

# **The Untapped Workforce**

## **Realising the Contribution of Refugees to the Labour Market in Southampton**

**FINAL REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2004**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Report Prepared by CLEAR  
For the Southampton Employment Advisory Group**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report has been produced by CLEAR, a voluntary agency working with refugees and asylum seekers in Southampton.

The brief for this report was:

- To research the local refugee community organisations and identify the key issues facing refugees in accessing the labour market
- To make recommendations on ways that organisations may help to overcome some of the employment barriers facing refugees

## Summary

- Asylum seekers are people claiming a safe haven. They do not have the right to work and enter training schemes, but are able to volunteer.
- Refugees are asylum seekers whose claim for safe haven has been accepted, they do have the right to work and enter training schemes.
- Contrary to some news reports, research shows that Refugees make a significant contribution to the UK economy.
- Nationally, figures show that unemployment rate for refugees to be 64% compared with an average 4.7% in the UK. Pay rates are also significantly lower than average.
- It is estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 of Southampton's population (1.5 to 2%) are refugees or asylum seekers.
- The main countries of origin for this community are Iraq (1200), Afghanistan (800) Somalia (800), although the total community includes a wide range of countries speaking over 40 languages
- It is important to understand that there is a distinction between asylum seekers/refugees and economic migrants when planning employment and training services.
- Primary research carried out in Southampton in 2003 demonstrated that refugees are highly motivated to work and have a wide range of skills and experience, but if they find work at all, it is frequently below their skill levels.

- There was also found to be a lack of appropriate or sufficiently resourced information and advice services to move refugees into employment and training and an insufficient supply of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, help people back from integrating with the local community and engaging with work.
- The audit demonstrated the need for more skills training that is accessible to refugees to be integrated with English language teaching to improve chances of employment.
- Five case studies from Southampton of circumstances experienced by members of the refugee population are presented in this report. They describe the issues faced when: accessing education; setting up a business; job searching; and accessing employment appropriate to qualifications & experience, and contribute to identifying the barriers at local level.

The issues facing refugees are complex and so the report uses case studies to reflect the variable nature of refugees' experience. A summary of the problems and recommendations arising from the case studies is given in the table below.

<b>Person</b>	<b>Problems</b>	<b>Recommendations/ <i>Suggestions</i></b>
<b>Hashim Salah</b>	Unable to show evidence that had previously completed part of course.	<i>Guidance on how to complete UK course of study</i>
	Had not received notification of leave to remain - so unable to seek work.	<i>Assistance with following up confirmation of leave to remain</i>
	Concern that likely to be uprooted, linked to timing of IELTS.	<i>Support during period of considerable uncertainty to continue with plans.</i>
<b>Khadijeh Jamal</b>	Little support as a medical professional for recognition of qualification.	<i>Refugee Doctors programme has now been developed by NHS</i>
	Setting up a Business	<i>Not sure.</i>
<b>Alain Tchami</b>	Employed at lower level than qualifications and experience.	<i>Assistance with presenting skills and experience to employers.</i>
	Understanding application process	<i>Help with job search.</i>
<b>Hamid Mahmoud</b>	Classroom environment too challenging.	<i>Need to integrate ESOL with vocational training.</i>
	Unfamiliar with concept of transferable skills for work.	<i>Familiarisation with UK processes.</i>

<b>Joseph</b>	Difficulties with understanding the various claim systems resulting in loss of income and homelessness	<i>Help in understanding the systems for claiming entitlements.</i>
	Delays in waiting period for National Insurance number interview	<i>Support with chasing this interview up.</i>
	Distressed individuals required to complete application forms	<i>Help with completing an application form.</i>

- Locally the arrival of asylum seekers in 2000/01 has resulted in a previously unanticipated demand for English language classes and information about jobs and training. The development of services is ongoing.
- In 2002 a Refugee Training & Employment Group was established by Southampton City Council (Training & Employment Initiatives) to co-ordinate and develop services for refugees. The group takes a multi-agency approach and feeds into the City Council's Strategic Group for New Communities.
- As part of this research details of employment and training services have been compiled and will be published separately as a Guide for Refugees.
- Many of the services available are not specific to refugees with the exception of the voluntary organisation CLEAR and the BRITES projects. The BRITES & BRITES PLUS are two linked projects co-financed by the European Social Fund that have been set up to address the needs of refugees and the black and ethnic minority community in Southampton.
- A range of English language tuition at different levels is provided from a variety of sources, although difficulties associated with this include duplication of assessment procedures, a lack of beginner level ESOL classes that are combined with vocational skills, and withdrawal of ESOL provision once individuals find employment.
- A deficit of services to promote the skills and experience of refugees to employers who might be experiencing shortages in some areas has also been identified.
- A National refugee employment strategy is being developed by the Department for Work & Pensions, this has not yet been finalised.

UK wide, four significant barriers to employment that have been identified are English language skills deficit; employers' lack of familiarity with Home Office permission to work documents; refugees lack of familiarity with the UK labour market; problems with transference of overseas qualifications.

Recommendations to address these barriers include:

1. Provision of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages).
  2. Intensive work on employability skills
  3. Provision of training and work experience
- Two good practice examples in other areas include Oxfordshire County Council working with Refugee Resource and Jobcentre Plus to set up subsidised work opportunities under the New Deal Programme, and in Leicester a Refugees Employment Officer works independently with the community to ensure refugees skills and experience benefit the local economy.
  - At local level the report identifies specific recommendations for action by Hampshire & IOW Learning & Skills Council, Southampton City Council, Jobcentre Plus, Business Link Wessex, the Chamber of Commerce and other business support agencies. These relate to the development of ESOL provision, multi-agency working, services tailored to the needs of the refugee community and assistance to employers to provide information and good practice relating to the employment of refugees.