

Assessing the refugee's application: How to prevent the difficulties?

The refugee and newcomer population are a good opportunity for companies but a challenge as well. As a matter of fact “successfully employing refugees demands more than a hiring decision”¹. Hiring a newcomer or refugee requires specific attention, a risk management approach and a plan of inclusion strategy to make the process as smooth as possible; many factors may impede successful working inclusion, such as mismatch between skills and role assigned, cultural differences, misunderstanding of work assignments, communication and relationship difficulties with the staff, etc. The first six months are generally considered as the most critical.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution when recruiting newcomers and refugees. Differences among companies such as size, sector, organization and structure, location necessarily affect the recruitment and on-boarding processes of newcomers. Hiring lower-skilled refugees in a large manufacturing company, high-skilled engineers in a medium high-tech enterprise or a medium-skilled technician in a small/micro firm require different approaches. So each organization has to consider the context of its workplace and workforce base as unique and special, thus defining specific and tailor-made pre-boarding and inclusion programmes. Each HR specialist/manager and employer is required to design specific initiatives and methods which can fit the specific needs of the workplace they are thought for. Nevertheless, some tips may be offered to any employers or recruiters who are considering hiring refugees or newcomers, in view of reducing a number of uncertainties and risks:

Key questions	Risks and actions
Legal certainty and administrative burden	<p>Risk: an insecure legal status may impact upon the working rights of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. State policy law defines the conditions under which refugees and newcomers are able to stay and work in the host country. Law changes are frequent and beyond the control of employers.</p> <p>What to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and verify the typology of residence permit owned by the newcomer, work entitlements, length of stay: does it permit him/her to work? How long is it valid? Is it renewable? Pay attention to time schedule for its renewal. • In case of doubts contact local stakeholders who are in touch with the newcomer (training agency, job centre, NGO, charity organization...). Legal framework frequently change.
Language and	<p>Risk: when the refugee candidate has a poor knowledge of the host country language, the job interview may fail, due to problems of communication.</p>

¹ Deloitte, A new home at work. An employer’s guidebook to fostering inclusion for refugee employees (2019).

communication	<p>What to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the interview verify if it is possible to use another vehicular language, e.g. English. • Verify if inside the company a worker with the same nationality of the candidate is available; if so use him/her as an interpreter. • Be open to proposals from the candidate to bring an interpreter for the job interview. • During the interview use printed documents translated in a language familiar to the candidate, which explain the tasks required by the position you are offering, procedures, time schedules, rules, etc. • Make sure the candidate has understood what your company request him, his/her rights and duties. • Do not take for granted information that may seem trivial, because the candidate probably does not know our labour market conditions, rules, habits. • Consider that your company is expected to invest in increasing his/her language skills. • Verify which language courses are available in your area.
Assessment of skills	<p>Risks: the uncertainty about the educational profile and professional abilities of candidates may lead to under/overestimation of newcomers' qualification and skills.</p> <p>Companies generally meet the following problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they do not speak (or speak little) the language of the host country • they lack documents proving their educational attainment and/or previous working experiences (providing references is rather impossible) • they come from countries which have different education systems, business environments and technological development <p>How to assess their skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that they cannot provide certain documents. • Use existing self-assessment tools, such as the <i>EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals</i>, available online in many languages, including Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Sorani, Somali, Tigrinya and Turkish with the possibility to see two languages at the same time on one screen, reducing language barriers. The tool has been intended for job counsellors and training advisors, but it can be used by a company as well during the job interview and assessment with the refugee/newcomer candidate. It helps to detect the candidate expectations, skills (language, digital, professional, basic, transversal and those acquired outside the workplace). • Submit a prepared test with technical or specific questions related to typical situations in a context (e.g. garage, restaurant kitchen...). The German site https://www.myskills.de/en/ includes examples of downloadable tests for eight professions¹ in English language. • Ask candidates to provide references from previous traineeships in the host country, testimonials or references from local stakeholders (mentors,

	<p>trainers, social workers, local entrepreneurs ...). Employers providing internships should be encouraged to give the candidate references; this practice may help other entrepreneurs during the recruitment phase in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the training agency or schools where s/he attended the language course or other training programmes to ask for references. • Put the candidate in situation where s/he can demonstrate her/his skills (practical tests, simulation situations, craft tests). • Use the pre-recruitment workplace assessment (in France it is called <i>EMTPR évaluation en milieu de travail préalable au recrutement</i>, in Italy it is called <i>prova mestiere</i>): the candidate is evaluated for several days on his/her workstation, in order to check the concordance between the work performed and the tasks requested by the company. During the assessment the individual maintains his/her status of jobseeker and maintains the social protection provided by the job centre or training agency; after the assessment the application can then be validated or not. • Use the traineeship and work probationary period as a further phase of the selection process to observe and assess the skills of the refugee/newcomer. While the traineeship is not an employment contract yet, the work probation period is included in an employment contract; at the end of the period the employer can confirm or terminate the worker.
<p>Cultural background</p>	<p>Risks: cultural differences impact on both the initial job interview and further on-boarding phase. Not taking them into account may generate confusion, mistakes in evaluation, tensions in relations, prejudices and even conflicts between persons.</p> <p>What to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider that cultural practices or traditions of the refugee may not align with your expectations. Be aware of key cultural differences. • Be aware that for some people with different culture it is difficult to say no; so do not ask yes/no questions and use open-ended questions; check for understanding with clarifying questions; use the technique of rephrasing during conversation, i.e. restating the information received in your own words without changing the meaning. • Be aware that for some people with different culture it is difficult to say “I have not understood”; so take care to ask them to show you how they intend to carry out the task assigned. • Be sure that migrant’s cultural beliefs does not make him/her uncomfortable in carrying out certain tasks, e.g. handling pork meat, alcohol, etc.. Do not assign him/her to positions and tasks which may be in contrast with his/her cultural or religious background. • Be aware that your company may be asked to allow time off for religious holidays or accommodate holiday needs. • Be patient to explain the dress code and code of conduct required by the company in each context or situation, taking a more flexible approach to account cultural differences among refugee population: they need time to learn and adapt.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient to explain and be open about your business culture (e.g. emphasize the importance of arriving on time and dress code for professional appointments). • Be careful not to use a too direct and assertive verbal communication style (it might be considered too aggressive by some cultures used to a more passive form of communication). • Understand that no eye contact is not a lack of respect or confidence or sign of dishonesty (some cultures do not practice direct eye contact).
Mobility	<p>Risks: refugees and newcomers have limited mobility due to financial constraints or lack of a valid driver's license. They rely on public transportation.</p> <p>What to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure they can easily reach the workplace if public transportation is scarce in your area or if work sites are mobile in your company (are any colleagues available to take them to the workplace? May carpool or bicycle be a solution?). • Put the newcomers in contact with co-workers to facilitate their access to the work site and social integration. • Explore creative solutions.
Working environment and team readiness	<p>Risks: not all working teams are ready to welcome refugees; some employees may feel unsure of how to interact with them; someone may be reluctant thinking of the supplementary tasks they are required to work with them; some other may be afraid of refugees receiving special treatment; managers and supervisors in particular may feel uncomfortable not knowing what to expect from them, how to support them, how to manage cultural differences. Refugees encounter language difficulties and face new experiences, habits, behaviours, culture. So if the working environment has not been prepared carefully, the situation may become out of control leading to misunderstanding, discomfort and tensions.</p> <p>What to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself to what extent is your team/staff ready to welcome and include refugee workers. • Think in advance of who may act as tutor or “buddy” for the refugee inside your organization (this role requires high social and communication skills). • Think of the fact that refugees may have different cultural and religious backgrounds and of possible impact on the working organization: may a change of shifts be necessary? (Muslim workers may work on Saturdays and Sundays, maybe not on Fridays), has the company got a room which may be devoted to prayer moments during the day? If not, may a break room be dedicated to prayer services for time slots blocked? • Involve your “buddy” and key staff in training on how to support refugees. • Engage managers, responsible and staff in understanding the rationale behind hiring refugee (why does your company need them?).

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involve other refugee or immigrant employees, if there are at the company, to interact with the newcomer because interaction among pairs can speed up the integration process and learning of skills and language needed for the workplace.• Provide a welcome kit for the refugee with clear information on company policies and work habits.• What about the company administrative and organization paperwork? Think of translating administrative and emergency information, as well as signals on health and safety at work and use pictures to make it easier to be understood. |
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