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MAKING STRIDES

REFUGEES' EMPLOYMENT TRAJECTORIES IN YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

Amreen Qureshi, Lucy Mort and **Jack Liuta**

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to promote research on the employment experiences of refugees and people with humanitarian leave living in Yorkshire and the Humber.

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the UK government has introduced several bespoke humanitarian routes in response to global events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the collapse of the Afghan government and resurgence of the Taliban, and the placing of restrictions on Hongkongers' freedoms by the Chinese government. Consequently, Yorkshire and the Humber has welcomed newcomers through a range of new immigration channels. This, in combination with the diverse social, economic and political contexts from which people on these routes have arrived, contributes to an increasingly complex picture when it comes to supporting new arrivals to establish themselves in the region.

This report presents the findings of a research study looking at the employment experiences of refugees and people with humanitarian leave living in Yorkshire and the Humber. This is an important area for study, as work supports individuals and their families to rebuild their lives and secure their financial independence as well as supporting their wider integration into local communities. Through work, new arrivals can meet and connect with others, boost their self-esteem and wellbeing, and improve their English language skills.

However, refugees and people with humanitarian leave often face significant challenges when it comes to moving into good-quality work. Many that do find work end up underemployed in roles that are not commensurate with their skills and educational background or in low-paid and insecure work subject to poor working practices and weak unionisation. Many people moving to the UK bring a wealth of expertise and experience – ensuring they can utilise this appropriately is of benefit to all of us.

This study is concerned in particular with the job progression opportunities that are available to refugees and people with humanitarian leave. We know much more about the experiences of these groups when it comes to entering the workforce than we do about their onward trajectories once they're in work. A focus on their continued development in the workplace is vital to ensure that they can be supported to move closer towards their personal and professional goals and achieve their potential. We want to see that refugees and people with humanitarian leave are given the tools and the boost they need to move from *surviving* to *thriving* – this is better for the individuals themselves, their families and communities, and wider society.

People arriving in the UK on different schemes and routes have a variety of rights and entitlements that shape their access to the labour market and the employment support they might receive. For this reason, this study looked at four groups, on different routes, as case studies to understand better how the route through which people enter and are permitted to remain in the UK impacts on their employment and job progression experiences. The groups were:

- Ukrainians who arrived via the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme
- Hongkongers who arrived via the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route
- Afghans who arrived via the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) resettlement programme
- "asylum route" refugees granted leave to remain following a positive decision on their asylum claim.

This small-scale qualitative study gathered first-hand information on the employment experiences of refugees and people with humanitarian leave in Yorkshire and the Humber through in-depth interviews with 15 people on one of the four immigration routes. In addition, we engaged with stakeholders working to support refugees and people with humanitarian leave into employment. Additionally, two workshops were held, one with people with lived experience and one with stakeholders. The former explored what it means to have a "good job", and the conclusion of this discussion is the basis of a separate "good jobs" charter. The latter brought together 33 stakeholders to discuss policy options that would support refugees and people with humanitarian leave into good-quality work and support them to progress in their career. The outcomes of these interviews and workshop deliberations form the basis of recommendations presented in this report.

In the next chapter, we set out the context for this research, including what we know from existing studies about the experiences of refugees and people with humanitarian leave in work, how immigration policy shapes and interacts with their employment experiences, and what employment support is available for these groups in Yorkshire and the Humber. Then, we detail our methodology (chapter 3), before going on to present our findings. In chapter 4, we explain what job progression meant to our interviewees. Chapters 5 and 6 explore what people need to progress in their career and what barriers hinder progression. Finally, in chapter 7, we conclude the report with policy recommendations that seek to improve the opportunities for refugees and people with humanitarian leave to progress in their career.

2. CONTEXT

This chapter outlines the employment rights of refugees and people with humanitarian leave, the support options available to them, and what we know from existing literature about their career trajectories. It then goes on to suggest some of the key needs that each of the four groups included in this study may have in relation to job progression. Finally, we set out the employability support available to refugees and people with humanitarian leave in Yorkshire and the Humber.

WHAT EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS DO REFUGEES AND PEOPLE WITH HUMANITARIAN LEAVE HAVE? WHAT SUPPORT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM?

The rights and entitlements of refugee groups vary depending on the conditions attached to the leave they are granted. For the most part, refugees and people with humanitarian leave are granted full access to the UK labour market.[1] However, asylum seekers do not have the right to work, unless they have been waiting the outcome of their application for at least 12 months through no fault of their own. Moreover, any job they are employed in must be on the shortage occupation list. This means that asylum route refugees may have experienced an extended period of worklessness before they are granted status, which, as we have described, can have long-term implications for their labour market outcomes.

Refugees and people with humanitarian leave are generally able to access support to find employment, whether this is provided via local councils, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/Jobcentre Plus, or other national employability schemes. They can also be employed in apprenticeships supported through government funding.

There are some dedicated government funding pots which cater to certain refugee groups. For instance, the Home Office's Refugee Employability Programme (REP), recently introduced, caters for people who arrived via the ARAP scheme and people granted refugee status no earlier than 28 June 2022. This programme provides employment, English language and integration support, including help with CV writing, interview practice, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and conversation clubs.[2]

People with formal refugee status are eligible for funding for accredited ESOL provision (up to Level 2) via the Adult Education Budget (AEB). Other eligible groups include people on the Ukraine schemes and people in the UK via the ARAP scheme (because this group has indefinite leave to remain). Those on the BN(O) visa, however, are only eligible if they

[1] There are some limited exceptions – for example, someone on the BN(O) route cannot work as a professional sportsperson or sports coach.
[2] See the Home Office guidance for the REP: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/refugee-employability-programme

have been resident in the UK for at least the three years preceding their course. Fully funded ESOL provision via the AEB is available to those eligible learners who are unemployed or on low incomes; otherwise, eligible learners can receive co-funding. However, these eligibility rules may vary where the AEB is devolved to combined authorities (and the Mayor of London).[3]

There are other circumstances where some groups may not be eligible for government support to help them secure employment. People on the BN(O) visa route are usually subject to the "no recourse to public funds" (NRPF) condition, which means they cannot access most mainstream benefits. This prevents them from accessing forms of support which are defined as public funds or provision where eligibility is in practice contingent on already being in receipt of such funds. Employment support is not defined as a public fund; however, a considerable amount of employment support is provided via Jobcentre Plus and is, in practice, only available to those receiving benefits, which makes it difficult to access for those subject to the NRPF condition. In addition, many subject to the NRPF condition assume that they are ineligible for all forms of employability support due to their status.

Another important consideration concerns the type of leave granted to different groups. Where individuals are granted limited (that is, temporary) leave to remain (for example people on the BN(O) route or the Ukraine schemes), this might affect their ability to access certain forms of support. For instance, where apprenticeships extend beyond the time period of their leave, individuals will struggle to receive funding for them.

Table 2.1 summarises the status and rights for the four refugee groups in our research.

TABLE 2.1: STATUS AND RIGHTS OF THE FOUR REFUGEE GROUPS

Refugee group	Status granted	Right to work?	Recourse to public funds?	Access to employment support?	Access to ESOL funding through the Adult Education Budget?*	Eligibility for the Refugee Employability Programme?
Asylum route refugees	5 years' limited leave (can apply for indefinite leave to remain after 5 years)	Yes (but asylum seekers must have been waiting for 12 months through no fault of their own and be employed	Yes (but restricted while an asylum seeker)	Yes (but may be restricted while an asylum seeker, depending on provider)	Yes (but asylum seekers must have been waiting for 6 months or be in receipt of local authority support)	Yes if granted refugee status on or after 28 June 2022

[3] See the Education and Skills Funding Agency guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-education-budget-aeb-funding-rules-2022-to-2023/adult-education-budget-aeb-funding-rules-2022-to-2023

		in a shortage occupation)				
People on the ARAP scheme	Indefinite leave to remain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
People on the Ukraine schemes	3 years' limited leave	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
BN(O) visa holders	2.5 or 5 years' limited leave (can apply for indefinite leave to remain after 5 years)	Yes	No (unless the NRPF condition is lifted by the Home Office – eg because the individual is destitute)	Depends on provider (Jobcentre Plus support limited in practice due to the NRPF condition, but support should be available from other providers)	Only after 3 years of residence in UK	No

Source: IPPR analysis of Home Office documents (Home Office 2023d–j)
****Note: Rules may be different where AEB funding is devolved.***

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF REFUGEES AND PEOPLE WITH HUMANITARIAN LEAVE IN THE UK?

Overall, research indicates that in the UK, refugees[4] have worse labour market integration outcomes when compared with the wider migrant population (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2018). A number of factors have been identified as contributing to this. Refugees' motivations for migrating – which are different from the motivations of those who move primarily for economic reasons – mean they are less likely to have readily transferable skills for the UK labour market. People who seek asylum are, in most cases, barred from working while their claim is being assessed. Finally, the health and wellbeing consequences of traumatic events can prevent refugees from being able to work (ibid).

There are a number of common barriers that refugees face in gaining employment. These include poor English language proficiency and difficulty accessing language learning support, lack of work experience in the UK, insufficient qualifications or lack of

[4] Most available literature refers to refugees and not those with humanitarian leave to remain. When citing these studies, we refer to refugees only. Where relevant and known, we distinguish between those who have received status via the asylum system and those who have come to the UK via a resettlement programme or have otherwise received humanitarian leave.

recognition of existing qualifications and skills, unfamiliarity with the UK labour market and lack of information or advice, difficulty completing application forms and limited IT skills, gaps in employment history and periods of inactivity, and employer discrimination (Bloch 2004, Stevenson 2019). For women especially, childcare and caring responsibilities are also a significant barrier to entering the workforce (Holtom and Iqbal 2020). In particular, the short-term emphasis on getting a job over and above learning English can put refugees in the UK at a significant disadvantage when it comes to securing good-quality work in the longer run, as it is more difficult to attend language classes once in work (Gloster and Wimalasiri 2022).

Barriers to employment for refugees are not only individual but also institutional and structural. Lack of specific support initiatives for refugee employment, limited opportunities to develop skills, acquire relevant knowledge and gain qualifications, insufficient advice from mainstream employment support advisors, and employers' lack of awareness on the rights, potential and skills of refugees – all these contribute to refugees not being able to enter the job market (Stevenson 2019).

The job progression of refugees, as compared with their entry to the workforce, is much understudied. Available studies tend to agree that job progression is a key challenge for refugee groups. The tendency for refugee groups to work in entry-level roles can mean that they have few meaningful opportunities to progress within the workplace (Gloster and Wimalasiri 2022). In a study of refugee employment experiences in Wales (Holtom and Iqbal 2020: 111), the 54 stakeholders interviewed reported that job progression was uncommon – while there were some examples of people who had progressed, this was often seen as the exception rather than the rule. Over-representation of refugees in part-time work, insecure work and self-employment[5] means that fewer opportunities for progression are available to them. The report highlighted that institutional and structural barriers can be insurmountable for those looking to progress in their careers: "No matter how resourceful, creative and determined they are … the scale and/or complexity of barriers can thwart their aspirations."

The upshot of this is that refugee groups may be forced either to lower their expectations and accept poorer-quality work than they would otherwise like or to defer their entry to the workplace while they improve their language and employability skills – an option that is not available to many who need to work to provide for themselves and their family.

A study looking at the career progression of ethnic minority communities similarly found that diversity policies and processes can also hinder progression. Workplaces such as this can effectively "trap" entry-level and low-paid workers in these roles (Hudson et al 2013, Wood and Wybron 2015).

Studies looking at the specific employment experiences of the case study groups that are the focus of this report are, on the whole, limited. This is particularly the case for those on

[5] See, for instance, Kone et al (2019), who found that asylum route refugees earn less and work fewer hours than UK-born employees and other migrant groups. Their analysis showed that this group earned, on average, 55 per cent less per week than those born in the UK, worked four fewer hours per week, and was 20 percentage points less likely to work full-time. Of those asylum route refugees who were working, 21 per cent were self-employed, compared with 14 per cent of the UK-born workforce.

more recent resettlement and humanitarian schemes – that is, those on the BN(O) route, the Ukrainian schemes, or the Afghan schemes.[6] Below, we outline what is known about the specific employment experiences of the four groups under consideration.

Hongkongers on the BN(O) route

The BN(O) route is an immigration route opened by the UK government on 31 January 2021 in response to China passing a national security law which restricts fundamental rights in Hong Kong. From its introduction to the end of September 2023, 135,400 people arrived in the UK on this route (Home Office 2023a).

A UK-wide survey, commissioned by the Home Office, of 500 people on the BN(O) route found that BN(O) visa holders tend to be highly educated and skilled workers: 69 per cent of visa holders were educated to degree level or higher and 50 per cent of those who had worked in Hong Kong had a background as a manager, director or senior official, or in professional occupations (Home Office 2022).

In a study by the UKHK network of 1,081 Hongkongers, the most common concerns raised by respondents were related to employment and finances. They identified employment and training, as well as language acquisition, as areas the respondents most required support with (UKHK 2022). The top five areas of employment that respondents were interested in pursuing were: IT and information management; administrative and clerical work; education and training; accountancy, banking and finance; and transport and logistics.

A third study, by the UK Welcomes Hongkongers project and Good Neighbour Church England (2022), based on a survey of 586 Hongkongers, found that 67 per cent were educated to degree level or higher. In relation to work, 23 per cent were in full-time employment, 16 per cent were in part-time work, 16 per cent were homemakers, and 10 per cent were retired. Just under 30 per cent were job seeking. The research found that many people on the BN(O) route saw employment as a secondary priority to finding a suitable home and securing school places for their children. This is likely to be influenced by the savings that Hongkongers on the BN(O) route must have in order to be eligible for entry to the UK.[7]

A qualitative study by the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers (Rolfe and Chan 2022), based on interviews and focus groups with 35 stakeholders and 62 Hongkongers, found that underemployment in jobs below people's skills and qualification levels as well as lack of awareness among employers about the BN(O) visa were key barriers to Hongkongers' integration into the workforce. They found that BN(O) visa holders were taking "a planned and measured approach" to pursuing employment through improving their English (ibid, p34), researching available options, changing career paths, and setting up their own businesses. Referring to the Hongkongers in Britain (2021) survey, they noted that many Hongkongers were open to changing sectors, though it is unknown the extent to which this

[6] These are the ARAP scheme, which is one of the four routes our study focusses on, and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).
[7] BN(O) visa applicants must demonstrate that they can adequately maintain and accommodate themselves for a minimum of six months.

was about a lack of confidence or a genuine desire to pursue a change of career (Rolfe and Chan 2022).

An unpublished small-scale qualitative IPPR study (Mort et al 2023) on the experiences of BN(O) visa holders in Scotland found that Hongkongers desired greater employability support around skills and qualifications recognition, vocational training, job search, and access to employment-related information and guidance.

Ukrainians on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme

The Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme were introduced by the UK government in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. As of the end of September 2023, these schemes enabled 188,900 people to arrive in the UK (Home Office 2023b).

A Europe-wide study found that the labour market inclusion of Ukrainians had been faster compared with other refugee groups (OECD 2023). However, noting that most Ukrainian arrivals are women and children, the report highlighted family and caring responsibilities alongside insufficient childcare provision as negatively impacting on their work lives, with part-time work prevalent among this group due to these responsibilities. The report cited ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2022) data showing that in the UK, around four-fifths of those arriving via the Ukraine schemes were highly educated and that English language proficiency tended to be relatively high, with 44 per cent speaking English 'well' or 'very well'. Most Ukrainian arrivals were in work before leaving their home country, often in highly skilled jobs. However, more than half of those responding to the ONS survey indicated they were not working in the same sector they had been in when they were living in Ukraine. The main reasons given for this were that Ukrainians were taking any available job (44 per cent), they had insufficient language skills (39 per cent), and their qualifications were not recognised (17 per cent). As of June 2022, the most common sectors that Ukrainians were employed in were accommodation or food service industries (29 per cent), manufacturing (8 per cent), and wholesale or retail trade (8 per cent). The report identified the need for greater support in finding work, more sophisticated skills assessment, and improved recognition of qualifications (OECD 2023).

A survey by the Sanctuary Foundation of almost 2,000 Ukrainians in the UK found that while 53 per cent of respondents were concerned about finding work and 82 per cent had been employed or self-employed in Ukraine, just 25 per cent were in full-time work, 36 per cent were unemployed, and 34 per cent were working in lower-level jobs than those they had held in their home country (Johnston 2023).

Afghans on the ARAP resettlement programme

The ARAP scheme was introduced by the UK government in April 2021 to resettle Afghans (and their families) who worked for or with the UK government as interpreters and, consequently, were at risk of reprisal from the Taliban. As of the end of September 2023, 11,684 people arrived in the UK on this route (Home Office 2023c).

In a survey of 286 Afghan refugees conducted by More in Common and USPUK (Universal Sponsorship Pathway UK), 56 per cent of this cohort had a good level of English and were often very well educated, with 56 per cent holding qualifications at degree level or higher

(Anstruther et al 2023). However, there were significant numbers on this route with low levels of English – typically women who were the family members of those that worked as interpreters or with the British army. Of those surveyed, 38 per cent were in employment at the time of the survey and 62 per cent were out of work. Of those who were out of work, 61 per cent were currently looking for employment, while 39 per cent were not. Breaking this down by gender, 51 per cent of women said they were not looking for work.

As that survey indicates, Afghans face significant challenges securing work in the UK, especially in roles commensurate with their skills and qualifications. Two key issues contribute to these challenges: the use of bridging hotels and the lack of recognition of their qualifications and skills.

The use of hotels to accommodate Afghans – a response to the increased volume and pace of arrivals following the deteriorating situation after the Taliban takeover in summer 2021 – was due to be a stopgap measure until individuals and families could move into permanent accommodation. The government has admitted that bridging hotels "hold families back from putting down roots and getting consistency in education, healthcare and employment" (Gower 2023, p10). Efforts to end the use of hotels have been mired with challenges, as Afghans have received notice to leave their bridging accommodation without suitable alternatives in place, raising concerns about the potential for widespread homelessness. Among Afghans looking to move out of hotel accommodation and into a permanent home, the top priority in choosing a new place to live was being close to job opportunities, with 52 per cent giving this response (Anstruther et al 2023).

An external review of Operation New Hope – a Ministry of Defence-led programme providing support to some ARAP arrivals, delivered in partnership with charities working with ex-military personnel – found that some of the main obstacles facing Afghans were related to the need for greater language support, skills-based training, recognition of qualifications, and tailored employment support. They noted that employers often did not accept references that were not recent, that jobcentres were focussed on short-term solutions over finding relevant roles suitable to a person's qualifications and background, and that there was a lack of understanding of the skills of Afghans on the ARAP scheme, by employers and more generally (Tyrone 2022).

Asylum route refugees

Most studies looking at the experiences of refugees in employment tend to focus on those who have been through the asylum system, as this is a longstanding route for people seeking refuge in the UK (unlike the more recent bespoke humanitarian routes described above). In the year ending September 2023, 38,761 people were granted refugee status or other protection following an asylum application (Home Office 2023c). Between January 2021 and September 2023, 64,527 people were granted asylum or another form of protection (ibid).

In addition to the experiences and barriers highlighted earlier in this chapter, there are long-term consequences for asylum route refugees resulting from the employment ban

that asylum seekers in the UK are subject to.[8] A Europe-wide study (Fasani et al 2020) investigated the medium- to long-term effects on refugee labour market outcomes of employment bans. The researchers found that such bans reduced the likelihood of a refugee gaining employment by 15 per cent, even once the ban was lifted (that is, when someone got their refugee status). Moreover, the negative impacts of the ban on working were disproportionately felt by refugees with lower educational background and led people to work in lower-quality roles.

As of the end of September 2023, 124,461 people had waited longer than six months for an initial decision on their asylum claim. Waiting a long time for a decision and being unable to work means that people can "struggle to make up for lost time" when they are granted status (Lift the Ban 2020). Long gaps in employment can be viewed poorly by employers, lead to a depreciation of people's skills, negatively affect self-esteem and confidence in securing work, and impact overall mental health and wellbeing (Dempster et al 2022).

Key support needs for refugees and people with humanitarian leave

Drawing on findings from the available studies of the employment experiences of the case study groups and analysing their rights and entitlements, we can conclude that some support needs are universal across the four groups. For instance, most studies – whether for asylum route refugees, Ukrainians, Afghans or Hongkongers – point to the need for greater recognition of existing skills and qualifications, tailored employment support and guidance, and (to varying degrees) access to English language provision.

However, some needs are likely to be more unique to or more commonly required by particular groups. For instance, given the work profiles of Hongkongers, they may require greater support to access professional roles, bespoke job search assistance (given that they are less likely to access Jobcentre Plus provision), information on setting up their own business or as self-employed, and access to language provision that can increase their confidence speaking English (particularly given that they cannot typically access AEB-funded ESOL provision until they have resided in the UK for three years).

Those on the Ukrainian schemes may be more likely to require support accessing and understanding childcare options so that one-parent families (prevalent in this group) can enter the workforce. Tailored support and guidance might include a focus on negotiating flexible working arrangements and understanding rights and entitlements as a parent in the workplace.

For Afghans arriving via the ARAP scheme, the greatest support need is likely to be related to securing accommodation in a location that enables them to move into work and takes their job progression aspirations into account. Women joining family members on this scheme are likely to require access to English language provision in order to develop their readiness for work.

[8] Asylum seekers may only work if their asylum claim has been outstanding for 12 months or more through no fault of their own and are restricted to jobs on the shortage occupation list published by the Home Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handling-applications-for-permission-to-take-employment-instruction/permission-to-work-and-volunteering-for-asylum-seekers-accessible

Finally, asylum route refugees are likely to require unique support that understands and seeks to mitigate the impact of long periods of worklessness on people's chances of securing good-quality work as well as on their self-esteem, confidence and general wellbeing. This support is likely required *before* someone receives their refugee status, so that while they are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, they can continue to develop their skills and future employment prospects (for example, through volunteering and training opportunities).

WHAT EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE IN YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER?

A number of stakeholders from across the public, private and third sectors support refugees and people with humanitarian leave to enter employment and to progress in their careers. These are discussed below.

The Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector

The VCSE sector within Yorkshire and the Humber plays an essential role in supporting refugees and people with humanitarian leave with their employment journeys. Some stakeholders work with individuals on a one-to-one basis, supporting them to find volunteer work, access skills training, improve their interviewing skills, and increase their understanding of the UK labour market. Some may offer long-term support and continue checking in on their clients after they secure employment. Examples of specialist support include the Refugee Council's Specialised Training and Employment Programme (STEP),[9] which is part funded by World Jewish Relief through the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and offers tailored support and regular coaching through dedicated employment and training advisors working in South Yorkshire, Leeds and York. New Roots Leeds[10] – an AMIF-funded integration service delivered jointly by RETAS (Refugee Education Training Advice Service), the Refugee Council and Path Yorkshire – also provides employability support through workshops and courses, visits to employers, and work placements as well as support to secure relevant licences to enable employment in certain professions (for example, the Security Industry Authority [SIA] licence).

Migration Yorkshire

As the strategic migration partnership (SMP) for Yorkshire and the Humber, Migration Yorkshire takes a "whole society" approach to integration across the region. They have been the lead partner on programmes seeking to improve refugee groups' access to employment, including the following.

- *The Refugee Integration Service*[11] – an AMIF-funded programme that provides individual support to new refugees for six months on various issues, including

[9] See the Refugee Council webpage on STEP for more details: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/specialised-training-and-employment-programme-step/
[10] See the Refugee Council webpage on New Roots Leeds for more details: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/new-roots-leeds
[11] See the Migration Yorkshire webpage on the Refugee Integration Service for more information: https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/our-work/refugee-integration-service

employment. When AMIF funding ends at the end of 2023, local authority partners delivering this programme intend to continue the service in some form.

- *Connecting Opportunities*[12] – a programme funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund that ran from 2017 to March 2023. It supported people into employment and helped with their wider integration.

DWP and Jobcentre Plus

Those receiving universal credit can access employability support through their local jobcentre. Typically, they are assigned a work coach who provides job search assistance.

The DWP also has a regional partnerships team, which works with local stakeholders to identify gaps in employment support and coordinate work-focussed activities to help people move into work.

Since March 2023, dedicated 'progression leads' have been rolled out at a district level across Great Britain to support people who are in low paid work to progress and increase their earnings (DWP 2022).

While support from the DWP and Jobcentre Plus is available to refugees and people with humanitarian leave, those who are subject to the NRPF condition, such as BN(O) visa holders, are less likely to interact with this provision, because they are not eligible for qualifying benefits such as universal credit.

Support outsourced by the DWP or the Home Office

Employment support can be outsourced to other organisations through a tendering process. The REP, launched in the summer of 2023, is one example of this. Funded by the Home Office to deliver tailored employment support to refugee groups, it is delivered in Yorkshire and the Humber by The Growth Company.[13]

Employers

Some employers in Yorkshire and the Humber have established their own programmes and practices aimed at supporting refugees and people with humanitarian leave into the workforce. Some large employers have bespoke employability assistance programmes, and some have adapted their working practices to make their recruitment procedures more inclusive. This report explores specific examples, including work by IKEA and the NHS.

Combined authorities

Mayoral combined authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber also have a role to play in initiating and funding programmes to support refugee groups into employment. For instance, West Yorkshire Combined Authority has recently awarded funding to Migration

[12] See the Migration Yorkshire Connecting Opportunities webpage for a film and evaluation report detailing the impact of this programme: https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/connecting-opportunities

[13] See the REP website for further details: https://repyorkshireandhumbergc.co.uk/

Yorkshire to deliver an entrepreneurship project for migrant women.[14] This will see women from a refugee or migrant background who aspire to set up their own business supported through group workshops, one-to-one mentorship, access to business networks, and the opportunity to apply for an interest-free business loan.

[14] For more information, see the Migration Yorkshire webpage on the Migrant Women In Business project: https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/migrant-women-business

3. METHODOLOGY

RECRUITMENT

We recruited 15 interviewees across Yorkshire and the Humber, representing the four different immigration routes. Each had been in the UK for at least a year and was employed or had worked for a significant period in one job before leaving in pursuit of other opportunities. A snapshot of their profiles is provided in table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Pseudonym	Immigration route	Age	Location	About
Daniel	Asylum route	35–44	West Yorkshire	While waiting for an asylum decision after leaving the Democratic Republic of Congo, Daniel took online IT courses to help him qualify for jobs in the tech sector. He now works remotely for a US-based company and has established a thriving career in senior IT roles.
John	Asylum route	25–34	West Yorkshire	John had a background in engineering in the Democratic Republic of Congo before coming to the UK. He works as a mechanical engineer for a Yorkshire-based company. While working, he completed a university degree, juggling work and studies.
Michelle	Asylum route	55–64	South Yorkshire	Originally from Zimbabwe, Michelle received her Level 2 Certificate in Health and Social Care while awaiting her asylum decision. She works as a care assistant in a nursing home in South Yorkshire.
Anna	Homes for Ukraine	35–44	South Yorkshire	Anna arrived in the UK with her two children. Her partner is still in Ukraine. She works in the public sector, supporting other Ukrainian refugees.

				For her, flexible work was critical to ensure she could care for her children and work.
Artem	Homes for Ukraine	25–34	South Yorkshire	Artem found a position in the food and drinks industry with the help of his Homes for Ukraine host. his job through the help of his Homes for Ukraine host and currently works in a beverage manufacturing company. He wishes to open his own business eventually.
Ivanna	Homes for Ukraine	35–44	West Yorkshire	Ivanna was a medical doctor and associate professor at a medical university in Ukraine. She is exploring routes to work as a doctor within the NHS or in clinical research for a private company. She works for a local charity in West Yorkshire, coordinating ESOL classes in her area.
Natalya	Homes for Ukraine	45–54	The Humber	Natalya had a well-established career in the legal field in Ukraine but took on a role at a local supermarket in the UK due to language barriers. Eventually, she wants to return to a role related to her previous work. She is trying to find ways to improve her English while working.
Ahmad	ARAP scheme	35–44	The Humber	Ahmad worked predominantly as a teacher in Afghanistan and was also a language trainer for the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. He is exploring options to return to teaching. He currently works at an advice centre in North Yorkshire.
Amina	ARAP scheme	35–44	The Humber	Amina left Afghanistan during her final year of medical school. She wants to work as a doctor in the UK. While exploring routes to enter the medical field in the UK, she is working as an assistant ESOL tutor in North Yorkshire.
Amir	ARAP scheme	35–44	West Yorkshire	Amir was a senior political officer for the British embassy in Afghanistan before coming to the UK. Before that, he worked for the United Nations. Amir

				now works for a national charity that provides asylum support.
Christine	BN(O) route	35–44	West Yorkshire	Christine worked as an accountant in Hong Kong. She now works as a senior finance administrator for a housing charity. She has already been promoted once at her workplace.
Claire	BN(O) route	Not recorded	North Yorkshire	Claire worked in a civil society organisation with young people in Hong Kong. She now works at a local hospital in North Yorkshire as a patient service operative. She is working to improve her English proficiency.
Jason	BN(O) route	35–44	West Yorkshire	Jason gained over a decade of experience in e-commerce in Hong Kong. When he arrived in the UK, he worked at a family-run hardware store in West Yorkshire for six months before leaving because he did not find the job challenging enough.
Lee	BN(O) route	35–44	North Yorkshire	Lee had been an electrical engineer in Hong Kong. After arriving in the UK, he found work through agencies and worked in several factories and manufacturers across Yorkshire before finding a more permanent role in a food manufacturing company. He had difficulty securing income initially due to the precarity of his zero-hours contract.
Wesley	BN(O) route	45–54	West Yorkshire	Wesley worked as an IT programmer for most of his career in Hong Kong. When he came to the UK, he found a job as a warehouse operative in a distribution company.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

We conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews online, during which we inquired about interviewees' experiences of entering the labour market in the UK, their career trajectories, and their aspirations for job progression. Additionally, we asked about barriers they might have faced while striving for job progression, challenges they might have had in the workplace, and how they defined a "good job" and "job progression". IPPR researchers and a peer researcher from Migration Yorkshire undertook qualitative

analysis and coding. Interviewees received a £40 supermarket voucher as a thank-you for their contribution to the research.

PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP

A participatory workshop was conducted around one month after the one-to-one interviews to share the research findings with interviewees and allow them to codesign a "good jobs" charter that reflected the needs of employees who are refugees and people with humanitarian leave. They were asked to consider what a good job would allow them to do, how it would make them feel, and what support is needed to access good jobs in Yorkshire and the Humber. The workshop was held virtually, and 10 out of the 15 interviewees, representing all four immigration routes, attended. To reduce language barriers, interpreters were also involved in the workshop. Those who took part received a further £50, either in cash or as a supermarket voucher.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Over the course of the research, we engaged with stakeholders in Yorkshire and the Humber to gain insights into their perspectives of the barriers particular refugee groups face when seeking meaningful employment or progression pathways at work. We spoke to various stakeholders, such as employment advisors, trade unions, Yorkshire-based charities, and experts in English language support.

In addition to these conversations, we conducted a policy workshop with Migration Yorkshire to test out policy recommendations with stakeholders. In total, 33 people joined the workshop.

Analyses of the interviews, participatory workshop, and stakeholder engagement exercises have cumulatively formed the foundation of the recommendations in this report.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A number of ethical measures were put in place to support and protect the rights and dignity of interviewees throughout the research process. In particular, for participating refugees and people with humanitarian leave, researchers:

- offered to translate or interpret the information sheet and privacy notice into their preferred language to ensure consent to participate was informed and freely given, and provided interpreters for those who required language support to enable their full participation in interviews and the participatory workshop
- asked partner organisations supporting researchers with recruitment to identify people who they anticipated would be suitable interviewees, in particular taking into consideration any acute difficulties or challenges the potential interviewees were currently facing
- agreed that interviewees who had identified support needs during the course of the interview would receive a follow-up call from the referring organisation to discuss these further (with permission of the interviewee)
- reiterated the rights of interviewees at the beginning of each interview, particularly in relation to being able to withdraw without penalty and being free to decide not

to answer a question – interviewees received an information sheet assuring them that researchers were independent and that their participation would in no way impact on services they receive, and they were advised to take breaks should they need them
- informed interviewees of the safeguarding protocol that researchers would follow, in line with IPPR's safeguarding policy.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this study arises from the small number of interviewees. Care should be taken when interpreting the findings and evaluating their generalisability to the wider population of refugees and people with humanitarian leave. In particular, the diversity of those in the wider asylum route refugee population – in terms of nationality, among other factors – means that findings related to this group should be taken as illustrative of the experiences of those that participated in this study only. The method of recruitment – via the civil society networks of IPPR and Migration Yorkshire – is likely to have led to an over-representation in our sample of people working in the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, which has the potential to bias findings.

4.
WHAT IS JOB PROGRESSION

DEFINING JOB PROGRESSION

We start our discussion of the findings by outlining the nuanced meaning of "job progression" as understood by our research interviewees. While the concept of progression in the realm of work is often loosely defined, it generally entails advancing along an occupational hierarchy – whether through promotion within the same workplace or by transitioning to a more senior position in a different organisation – and is accompanied by increased wages. However, the trajectory of job progression is rarely linear, especially for people who have been forced to move due to war, conflict and persecution.

For refugees and people with humanitarian leave, considerations of job progression must account for the roles they held prior to their arrival in the UK. Attaining a position equivalent to or on par with their pre-arrival roles may necessitate years of transition and numerous interim jobs. The question arises: when they eventually secure a role akin to their previous work, is it genuinely progression or is it more a continuation of their prior employment? Such complexities surrounding job progression underscore the distinctive challenges faced by refugees and people with humanitarian leave in navigating their career trajectories.

When interviewees were posed the question "what does job progression mean to you?", it was clear that there was no single definition of progression. This is unsurprising given that those we interviewed were diverse in terms of the jobs they currently held and their educational backgrounds, employment histories, work-life priorities and aspirations. For some, it was important to be able to grow and move into senior roles in their workplace, to set up their own business, or to step into a job that utilised their talents, desires and passions. For others, the idea of progression was more modest. They sought to progress into a role that allowed a sense of work-life balance, provided enough for them and their families, and was convenient for them.

Importantly, job progression – particularly when it comes to refugees and people with humanitarian leave – is often far from linear. Instead, many spoke about their hopes to find their way *back* into the profession that they had trained for, were qualified in, and had worked in prior to their arrival in the UK.

A "GOOD JOB"

However, one thread ran through everyone's answer to the question on progression: it is ultimately about working towards a "good job".

But what does it mean to have a good job? In broad terms, for our interviewees, it was a combination of decent pay, flexibility, job security, job satisfaction, a supportive employer and a sense of belonging.

Decent pay

Most interviewees stressed that their foremost priority was for a wage that supported them to sustain themselves and their family. As John, an asylum route refugee living in Leeds and working as a mechanical engineer, said:

> ***"[A good job] gives you decent wage to cover most of your expenses. Because nowadays people, like, are living wage to wage after wage. Why? Because of cost of living … So, I think, yeah, wage-wise, it's really important because if you're satisfied financially, you end up doing your job well. More, mentally, you'll be able to wake up every morning and go without thinking too much."***

Some also spoke about the need to support not only their immediate family or those living with them in the UK, but also, through remittances, their loved ones in their country of origin. As Amir, an Afghan man living in Leeds and working in a charity supporting asylum seekers, said:

> ***"The difference from the rest of the population is that we have left loved ones back home because of the … situation. They have lost their jobs, their source of income, and they rely on the contribution that we make to our extended family, or sometimes our own family, the core family."***

Flexibility

For some interviewees, a key factor in a good job was flexibility. Especially when someone is recently arrived, there can be a lot of personal administrative tasks to attend to. Amir explained that having an employer that was sympathetic to this made all the difference:

> ***"Finding a job that allows flexibility with your needs and knows that you haven't resettled yet … there is lots of documentation that you need to get, there are lots of things that cause you to be away from work for a few hours, and they understand that. You won't get it everywhere, so I really appreciate my employer being as flexible as possible."***

Flexibility was also especially important for parents who required childcare support. Some interviewees described being single parents and having smaller support systems in the UK to help them with their caring responsibilities.[15] For them, having flexibility in terms of the hours they worked was crucial. Anna, a Ukrainian woman living in South Yorkshire and

[15] Though not raised by interviewees in this study, restrictions placed on those with NRPF, including BN(O) visa holders, prevent them from accessing some childcare support, such as the 30-hours of free childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds, aimed at working parents and intended to support them to increase their hours. This is a barrier to progression in work. For further details of childcare restrictions for those with NRPF, see the following CORAM blog: https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/on-the-outside

working in the public sector, explained how challenging it had been for her since moving to the UK:

> ***"My husband is in Ukraine … So, this is the main hard thing for me, because I have two children and I need to combine work, school and everything just by myself."***

Such flexibility allows parents to do the school run, attend important appointments, and manage their family responsibilities alongside their jobs. Moreover, beyond family and caring responsibilities, many interviewees strove for a good work-life balance, and having flexibility was crucial for maintaining this.

Job security

Ahmad, an Afghan man living in the Humber area and working for an advice organisation, indicated that for him, job security was a primary need, albeit one that was not met by his current employer:

> ***"I think for you to feel secure, you need to have a contract that lays everything out for you. And that's something that I still have not signed … I mean, I really like the people here, they've been very supportive, but at the end of the day it's those things that matter most. Not having a contract, that itself makes things a little insecure. You're not confident about things, you're not sure how long you're going to be here, you're not sure about your rights, you don't know what your rights are."***

Similarly, Lee, a Hongkonger living in York and working in the food manufacturing industry, explained that stability and secure hours were really important facets of a good job. He had been on a zero-hours contract previously, which had left him feeling insecure:

> ***"For myself, I think I want a stable job. Like, you know, [my] previous experience, I didn't like it. They just cancel it one day before, and then they have different reasons. And I get not enough of a job in a week."***

Anna highlighted how her temporary status (people arriving on the Ukrainian schemes have three years' limited leave to remain) put her in a more precarious position than colleagues born in the UK or with indefinite leave to remain:

> ***"My colleagues who are British citizens or who have [indefinite leave to remain], their contracts are longer than mine. And my contract is only for one year. We will see what happens next."***

Job satisfaction

Some interviewees spoke about how a good job made them *feel*. For instance, they highlighted the importance of feeling a sense of fulfilment and of their work being purposeful. Amir and John, despite working in very different fields – one in charity support for refugee groups and another in mechanical engineering – each described this sense of satisfaction in detail.

> ***"You feel that you belong to an organisation whose primary purpose or mission is to help the people who are in the most need, so you think that you are part of a bigger good cause and that you are an agent for change. You think that you are a source of inspiration and help, and hope, for so many people."*** (Amir)

> ***"I was motivated. Sometimes … when it's Sunday, I was thinking I could be at work at this time, you know! … The process where you have to build something and [at] the end, you need to test it to make sure it works properly – so, it's like you can see your achievement when that machine is running properly and then you feel a rise, like you made something, you just accomplished something."*** (John)

Supportive employer

For some, having a supportive employer who took an interest in who they were – their interests and aspirations – and how they were doing, and who supported them to develop in their role, was highly valuable. Anna felt very supported by her employer:

> ***"We have a review every three months where we discuss everything, basically, like my mental health and everything. How happy am I at this position and what things I need to do to feel more comfortable, and things like that. So, yeah, at some point, if I decide to get some training or anything, I don't think it would be very hard for me to get this, because I just need to speak to my line manager."***

Similarly, Ahmad appreciated the open-door policy of his manager and the collegiate atmosphere of his workplace:

> ***"No matter when, whenever we go to our manager and we need help, even when he is not free and is busy doing his own stuff, he makes time to try to answer our questions and help us with things, and he's very patient. He tries to give as much time as we need. So, I'm happy with the environment, with the atmosphere, with how supportive the staff, the colleagues, and the senior colleagues are, and especially the manager."***

Sense of belonging

For those new to working in the UK, feeling valued and appreciated, and receiving a warm welcome from their employer, can make all the difference. Related to this, Amir identified a sense of belonging as a component of a good job:

> ***"I would say that if you have a passion for that job, if a job can instil a real sense of belonging, and a job that you are completely prepared for, that's a good job."***

Similarly, Ivanna, a Ukrainian woman living in Leeds and working in a charity supporting refugee groups, found that her workplace onboarding had been warm, welcoming, and made her transition into the role "easy".

In summary, a "good job" is not defined by any one thing. It is multifaceted, as Amir illustrated:

> ***"A good job is a job that really addresses four parts of your being: your mind, your body, your spirit and your heart. You need to be passionate about the job. You feel fulfilled, you think that your brain is in the business, and you feel that the overall business is good, and for a good cause, and you get a good salary to be able to protect yourself and your family."***

The facets of a good job that our interviewees highlighted are not necessarily unique to refugees and people with humanitarian leave. Indeed, many of them tally with the definition of "decent work" as set out by the Trades Union Congress' (TUC's) Great Jobs Agenda (2017), which identified the following as constituting a "great job": having a voice at work, fair and decent pay, regular hours, fair treatment and respect, healthy workplaces, and opportunities for learning and progression.[16] The convergence of these criteria and the views of our research interviewees suggests that the facets of a good job are universal and not exclusive to any particular demographic. These findings underline the importance of creating inclusive and supportive workplaces where all workers, including refugees and people with humanitarian leave, can thrive.

The multifaceted ways of thinking about job progression as set out by our interviewees lay in sharp contrast with the way that progression is defined and measured by the DWP for those receiving universal credit, which is framed purely in terms of earnings – and even then, only in relation to reaching a specific earnings threshold (DWP 2022).[17] This indicates the potential limitations of mainstream jobcentre support when it comes to job progression.

[16] Moreover, the government's own 'Good Work Plan', and the Taylor Review which preceded it, note similar indicators of quality work. For further details see the Good Work Plan: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-work-plan/good-work-plan#fair-and-decent-work-1. See also the Taylor review of modern working practices: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-work-the-taylor-review-of-modern-working-practices

[17] For details of the earning thresholds for universal credit claimants, see DWP guidance: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-earnings#earnings-and-your-responsibilities

5.
WHAT SUPPORT DO PEOPLE NEED TO PROGRESS IN THEIR CAREERS?

This chapter outlines the key support needs identified by interviewees and stakeholders when it comes to job progression.

Understanding what these needs are allows us to identify areas in which people require external support – from their employer, employability support workers, Jobcentre Plus and so on – in order to move into a good job that satisfies the principles set out in the previous chapter.

We also share good practice examples that seek to support people to progress in their careers.

FINDING AND SECURING THE RIGHT JOB

Interviewees spoke about a range of different ways that they found a job. Some had used online recruitment websites, such as Indeed.com or Totaljobs.com; some found work via informal networks; and those claiming universal credit were supported by work coaches at the jobcentre. For Hongkongers who are unable to access public funds, it was more likely that they found their jobs via their own online searches. Ukrainians, Afghans and asylum route refugees were more likely to have experience with the jobcentre, as they were entitled to access universal credit. In addition, Ukrainians tended to have more opportunities to find work via informal networks as a result of their accommodation with host families.

For those looking to find a route back into the profession they had in their home country, the pathway to do so was often unclear. Interviewees who had a previous career in a highly specialised and skilled field – such as medicine, law, education and engineering – were unable to easily find out how to secure similar work in the UK. Ahmad explained how looking for work in a new country, with entirely different norms and expectations, can be challenging:

> ***"First and foremost, [we need] the right kind of advice. Because the system seems to be very complicated for people like us who have come from a totally different country … and we don't understand the system here. I haven't been able to find the right information, where I need to start. Otherwise, I would have already started***

doing it long ago, as soon as we got here. So, the right guidance. Somebody saying what exactly you need to do."

A number of our interviewees explained that what they need is better access to information so that they can re-enter the sector they had built a career in. They wanted clear information and specialist advice on converting their qualifications, guidance on required conversion courses and examinations, financial advice, help with exam fees, and help to identify professional networks and peers in their field of expertise who can support them on their journey.

One participant who was able to secure employment in a job equivalent to their previous role, before progressing to a more senior role, was Daniel. He works in the tech sector, employed by a US company to work remotely. Conversely, interviewees who worked in sectors such as law, health and education had faced significant barriers to finding work commensurate with their previous role. The ability to secure employment in a role equivalent to or advancing beyond the individual's previous position is likely to be contingent to some degree on industry-specific factors. In Daniel's case, the tech sector has far more remote working opportunities and that opens up the job market, rather than limiting people to jobs in their local area. On the other hand, the legal, health and education sectors tend to have country-specific accreditation requirements that can slow down or alter the course of progression pathways.

Case study 5.1 describes a new government-funded programme that seeks to support refugees and people with humanitarian leave to overcome barriers to finding work.

Case study 5.1: The Refugee Employability Programme

The REP was officially launched in September 2023, at which point the Home Office released a policy statement outlining the programme's purpose and provided a list of organisations delivering the programme in regions across the UK.

The government designed this programme to address barriers people in refugee groups contend with when job seeking that are not fully addressed through mainstream provision. This programme aims to offer bespoke support to refugee groups to help them enter the labour market and contribute to the economy faster than they could otherwise. The type of support includes CV writing, employment-specific language support, skills courses and work experience opportunities. This support aims to build jobseekers' confidence, skills and motivation.

The REP is designed to complement existing support for refugee groups. Those eligible for the REP include those on the UK Resettlement Scheme, those on the Afghan schemes (the ARAP scheme and the ACRS), those granted refugee status no earlier than 28 June 2022, and those arriving through refugee family reunion. People arriving via the Homes for Ukraine scheme or the BN(O) route are not eligible.

In Yorkshire and the Humber, The Growth Company, a social enterprise with a track record of providing employability support across northern England, is delivering the programme. Given that the programme is still in its nascent stages, the extent of its impact on mitigating barriers is not yet known.

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

A recurring need raised by interviewees and stakeholders alike was being able to learn and improve English language skills in order to progress in the workplace. Those we spoke to advocated (i) for better access to English language classes outside of work hours and for employers to be flexible to accommodate English language learning (see Lee's story) and (ii) for more English language classes within the workplace. Many of those we spoke to had not found it easy to marry up their work lives and their English language studies and, as such, felt that they were stuck in a cycle of low-paid work while they could not improve their communication skills (see Natalya's story).

Lee's story: Juggling shiftwork with ESOL

Lee arrived in Yorkshire from Hong Kong having previously had a longstanding career as an electrical engineer. However, he was told he could not convert his Hong Kong certification and would be required to complete an electrician course in the UK – possible only with a strong command of English – in order to work in a similar field.

He eventually found a steady job in food manufacturing in York. Despite language barriers, Lee managed to get through the training and induction with the help of colleagues and Google Translate.

Lee also attempted to find ways to attend ESOL classes while working shifts at the factory, but was constantly met with clashes due to his shiftwork schedule. "I can only attend the English class once every two weeks", he said. This inevitably slowed down his progress in picking up the language.

Lee continues to work in the factory and hopes that promotion opportunities will arise in the future. When asked how people in his position could be better supported, he said:

"Provide more on-job training programmes for people, and also, because of the language barrier, they should provide an interpreter in the training course."

For now, although Lee would like to improve his English while working, he finds himself in a situation where his focus is being diverted from prioritising language improvement to ensuring that he is available to work in order to provide for his family.

Natalya's story: Finding the right English language class

Natalya arrived in Yorkshire in 2022 through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Previously, she had worked in the legal field in Ukraine, in a senior position. However, because of language barriers, she wanted to find work where speaking English fluently was not paramount to the job. She eventually found a job in her local supermarket as a sales assistant.

As a universal credit claimant, Natalya had access to free ESOL classes through the jobcentre. However, once she had started her job, she was no longer eligible to attend the class.

Instead, she started joining conversation clubs held after work in the local church. Of these, she said:

"Those lessons weren't very efficient for me because the groups' [skills] were mixed. And it was more like conversational practice. The other class allowed me to learn the language."

As a result, she felt compelled to explore private lessons with a teacher from Ukraine, for which she was willing to bear the cost herself. However, she found that even if she were to opt for private tuition, she would have to wait a long time due to the high demand for the tutor.

Natalya hopes that one day she can leave the supermarket and work again in a role related to her specialism.

"I would like to get to work as a lawyer here as well. I don't think that my current job is the [last] job in my life. There should be some support for me, which helps me to improve my English and to find another job in the future."

While Natalya possesses valuable skills and expertise from her extensive legal career in Ukraine, her current employment prospects in the UK are significantly hindered by language proficiency challenges, despite her dedicated efforts to attend language classes.

Although Natalya aspires to return to a role in her legal specialism, the obstacles extend beyond language proficiency, encompassing the differences in legislative context between Ukraine and the UK. Nevertheless, supporting Natalya to move closer to her previous role or transfer her skills to another profession is crucial for her successful integration into the UK job market.

This unfortunate tension between language learning and employment left some in a tricky catch-22 situation: they could neither improve their English language skills at a decent pace nor progress easily in their workplace. Those who had accessed free ESOL classes through Jobcentre Plus prior to starting work found that once they were in employment, they were no longer eligible for the free provision and had to find alternative ways to learn English.[18] For some, their irregular shiftwork meant that it was difficult to access community-based ESOL provision.

It may have been the case that interviewees were unaware of options available to them when it comes to ESOL – for instance, there are a number of options for Afghans and Ukrainians.[19]

SKILLS TRAINING

When asked about their requirements for workplace and career advancement, some interviewees emphasised the importance of vocational and technical skills training

[18] In principle, however, fully funded ESOL provision should be available for those on low incomes (via further education colleges).
[19] See, for instance, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities guidance on ESOL provision for those on the Homes for Ukraine scheme: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/learn-to-speak-read-and-write-english-homes-for-ukraine#:~:text=Free%20ESOL%20courses%20online,also%20learn%20Ukrainian%20or%20Russian

coupled with a need for better understanding of "soft skills" crucial for success in the UK workplace. Given the diverse expertise among refugee groups, interviewees and stakeholders alike stressed the necessity for tailored employment support rather than a "one size fits all" approach.

Some interviewees – particularly those on the BN(O) route – highlighted the need for guidance on writing CVs and training in interview skills, recognising differences in norms between the UK and their home country.

Daniel, sharing insights from the tech sector, pointed out that some individuals aspiring to enter this field lack familiarity with the technical tests conducted during interviews. While he managed to prepare through online resources, he acknowledged that not everyone knows where to find such information.

Case study 5.2 illustrates an effective upskilling initiative led by a large employer in the region.

Case study 5.2 : IKEA's UPPNÅ scheme

IKEA, in collaboration with the Refugee Council, offers individuals the opportunity to develop essential skills for navigating the UK labour market and supports them in securing long-term employment. It runs workshops on CV writing, making applications, interview techniques and customer service, among others.

In April 2021, IKEA also introduced the UPPNÅ scheme – an eight-week paid placement offering practical work experience, English language enhancement, and improved employability skills.

As of June 2023, 140 people from refugee groups completed the scheme, with an impressive 89 per cent securing permanent roles at IKEA (Business Matters 2023).

This initiative – a collaboration between Path Yorkshire, the Refugee Council and IKEA in Leeds – exemplifies successful efforts to address refugee groups' skills training needs in Yorkshire and the Humber.

POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Interviewees underscored the significance of a positive workplace culture for having a fulfilling job. Such a culture fosters a sense of welcome, value and support for employees to thrive. For Anna, working in the public sector highlighted the inclusivity in the diverse workforce she was part of:

> ***"The working environment is very, very good and professional. And we have [an] international team. We have people from Afghanistan, Morocco, El Salvador. So they share … their experience, and it makes the whole team … stronger, I would say … Every staff member is very friendly, I would say, so it's a healthy environment."***

While the importance of inclusivity was widely emphasised, interviewees in the voluntary sector, especially those supporting refugee groups, stressed the additional need for employers to acknowledge the challenges faced by these groups. An intentional trauma-

informed approach was deemed vital, as shared by Amir, who appreciated his manager's approach:

> ***"My manager is very supportive and always says: 'The workload is your call. If you think that a client was tough, and it's a difficult case, feel free to take a break, and just distance from the job for a little while, and then start again.' The environment is very compassionate and understanding."***

Recognising the lived experiences of employees who are refugees and people with humanitarian leave and the unique perspectives they bring to a role and workplace was a common theme. Many interviewees emphasised that upon arrival in the UK, these groups not only have to adapt to a new country but also must navigate unfamiliar workplace cultures and norms, and, for some, an unfamiliar language.

Amina, a former medical student from Afghanistan who now works as an ESOL tutor, stressed the importance of recognising and supporting the mental health needs of refugees and people with humanitarian leave. Amir highlighted that his drive to secure employment was not solely for survival but also because he was "*so desperate to build a routine to feel better and start a new life after going through much trauma*".

Employers, especially in the VCSE sector, were recognised by some for their adept support of employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave, viewing them as invaluable assets due to their lived experiences. Interviewees working in VCSE organisations across Yorkshire and the Humber expressed high levels of job satisfaction and referred to the fulfilment they got from "giving back" to others facing situations similar to their own upon arrival in the UK.

The peer researcher working on this project reflects further on this in box 5.1.

Box 5.1: A reflection on job satisfaction and progression for highly qualified refugees and people with humanitarian leave working in the VCSE sector

We observed a trend among highly qualified refugees and people with humanitarian leave we interviewed for this study: most of them have moved from their previous employment sector to what is known as the VCSE sector. This is particularly noticeable in charities that aid refugee groups.

For example, we met with Ahmad, a qualified teacher from Afghanistan who joined a local charity in the Humber as a trainee advisor providing direct support to refugees, migrants, and other minority ethnic groups in various areas. Also with Ivanna, a medical doctor from Ukraine who works for an organisation supporting refugee groups in Leeds as coordinator of a Ukrainian wellbeing and educational project, and as an occasional interpreter. And, finally, with Amir, who worked as a senior political officer at the British embassy in his country and is now working as a caseworker with an organisation in the region where he provides first-hand support to people seeking asylum.

This pattern raises the question as to why the VCSE sector seems to be attractive to highly qualified refugees and people with humanitarian leave? Reflecting on the interviews, three factors might explain this.

The first plausible reason is the difficulty refugees and people with humanitarian leave face in having their qualifications recognised in the UK and the long process it takes to get back to their original sector of work. Many positions in the VCSE sector require a combination of practical face-to-face support and administrative skills, and this works well as an alternative to their previous occupation. Moreover, before being hired by a VCSE organisation, most of them volunteered with the organisation. In fact, many highly skilled refugees and people with humanitarian leave arriving in the UK start their career plan by volunteering with VCSE organisations. In this way, employers benefit from their experience, which may be lacking locally, and the employees get new references which they can use when applying for local job opportunities.

The second reason is that most of those VCSE organisations will consider people with overseas qualifications and work experience, which is often a challenge in some sectors, such as education and health. There is, at the same time, an emerging tendency for VCSE organisations supporting refugees and people with humanitarian leave to open positions in which the lived experience of these groups is counted among the job criteria.

Finally, highly qualified refugees and people with humanitarian leave often prefer not to undertake manual labour, such as warehouse or factory work. This is simply because this does not match their previous experiences of working in offices. Working in the VCSE sector provides them with an office-based working environment, where they feel their knowledge and skills are valued.

In terms of job satisfaction, highly qualified refugees and people with humanitarian leave working with VCSE organisations were, in general, positive about their experiences. This is because of the recognition of their overseas work experience and qualifications on the one hand and the satisfaction they gain by providing support to others in the community on the other. However, in terms of work progression, most of them have reported not seeing many possibilities for career advancement within those organisations – a common feature of small VCSE organisations, which often have limited formal opportunities for progression. This prompts consideration of the risk that these organisations will turn out to be places of contentment for them rather than offering a career with all the possibilities for them to thrive professionally.

CHILDCARE SUPPORT

Employers' understanding and accommodating childcare responsibilities emerged as a crucial factor for some interviewees, shaping their ability to enter the workforce and develop necessary skills, including English language proficiency, crucial for job progression.

For Anna, who has been the sole carer for her children since arriving in the UK, flexibility and support to balance her numerous responsibilities were paramount:

> ***"Women with children [need support because] … they need to pick up kids from school and all these things. So, they're trying to study language, but at the same time, they need to look after their kids, because we're on our own here. So maybe it would be helpful to … [get] some extra child support, I would say."***

Box 5.2 highlights funding available to support access to ESOL provision for parents in similar situations.

Box 5.2: Funding for ESOL provision

The Home Office has made funding available to enable parents on certain resettlement and community sponsorship schemes (the UK Resettlement Scheme, the ACRS and the ARAP scheme) to access ESOL provision.

Acknowledging that women with children face particular barriers to participating in formal language classes due to lack of adequate childcare provision, the funding aims to support local authorities and SMPs to address this problem. For 2023/24, a total of £1.8 million has been allocated to support projects to increase ESOL attendance among these groups. While only local authorities and SMPs can apply, they are able to use this funding to commission ESOL provision through their trusted partners.

Eligible projects[20] can receive funding for:

- room/facility hire in which childcare is offered so that parents can attend ESOL lessons

- direct payment of creche, nursery and childminder fees

- interpreter fees to assist parents to communicate with childcare providers

- creche/nursery worker wages for the hours spent providing childcare to the children of eligible refugees and people with humanitarian leave

- innovative and creative approaches, such as family learning events to help adults who are unwilling or unable to leave their children to learn English.

Provision such as this can support parents, especially women, to develop their English language skills and confidence, enabling them to get into work and progress their career. Interested applicants (either local authorities bidding directly or SMPs interested in leading a regional bid) can receive further information about this funding stream, including how to apply, by emailing: ESOLChildcare@homeoffice.gov.uk

FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

When discussing what they appreciated about their employers, many interviewees highlighted the significance of flexible working hours, a sentiment particularly echoed by those with caring responsibilities, such as Anna:

> ***"When I applied for this position, I told [my employer] that I have two kids. They helped me with my children's commitments, I would say. So, I can pick them up from***

[20] For further details of eligible projects, see the Home Office funding instructions: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-resettlement-programmes-funding-instruction-2022-to-2023. See further information on the Greater London Authority webpage: https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/migrants-and-refugees/english-esol-classes-london/english-language-esol-resettlement#childcare-147785-title

the school, and sometimes continue my admin. work from home to catch up on things I'm missing."

The value of a job that supports a good work-life balance extends to employees being able to dedicate time to personal and professional development goals outside of work. John, for instance, successfully completed a degree in engineering while working, and he noted the support he received from his employers:

> ***"[My employer gave] me the flexible time to go to university, not many companies will do that … sometimes I was coming when I want and leaving when I want just because they know I was going to classes, university, going to the lab."***

Interviewees from Hong Kong overwhelmingly appreciated their improved work-life balance in the UK, seeing this as a departure from the culture of overwork they were accustomed to. The culture of "clocking off" on time was pleasantly surprising, with many expressing relief at being able to shift away from working long hours. Christine, a BN(O) visa holder working as a senior finance administrator for a charity in West Yorkshire, told us:

> ***"I like accounting, but I don't like the working hours in Hong Kong. But here in the UK, there is so much difference. I can get off work on time, providing a very good work-life balance here. So, actually, yeah, I enjoy working here in the UK."***

KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

Having a secure job where their rights were protected was a priority for many interviewees. Those on zero-hours contracts also wished that the communication channels between them and their employers could improve to prevent misunderstandings about their work contracts. Interviewees felt it was the responsibility of their employers to communicate to them what their rights and entitlements were in the workplace.

Asked about trade union membership, most interviewees were not aware of the role of unions or worked for small organisations where employees were not unionised; in the case of one participant, they had underwhelming experiences of their union. This indicates that there is a greater role for unions to support new arrivals in understanding and advocating for their rights in the workplace.

6.
WHAT BARRIERS PREVENT PEOPLE FROM PROGRESSING IN THEIR CAREERS?

This chapter outlines the barriers identified by interviewees and stakeholders as preventing people from progressing in their career.

Understanding the obstacles and barriers that people face in their efforts to move into employment and progress in their career allows us to understand the root causes of challenges faced and indicates where policy and practice should be directed to improve outcomes for refugees and people with humanitarian leave.

BEING MADE TO ACCEPT "ANY JOB"

Reflecting back on their experiences, several interviewees described finding it difficult to secure work that they wanted, and a number spoke of not knowing where to start when it came to looking for work and completing application forms. Two key issues came up in relation to interviewees efforts to find work in the first place: being pressured or feeling that their only option was to take "any job", as opposed to a job they actually wanted; and not knowing how to re-enter professions they had previously worked in.

For those engaged with Jobcentre Plus, all bar one person had a negative experience, viewing the support from their work coach as unhelpful. In particular, they described feeling pushed into finding and accepting any job, even if it did not fit with their skill set or aspirations. Michelle, an asylum route refugee living in South Yorkshire and working as a care assistant, shared her experience:

> ***"Sometimes, you know, in the jobcentre, it is like they pressure you to get a job, get a job, get a job, so some end up getting worse jobs, and they don't complain about it. They go to work to put food on the table. But still, they will not be comfortable."***

Similarly, Artem, a Ukrainian man living in South Yorkshire, had not found any meaningful offers via the jobcentre:

> ***"Before I started this job, I came to the jobcentre. In the jobcentre, they didn't offer me any job, anything. And the same situation was with my other acquaintances."***

The pressure from Jobcentre Plus to take any job has been identified by IPPR researchers previously as a limitation of employment support.[21] They found that such a focus limits jobseekers' ability to focus on and achieve their long-term goals and noted that the model is based on the assumption that people have no intrinsic motivation to find work (Wilkes et al 2023). The threat of financial penalties for not accepting work adds to the sense that Jobcentre Plus is taking a more "stick" than "carrot" approach to employability support.

INSUFFICIENT RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

Navigating the under-recognition of existing qualifications and skills poses a significant challenge for new arrivals seeking employment in the UK. The translation of qualifications into the UK job market can be a stumbling block, undermining their ability to secure suitable opportunities. The pursuit of survival sometimes forces people into lowering their expectations. Some with substantial educational backgrounds and work experience may find themselves in positions where they are overqualified. While this strategy might lead to immediate employment, it carries the risk of devaluing the skills, qualifications and achievements acquired before arriving in the UK.

Lee, for instance, had been unable to continue working as an electrical engineer electrician in the UK due to his skills and qualifications not being recognised and as yet being unable, due to language barriers, to sit the test needed to qualify.

In discussions with interviewees, perspectives on skills mismatch varied. Some were willing to adapt, expressing a willingness to work in a new sector as long as they could secure a stable income.

However, for others, like Jason, the impact of skills mismatch on motivation in the workplace was evident. With over a decade of experience as an e-commerce manager in Hong Kong, having reached senior level, Jason faced challenges aligning his skills with suitable roles in the UK. When seeking positions matching his expertise at a mid-managerial level, he encountered barriers related to his lack of UK work experience. Conversely, pursuing more junior roles resulted in his being deemed overqualified. Jason shared his frustration, recounting instances where potential employers expressed concern about the likelihood he would leave for better opportunities:

> ***"I just needed a job … but they would say, 'We'd hire you, but you might leave at some time when you get a better opportunity.' I'd say, 'Oh, come on.'"***

Case study 6.1 illustrates a concerted approach to overcome barriers caused by the under-recognition of qualifications.

[21] Jobcentre support is driven by a model termed "Any job, Better job, Career" (or "ABC"), with people encouraged to apply for any role, before being supported to progress in work and ultimately their career. However, a study by IPPR found that there is little evidence the model works when it comes to job progression and that outcome measures do not take account of, for example, working conditions or scope for progression. While this brings problems for the population as a whole (see Wilkes et al (2023) for more details), this is particularly problematic for refugees and people with humanitarian leave, for whom working 'any job' might hold them back from building their English language skills or gaining experience in their preferred sector of work.

Case study 6.1: The ReStore programme

The ReStore programme is a new programme that creates pathways for refugees with healthcare backgrounds in their country of origin to become nurses within the NHS. Based in South Yorkshire, ReStore is in its pilot year and runs through the South Yorkshire Workforce and Training Hub.

The NHS previously had a national programme that helped refugee nurses; however, due to funding restrictions refugees were compelled to relocate to London, away from their homes, to complete the programme. This was difficult for some.

ReStore liaises with local hospitals and the voluntary sector in South Yorkshire as well as the Refugee Council and local jobcentres to provide structured support through a programme which offers English language support, training in computer skills, and the clinical skills training necessary to pass clinical exams to become registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

The programme is spearheaded by Blerta Ilazi, with the support of nurse Emma Matthews. Through Blerta's lived experience of going through the system herself, she was inspired to create pathways for other refugees with a nursing background to join the NHS.

Blerta emphasised the importance of offering pastoral support and trauma-informed education to the students on the programme:

"I have created a connection with all my students, which has allowed me to give trauma-informed care. We are flexible. If they have a bad day at home, they can join classes from home. The most important part, when they leave for the hospitals, we make sure that trusts know that these nurses have been through a lot, so they should be aware of how they are communicated with, and any interviews have been arranged according to their needs."

At the time of writing, ReStore is a bespoke programme, only found in South Yorkshire. It has so far supported eight people into nursing. When asked what the future of ReStore will be, Blerta hopes that the programme can support more nurses with more funding, not just in South Yorkshire but nationally, and that connections can be made with NHS trusts across the country. ReStore is now being used as a model of best practice for refugee integration in NHS employment.

INSECURE AND CASUALISED WORK

As mentioned in chapter 4, for some, job progression means moving into what they deem to be a "good job". For a job to be classified as "good", it should offer decent pay that allows people to provide for themselves and their families. However, one barrier that interviewees described as holding them back from this was having to take insecure and casualised work, which did not allow for a steady income. This was particularly an issue for those who were working via agencies, which were more likely to withhold or cancel work shifts at the last minute.

Lee, reflecting on his own experience, offered this advice to new arrivals:

"I would advise people to look for the company [as] they can provide a more stable job or secure job. Because for my bad experience, I was so confused, like the previous jobs, because the agency booked me [provisionally] for the five days in a week, so I can't [work anywhere else]. Like if I want to meet with some friends, I want to have a part-time job [as], like, [a] takeaway driver, [but] I can't. I have to stand by all the time, but they keep [making] cancellations, so it makes me so … [it was not] easy for me."

BACKGROUND CHECKS

For some interviewees, background checks posed a significant barrier to entering the workforce, hindering individuals from pursuing their preferred roles. Notably, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks presented challenges, particularly for those aspiring to work in healthcare or education settings. In the case of individuals seeking employment in security roles, delays in obtaining security clearance for their SIA licence extended over several months, leaving them unemployed or compelled to accept lower-paying positions.

Meeting paperwork requirements can be a formidable challenge for refugees and people with humanitarian leave who have fled conflict, as they may not have the necessary documents for relevant checks. Additionally, some countries lack data-sharing agreements with the UK government, making it nearly impossible to obtain the information required to assess an individual's record. This was a predicament faced by some interviewees on the ARAP scheme, where the fall of Kabul to the Taliban prevented support from the Afghanistan embassy, making it difficult, if not impossible, for interviewees to obtain needed documents.

Stakeholders highlighted alternative provisions, such as submitting fingerprints via the police instead of providing original identity documents. However, this approach can be stressful and potentially retraumatising, particularly for individuals who have experienced persecution from police and government authorities before coming to the UK.

Stakeholders also shared that some Hongkongers they worked with had expressed anxiety about the DBS process due to them having criminal records from participating in pro-democracy protests in their home country.

Ahmad's story: From teacher to trainee advisor

In 2022, Ahmad and his family arrived in the UK from Afghanistan via the ARAP scheme. He has an extensive background in teaching as well as in media and narrative training for the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. Ahmad currently works as an advisor at a North Yorkshire advice centre.

Teaching is Ahmad's true passion, but he has faced challenges entering the education sector in the UK. Despite being qualified and experienced, the primary barrier he encounters is the inability to obtain an enhanced DBS check.

"One of the problems that seemed to impede my efforts was my inability to get the enhanced criminal record check certificate, the DBS checks. Because one of the roles was for an online maths tutor role. I passed and cleared everything, [but] they asked for a DBS certificate. When I provided them with a copy of the basic certificate, they said it wasn't acceptable. I lost that job. Even now, when I try to apply for any teaching-related job, that

is one of the requirements that I know I can't meet. So that puts me off, and I don't even make any effort to apply for any job that would require that."

Escaping Afghanistan during the 2021 fall of Kabul brought challenges in obtaining official documents from the Afghan government for DBS checks. Ahmad, along with others facing hurdles related to DBS checks, believes employers should better understand the difficulties in obtaining these documents and offer alternative background check methods.

Currently working in an advice centre, Ahmad, though not teaching, is finding joy in his job:

"Whatever I do, I try to do it as passionately and as dedicated as I can. That's what makes it enjoyable and fun for me to do. Otherwise, you would not enjoy doing anything."

POOR WORKPLACE CULTURE

Unfortunately, some interviewees shared that they had experienced discrimination or the feeling of being "singled out" in their workplace. Some experienced covert racism. For example, Claire, a Hongkonger working in healthcare in North Yorkshire, felt she was the victim of racism from a colleague, who she described as being "quite nasty". When she reported the issue to her line manager, the inappropriate behaviour was addressed, leading to a resolution.

Similarly, Artem, a Ukrainian man employed in the food and drinks industry in South Yorkshire, shared how a colleague accused him of "taking his job".

At the intersection of discrimination and poor workplace culture, some interviewees found themselves in low-paid roles where every move was scrutinised. John described his past experience with a manufacturing company where he faced restrictions on breaks and had to seek permission to use his phone. Moreover, due to language barriers, he struggled to defend himself when blamed for errors on the assembly line:

> ***"Yeah, I struggled a bit. You know, something maybe happened, but it's not me who's done it. But because I couldn't explain well, they would assume that I've done it. So, everything was going against me. But I couldn't … I was trying my best to say it's not me, and I couldn't explain myself properly."***

These experiences resonate with the findings of a TUC (2022) report highlighting the challenges faced by individuals from minoritised backgrounds in the workplace. The report indicated difficulties in job progression, unequal shift assignments, and disproportionate accountability for things going wrong. Moreover, a survey of minoritised workers found that people were often denied promotion and their requests for training were refused.

LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKPLACE PROGRESSION

Some interviewees, especially those working in sectors such as manufacturing and retail or in small VCSE organisations, reported that there were few opportunities to progress in their workplace. For instance, Ahmad told us:

> ***"The current organisation I'm working with, it's a very limited and small organisation and I don't see any prospects, any chances for progress, a lot of progress here. It might expand in the future, as it has recently expanded already. It might expand and new roles might emerge in the future, but I don't see that happening right now. So, if I wanted to stay in my current role, maybe I would need to try to look for a similar role in a different organisation with better opportunities."***

For some, the trade-off between increased responsibility, stress and higher pay did not seem worthwhile. Michelle was offered a promotion in her workplace, but deemed the increase of 50p per hour not worth the added stress.

Some interviewees who had senior roles in their home country aspired to similar positions in the UK. Christine emphasised the need for UK employers to recognise and value the expertise and different forms of experience that people from outside the UK bring:

> ***"Maybe I think the employers, they should trust the people from Hong Kong more. Like, for example, if they are working at manager level in Hong Kong, they might not be able to get the same level of job here, but I think the people who are in a high position in Hong Kong, they could really provide a very high level of work. They could provide a very high level of work in the UK as well, so I think they should give them more opportunity in that aspect."***

In contrast, as mentioned earlier in chapter 4, Anna shared that she had positive experiences, expressing confidence that she would be supported in progressing and receiving additional training due to the positive relationship she has with her line manager.

7.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We now present recommendations derived from the research findings, the coproduced "good jobs" charter, and the insights from the stakeholder workshop. Building on successful examples that already exist within Yorkshire and the Humber, these recommendations serve to complement existing efforts and propose opportunities to further strengthen employment support for refugee and people with humanitarian leave in and beyond the region.

The recommendations are designed to reflect what refugee groups *need* to secure meaningful employment and address the *barriers* faced when trying to secure a job or when seeking opportunities for progression once employed. The recommendations are primarily focussed on the views of key stakeholders in the region, including employers, local authorities, and organisations contracted to deliver employability support.

While these recommendations aim to enhance the career prospects of refugees and people with humanitarian leave, it is important to note that, as we have outlined, the concept of job progression varied among individuals. Not every interviewee's primary goal was career advancement. Nonetheless, even for those who were satisfied in their current role, their position should still align with how they defined a decent, sustainable and fulfilling job – a *good* job.

The recommendations are categorised into four themes:

- creating meaningful opportunities for job progression
- fostering partnerships among key stakeholders
- raising awareness of the employment challenges for refugees and people with humanitarian leave
- delivering tailored progression support.

CREATING MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK PROGRESSION

The recommendations in this subsection focus on employers' responsibilities to ensure ongoing support within the workplace for employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave. This can be understood in two ways: first, ensuring that employees are content with their working conditions and the level of support being provided to them by their managers; and second, proactively identifying career development opportunities for employees and encouraging their progression in the workplace.

Recommendation: Employers should ensure their organisation provide a safe and welcoming environment for employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave.

Nearly all interviewees expressed the importance of working in an environment where they were treated fairly, felt a sense of belonging, and were supported by management. Moreover, a range of studies have shown that inclusive leadership in the workplace can foster a greater sense of belonging and help to reduce turnover among ethnically diverse employees (see Gajdzińska 2021 for a review of the literature). Promoting a welcoming workplace is therefore an important way in which employers can support staff wellbeing and retention.

Employers should ensure that a supportive and accommodating work environment is nurtured by considering some of the following actions:

- offering a comprehensive induction and onboarding process that accommodates requests for flexible working or other adjustments at work
- implementing a diversity, equality and inclusion framework to combat discrimination in the workplace
- offering support to become familiar with the workplace culture and meet other staff members across the organisation
- prioritising worker wellbeing and adopting a trauma-informed approach[22] to pastoral support and, additionally, implementing employment assistance programmes that give workers access to resources to address any mental health and wellbeing needs
- promoting a healthy work-life balance through offering flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options, flexitime, and policies like time off in lieu (known as "TOIL")
- providing clear and transparent information about rights and how to become a member of a trade union, and signposting to relevant union representatives in the workplace.

Recommendation: Employers should proactively create meaningful progression opportunities for employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave.

After employees have settled into their roles, employers should take proactive steps to identify avenues for their professional growth. This can be achieved through appraisal processes, quarterly check-ins, and fostering open dialogue on development needs.

Recognising that not all employees in these groups will operate on the same skills level is also vital. Employers should take steps to secure meaningful development opportunities, considering each employee's unique requirements. For instance, while some may benefit from language support, others may be ready for leadership positions and could benefit from leadership training.

[22] See, for instance, the NHS Education for Scotland guidance 'Transforming psychological trauma' which sets out how the Scottish workforce should, as a minimum, be 'trauma informed' https://transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot/media/x54hw43l/nationaltraumatrainingframework.pdf. This model has since been adopted by Manchester City Council who state it is their objective to implement an approved model of trauma-informed supervision to support the health and wellbeing of the workforce. https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s10614/ACE%20aware%20city.pdf

This approach would nurture a supportive work environment, enabling employees to expand their potential, paving the way for promotion, and ultimately enhancing their value in the workplace.

As discussed earlier, creating meaningful progression opportunities for employees is vital, including within smaller organisations that may lack the formalised learning and development structures found in larger employers. Leveraging networking opportunities, identifying low-cost or cost-free training courses, or creating mentorship schemes are some approaches smaller employers can adopt to prioritise the development needs of their employees.

Recommendation: Employers should actively support employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave with English language acquisition.

Supporting employees to learn English not only aids their integration into the workforce but also significantly eases their integration within the wider community. Feeling confident in English will contribute to their overall wellbeing and professional growth within the workplace. It could also help to facilitate more effective communication between colleagues across the whole workplace, bringing potential benefits for staff morale and productivity. Some actions that medium and large employers with multiple employees can take include:

- providing language training by offering on-site ESOL classes during work hours
- adapting and simplifying communication at work while employees are initially learning English – this can be done through using visual aids, encouraging clear and inclusive communication during meetings, and simplifying language in workplace manuals and training guides
- implementing a language exchange programme where native English-speaking colleagues can engage in "conversation clubs" at the workplace, which would also promote a supportive learning environment.

While all employers, including smaller organisations, should endeavour to offer flexible scheduling options to accommodate ESOL classes outside of work hours.

Recommendation: Employers should implement mentorship or buddying schemes in the workplace for employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave.

A well-designed mentorship programme or buddying scheme in the workplace for these employees could provide major benefits. Such schemes could help to cultivate a supportive working environment, aid inclusion into the workplace, and provide opportunities for professional development.

For a mentorship programme to be successful, employers should identify culturally sensitive mentors and tailor the programme to address the mentees' specific needs, such as those relating to language barriers, cultural differences, and challenges in adjusting to a new work environment. Mentors can also play a key role in advocating for their mentees' career development.

With effective mentorship, mentees are better placed to become confident English speakers and understand workplace norms and workers' rights. They could also acquire essential "soft skills" with effective mentoring, aiding progression in their role.

Recommendation: **Employers should recognise barriers faced by refugees and people with humanitarian leave when obtaining DBS checks and, where possible, offer alternative screening and background check measures.**

Employers should demonstrate flexibility and willingness to support employees who potentially face such barriers to ensure that, where possible and appropriate, they can still secure the position offered to them without being hindered by issues such as being unable to obtain DBS checks due to factors outside their control. Migration Yorkshire's toolkit, "The time is now: Bridging the gap between refugees and employers",[23] offers specific guidance on completing DBS checks. The resource outlines some alternative and additional measures employers could consider, such as:

- supervising the work of a new employee for the first few months
- extending the probation period
- acquiring a sworn oath from a local solicitor
- requesting character references
- helping with completion of a "no criminal record" self-declaration form

Recommendation: Establish an accreditation scheme for responsible employers of refugees and people with humanitarian leave.

For organisations that wish to demonstrate their commitment to positively integrating and supporting these groups in the workforce, an accreditation scheme could be rolled out across the region (and beyond). For employers, gaining accreditation as a "refugee-inclusive employer" could fall under their corporate social responsibility goals. The criteria for receiving accreditation under the scheme could include designing and implementing a strategy for addressing barriers to employment and progression for these employees and developing an inclusive and welcoming workplace for them.

This type of accreditation can take inspiration from the already successful Living Wage campaign, which invites employers across the UK to demonstrate a public commitment to fair pay, in exchange for which they obtain accreditation.[24] The scheme could be coordinated and led by VCSE organisations within the region.

Increasingly, such accreditations are a requirement for companies involved in government procurement and commissioning, which could be a potential lever for embedding these approaches across a range of organisations.

[23] This toolkit is available on Migration Yorkshire's website: https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/refugee-integration-yorkshire-and-humber/our-toolkits/time-now-how-bridge-gap-between-refugees-and-employers

[24] For more information on Living Wage accreditation, refer to the Living Wage Foundation's website: https://www.livingwage.org.uk/accredit#

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS AMONG KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The success of many of the proposed recommendations hinges on key stakeholders adopting a collaborative and coordinated approach to tackling the barriers refugees and people with humanitarian leave face with job progression. This would require a long-term commitment from key stakeholders to build and reinforce partnerships supporting employment for these groups.

Recommendation: Local authorities, the VCSE sector, employers, the DWP and employment support providers operating in Yorkshire and the Humber should strengthen existing partnerships or foster new partnerships to enhance the opportunities for job progression for refugees and people with humanitarian leave.

Given the multiple stakeholders involved in job progression for these groups, partnership working was recognised by stakeholders as essential for improving employment outcomes. Local authorities already hold experience in commissioning employment support services and therefore could be best placed to act as a single point of contact to bring together various stakeholders and facilitate collaborations.

Highlighted below are key examples of partnerships that have been suggested by stakeholders in the course of the project.

- The VCSE sector could collaborate with local businesses and local employment support providers to coordinate the delivery of training workshops on subjects such as language learning and trauma-informed support in the workplace.
- ESOL providers could directly engage with local employers to explore ways to deliver English classes in the workplace. ESOL providers could also guide employers on best practice for supporting employees' language acquisition.
- Jobcentres and other employment support providers that work within Yorkshire and the Humber could find opportunities to connect regionally and form stronger working relationships. In particular, a relationship between the Jobcentre Plus district manager and/or district progression lead with employment focused VCSE organisations, could be effective. This would allow staff with expertise on employment issues faced by refugees and people with humanitarian leave to share their learning across the region.
- Refugees and those with humanitarian leave could be actively involved In Local Skills Improvement Plans in the region.
- VCSE organisations and local colleges could directly collaborate to facilitate flexible ESOL provision outside of work hours.
- Local chambers of commerce, as well as trade and sector bodies, could play a role in hosting engagement between employers and VCSE organisations.

Partnerships allow for a more streamlined approach to supporting the specific needs of refugees and people with humanitarian leave in their job search. Each partner will have different expertise and resources to bring to the table, which can help to "plug gaps" in employment support. Partnership working expands the pool of opportunities available to people in these groups by leveraging networks and information across the sector. It bolsters capacity building by facilitating the exchange of best practice, resources and

expert knowledge, with the ultimate goal of facilitating meaningful employment opportunities where refugees and people with humanitarian leave can thrive.

Partners can also help to identify and respond to the bespoke needs of people on different refugee and humanitarian routes within the UK. As our research has found, cohorts differ with respect to their rights, entitlements and circumstances. The involvement of VCSE organisations working directly with communities on the ground can help to ensure that support with job progression is appropriately tailored to the circumstances of different groups.

Finally, partnership working can help with advocacy for broader structural policy changes to remove barriers facing refugee groups. Collective advocacy can lead to better employer practices and can potentially influence future regional and national government policy on job progression for refugees and people with humanitarian leave.

RAISING AWARENESS OF EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES FOR REFUGEES AND PEOPLE WITH HUMANITARIAN LEAVE

In earlier chapters, we emphasised the importance of raising awareness of refugee groups' distinct hurdles when trying to secure meaningful employment. Key stakeholders should learn more about these challenges to support job progression for people in these groups.

Awareness-raising measures should target employers across Yorkshire and the Humber and organisations providing employment support for these groups (including VCSE organisations, jobcentres, careers services and other providers). Such measures would allow stakeholders to gain a deeper insight into the challenges, promote changes to workplace culture, and strive for best practices in providing employment advice.

Recommendation: Awareness-raising workshops should be delivered to employers, jobcentre staff and organisations that provide employability support to refugees and people with humanitarian leave.

We recommend that awareness-raising workshops should be delivered across Yorkshire and the Humber. These should be targeted at employers to raise awareness about the diverse skills of employees in these groups, the rules around their right to work, and the potential approaches to supporting their job progression. They should also signpost employers to available resources and offer a forum where they can raise any questions or concerns about supporting refugees and people with humanitarian leave in their workforce. Employers that have supported people in these groups to progress in the workplace should be invited to share their experiences, including their successes and how they overcame challenges (for example, related to understanding and navigating the different rights and entitlements of refugee groups).

Parallel workshops should also cater for employment support providers. These workshops could educate on the specific needs and barriers refugees and people with humanitarian leave face in finding meaningful jobs and how they can be best supported. Workshops could be designed to focus on the particular circumstances of different cohorts – that is, people on the Ukraine schemes, those on the Afghan schemes, those on the BN(O) route, and those recently granted status after making an asylum application in the UK.

Finally, other types of supplementary training focussing on specific issues should be made available to benefit employers, work coaches in jobcentres, and other stakeholders that play a role in providing employment support. These should include how best to support the language needs of employees and jobseekers and what intentional trauma-informed support in the workplace looks like.

These workshops should be facilitated by professionals specialising in these subjects, including "experts by experience" (that is, refugees and people with humanitarian leave who have a wealth of experience of navigating the job market).

DELIVERING TAILORED PROGRESSION SUPPORT

The following recommendation focusses on how employment support providers can help refugee groups to secure jobs aligned with their skill set and facilitate their professional development.

Recommendation: Employment support providers – including VCSE organisations, local authorities, jobcentres and careers services at further education colleges and universities – should support the delivery of personalised job progression plans for refugees and people with humanitarian leave.

Employment support for these groups has traditionally placed a priority on facilitating entry into work. While this is understandable, our research in this report makes clear that greater focus is needed on ensuring that employees who are refugees or people with humanitarian leave can access "good jobs", which are secure, well paid and fulfilling, and reflect their skill sets and qualifications.

We therefore recommend that relevant stakeholders across the region work in partnership to support the delivery of personalised job progression plans for people in these groups who are currently in employment but wish to find better-quality work and are seeking help with their professional development. Plans should be tailored both to individual circumstances and to the particular immigration status and refugee route of the employee. The plans should be developed in collaboration with individuals and should identify short- and long-term goals, opportunities for progression, barriers and how to overcome them, and additional support options.

The REP – recently introduced by the Home Office and delivered by The Growth Company in Yorkshire and the Humber – provides an opportunity to test out this model of support for job progression. As discussed earlier in the report, the programme is available for a number of different refugee cohorts, including people granted refugee status on or after 28 June 2022 and those on the Afghan relocation/resettlement schemes. Eligibility is restricted to people who are not in full-time work (defined as at least 16 hours per week). We recommend that as part of the REP, some of the available funding should be used for a specific referral option for refugees and people with humanitarian leave who are currently in part-time work and looking for help with job progression. The REP would then offer a dedicated caseworker, who would work with individuals on a personalised job progression plan. Once piloted and evaluated, the case could be made to the Home Office for additional funding to roll out this approach to support job progression for these groups more widely, including for those in full-time work.

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