



## Big Conversation on what works in supporting Refugees living in Tyne & Wear to transfer, utilise, and build on their prior skills and experience

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011

10.30 – 15.00

Newcastle Arts Centre  
67 Westgate Road, Newcastle NE1 1SG

### Pre-Information for participants

To help progress our work on the day, we wanted to send you a summary of the additional and specific challenges that prior skilled refugees face in transferring those skills in the region that is their new home.

These come from:

1. research with the Regional Refugee Forum's membership
2. discussions held with employment support providers in Tyne & Wear who have specialist experience in supporting refugees into employment
3. desktop research of regional and national reports

This may not be the complete picture of course, but its just intended to help establish a baseline for the day. Our hope is that you will have time to read those factors listed here and reflect on how they may relate to your own work and experience.

**Complex and changing documentation and policy framework** creates uncertainty about eligibility amongst refugees, service providers and employers

**Difficulties in proving prior qualifications,** experience and references from outside UK. Access to NARIC and downgrading of equivalence of overseas qualifications

**Lack of UK references:** catch 22

**Attitudes and awareness** within support agencies and employers . Awareness of circumstances and special needs of refugees. Assumptions of lower ability. Prejudice. Discrimination

**Language barrier:** level of English language and access to skills related curriculum

**Reduced access &/or support from generalist service** lacking cultural competency skills or confidence in serving diversity. Seen as specialist support role.

**Weak Refugee networks, few peers or role models known:** lack of, incomplete, inaccurate information or misinformation circulating within the community. Reduced access to existing range of CIAG services, or sites for specific skills recruitment. No advice or advice to late, or wrong advice – no clear route map.

**Limited Reach into the refugee community** by CIAG services. Less referrals. And refugees 'fall through gaps' in a signposting system

**Access to impartial advice:** BME are heavily targeted for engagement targets. Often leads training not relevant to actual needs

**Not allowed to work /do business whilst waiting for asylum decision:** Can wait for years - Psychological impact of long term unemployment, loss of confidence and self-esteem. Progressive deskilling over time

**Volunteering:** types of opportunities available rarely relate to prior skills

**Negative public perceptions.** 'Benefits scroungers'. 'Drain on economy'. Affects confidence

Skilled is designed to identify what works, and what could work, on the ground. We are looking for what can be made possible through practice - practicalities and practical actions – rather than policy. So we will be asking ‘What does *good* look like?’ and for examples of good practice including transferability from other areas of service provision. This is the role of the Big Conversation on 25<sup>th</sup> January. Where actions are limited by policy, we will seek to engage with policy makers further on in the project.

The Regional Refugee Forum North East does not itself deliver services. It was established 10 years ago by the region’s refugee led community groups (RCOs) to generate and present their Collective Voice. So that as ‘consumers’ they can play their part not only in providing evidence to inform policy and practice, but also to ensure that RCOs can take practical steps to ensuring the communities they support can gain maximum benefit from mainstream and specialist service provision and so promote integration. This means increasing their own knowledge of agency roles, remits and programmes, and creating opportunities to build communications and relationships with a wide range of agencies.

So we look forwards to seeing you on the 25<sup>th</sup> and specifically to hear about your own experience of what works, and your own ideas about how things could work better.

Thank you



**Blocked from access to higher education for re-qualification or upgrading:** overseas fees whilst waiting for asylum decision, not allowed to work or access loans. Sometimes concessionary access to part-time courses, but takes many years to complete

**Value of Further Education qualifications?** Adult learning & skills courses rarely relate to prior skills and level is low. Vocational training seen as good, but only offered in limited areas e.g: hairdressing or customer call centre skills

**Transition to refugee status is a rapid upheaval:** 28 days ‘Move on’ involves finding new housing and orientating through new benefits system. Need time to understand possible career route maps

**Refugee attitudes to benefits:** some refugees not comfortable with signing on or attending JCP. Lose access to JCP support programmes

**DWP targets:** getting people off benefits. Payment by results on contracts. Refugees pulled out of career based preparation into work readiness programmes, and must prove seeking work. Focus on work rather than transfer of prior skills

**Lack of social and financial capital for new business start up.** UK bureaucracy and legislation. Access to business development support.

**Lack of familiarity with UK workplace culture:** difficulties in workplace, and with work colleagues, can lead to poor retention, and barrier to promotion/progress

**Value of work based opportunities:** but will refugees be allowed to do unpaid work placements or skills-related volunteering whilst meeting JCP requirements?

**Employers :** cost of training HR staff to recognise refugee documentation, achieve reach in their recruitment process and provide induction. If retention is low then Employer risks losing investment. Will volunteering or work placements fit with H&S policies?

**Pressure on refugees to support families** with remittances home. Pressure leads to underemployment

**Permanent underemployment:** refugees mostly enter low skilled low paid work unrelated to prior skills. Skills usually lost forever

## Macro-level change 2011 onwards:

*Spending cuts:* impact on support services continuation, focus and scope

*Economy:* impact on labour market. What will recovery look like

*Attitudes:* to 'migrants'

*UKBA:* delivery of new contracted services for asylum and refugee support from May 2012. Speed of decision making on asylum claims

*DWP:* begin Implementation of *Get Britain Working*, and new Work Programme contracts delivery from July 2011

*Big Society & Localism:* Impact of decommissioning of regional agencies; role of Local Enterprise partnerships; role of local authorities; role of 'Civil Society'

*New geography:* North East combined with Yorkshire & Humberside as single region for DWP and UKBA

*World events:* affecting numbers seeking asylum and dispersal into region

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[www.refugeevoices.org.uk](http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk)