

## Looking for employees with high productivity and low turnover? Hire a refugee.

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‘What I've learned is that there's an enormous appetite for understanding other cultures, for working among people who are not the same as you. Fresh perspectives, other ideas, skills, capabilities that may not be part of your everyday universe, that can really add value to you as an individual, not just at work, but also at home.’ - *Harriet Pope, Workforce Inclusion Leader, IKEA*

Hiring a refugee is a smart business decision. That's what the employers involved in our research into refugee employment reported. There are of course also very good social reasons for recruiting refugees – including increasing diversity within organisations, expanding cultural awareness, and contributing to achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10 (promoting decent work, economic growth, and reducing inequalities).

But the bottom line is refugees make great employees: our [previous research](#) shows they have higher than average productivity compared with fellow workers at the same level, and they are loyal employees with lower than average turnover rates. In a recent survey of 26 US companies, [73% reported lower turnover](#) for refugee staff, which was also verified by the Australian employers we interviewed.

Considering this, we need to confront the reasons why refugee employment rates are lower than the average: after two years of arriving in Australia, only [a quarter of refugees](#) are employed.

### Tackling Common Misconceptions

Let's deal with the misconceptions about hiring refugees.

These include a lack of qualifications and skills, language barriers, a limited cultural fit, perceived security risks, and difficulty integrating into the local job market.

Yet the reality is often rather different.

Many refugees possess valuable skills, education, and work experience gained in their home countries. While there may be challenges in recognising their credentials, they are often resilient and motivated. Moreover, they can adapt to new environments and learn quickly.

‘One thing we've really learned, working with people who come from a refugee background, is the diversity of opinions and ideas. That's something that really helps us get a full picture when we're dealing with complicated problems. To ensure that we can come out with the solutions that we really need that make our organisation much stronger.’ - *Tim O'Connor, Impact Director, Amnesty International*

Although language proficiency can initially pose a challenge for integration into the workforce, many refugees are committed to improving their communication skills through education. Organisations can also provide language support and training programs to enhance workplace integration.

We recognise that some organisations assume refugees may not fit well into the existing company culture. However, embracing diverse perspectives, experiences, and cultural backgrounds can lead to innovation, creativity, and increased adaptability. Organisations that foster an inclusive environment can create a sense of belonging for refugees and other employees alike.

*'For me, inclusive leadership is about creating a space where people are enjoying themselves and having fun. And that just makes them more engaged, and our deliverables are better because of it. Your retention is better when people are happy.' – Ursula Lepporoli, Partner, KPMG*

Despite assumptions that hiring refugees may pose security risks, all refugees undergo a thorough screening process before being granted refugee status, and are subject to the same legal obligations and background checks as any other employee.

Organisations that specialise in refugee employment can guide businesses through the recruitment process and identify suitable candidates. These providers can support the integration of refugees into the workplace, helping them build professional networks and find long-term employment opportunities. [IKEA's Refugee Workforce Inclusion programme](#) is an excellent example of how this can be done well.

It is crucial to base employment decisions on individual merit rather than preconceived stereotypes. By dispelling these misconceptions, organisations can recognise the untapped potential of refugees and create pathways for their meaningful employment.

*'I'm proud of what I'm doing. It's not just a job for me. I'm passionate about what I do. And working for a human rights organisation was a dream for me. So where I am now, I am very happy... I know that I'm doing something meaningful.' – Zaki Haidari, former refugee and Refugee Rights Campaigner, Amnesty International*

## The Benefits of Hiring Refugees

There are numerous practical benefits for employers who hire refugees in their organisation.

Hiring refugees opens up a wider talent pool, with many bringing unique skills, experiences, and perspectives shaped by their diverse backgrounds. Their resilience and adaptability, honed through surviving displacement and rebuilding their lives, make them valuable assets who foster innovation and creativity within their teams.

Cultural diversity enriches workplaces by promoting a vibrant and inclusive environment. Refugees bring new customs and perspectives, that can improve problem-solving, decision-making, and collaboration within teams, leading to a more dynamic and competitive organisation. Having refugees on board enhances cultural competence, preparing employees for an interconnected global marketplace.

Employee morale and engagement can be positively impacted by hiring refugees, since it demonstrates an organisation's dedication to social responsibility and inclusivity. Employees who

witness this are more likely to feel proud of their workplace and its values. This sense of pride can translate into increased motivation, loyalty, and productivity. Furthermore, interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds fosters empathy and cultural understanding among employees, contributing to a harmonious work environment.

Refugees can facilitate access to new markets, networks, and customers, since they often maintain connections with their home countries and communities abroad. Refugees offer valuable insights into emerging economies and consumer trends, helping businesses cater to diverse customer bases and gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly interconnected business landscape.

A commitment to social responsibility resonates with consumers, employees, and other stakeholders, bolstering an organisation's image and brand. It aligns the business with the values of inclusivity, equality, and compassion, attracting socially conscious customers and talent.

[Recent research](#) indicates that 64% of millennials factor in a company's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) when deciding where to work, 88% find their job more satisfying when they are given the opportunity to positively impact social and environmental issues, and 83% feel more loyal to a company that helps them to achieve their social and environmental goals.

Knowing your 5Ws: A Simplified Approach to Hiring Refugees

Our team has developed a brief checklist – [the 5Ws](#) (*who, what, when, where, and why*) – to help employers streamline their thinking around hiring refugees.

There are many other [valuable resources](#) available for employers. [Service providers](#) specialising in refugee employment can help employers validate their 5Ws of hiring refugees. They offer guidance, support, and simplify the overall experience, making it easier for organisations to engage in refugee recruitment.

Socially responsible, strategically sensible

Hiring refugees is not only a socially responsible action but also a strategic decision that brings numerous benefits to businesses, communities, and sustainable development. By recognising the potential of refugees, organisations can tap into a diverse talent pool, foster innovation, enhance cultural diversity, and increase employee morale and engagement. Moreover, through refugee employment initiatives, businesses can directly contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10, promoting decent work, economic growth, and reducing inequalities.

'I see the difference that it makes, the impact that it has in someone's life, in an organisation. In a team. Why wouldn't you do it?' – *Harriet Pope, Workforce Inclusion Leader, IKEA*

## Bios

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