement support that NHS Trusts provide to displaced nurses, who continue to arrive under the labour pathway to the UK.

“

***Now the work has transitioned and we are training the NHS pastoral teams in different hospitals to welcome nurses in a very similar way.***

Reset<sup>XVII</sup>

## Win for employers

“ “

*The learning we took around the Neighbours for Newcomers and the community settlement, we've applied that to our international recruitment.*

NHS Trust Manager<sup>xviii</sup>

- 100% of NHS Trusts felt that the volunteers were welcoming of the newcomers and that N4N helped them find their way around the local neighbourhood, navigate initial challenges on arrival, and access key services and local activities.
- 100% of NHS Trusts said that it was reassuring to know that newcomers would be welcome in the community.
- 80% of NHS Trusts said that N4N helped the nurses feel more connected with the local community and that they would recommend N4N to other refugee nurse recruits.<sup>36</sup>

## Win for displaced workers

*They were like a family to me, checking on me, asking me if I wanted to go out and do something with them, showing me around Great Yarmouth and Norwich. I wasn't expecting all of this kindness from them, I'm grateful.*

Khaled, nurse working in Norfolk<sup>xix</sup>

“ “

*When you come to a new country, a different culture and a big city, you are excited, but it is difficult to make contact with other people. The community volunteers contacted us via WhatsApp, invited us to picnics, took us bowling... I am living alone far away from my family, so I am very grateful for the support that volunteers are providing to displaced nurses like myself.*

Wissam, nurse working in London<sup>xx</sup>

“ “

*The words are not enough to say thank you. When I came to the UK, they were like a family. They helped me in all the ways they can. Thank you all.*

Displaced nurse who participated in N4N<sup>xxi</sup>

## Win for volunteers

“

*Such a privilege to get to know these amazing nurses.*

N4N volunteer

“

*The other volunteers are great people to have spent time with as well. I am glad I could.*

N4N volunteer

→ Volunteers learned more about challenges faced by refugees, gained a sense of purpose, satisfaction and community, and made new friends with other volunteers.<sup>37</sup> The programme was also an opportunity to practice intercultural and mentoring skills, and to come together as part of a collaborative initiative.<sup>38</sup>

## After 1 Year

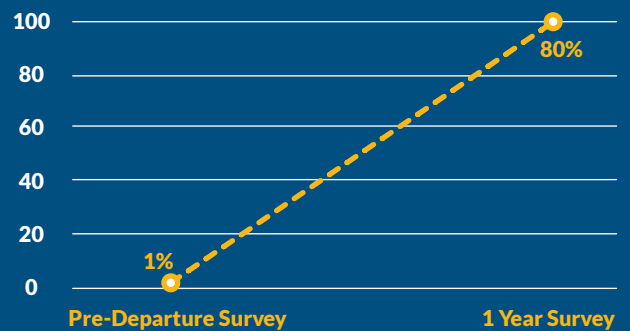
92%

Feel positive about their life in the UK

90%

Are sending remittances to family abroad

% of candidates who feel their hopes and goals are achievable



# Notes

- 1 See [link](#).
- 2 See [link](#).
- 3 See [link](#).
- 4 See [link](#), page 49.
- 5 BusinessEurope 2023, see [link](#).
- 6 Jacques Delors Centre 2023, see [link](#).
- 7 See [link](#).
- 8 See [link](#), pages 8, 47 and 49.
- 9 See [link](#).
- 10 See [link](#).
- 11 See [link](#).
- 12 These groups had initially mobilized to engage in Australia's Group Mentorship Programme (GMP), but were willing to welcome workers arriving to Australia through the labour pathway. Launched by CRSA in June 2020, the GPM connected refugees who were already in the country with a trained group of local volunteers. Groups provided support, connection and friendship to mentees, building the foundations for their new life in Australia. The GMP was developed as a proof of concept to show policymakers that a full Canadian-style community sponsorship programme could succeed in Australia. With the introduction of the new Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) by the federal government in 2022, the GMP had achieved its initial purpose and was wound down, with community members encouraged to participate in the CRISP going forward. See [link](#).
- 13 See [link](#).
- 14 See [link](#), page 1.
- 15 See [link](#), pages 2 and 3.
- 16 See [link](#), page 18.
- 17 See [link](#), page 16.
- 18 See [link](#).
- 19 See [link](#), pages 1 and 15, as well as information provided by WUSC staff.
- 20 See [link](#), page 16.
- 21 See [link](#), page 20.
- 22 See [link](#), page 15.
- 23 See [link](#), page 19.
- 24 See [link](#) for a detailed analysis of this pathway.
- 25 Volunteers can help displaced workers when applying for an Irish Residence Permit (IRP) or a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN); setting up a bank or credit union account; buying a cell phone and / or a SIM card; applying for Child Benefit or other social welfare supports; getting an insurance; etc.
- 26 See [link](#).
- 27 See [link](#) for a detailed analysis of this pilot experience.
- 28 See [link](#).
- 29 See [link](#).
- 30 See [link](#).
- 31 See [link](#).
- 32 See [link](#).
- 33 See [link](#).
- 34 See [link](#), page 5.
- 35 See [link](#).
- 36 See [link](#), pages 4, 5 and 7.
- 37 See [link](#), page 7.
- 38 See [link](#), page 2.

This booklet was written by Irene de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero. The author would like to thank all individuals and organizations who provided inputs and feedback, including those engaged in the programmes featured in the document.

This publication was produced through generous funding from the European Commission under the EU-Passworld project. Its content represents the views of the author only. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

- I See [link](#), page 14 and [link](#) page 4.
- II See [link](#).
- III See [link](#), page 49.
- IV Liverpool John Moores University (2022), Evaluation of NHS England Refugee Nurse Support Programme Pilot cohorts 3, 4 and 5. Out-of-country refugees.
- V EU-Passworld Webinar, How does Sponsorship make Education and Labour Pathways Sustainable? The Community Perspective, 17 May 2023, see [link](#).
- VI EU-Passworld Webinar, How does Sponsorship make Education and Labour Pathways Sustainable? The Community Perspective, 17 May 2023, see [link](#).
- VII EU-Passworld Webinar, How does Sponsorship make Education and Labour Pathways Sustainable? The Community Perspective, 17 May 2023, see [link](#).
- VIII See [link](#).
- IX See [link](#), pages 12-13.
- X See [link](#) and [link](#).
- XI See [link](#) and [link](#).
- XII See [link](#), page 17.
- XIII See [link](#).
- XIV Volunteers are trained in understanding the power imbalance that will initially exist between volunteer and newcomer, and are given tools to redress this.
- XV EU-Passworld Webinar, How does Sponsorship make Education and Labour Pathways Sustainable? The Community Perspective, 17 May 2023, see [link](#).
- XVI See [here](#).
- XVII EU-Passworld Webinar, How does Sponsorship make Education and Labour Pathways Sustainable? The Community Perspective, 17 May 2023, see [link](#).
- XVIII Liverpool John Moores University (2022), Evaluation of NHS England Refugee Nurse Support Programme Pilot cohorts 3, 4 and 5. Out-of-country refugees.
- XIX See [link](#), page 3.
- XX EU-Passworld Webinar, How does Sponsorship make Education and Labour Pathways Sustainable? The Community Perspective, 17 May 2023, see [link](#).
- XXI Liverpool John Moores University (2022), Evaluation of NHS England Refugee Nurse Support Programme Pilot cohorts 3, 4 and 5. Out-of-country refugees

## Photo Credits

- Cover** Safia Poya at work  
/ Photo Credit: *Fondazione Italiana Accenture, 2023* (see [link](#))
- P.2** Photo Credit: *Muse Mohammed*
- P.3** Photo Credit: *IOM / Beyond Borders Media 2022*
- P.4** Photo Credit: *ABC News / Emily Smith*
- P.6** The Rizae family (Fatima, Nemat and their children) with members of the community sponsorship group 'The North Sydney Friends of Refugees'  
/ Photo credit: *Julie Moriarty*
- P.7** Members of the community sponsorship group 'The North Sydney Friends of Refugees'  
/ Photo Credit: *The Australian Womens Weekly / Alana Landsberry*
- P.9.1** Photo Credit: *Camosun College / WUSC, 2024*
- P.9.2** Photo Credit: *Camosun College / WUSC, 2024*
- P.10** Photo Credit: *Blue Mountain Solutions / WUSC, 2024*
- P.11.1** Photo Credit: *Camosun College / WUSC, 2024*
- P.11.2** Photo Credit: *Blue Mountain Solutions / WUSC, 2024*
- P.12-14** Photo Credit: *IOM / Ireland 2024*
- P.15** Photo Credit: *IOM / Elyor Nematov 2018*
- P.16** Hamed Alkozay and Caterina Carelli (Caritas Firenze) walk through the streets of Florence / Photo Credit: *Caritas Italiana, 2023* (see [link](#))
- P.17** Safia Poya and Monica Molteni (Consortio Communitas) at the Ready for IT graduation in June 2023  
/ Photo Credit: *Fondazione Italiana Accenture, 2023* (see [link](#))
- P.18** Photo Credit: *UNHCR / Andrew McConnell*
- P.19** Displaced nurses with one of their N4N volunteers  
/ Photo Credit: *Reset 2024* (see [link](#))