

A Guide for Employers in Sweden

Supporting Access to Employment for People
with Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Status



CREATE

Centre for Refugee Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education



FORTE

Swedish Research Council for
Health, Working Life and Welfare

CGM
CENTRE ON
GLOBAL
MIGRATION

Contributors

Karen Dunwoodie
Bismillah Hakimi
Luke Macaulay
Alex Newman
Andreas Diedrich
Lucy Taksa
Alice Johansson
Andrea Spehar

© Copyright 2023

This work may be reproduced for private study, research or educational purposes as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 of the Commonwealth of Australia. Commercial copying, sale, hiring or lending is prohibited.

Apart from the permitted uses as state above, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process without the written permission of Deakin University and the University of Gothenburg. This work has been funded by Deakin University and the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE) (Grant no. 2016-07205). Any permitted reproduction must include a copy of this copyright notice and must acknowledge the funding by Deakin University and FORTE.

We would like to acknowledge Monash University, Australian National University and Career Seekers for their contributions to the original Australian research which led to the first edition of the Australian employer's guide.

Please note this guide provides general information and is not intended to and does not constitute legal advice regarding the employment of those with refugee or asylum-seeking status.

The law, particularly in relation to employment and the legal status of refugees in Sweden and abroad, is complex and subject to change based on government policy and legislation. The particular circumstances must be considered in every case and for that reason legal advice should be sought. The authors disclaim any and all liability arising from reliance on the contents of this report however caused.

Printed October 2023

Table of contents

- 03 Why a guide for employers?
- 04 What employers need to know
 - Permit categories
 - Reception of Asylum-Seekers Act (LMA)
 - Temporary Residence Permit (Refugee Status)
 - Temporary Residence Permit (Subsidiary Protection Status)
 - Permanent Residence Permit
- 05 Confirming eligibility to work
- 06 Benefits of employing people with refugee or asylum-seeker status
- 08 Case studies
 - Ehsan
 - Fatima
- 09 How can business organisations support employment of people with refugee and asylum-seeker status?
 - Communication tips
- 11 How to go about employing people with refugee or asylum-seeker status
 - Cooperation
 - How to get your management team and organisation on board
 - Different types of support
 - Examples of employers that have done successful work and promising initiatives to support the employment of people with refugee and asylum-seeker status
- 12 References
- 12 Additional resources and support for Employers





Why a guide for employers?

This guide was produced based on the findings of studies conducted by Deakin University in Australia in conjunction with the University of Gothenburg in Sweden that examined why some organisations actively employ people with refugee or asylum-seeker status and why others do not.

Many employers experience the process of hiring people with a refugee or asylum-seeker status as complex and full of challenges and barriers given difficulties faced in verifying skills and qualifications and determining work rights associated with different permit categories. Most people with refugee and asylum-seeker status are, however, entitled to work in Sweden.

This guide provides practical steps for employers who want to be more pro-active and successful in hiring people with refugee and asylum-seeker status.

Please note this guide does not constitute legal advice regarding the employment of people with refugee or asylum-seeker status, as the legal status of refugees is subject to change based on government policy.

What employers need to know

Most people with refugee or asylum-seeker status have the right to work or study in Sweden. Confirming so is straightforward.

In 2022, The UNHCR reported that there were over 103 million individuals worldwide that were forcefully displaced, equivalent to 1% of the global population. That same year, 16,825 persons sought asylum in Sweden and another 50,365 persons came to Sweden in accordance with the temporary protection directive activated by the European Union in response to the war in the Ukraine. In our research, we were frequently asked what the difference is between someone who has sought asylum and someone who has been granted refugee status. In the boxes below, definitions for both terms are provided.

A Refugee is a person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence...is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Source: www.unhcr.org/en-au/

An Asylum-Seeker is a person who has left their country in search for protection but has not yet received a decision on whether they are going to receive a residency permit.

Source: www.migrationsverket.se

Permit categories

There are different types of permits granted to refugees and asylumseekers. These depend on the country in which the person applies for protection, how the person arrived there, and in which stage the application of protection is. Below is a summary of permits commonly issued to people with refugee or asylum-seeker status.

- LMA (*Reception of Asylum-Seekers Act*)
- Temporary residence permit (with refugee status or Subsidiary Protection Status)
- Permanent residence permit

LMA is an abbreviation of the Swedish name for (*Reception of Asylum-Seekers Act*). LMA is a certificate issued to asylum-seekers to allow them to remain lawfully in Sweden while a permit application is being considered, during the judicial review process, or in preparation for leaving Sweden.

Reception of Asylum-Seekers Act (LMA)

LMA is a certificate photo ID card that is issued to asylum-seekers while they are waiting for their cases to be assessed. LMA contains information on whether the person has a work right during the time as an asylum-seeker, known as "AT-UND". LMA cards are issued temporarily and need to be replaced after 3-6 months. It says on the card when to replace it. The LMA is issued digitally, and the period of validity can be extended by three months every time the LMA holder visits the Swedish Migration Agency. The new LMA card issued after 1 January 2022 has a QR code enabling everyone with access to a QR reader to easily check if the card is valid and if the cardholder has the right to work (*so-called AT-UND*). When a person receives a decision on AT-UND, it is directly registered on the LMA card, and an employer can check it by scanning the QR code. The AT-UND status normally lasts until either someone is *granted a residence permit or until someone leaves the country*. LMA holders are entitled to open a bank account, access emergency health care, financial support, and get a driving license.

Temporary Residence Permit (Refugee Status)

If the application for asylum is approved, the individual will receive a temporary residence permit with *refugee status*, which is valid for three years. The temporary residence permit gives the person the right to live and work in Sweden for three years. During that period, they have the same right to medical care as a person with a permanent residence permit. When a person with temporary residence permit applies for a job, they should bring the documents that show that they have the right to live and work in Sweden, together with their residence permit card. The employer must know for how long the person is allowed to work in Sweden and whether the permit is subject to any restrictions. As an employer you need

to take copies of all documentation and inform the Swedish Tax Agency of the employment. When the temporary residence permit expires and the person is still in need of protection, it is possible to apply for an extension. After three years, it is possible to apply for a permanent residence permit.

Temporary Residence Permit (Subsidiary Protection Status)

This permit is for people who do not meet the definition of refugee under the *Refugee Convention (Geneva Convention) from 1951*. To qualify for subsidiary protection, a person must usually prove that they would face a risk of serious harm if they returned to their country of origin. It is not necessary to be at risk for a specific reason such as race, religion, or political opinion. If someone has been granted subsidiary protection status the person will receive a 13-month residence permit. When a person with temporary residence permit applies for a job, they should bring the documents that show that they have the right to live and work in Sweden, together with their residence permit card. The employer must know how long the person is allowed to work in Sweden and whether the permit is subject to any restrictions. As an employer you need to take copies of all documentation and inform the Swedish Tax Agency of the employment. When the temporary residence permit expires and the person is still in need of protection, it is possible to apply for an extension. After three years, it is possible to apply for a permanent residence permit.

Permanent Residence Permit

In order to obtain a permanent residence permit, a person must:

- Fulfil the requirements for a continued residence permit.
- Have lived in Sweden with a residence permit for a minimum of three years.
- Be able to support themselves financially.
- Live an orderly life.



Confirming eligibility to work

All refugees and most people with asylum-seeker status have the right to work in Sweden. Confirming so, is straightforward.

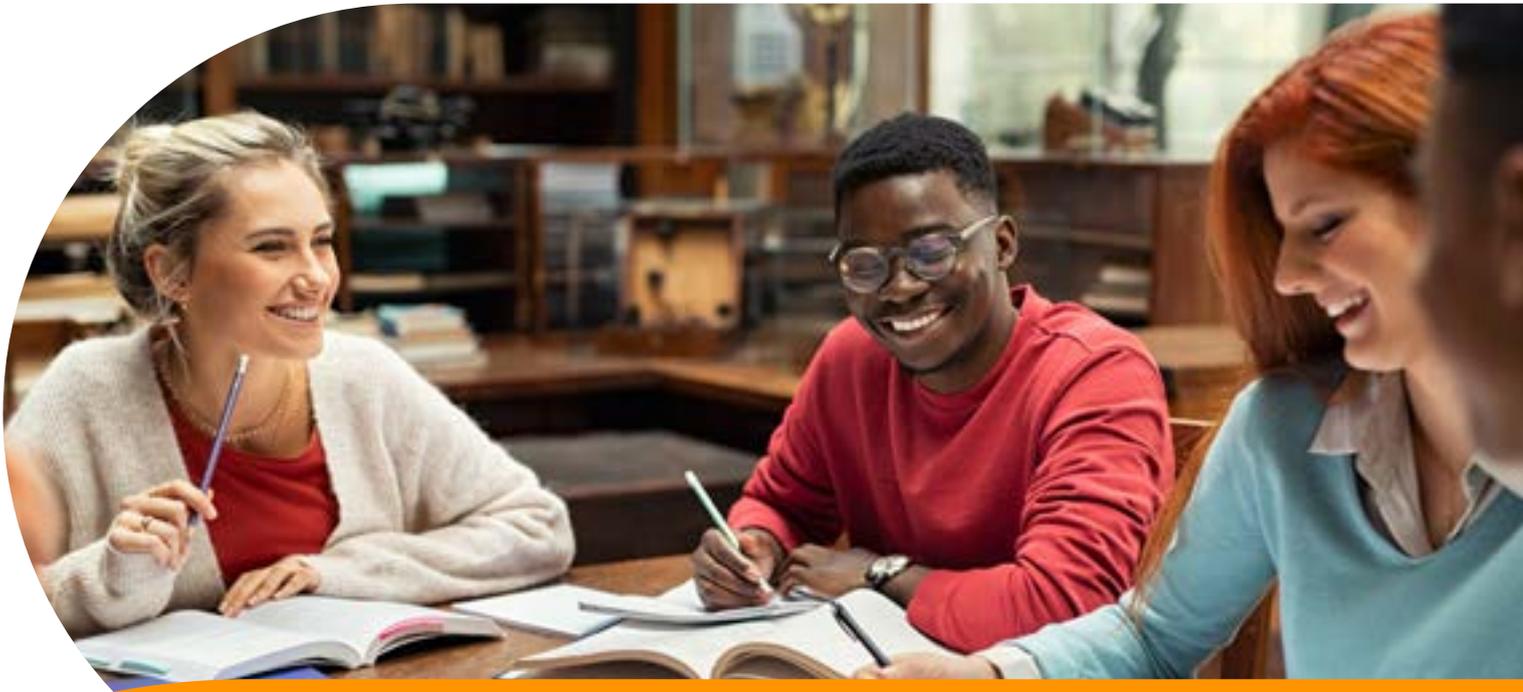
For people with asylum-seeker status: To have work rights while waiting for an asylum application, a person should have *AT-UND* in their LMA stating that they are exempted from the requirement to have a work permit. When someone receives a decision on *AT-UND*, it is directly registered on the LMA card, and an employer can check it by scanning the *QR code*.

For permanent and temporary permit residents with refugee status or subsidiary protection status:

- The person must bring their residence permit card and present it to the employer.
- The employer must know for how long the person is allowed to work in Sweden and whether the permission to work in Sweden is subject to any restrictions.

Note: Work rights should be confirmed for any worker with a permit (temporary or otherwise) before making an employment offer.





Benefits of employing people with refugee or asylum-seeker status

Business organisations can obtain significant benefits from employing people with refugee or asylum-seeker status, according to research and a recent pan-European study undertaken by the Tent Partnership for Refugees.

- 1) The Tent 2023 report showed that 51% of the more than 5,600 consumers indicated they purchase from brands that **hire refugees**¹.
- 2) In 2022, Tent released a study of 100 large to mid-sized companies in Germany that have hired refugees. 68% of companies surveyed said **hiring refugees contributed to increased employee engagement**².
- 3) Research on diversity suggests that more diverse workplaces typically have higher levels of innovation, productivity and staff retention.
- 4) People with refugee or asylum-seeker status may have an easier time understanding and responding to customers with a similar background.
- 5) Through previous life experiences, people with refugee and asylum-seeker status might have attained skills, qualities and knowledge that can help bring new ideas and perspectives into the organisation.
- 6) Recent studies have shown that people with refugee background are more entrepreneurial than the general population. In an increasingly competitive and diverse global marketplace, such capabilities can benefit organisations. In 2018, 73% of companies surveyed reported higher retention rates for **refugees compared to other employees**³.
- 7) Finally, helping people with refugee or asylum-seeker status to integrate into the workplace and civil society as well as supporting them to re-establish their livelihood can contribute to building a stronger community, locally and internationally.

Case studies

Ehsan — An Afghan male from a refugee background, with a Diploma of Assistant Nursing

Ehsan Baqiri fled as unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan to Sweden in 2015 when he was 16 years old. He applied for asylum in Sweden in December 2015, after having crossed multiple borders. Upon arrival he was registered as an asylum-seeker and was eligible for LMA certificate (Reception of Asylum-Seekers Act). He was without work rights until 2020 but was eligible to study during that time. Ehsan had no nationality documentation, such as a passport. Under Swedish migration law, people seeking asylum must prove their nationality in order to be given work rights, known as (AT-UND). While waiting for his work rights to be approved, Ehsan completed a three-year long college study program to become an assistant nurse. Since then, he has received his temporary residence permit which allows him to work.

Since April 2022, he is working full-time at Sahlgrenska University Hospital. “I have worked and volunteered in the healthcare sector since starting my study in Sweden. Due to the skills shortage in the health sector, I secured the job relatively easily once I graduated with my diploma and license”. Ehsan is a multilingual and speaks Farsi, Dari, Swedish and English.

Fatima — A Yemenite female from a refugee background, with a Graduate Degree from Yemen

Fatima came to Sweden in 2014 and wanted to continue her studies and find work. She quickly realised that finding a job in Sweden was not as easy as she expected. To get a foothold on the labour market, she decided to search for internships. She did not have a lot of contacts and only rudimentary Swedish language skills. One day, while visiting the branch office of a large bank together with a fellow student from one of her language classes, to open a bank account, she was informed by the bank clerk about a six-month internship program for recently arrived refugees and other immigrants. The bank clerk was from a refugee background herself, was participating in the program at the time, and urged Fatima to apply. She did so and successfully completed the recruitment process. Fatima greatly improved her Swedish language skills during the program as she was put in constant contact with the banks clients. Upon completion, was offered a part-time position in the company’s staffing pool. Over the coming months she was temporarily brought in to work at the branch offices that experienced temporary staff shortages. During this time she worked at 10 different branch offices, met many different colleagues and clients and learned much about the local work culture at different work places, even within the same company. After one year on the staffing pool, Fatima was hired by the bank on a permanent basis.

Many people with refugee and asylum seeker status in Sweden are highly qualified, have extensive work experience, are keen to learn and work hard. Yet, many do not find jobs within their preferred professions.

To get to where they are today, Ehsan and Fatima have shown enormous courage, curiosity, confidence, innovativeness and resourcefulness. These are qualities that employers in Sweden often highly value. Take Ehsan’s and Fatima’s stories as inspiration for considering your employment practices and strategies, and ensure that they include people with refugee and asylum-seeker status. Employees with Ehsan’s and Fatima’s experiences and skills will most certainly contribute positively to your organisation.

Note: Work rights should be confirmed for any worker on a permit (refugee or otherwise) before making an employment offer.



How can business organisations support employment of people with refugee and asylum-seeker status?

There are a number of ways in which companies and organisations can support employment of people with refugee or asylum-seeker status:

- 1) Consider rethinking your hiring practices to support the employment of people with refugee and asylum-seeker status. This can include setting up inclusive recruitment and talent pipeline processes — ranging from working closely with governmental and local non-governmental organisations, to participating in refugee job fairs, as well as establishing new processes, such as incorporating ‘blind’ resumes and skilled-based hiring tests.
- 2) Consider working with specialist refugee employment agencies, not-for-profit initiatives, such as Jobbsprånget (roughly translated as The Employment Leap), or not-for-profit consultancy firms specialising in developing inclusive workplaces, such as MittLiv.
- 3) Acknowledge overseas experience and qualifications in your hiring process through validation.
- 4) Consider internships or apprenticeships models of employment as a way of building familiarity between the employers and potential employees and for providing a realistic job preview. These can be organized in-house or through collaborative private or not-for profit initiatives, such as Jobbsprånget, which are supported through temporary employment subsidies from the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen).
- 5) Provide a supportive environment and allow time for your new employee to acclimatize to the workplace, which could look and feel vastly different to previous workplaces, and to learn the Swedish language. A comprehensive on-boarding program, including briefings on workplace culture, and the assignment of coaches or mentors/supervisors is highly recommended.
- 6) Educate the management about the benefits of employing people with refugee and asylum-seeker status and about inclusive workplaces in general.
- 7) Be patient and think long term. To recruit and integrate new employees from various backgrounds can mean a significant change for the new as well as old employees, and for the organization as a whole. Continuous reflection and consideration is necessary for a successful outcome.

Communication tips

Facilitate language learning

Swedish is almost certainly not the first language of a person with refugee or asylum-seeker status. Whilst proficiency will vary person to person, the workplace is often the optimal arena for language learning and employers should explicitly facilitate this learning process.

Create an environment of trust and openness

The aim to do a good job and to come across as ambitious can sometimes stand in the way of clear communication. New employees might choose not to inform their colleagues and managers when not feeling comfortable with some aspect of the work, when something is unclear, or when asked to do something or act in an unfamiliar way. At the same time, when a task is not performed to expectation, like with any employee, it is important to provide feedback. As the workplace and expectations on the employee might be very different from what the person is used to, it can be helpful to also explain the rationale behind the feedback. Established colleagues might also find it difficult to know how to approach their new colleagues when giving feedback or sharing their ideas concerning work. It is therefore important for managers and supervisors to create an open environment of trust where it is possible for all employees to share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings, and over time build mutual understanding.

Confirm understanding

Some people might not be used to asking for clarification on a task allocated by their manager. When giving tasks to a new employee, ask questions to establish the person's previous experiences and understanding.

Don't introduce the employee as a refugee or asylum-seeker

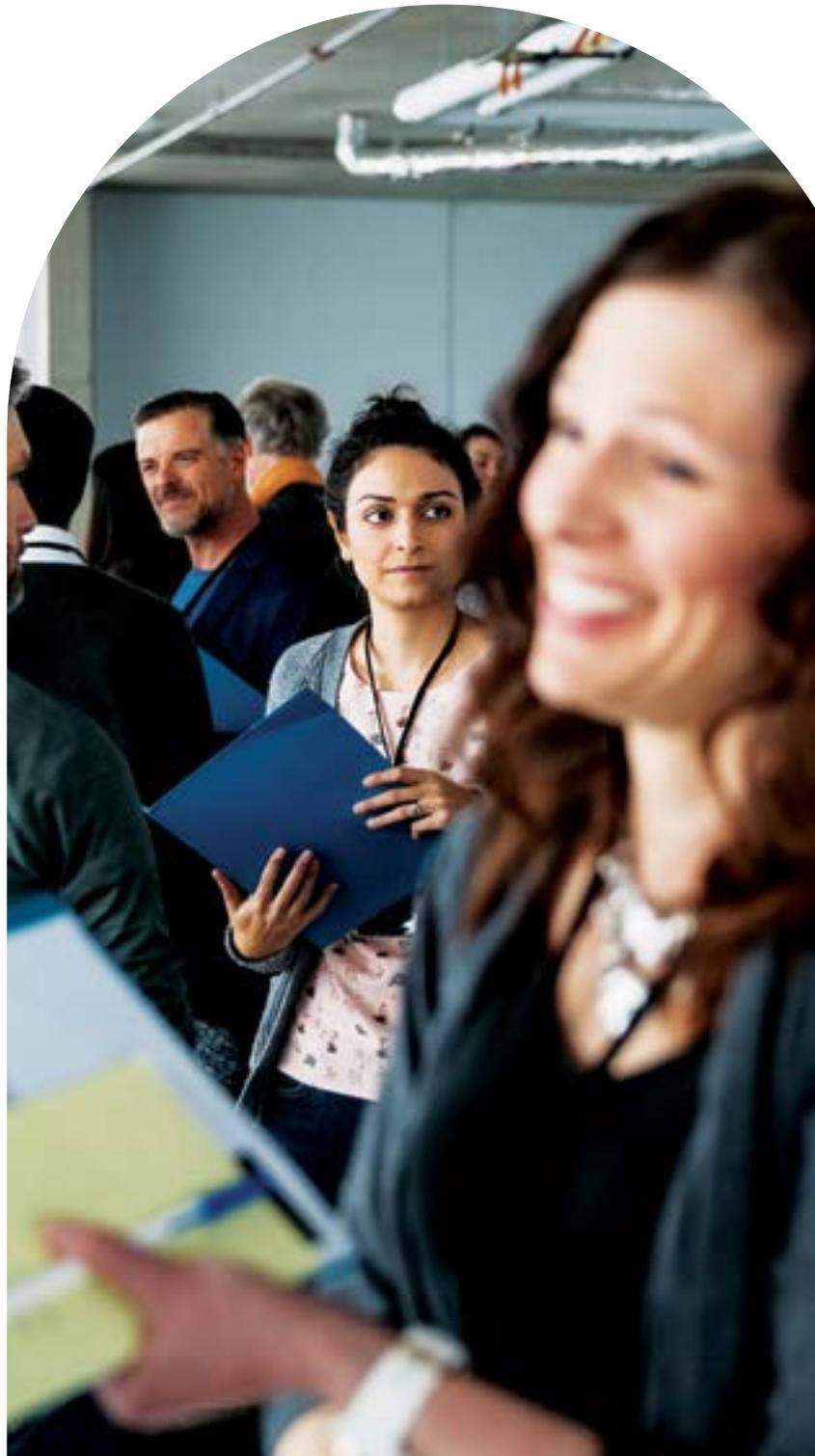
People with refugee and asylum-seeker status have experienced forced migration due to factors outside of their control. Whilst, in some instances, it will be appropriate to recognise a person's background, or celebrate their achievements, this needs to be done delicately.

Ask rather than assume

People with refugee and asylum-seeker status are not a homogeneous group, but culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse. While some require a prayer room or have special dietary requirements, not all do. Where in doubt, ask. In particular, if this is a person's first exposure to the Swedish workplace, they might not feel comfortable to disclose a special need.

Generally speaking, exercise caution when asking

- About the person's migration or refugee experience. This is personal and something that people might be uncomfortable talking about, especially as many migration experiences are traumatic. If a person opens up as time passes, be aware that what they share can be highly confronting.
- Questions about family. Many people have lost loved ones, so please be sensitive to such life experiences.
- About grounds for protection/how they sought refuge, especially if someone is from a country not typically associated with refugees. Persecution takes various forms and probing questions can be offensive.



How to go about employing someone with refugee or asylum-seeker status

Cooperation

Consider partnering with Swedish not-for-profit training and recruitment specialist organisations, such as **MittLiv**⁴ or employment support initiatives, such as **Jobbsprånget**⁵, or international specialist agencies, such as the **Tent Partnership for Refugees**⁶.

The latter option is often appealing to organisations that are keen to offer internships to university students during semester breaks or to aid in re-establishing the careers of mid-career professionals with overseas qualifications and experience. Alternatively, read our Job Seekers Guide for further information or contact the authors of this guide and we will work with you to ensure that you are directed to an appropriate supporting organisation.

How to get your management team and organisation on board

Include people with refugee or asylum-seeker status when developing diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) strategies. Communicate these clearly among colleagues and management and emphasise its benefits.

Different types of support

- Language support.
- Support when interacting with public agencies and with practicalities such as securing day-care or transportation.
- On-the-job mentoring.
- Trusted colleagues who take the role of friend, coach or mentor.
- Clear pathways to re-establishment of career.
- Training and education.
- Counselling/coaching.
- Help in understanding the Swedish labour market and the workplace culture.

Examples of employers that have done successful work and promising initiatives to support the employment of people with refugee and asylum-seeker status

There are many examples of employers that have been successful in employing and supporting people with refugee and asylum-seeker status. For example, Tent member company **Marriott**⁷ has gone above and beyond to hire hundreds of refugees from Ukraine across Europe since the beginning of the war and have adapted their processes to ensure that the new employees are fully integrated into their workforce.

Another example is the **Deutsche Post DHL Group**⁸, which has trained and hired around 20,000 refugees since 2015 in Germany.

In Sweden, a prominent example is AFRY, an engineering consultancy company with 19,000 employees in 40 countries. Between 2016 and 2022, the company recruited 670 highly skilled immigrants, many of them with refugee status, through its Immigrated Competence program, a coaching and matching program for engineers. 400 employers are also connected to the well-known recruitment initiative Jobbsprånget (roughly translated as *The Employment Leap*). The initiative matches recent immigrant job seekers with internships, and since 2015, 60-70 percent of the interns admitted to the four-months long program have been offered a permanent position once their program ended.

References

- 1) <https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/How-Hiring-Refugees-Helps-Brands-Europe.pdf>
- 2) <https://www.unleash.ai/hr-for-good/why-hiring-refugees-is-good-for-business/>
- 3) https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TENT_FPI-Refugees-as-Employees-Report.pdf
- 4) <http://www.mittliv.com>
- 5) <https://jobbspranget.se/>
- 6) <https://www.tent.org/our-work/hiring/>
- 7) <https://news.marriott.com/news/2023/06/20/marriott->
- 8) <https://www.unleash.ai/skills-development/deutsche-post-dhl-understanding-skills-is-paramount/international-commits-to-hiring-more-than-3-000-refugees-globally-by-2026>

Additional resources and support for Employers



Andreas Diedrich
andreas.diedrich@gu.se



Andrea Spehar
globalmigration@cgm.gu.se



Centre on Global Migration
globalmigration@cgm.gu.se



Support Group Network Sweden
supportgroup.se



Swedish Migration Board
migrationsverket.se







CREATE

Centre for Refugee Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education



FORTE:

Swedish Research Council for
Health, Working Life and Welfare

CGM
CENTRE ON
GLOBAL
MIGRATION



deakin.edu.au

Deakin University CRICOS Provider Code: 00113B