Deakin researchers have launched a first-of-its-kind guide to help Australian employers hire refugees and asylum seekers.

The guide forms the flagship project of Deakin University’s Centre for Refugee Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education (CREATE). Since 2019, CREATE’s research has examined better ways to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into the Australian workforce.

The 10-page Guide for Employers: Supporting Access to Employment for People from a Refugee or Asylum-Seeking Background, helps simplify processes for different visas and explains the work rights of potential employees with a refugee or asylum-seeking background.

Building opportunity and diversity in the workforce

The practical, multi-beneficial guide will ultimately contribute to reducing workforce exclusion and establish a more diverse, highly skilled workforce by highlighting the value of hiring people from refugee backgrounds to potential employers.

By providing clear, concise guidance around what employers need to know when employing a person from a refugee background including visas, how-to-employ instructions, benefits of diverse employment, and case studies the guide aspires to reduce unemployment in one of Australia’s most vulnerable employment groups.

Reducing barriers on both sides

The daily barriers and challenges faced when acclimatising to a new country is well-known. Add in a rapidly changing employment environment and unfamiliar hiring processes, and people from a refugee background can find securing employment challenging.

CREATE Director Professor Alexander Newman – an expert in organisational behaviour, leadership and entrepreneurship – says by reducing the barriers to employers, refugees and asylum seekers have a better chance of gaining employment.

“Many organisations assume hiring refugees is fraught with challenges and barriers, when, in fact, the large majority of people from a refugee and asylum seeker background are entitled to work in Australia.”

In addition to providing important information about work rights and visa requirements, the Guide is supported by CREATE’s extensive repository of activities that target both organisations and employees, allowing for a more streamlined, inclusive onboarding process.

Key Facts

- Deakin researchers have launched a unique guide to encourage employers to hire refugees or people from an asylum-seeking background.
- The guide aims to reduce workforce exclusion and establish a more diverse, highly skilled workforce.
- Evidence shows employees from a refugee background are loyal, remaining with their employers longer than the general population.
- CREATE was awarded the 2020 Australian Financial Review Award in the Equity and Opportunity category for their variety of research projects. This included a series of free refugee careers clinics based on a mentee-mentor model.
- To ensure a wide array of expertise, the research team collaborates with multiple universities and organisations in areas such as workplace integration of refugees, organisation behaviour and psychological ethics.

The innovative research being undertaken by CREATE was recognised in 2020’s Australian Financial Review Awards Equity and Opportunity category. From research-based employment programs to career clinics to higher education and employment guides, CREATE’s research is industry- and world-leading in supporting people from refugee backgrounds to rebuild their careers.
Drawing on primary evidence

Significantly, CREATE’s guide draws on the voices of successfully employed people from refugee backgrounds to showcase the positive impact employment has had on their lives. One such person was Ali (a pseudonym) who fled Afghanistan and applied for protection in Australia. He remains on a bridging visa with full work rights, as his application is yet to be assessed.

Ali says that even with his experience and University qualifications, he was never shortlisted for an interview. Common feedback was that he had no local experience. With CREATE’s support, he was successful in gaining employment:

“I remember that first day...everyone was so fast. I was a bit stressed out and confused of how to learn everything. But thanks to all your support and help, I have learned a lot, and this makes me feel more confident.”

This firsthand feedback provides a valuable tool for helping organisations enhance their understanding of the barriers faced by refugees in seeking employment, and assists in ensuring meaningful employment opportunities for those from a refugee background.

“We hope this guide can highlight practical steps that any Australian organisation can take to employ those recently arrived in Australia, either as humanitarian migrants or those who have sought asylum on our shores,” Professor Newman says.

The guide is currently used by over 30 community sector organisations with a high online access rate of about 200 views each month. Beyond the numbers, Professor Newman says the benefits of employing people from a refugee background are significant.

“People with a refugee background often bring new ideas and perspectives into the organisation too. Research on diversity suggests that more diverse workplaces typically have higher levels of innovation, productivity and staff retention.”

Professor Alexander Newman

Grants and Funding

This work was supported by the Australia Research Council with $207,287 in research funding.

Collaboration

Collaborators include The Uniting Asylum Seeker Program, Career Seekers and The Salvation Army Asylum Seeker Services.

More Information

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