



UNLOCKING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL TALENT OF REFUGEES

CONFERENCE OUTCOME REPORT



MONDAY 30TH OCTOBER 2017
ENGINE SHED, BRISTOL



KEY OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE:

Setting priorities for action to break down the barriers for migrant entrepreneurs



Introduction

Enterprise and entrepreneurship is at the heart of any successful economy, bringing diversity and innovation through new products, processes and services. At this challenging time with the prospect of Brexit, an ageing population and the impact of digital technologies, we need to harness entrepreneurial talent as much as possible.

Refugees and migrants have long been a major source of new ideas and new businesses and Ashley Community Housing (ACH) are focused on unlocking this potential. We cannot do this alone and hence our successful event to bring together a range of stakeholders to address this issue which was attended by over 50 people.

The following is a summary of the outcomes of the discussions and the issues discussed on the day.

Facilitating New Migrant Business Development: A Collaborative Approach

Many migrants start new businesses in the UK, which create new jobs and facilitate social inclusion in their local communities. However, there is little research on the topic of migrant enterprise or their experience of business support. At this event, ACH and The Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) presented their 2-year research project on the topic, and invited conference participants to share their insights on the challenges and opportunities in unlocking the talent of migrant entrepreneurs.

The #rethinkingrefugee Approach

Fuad Mahamed, ACH CEO, explained that the ACH approach was to see refugees as neither victims nor problems but as assets who could make a positive contribution for wider society. ACH is the leading provider of integration support for refugees in the West of England and regards economic opportunity as central to that process. This process is illustrated below in figure 1.



Photo: ACH gardening project, funded by Benenden

Working with other agencies, we can do more to overcome barriers (for example, access to appropriate financial instruments) and unlock the talent of refugees who wish to set up their own businesses.

Unlocking Existing Potential

Professor Monder Ram began his presentation by emphasising the contribution that migrant entrepreneurs already make to UK society, creating businesses across various sectors. He discussed the ways in which we can promote the 'human flourishing' that we all have potential to achieve, among migrant and refugee populations. As well as making a strong economic case, he talked about the importance of having empathy and establishing personal connections, in order to learn from migrant entrepreneurs themselves.

"There is no doubt. The economic case for migrants' contribution to the UK is watertight. Migrants make an unequivocal contribution, as employees and as entrepreneurs." Prof. Monder Ram

The data presented by Abdi Mohamed of ACH further demonstrated the potential that is available, highlighting the

Figure 1. Five Stage Innovation Model

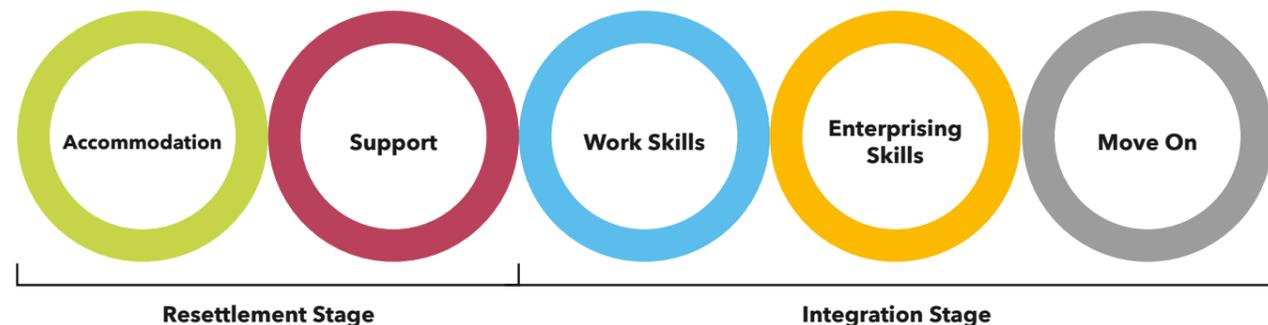
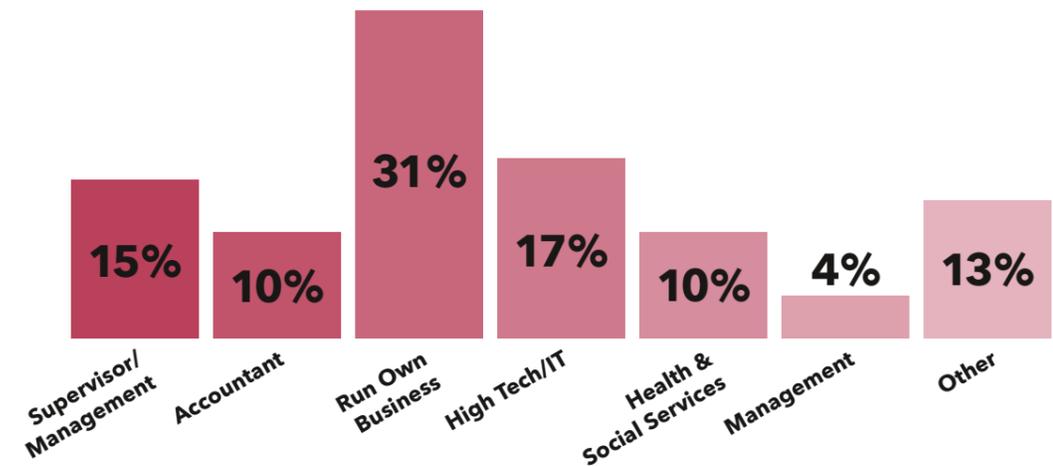


Figure 2.

Sample of Refugees Interviewed October 2017



mismatch between aspirations and reality among refugees in employment or self-employment. Of the sample interviewed, 74% possessed higher education qualifications - and the rest at GCSE or A level equivalent - but the majority were working in low-level jobs. Contrasting with this were the interviewees' job aspirations, which included high-tech, accountancy, and managerial roles. The majority (31%) aspired to running their own business. See figure 2 above.

As Abdi pointed out, businesses and communities are missing out on a wealth of resources. To make the most of this opportunity, we need to ensure that the existing systems for businesses in the UK are accessible to all. The responsibility to support this, it was agreed, should not lie with one organisation, but should be shared.

Conference participants agreed that the system as it stands is not conducive to inclusivity. Discussion focused on the challenges that prevent refugees' high aspirations from being met, and possible solutions and approaches that can be taken.

"The demand's there, the aspiration's there, but there is a gap in the middle" Nick Sturge, Engine Shed

Access To Mainstream Business Support

Zara Nanu, CEO of Gapsquare, discussed her research on BME and female-led businesses, and the challenges faced by these groups. Specific to migrant business owners was a lack of engagement with mainstream business support or networking groups. This meant that for many, establishing a business was a difficult and time-consuming process because of a lack of information on the regulations around doing so. It also meant that available resources for skills development were not being reached, slowing business growth as a result.

The main reasons given for this lack of engagement with support were inaccessible locations, language barriers, and structural inequality. In order to improve this, a truly inclusive approach is needed. Suggestions included ensuring support groups are available in culturally accessible locations and on easy public transport routes. For this, organisations need access to community hubs. There also needs to be a focus on the type of language used both in providing and promoting business support, and on avoiding unnecessarily complicated phrasing or

acronyms, so that speakers of other languages are better able to understand.

Financial Barriers

Migrant businesses are often prevented from growing by a lack of access to finance, as an inevitable absence of credit history means they face difficulty getting loans. This can be even more of a problem for refugees, who may not have the identification required by lenders. Being located in deprived areas also causes a disadvantage for refugee businesses, and inhibits their access to many of the facilities other UK businesses take for granted.

Methods for tackling this need to be creative and innovative, said Charlie Fraser of The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network. He suggested looking at non-traditional funding in order to set up sustainable economic pathways for refugees, and argued that the private sector is currently in the best position to play a part in this.

Again, it was noted that inclusivity should be central to any approach to the issue, and those creating solutions need to work directly with refugees, to learn about the barriers they face, and how they can most benefit from initiatives taken.

"Incorporating refugees into your innovative methodologies is absolutely crucial" Charlie Fraser, TERN

Moving Beyond Research

Though research is invaluable for informing work and discussions like these, it needs to be fed into practical solutions to really make a difference. Participants expressed the sense that many of the problems discussed are not new to the area, and that concrete actions need to be taken to make real progress.

A number of services that already exist could make a difference to refugee entrepreneurs, but there is a communication gap that needs to be bridged to make communities aware of what is available to them, and the ways they can play a part in the city. It is also important to connect with refugee entrepreneurs so that they can act as champions and speak for themselves. Building the trust needed for successful relationships with these communities

SPEAKERS

Fuad Mahamed (CEO, Ashley Community Housing)

Prof. Monder Ram OBE (Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, University of Birmingham)

Dr Zara Nanu (CEO, Gapsquare)

Abdi Mohamed (Director/Company Secretary, Ashley Community Housing)

Cassie Yates (Project Manager, Business West)

Charlie Fraser (Director, The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network)

Ed Rowberry (Chief Executive, Bristol & Bath Regional Capital)

Imran Shah (CEO, Language Services UK Limited)

Nick Sturge (Director, Engine Shed)

Sado Jirde (Director, Black South West Network)

David Jepson (Director, Himilo Training)

Cllr. Asher Craig (Deputy Mayor, Bristol City Council)

will take time, but is vital for inspiring motivation and becoming more informed on refugee experiences.

Similarly, several organisations in Bristol are already working on initiatives to support refugees and entrepreneurship, but networks need to be established that connect the work of these groups, and involve institutions with the access to finance that is needed for large-scale projects. **When communicating with businesses and institutions that are not already invested in refugee entrepreneurship, the business case needs to be put forward in a way that will inspire curiosity and interest, not as a humanitarian cause.**

Things are already changing, and more businesses are seeing the refugee situation as an exciting opportunity, not a burden. Bristol has the potential to lead the way in its approach, and to tap into the entrepreneurial talent pool presented by refugees.

ACH is in a strong position to help coordinate and inform more focused support for refugee entrepreneurs through working with other stakeholders.

"Bristol is in a unique position to become a leading example of building an inclusive society. The time is right. If we don't do it now, this is a big missed opportunity." Zara Nanu, Gapsquare

Next Steps

We are determined to make sure that this wasn't just a great conference. Actions speak louder than words. *The following actions came out of the event.*

All participants to work together to promote and support refugee entrepreneurship. By sharing resources and

working collaboratively, we can make the most of the many organisations already working on refugee integration in Bristol.

"One thing we're doing today in our own micro way is to bring together our resources to generate the human flourishing that all of us have in common."

Prof. Monder Ram

Bristol City Council representatives committed to working with ACH and other organisations to better meet the needs of refugee communities in the future.

"I am willing to kick-start the conversation between ourselves, the LEP, Ashley Community Housing, and BSWN. We are committed to making a difference and improving the lives of migrant entrepreneurs. We need actions and purpose. We need a meeting and to have clear actions around what we're going to do"

Cllr. Asher Craig

"The workshop has been an interesting event, but it is important that we do not just describe the world but also change it by looking at practical steps that can be taken to make a difference." David Jepson, Director, Himilo

We run regular **Rethinking Refugee Conferences** across the **West of England** and the **West Midlands**, and will be running a **number of business focused events** in 2018. We can also organise events for specific employers as needed. All can join in the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag **#rethinkingrefugee**.

What Others Said About The Conference

"We're at 'Unlocking the Entrepreneurial Talent of Refugees' event with the very energetic Ashley Community Housing" Indycube

"Great discussion about building a more inclusive and diverse business ecosystem in Bristol" Zara Nanu, Gapsquare

"Raising the issue of humanitarian lead solutions for refugee inclusion with Ashley Community Housing at the Engine Shed." The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network

"Firstly, the event was rich and positive. I believe events like this help in highlighting issues that deprive migrants especially from BME background from accessing work or availing existing opportunities. [...] I see that we will achieve more in the near future." Imran Shah, Language Services UK.



ACH has organised **#rethinkingrefugee** Conferences in **Sandwell, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Bristol** and **Bath** with over 450 people attending these events. If you are interested in working in partnership with us please get in touch.

What do you say? Please let us know your views and how you might engage with our work to ensure far better integration of refugees within our city and region. Keep the conversation going and talk to us:

info@ashleyhousing.com • @ashleyhousing • #rethinkingrefugee

Ashley Community Housing, Unit 45, Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Easton, Bristol, BS5 0HE.
0117 941 5339 • info@ashleyhousing.com • www.ashleyhousing.com