

# Refugees & Mentors CIC Returner Project Impact Report April 2020 - March 2021

## Vision

An inclusive society where refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants have equal access to job opportunities, in order to build a sustainable life the UK.

## Mission

To support refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants to improve their employment prospects and to collaborate with other organisations to offer inclusive opportunities.

*“My skills in recruitment as a HR professional have been enhanced... my confidence has improved from working with the team and communicating professionally in English on a daily basis. I am very pleased to now have UK work experience on my CV as a result of the placement” candidate*

*“It was great to see just how skilled people were - a talent pool ready and waiting to be tapped into” rail infrastructure employer*



## Report Summary

This is the Refugees & Mentors CIC Impact Report exclusively for the Returner Project covering 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The Returner Project is in its 2nd year.

The main Refugees & Mentors Impact Report describes all our work and can be found here [Refmentors.org.uk/what-we-do/](https://Refmentors.org.uk/what-we-do/)

Refugees & Mentors support:

- Refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants in Greater Manchester to improve their employment prospects and get jobs.
- Employers to develop inclusive recruitment practices, to diversify their workforces, fill skill gaps and to offer support to refugees.

We offer high quality employment focused, holistic services, which are confidential and impartial.

Unemployment in Greater Manchester for people with refugee status has been estimated at 44% by the Manchester Refugee Employment Partnership in 2013. In our experience this estimate has not changed in the last 7 years. The 2019 'Tapping Potential' report by UNHCR, BITC and Prince's Trust, estimated the unemployment rate for refugees nationally at 18%, three times higher than the UK-born population.

The main countries Refugees & Mentors service users have sought sanctuary in the UK from are Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Palestine.

## How we evaluated the Returner Project

This evaluation is underpinned by an *Evaluation Survey*, carried out by members of our volunteer board of directors and a volunteer mentor.

The aims of the *Evaluation Survey* are to:

- Identify potential for improving or changing a service.
- Ensure services are relevant and effective to meet the stakeholder needs.
- Highlight the most important aspects of services from the stakeholder's perspective.
- Continue to learn and improve as individuals and as an organisation.

We used the following methods to ask service users, stakeholders and employers for feedback using questionnaires and gaining feedback after events or workshops.

The level of involvement in the Evaluation Survey of those contacted was 7 service users (70%) and 4 stakeholders (10%).

## Returner Project summary

Many refugee professionals face considerable challenges gaining employment through mainstream recruitment processes and are invisible to employers. The Returner Project works with refugees and employers;

- Refugee candidates supported on this project are engineers, architects, business services, IT and telecoms professionals rebuilding their professional careers.
- Employers are supported to fill skills gaps, to take a more inclusive approach to recruitment and to diversify their workforce.

The main focus of the service is brokerage of a 3-6 month paid professional placement with an employer for a refugee professional. The recruitment and support service for employers is fee charging and this income is used to sustain the Returner Project.

The 6-month pilot of this project ended in June 2020 and in September we restarted the service, supported with WEA/ESF funding. Transitions, London, also provided advisory support to this project until December 2020.

## Specialist casework service

Candidates are supported to develop their professional profile and knowledge in a number of areas, such as labour market information, companies to target for placements, CVs, LinkedIn, professional bodies, comparability of overseas qualifications to the UK system (UKNARIC, now ENIC) and developing portfolios. Many candidates using this service also access our Mentoring Project and Work Club, as well as our partner Rainbow Haven's, advice service. Using our ESF funding, we were able to financially support two candidates to join the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET).

## Group support

Separation from professional networks and the workplace adds an additional layer of isolation for refugee professionals. Many are also separated from family and friends as a result of fleeing war or persecution.

This year we started to connect candidates as a group more regularly, so they could support each other during the difficult process of rebuilding their careers.

- 2 x group peer sessions, including a presentation on "Building your Personal Brand".
- 1 x LinkedIn workshop.
- Candidates were invited to our End of Year event.
- Candidates received our R&M Bulletin of courses, jobs, training etc.
- Specialist opportunities shared with candidates.

## Awareness raising with employers and stakeholders

Knowledge of candidates' professional profiles and of returner placements is relatively low.

We developed relationships with the Tent Partnership for Refugees and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to raise awareness.

In January we held an event attended by 36 people (12 refugee professionals, 11 employers, 6 not for profit organisations and 7 R&M staff/volunteers).

Two candidates jointly delivered a presentation. The event took around 2 months to prepare and we continue to engage with employers.



**We are looking forward to our next virtual event!**

**Harnessing the skills of Refugee Professionals**

**Date:** Thursday, 28th January 2021  
**Time:** 10:00 - 12:30  
**Cost:** Free to attend  
**Platform:** Zoom

For more details and registration please contact:  
[claire@refmentors.org.uk](mailto:claire@refmentors.org.uk) | [www.refmentors.org.uk](http://www.refmentors.org.uk)

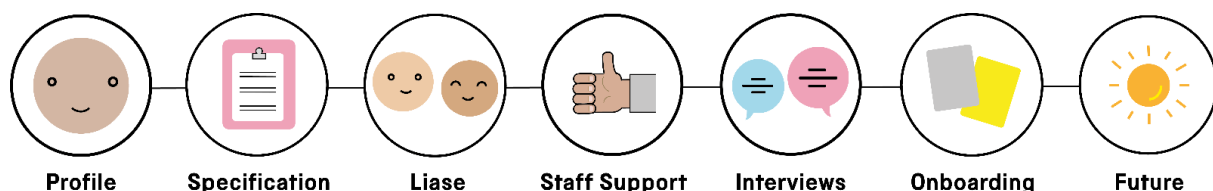




## Employer skills gaps, inclusive recruitment and workforce diversity

This service works with employers to develop 3-6 month paid returner placements, that meet employers recruitment needs and provide an opportunity for refugees to rebuild their career in the UK.

With employers we create a role description which meets their recruitment needs and enables candidates to draw on their knowledge, skills and experience and demonstrate their potential. Collaboration and good communication between the service, candidates and employers are essential at every stage of the process.



## Professional mentoring

In response to feedback from refugee professionals and our experience of delivering the Mentoring Project, we worked with 2 civil engineering employers to set up mentoring relationships between their staff and our candidates.

### Example of mentoring goals

- Increase knowledge of the civil engineering sector locally and in the UK.
- Gain industry feedback on qualifications & work experience and how they fit into UK industry.
- Gain industry guidance on how to improve their employment prospects and gain a paid placement or job.
- Explore how to continue to build their professional confidence.

### Candidates' professional profiles

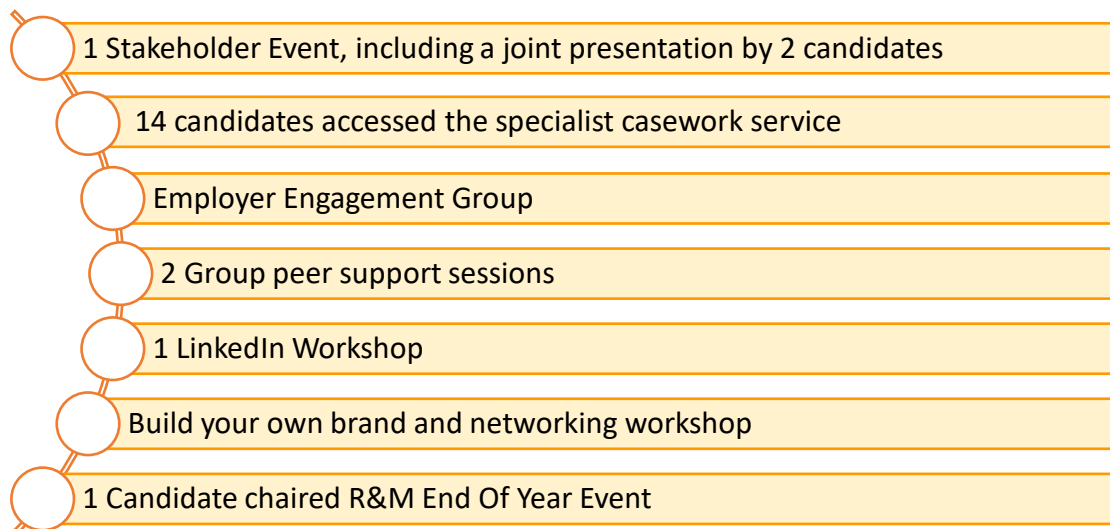
Seven people had a bachelors level degree and 7 people a postgraduate qualification, as well as other professional qualifications, such as 2 people with CIPD.

Electrical engineering	Mechanical engineering
BSC engineering technology	BSC Civil engineering
Computer engineering	MSC construction project management
PHD structural engineering	BA Architecture
3 x MBA	BSC agricultural engineering
MSC communications and signal processing engineer	
BA economics in micro and macro-economic analysis	
MBA (Masters in Business Administration) and a Masters of public policy and admin	

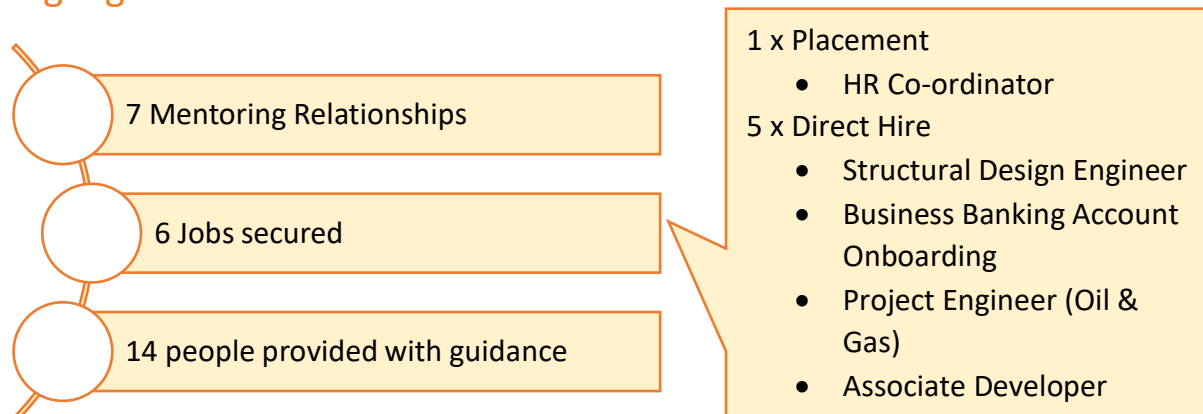
## Experience outside the UK

Telecoms engineer	Architect	2 x Sales, account management
Procurement and supply chain specialist	Computer engineer	Structural engineer
Mechanical engineer	Banking	Civil/construction project management
2 x HR professional	Communications engineer	Civil engineer

## Service in numbers



## Highlights





## Service user feedback

We asked candidates to explain to what extent the information and guidance provided by the Returner Project is important for an increase in their **knowledge, skills, confidence** and **motivation** and what could be improved?

Knowledge	Skills	Confidence	Motivation
"... to understand the engineering industry in the UK and improve my networking"	"Interview skills and techniques, STAR method"	"... (becoming a) member with the CIPS"	"RP workers & the professional mentor helped to motivate me"
"about how to apply for a job in my field, how to customise my CV when applying to a different job"	"How to show and transfer my skills to match every job that I am applying for and interview techniques."	"connected me to a professional mentor who helped me a lot to build confidence in myself"	"gave me the opportunity to present myself to over 30 employers in a meeting. This was great motivation for me to work harder and keep enhancing my skills"
<p><b>How could the Returner Project improve?</b></p> <p>"by involving more professional people and employers from industry"</p>			

## Service user feedback: The importance of placements and how they can impact on candidates' careers

*"Placement is the key for us to test our knowledge and work experience and match them with the UK's"*

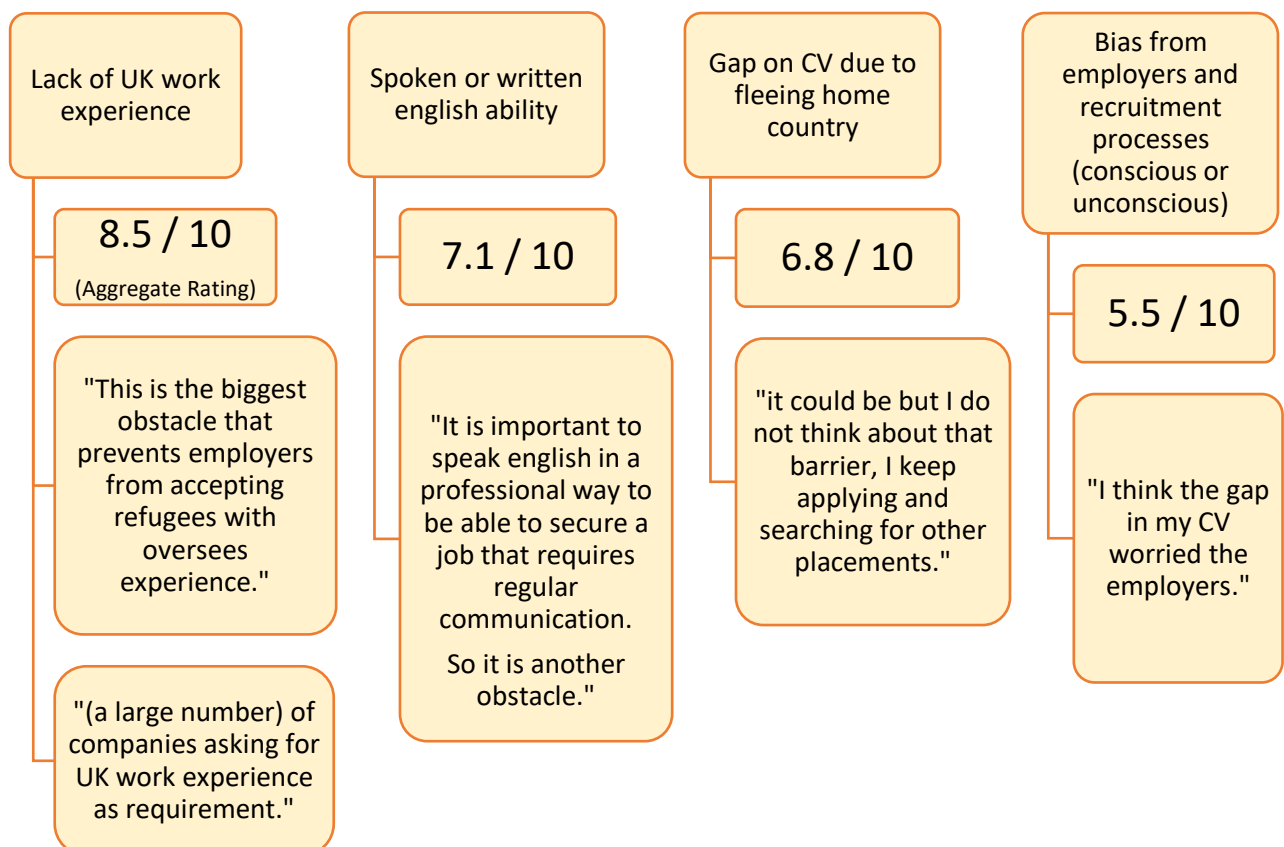
*"I am currently in a placement, it is very important for those who lack UK working experience. I personally have improved, learned new skills, gained UK work experience and most importantly my line manager will provide a reference for me in future."*

*"It was a turning point for my career, it was fresh blood in an incapable body".*

*"To have professional work experience in the UK and to have a chance to prove myself and skills to the employers who are afraid from refugees' abilities."*

*"It gives refugees the opportunity that employers won't give them directly (due to a) lack of trust of overseas qualifications or the unemployment gap due to the asylum process."*

## Key barriers, rated 1 to 10, preventing candidates from gaining work in their field and how. (1 = not a barrier, 10 = significant barrier)







## Stakeholder feedback

We asked organisations to reflect on their involvement with the project and if it had impacted on their knowledge of the challenges refugees face in the labour market.

### 1. Why are you involved or interested in the Returner Project?

*“I’m interested in cooperating with Refugees & Mentors to offer access to refugee candidates to our corporate members that want to hire refugees.” Associate Director for Global Partnerships; TENT*

*“(We) are an organisation that are looking to work with R&M as part of our social value agenda. This year, due to covid restrictions, much of our engagement has been around the planning of future activities, which will hopefully materialise in the next year.” Social Value and Stakeholder Manager; Engineering Contractor*

*“I am interested in offering placements to skilled refugees.” Resourcing Business Partner; Rail Infrastructure Employer*

### 2. To what extent were you aware of refugee employment issues before contact with R&M?

*“Very limited, I had basic knowledge of visa requirements etc but learnt a lot more through this.” Resourcing Business Partner; Rail Infrastructure Employer*

*“No, R&M have brought real insight on to this issue to me personally and the teams they have engaged with” Social Value and Stakeholder Manager; Engineering Contractor*

### 3. What barriers are you aware of now?

*“Language, stigma, bias, knowledge of UK employment market, familiarity with recruitment and selection norms in the UK, translatability of skills, experience and quals to the UK, confidence.”* *Head of HR, Refugee Action*

*“Unconscious bias, unrecognised qualifications from unknown institutions and equal pay. Language skills.”* *Resourcing Business Partner; Rail Infrastructure Employer*

### 4. What is your employer’s approach to hiring inclusively? What is the business case for you?

*“(We have) an ‘Everyone Matters’ strategy, of which diversity and inclusion is a huge part. We encourage our managers to adopt ‘Inclusive by Design’ principles, use inclusive and more gender-neutral language on their adverts and have diverse interview panels.* *Resourcing Business Partner; Rail Infrastructure Employer*

*“(We) have a very thorough approach to inclusivity and inclusive hiring and have been recognised as such by external benchmarks and awards.”* *Social Value and Stakeholder Manager; Engineering Contractor*

### 5. Was there anything Refugees & Mentors or yourself could have done differently?

*“We maybe could have been quicker in our response and decision but we were genuinely trying to see how we could make it work in this difficult, covid environment. In the end we had to postpone for a few weeks and we will re-visit in July.”* *Resourcing Business Partner; Rail Infrastructure Employer*

## Case study

Fatima (not her real name) held a senior HR position in a government department before fleeing her home country and seeking safety in the UK.

She has a bachelor's and master's degree, plus over 15 years' HR industry experience. However, her CV showed no UK experience and a gap due to the asylum system. Unfamiliar with UK recruitment procedures, she had not been invited to any interviews.

R&M helped Fatima to adapt her CV to make it conform to UK norms and to learn how to research her industry in the UK. Interviews in her home country had been very different and R&M shared interview techniques and arranged mock interviews so she could adapt to the change. She was very surprised at the level of detail expected in interview answers, but once she had grasped this and learned techniques, her confidence grew.

Fatima's placement came about very quickly - a national charity, in touch with R&M, explained they were facing a temporary staff shortage in their HR team. Fatima's experience in HR made her an ideal candidate and she was put forward for a placement interview. The interviewers agreed to provide the questions in advance to give Fatima some time to prepare.

Fatima was interviewed by a panel of three people at the charity, one of whom would be her line manager. The feedback from Fatima's interview was excellent, in particular, she gave very full and detailed answers.

She was offered a returner placement as a HR Assistant. The job description was discussed by Fatima, the line manager and R&M to ensure that responsibilities would be within Fatima's capabilities. The placement was initially for 3 months, but was extended by 2 months. At the end of the placement, Fatima intends to apply for a permanent position at the charity.

During the placement, Fatima and her manager, Rachel, found the monthly 3-way monitoring meetings, ongoing support for Fatima from R&M and learning journals invaluable. Rachel said the meetings provided a chance to discuss progress and to flag up additional experience which Fatima could gain during placement. Rachel was reassured that Fatima could speak to R&M at any point and regular learning journals recorded all Fatima's learning and experience - so Fatima could add this to her CV and use it at interview.

Fatima used HR specific software Cascade and Applicant Tracking Software (ATS), both of which she views as key to progressing her career.

Rachel says: "The whole placement is going really well. Fatima has been able to come in and work independently to help the team who were stretched. Fatima's skills are a really good match, we don't have to explain many things because she already knows the HR background to those issues."

## Supporters

Thank you to the following:



Leigh Day



## Location

We are based in the offices of Rethink Rebuild Society, Unit 7, Longsight Business Park, M13 0PD. We are a not-for-profit community interest company. Our financial accounts are at Companies House <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house>

Registered company number: 10373232.

## Contact us

Email: [info@refmentors.org.uk](mailto:info@refmentors.org.uk)

Website: <https://refmentors.org.uk/>

*Thank you for taking the time to learn about people seeking asylum, refugees, vulnerable migrants and Refugees & Mentors CIC*