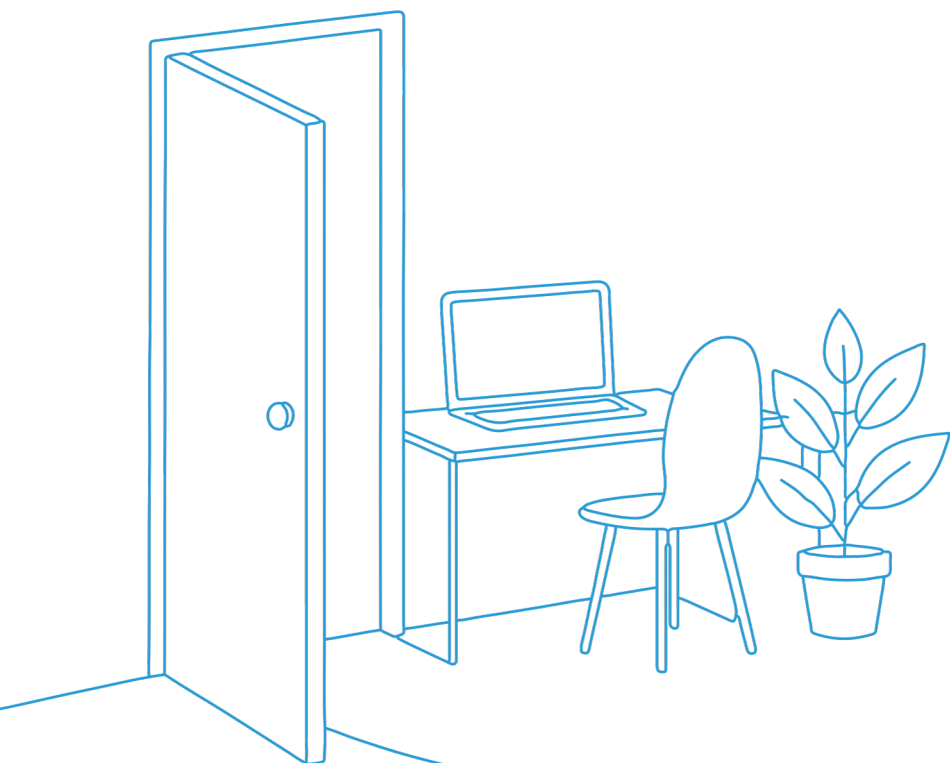


UNLOCKING THE TALENT OF WOMEN WITH REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS IN WALES

A practical guide for **women with refugee backgrounds** and **employers**

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Every workplace is looking for talent

Imagine interviewing someone who has:



Built a successful career Managed



people and projects Solved



complex problems Speaks three



languages



Rebuilt her life in a new country

Would you hire them?

Many employers would.
What they don't always realise is...

She's already in Wales

Every day, women with refugee backgrounds across Wales are ready to study, work and contribute. They bring experience, resilience and determination. Yet too often, those skills remain hidden behind recruitment processes that weren't designed with forced displacement in mind.

This toolkit is about changing that.

It's for employers who want to attract talented people and create more inclusive workplaces.

It's also for women with refugee backgrounds looking to take the next step into employment or education.

Together, we can unlock talent that is already here.

Why this matters

Every employer is looking for good people. Many women with refugee backgrounds tell us they want the opportunity to use their skills and build their future in Wales.

Those two things should it together.

Too often they don't. Not because talent is missing. But because recruitment systems don't always recognise it.

One woman told us:



“I don't have a chance to show my skills.”

Another said:



“I had a lot of ambition. I put my ambition aside.”

Imagine what Wales could gain if every talented woman had the chance to contribute.

What we learned

We spoke to women with refugee backgrounds rebuilding their lives across Wales. We listened to employers too.

Both groups wanted the same thing.

Opportunity

- women with refugee backgrounds wanted the chance to demonstrate their skills
- Employers wanted practical ways to recruit more inclusively

Neither group wanted complicated solutions. They wanted confidence. And that's exactly what this toolkit is designed to build.



The opportunity lens

Every CV tells a story. Sometimes we just need to read it differently.



WHAT WE OFTEN SEE



A gap in a CV



Limited English



Overseas qualifications



No UK experience



WHAT COULD ACTUALLY BE TRUE



Years lost through conflict, not a lack of experience



Someone who speaks several other languages/ learns languages quickly



A qualified professional whose skills haven't yet been recognised



Global knowledge and fresh perspectives

Changing the question changes the opportunity.

Inclusive recruitment isn't about lowering standards. It's about widening the way we recognise talent

Employers are ready

The employers we spoke to weren't saying **no**. They were saying...



They asked practical questions:

- How do right-to-work checks work?
- What if qualifications are from another country?
- How can we support someone who has experienced trauma?
- Where can we go for advice?

One employer summed it up perfectly:



Three doors every employer can open

Creating a more inclusive workplace doesn't always require big changes. Often, it's about looking at familiar processes with fresh eyes.

The employers we spoke to wanted practical ideas they could put into action. These three doors are a good place to start.



DOOR ONE

See potential, not paperwork



DOOR TWO

Design jobs that unlock talent



DOOR THREE

Create belonging, not just onboarding

DOOR ONE

See potential, not paperwork

Door One

See potential, not paperwork

Traditional recruitment wasn't designed with forced displacement in mind. Many women with refugee backgrounds have gaps in their employment history.

These often reflect conflict, caring responsibilities or time spent rebuilding their lives, not a lack of skills or ambition.

The question isn't:



“Where have you worked?”

It's:



“What can you do?”

Employers who recruit for skills rather than perfect CVs often discover talented candidates who would otherwise have been overlooked. Research shows that skills-first recruitment can widen talent pools without lowering standards.

A different way of thinking

Instead of asking candidates to prove where they've worked, create opportunities for them to demonstrate what they can do.



Try this:

- ✓ Use competency-based interview questions
- ✓ Include a practical task or work sample where appropriate
- ✓ Focus on transferable skills rather than continuous employment
- ✓ Accept alternative references from colleges, voluntary organisations or community groups
- ✓ Review whether UK work experience is genuinely essential for the role



Top tip - Ask yourself

If this candidate had gained exactly the same experience in Wales instead of another country, would I see it differently?

DOOR TWO

Design jobs that unlock talent

The best employers don't ask:



“Will people fit our jobs?”

They ask:



“How can our jobs attract the best people?”

Small barriers can discourage talented people from applying.

That might be:

- Fixed working patterns where flexibility is possible
- Rotas published at short notice
- Interviews at times that clash with caring responsibilities
- Asking for perfect English when it isn't essential
- Designing roles around tradition rather than outcomes

Many of the changes that benefit women with refugee backgrounds also benefit parents, carers, disabled people and other talented candidates.

In fact, organisations that embrace flexible and inclusive job design often see higher staff retention, greater employee satisfaction and access to a wider talent pool.

A quick design check

Before advertising a vacancy, ask yourself:

- Which requirements are essential
- Which are simply how we've always done it?
- Could some hours be flexible?
- Could rotas be more predictable?
- Could some tasks be completed remotely?
- Could training happen during paid working hours?

You don't need to redesign every role. Sometimes one small change is enough to help the right person apply.



Remember

The goal isn't to design jobs for women with refugee backgrounds. It's to design jobs that allow the best people to succeed.

DOOR THREE

Create belonging, not just onboarding



Recruitment doesn't end when someone accepts the job. It begins.

People decide whether they belong long before they've finished probation. Those first conversations, introductions and check-ins shape confidence, wellbeing and long-term success.

Starting a new job can feel daunting for anyone. Starting a new job in a new country, while learning a new workplace culture and often a new language, brings extra challenges.

The employers who retain diverse talent don't leave belonging to chance. They design it.

What good looks like:

Think beyond induction.

Think about how someone feels on their first day, their first week and their first three months.



Research shows that mentoring, buddy schemes and supportive management improve confidence, retention and progression for employees with refugee backgrounds.

Think about this:

Being able to do the job matters. Feeling that you belong can matter just as much when it comes to staying and progressing.

Try this:

- ✓ Explore pairing new starters with a workplace buddy
- ✓ Schedule regular informal check-ins during the first three months
- ✓ Explain workplace culture rather than assuming everyone already knows it
- ✓ Explain what is appropriate and clarify boundaries within your organisation
- ✓ Provide clear written guidance alongside verbal instructions
- ✓ Encourage managers to check understanding without making assumptions
- ✓ Celebrate different languages, cultures and experiences as strengths within your team
- ✓ Invest in trauma-informed management so leaders understand how past experiences may influence confidence, communication or wellbeing

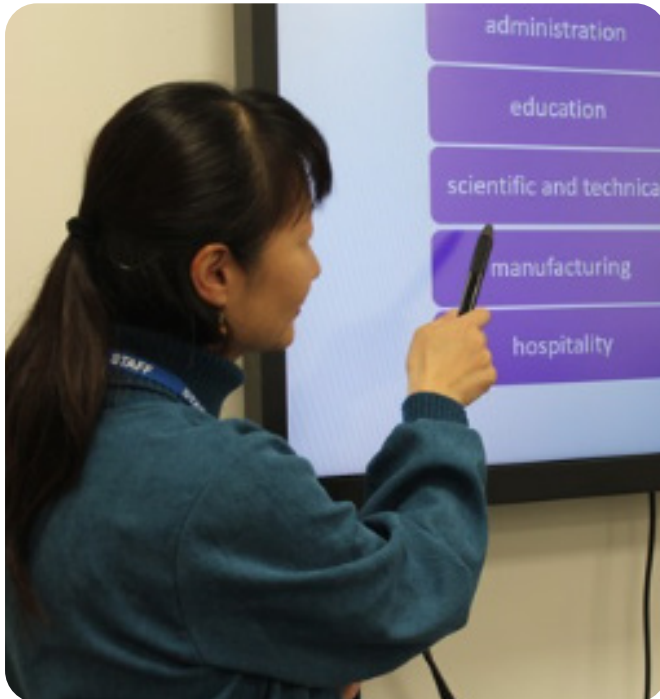


THE FIVE-MINUTE TALENT CHECK

Before you advertise your next vacancy, pause for five minutes.

The strongest recruitment processes don't just identify the best candidates.

They remove unnecessary barriers that might stop talented people from applying in the first place. Use these questions to sense-check your recruitment process.



Ask yourself:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Are we measuring someone's potential, or simply the opportunities they've had? | ☐ Can your candidates have the interview questions in advance? |
| ☐ Do our interviews allow candidates to demonstrate what they can do, or simply how well they perform in a traditional interview? | ☐ Would every candidate feel they belong here from their first interaction with our organisation? |
| ☐ Have we clearly explained the recruitment process and what candidates can expect? | ☐ Do you offer a pre-interview call with the hiring manager? |



Pause



Remove
barriers



Sense-check

FOR EMPLOYERS

What employers asked us for

Employers didn't ask for lengthy reports.

They asked for practical help.

They wanted:

- Training
- Step-by-step guidance
- Case studies
- Trauma-informed advice
- Local contacts
- Someone to ask when they're unsure

That's exactly what we're here to provide



Top tip

Don't assume someone has experienced trauma or needs additional support. Ask what helps them do their best work, just as you would with any employee.

How we can help

We can work with you to:

- Build inclusive recruitment pathways
- Deliver refugee awareness training
- Answer questions about employment and right to work
- Connect you with talented candidates
- Provide ongoing advice as your organisation grows

***Sign up for our
newsletter here***



FOR WOMEN WITH REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS

Your experience matters

Starting again doesn't mean starting from nothing. You already have:

- ✓ Skills
- ✓ Knowledge
- ✓ Experience
- ✓ Resilience
- ✓ Strength

Those are qualities employers value.

Three steps you can take today

Know your strengths

Think about everything you've done before.

- Paid work
- Volunteering
- Looking after family
- Running a business
- Studying

These all build valuable skills.

Keep learning

Learning English, volunteering or studying can all help you build confidence and local connections.

You don't have to do everything at once.

Ask for support

You don't have to rebuild your future on your own. Enrol with the Welsh Refugee Council's Education and Employability Programme.

You will receive help with:

-  CV writing
-  Interview preparation
-  Finding volunteering opportunities
-  Job searching
-  Understanding qualifications
-  Finding English classes
-  Exploring education and training

Where to find support?

Whether your goal is finding a job, studying at college or simply feeling more confident in everyday life, there are free ways to improve your English across Wales.

At Welsh Refugee Council, we'll help you find the learning that's right for you.

Talk to us about:

- ESOL classes
- Adult Learning Wales
- Local colleges
- Community language groups
- Learning that fits around your family, work and other commitments



Learn something new at your own pace

OpenLearn offers hundreds of free online courses.

Study at home, in the library or on your phone. There are no entry requirements, and you don't need perfect English to begin.

Choose a subject, scan the course QR code and get started.



Top tip

Start small. Even 20 minutes a day can help you build your skills and confidence.

KEEP LEARNING FOR FREE

Your future starts with learning.

The Open University's OpenLearn platform offers hundreds of free online courses designed to help you build confidence before you start college or university, or while you're studying.

OUR RECOMMENDED OPENLEARN COURSES



I want to improve my English

🕒 24 hours 📊 Introductory



English: Skills for learning

🕒 24 hours 📊 Introductory



Reading and note taking

🕒 12 hours 📊 Introductory



First steps into higher education

🕒 6 hours 📊 Introductory



Essay and report writing skills

🕒 8 hours 📊 Introductory



Presenting information

🕒 8 hours 📊 Introductory



Revision and examinations

🕒 6 hours 📊 Introductory



Need help accessing a course?

Speak to our Education and Employability Team.



What can I learn?



English and communication



Work and employability



Digital skills



Health and wellbeing



Money and budgeting

KEEP LEARNING FOR FREE



Studying can feel **exciting**



It can also feel a little **overwhelming**



That's completely **normal**

The Open University's OpenLearn platform offers hundreds of free online courses designed to help you build confidence before you start college or university, or while you're already studying.



Study **wherever** you feel comfortable



Take **your** time



Learn at **your** own **pace**



READY FOR **YOUR NEXT STEP?**

Practical support to help you move towards work.

Your skills matter

Finding work in a new country can take time, but you don't have to do it alone.

We can help you understand your options, build your confidence and take practical steps towards employment.

We can support you with:

- CVs and job applications
- Interview preparation
- Finding suitable vacancies
- Volunteering opportunities
- Training and employability programmes
- Understanding your employment rights



Get opportunities sent to you

Sign up for information about jobs, training, workshops, events and volunteering opportunities.

Scan the QR code to join our free employment email service.



Need more support?

Speak to our Education and Employability Team.

Can I use my existing qualifications?

Your qualifications and experience may still be valuable in Wales.

We can help you understand what they mean in the UK and explain possible next steps, including qualification recognition or professional registration.

Don't assume you need to start again.

ONE QUESTION...

If someone has **rebuilt their life...**

learned a **new language...**

raised a **family...**

and still wants to **contribute...**

What could they bring

to your organisation?



Women with refugee backgrounds already have skills, experience and ambition.

What they need is a fair opportunity to show them.





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