REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Unlocking the UK's Refugee Talent

Our impact in 2025-26





Hamed Amiri, Tech Business Partner | Tech Catalyst , PWC UK, Refugee and bestselling author of The Boy with Two Hearts and The Other Boy

“Access to meaningful work gives refugees far more than a job; it offers dignity, purpose, and the chance to rebuild a life. I know this personally.”

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From our chair



Janice Lopatkin MBE, Chair of the Board of Trustees

When we founded the Refugee Employment Network (REN), our ambition was to unite organisations committed to improving job opportunities for refugees across the UK. So, seeing that idea grow into an independent charity and a 400-member national network has been immensely rewarding.

Finding suitable, sustainable work is vital to rebuilding a life in a new country. It allows refugees to support their families, contribute to their communities, and use their skills. Yet refugees remain three times more likely to be unemployed than people born in the UK

REN connects the exceptional work happening across sectors, highlighting effective practices and addressing gaps so refugees can access support anywhere in the UK. Over the past year, we have entered an exciting new phase - strengthening our governance, securing long-term funding, expanding industry partnerships, and delivering ambitious programmes.

A personal highlight was our Refugee Jobs Fair at St James's's Palace, attended by His Majesty The King. The event connected more than 500 refugees directly with employers, with candidates going on to secure job offers from a wide range of sectors including marketing, healthcare and data analysis. It's also been wonderful to see the strength of REN's employer partnerships, including the development of our work with Aon and our continuing partnership with EY. This impact report - our very first - reflects what our collective effort has achieved, proving that being forced to flee your home country does not mean losing your potential.

As you'll see from the following pages, this wouldn't be possible without our members, partners, funders, staff, and the displaced professionals shaping our work. I'd also like to thank our Trustee Board for their commitment and guidance, and warmly welcome Chris Fitzgerald LVO, Hoa Ngo and Souleiman Lazrak, who joined the Board this year. Together, we're unlocking talent and supporting refugees to rebuild their lives.

704

displaced people participated in REN-convened job fairs, mentoring and employability programmes

112

employers and refugee support organisations connected directly with refugee talent

1 in 3

candidates at the St James's' Palace Refugee jobs fair secured an interview within three months of the event

...and

21

job fair attendees were offered a job!

36k

refugees and displaced people reached by our members

(Based on voluntary, self-reported member data, this figure represents the combined reach of REN's membership, rather than people directly supported by REN)

40%

of employers who attended the St James's's Palace Refugee Jobs Fair adapted or explored adapting their recruitment processes to be more inclusive of refugee talent

404

members in our UK-wide network, welcoming **54 new organisations** in 2025–26.

97%

of REN members feel part of a wider community advancing refugee employment

143

jobs advertised by **67 employers** through REN's Jobs Board

50

organisations convened to contribute to the Home Office's consultation on the Earned Settlement Proposals

Rebuilding a life in a new country is tough. We make rebuilding a career easier.

At the Refugee Employment Network (REN), our mission is to ensure every refugee across the UK can access appropriate, fulfilling and paid employment. As the UK's only national network dedicated exclusively to refugee employment, REN brings together over 400 member organisations across all four nations. Our cross-sector network spans employers, refugee charities, local authorities, training providers, and industry bodies - working collectively to improve employment outcomes at scale.



Refugees bring valuable skills, qualifications and professional experience to the UK, but too many face persistent barriers to finding suitable and sustainable work:

Only
24%
of refugees are employed in their first year, peaking at 48% after 8 years (far below the UK average of 74%)[1]

81%
earn less than £30,000 after eight years[2], despite half holding A-level equivalent or higher qualifications[3]

20%
of London businesses report difficulty finding qualified refugee candidates or knowing how to recruit them.[4]

1 Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO) Home Office
2 Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO) Home Office
3 Commission on the Integration of Refugees
4 London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Anna’s story



I’m a Mechanical Engineer from Ukraine with a Master’s degree and 13 years of professional experience. When the invasion made my hometown unsafe, I fled to the UK. Finding work that matched my skills felt impossible. Despite applying for professional roles, I received constant rejections and ended up on a zero-hours contract at a sports shop.

When an advisor introduced me to REN’s six-month mentoring scheme, things began to turn around. My mentor helped me overhaul my CV, and I immediately began receiving responses. Low self-confidence had been my biggest barrier - I knew I could do the work, but I struggled to present my value. My mentor taught me how to articulate my soft skills and recognise my worth.

For my current role, I faced a rigorous process: a soft-skills interview, a technical test, and a final technical assessment. REN helped me prepare by providing mock interviews and language support, and I was thrilled to be offered a job as an engineer with a supportive British business.

Engineering has been my passion since childhood. Constantly applying without success was demoralising, but REN helped me persevere. Now, the weight of worry has lifted, and I feel calm, settled, and motivated.

The mentoring programme helped me realise that all the experience I had before truly matters and has value. It gave me the confidence to believe in myself and my abilities.

How we create change

1

We connect refugees with employment opportunities

We connect refugee talent to jobs, employment support and development opportunities, and employers to a highly-skilled workforce.

2

We strengthen the refugee employment ecosystem

We convene employers, charities, local authorities, and industry bodies to join up employment pathways, share expertise, and build collaborative solutions.

3

We create more inclusive workplaces, industries and policies for refugees

We partner with employers to make recruitment practices more inclusive and use the collective voice of our network to advocate with policymakers to remove structural barriers to work.

Experts by experience



REN intentionally involves experts by experience in designing and delivering our work. We recognise both the expertise gained through forced displacement and navigating the UK labour market, and the professional knowledge and skills people bring.

People contribute professional expertise as HR leaders, recruiters, digital specialists, project managers, lecturers and employment advisers, as well as insights gained through forced displacement and navigating the UK labour market. We create opportunities for people to contribute both forms of expertise, while respecting whether, when and how they choose to share their personal experiences.

Rather than separating experts by experience into a standalone group, we involve people alongside other specialists as advisers, facilitators, trustees and partners. Here's how we put that expertise into practice:

- **Paid expertise:** We pay experts by experience for their time, knowledge and the expertise they contribute to our advisory groups, speaking at events and facilitating training.

  Co-develop our work: Displaced professionals helped build and co-facilitate our Unlocking Refugee Talent training, and serve on our Digital Advisory Group for the Refugee Employment Marketplace.

- **Inclusive hiring:** We reviewed REN's own recruitment practices alongside Experts by Experience employment initiative to make our practices more inclusive of refugees and displaced people. People with refugee backgrounds are represented throughout the organisation, from our staff to trustees and advisory groups.

Meaningful involvement requires time, capacity and appropriate payment. With more funding, we aim to embed lived and professional expertise even further into REN's strategy, leadership, and daily work.

1. Connecting refugees with employment opportunities

Refugee talent jobs fairs

This year, REN connected 704 refugees and displaced people with 112 employers, employment opportunities and employability support, helping them progress on their journeys towards employment.

REN's model is built on the collective reach of our national network. We connect employers and opportunities with trusted organisations already supporting refugees in their communities. Our members, including refugee charities, local authorities and strategic migration partnerships, collectively reach up to 36,060 refugees and displaced people across the UK. This enables jobs, programmes and employment support to be shared at scale across different regions and communities.

Building regional connections in Newcastle

Working with Newcastle City Council and a regional steering group of REN members, we integrated a dedicated Displaced Talent Hour into the council's established annual Careers Fair.

The event connected 102 refugees with 49 businesses offering live vacancies, seven council departments and 26 employment-support providers. The dedicated hour provided a quieter space for candidates to speak directly with employers and introduced businesses that might not ordinarily attend a refugee-focused event to local refugee talent and specialist support organisations. The event demonstrated REN's model in action: convening local expertise, strengthening existing provision and creating local connections that continue beyond the event itself.

Refugee Jobs Fair at St James's' Palace

In February 2026, REN partnered with the Royal Household and World Jewish Relief to deliver a landmark refugee Jobs Fair at St James's' Palace.

Supported by a visit from His Majesty The King, the event connected 590 displaced professionals across 44 countries with 29 major employers and industry bodies - including EY, HSBC, BBC Studios, Octopus Energy, PwC, and Barts Health NHS Trust. Beyond direct access to recruiters from a range of sectors including financial services, green energy and health care and 1-to-1 CV clinics, the fair drove immediate momentum and long-term hiring shifts.

Candidates also secured volunteering roles - including with the Royal Ballet & Opera House - to build local experience and bridge CV gaps.

The event proved the power of cross-sector collaboration - not just in landing immediate jobs, but in building sustainable, inclusive recruitment pathways.

- **83%** of employers reported a positive shift in their perception of refugee talent
- **63%** added 20 or more candidates directly into their hiring pipelines
- **40%** actively introduced or explored more inclusive hiring practices

HSBC strengthened its refugee-inclusive onboarding processes, while Barts Health NHS Trust progressed 6 candidates into pre-employment pathways, offering access to NHS vacancies and placements.

"Speaking directly to the attendees helped me better understand the resilience, skills,and determination that refugees bring to the workforce." Employer

Three months later:

- **91%** of candidates submitted job applications
- **33%** secured interviews, with 21 people receiving job offers
- **70%** felt more confident in their job search

"For a senior professional with 20+ years of experience, being able to discuss my specific technical background face-to-face was much more effective than a standard online application"

Refugee candidate





Mentoring

Refugee Engineering Mentoring Programme

This year, REN partnered with the Engineering Council and the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) to pilot the Refugee Engineering Mentoring Programme.

The initiative matches displaced engineers with mentors in equivalent disciplines to help them navigate UK engineering pathways, tailor their CVs, and rebuild professional confidence.

The programme's mentoring model was shaped directly by the mentees. They told us they wanted mentors who were active in their profession, working in the same discipline and familiar with current recruitment practices. This insight informed how REN and our partners recruited mentors and made the matches.

Eight refugee engineers who were unemployed or working outside of the engineering sector, were matched with mentors, who were members of the Institution of Civil Engineers. Importantly, the mentors worked in equivalent roles or disciplines to their mentees. Matching peer-to-peer by specialism, seniority and industry background meant mentees received support relevant to their career goals and professional experience.

The pilot also drove mutual value and systemic, industry-wide change:

- **83%** of mentors reported a stronger connection to their professional purpose
- **100%** of mentors gained high awareness of the barriers refugees face in finding employment in the UK by the end of the programme

By pairing specialist mentoring with institutional backing, the programme provides a scalable model to unlock skilled talent, lower barriers to entering the profession and drive industry-level change, while helping to bridge severe engineering shortages across the UK.

Within six months:

- **50%** of mentees had secured employment in engineering
- **63%** gained professional membership to the ICE professional network
- **50%** started or completed further engineering qualifications

"My mentor helped me revise my CV. As a result, I received a job offer in my field at a very good company."

Mentee

Refugee Employment Marketplace

REN is UK partner of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for its European Refugee Employment Platform. This year, 67 employers shared 143 vacancies through REN's existing Jobs Board, connecting refugee talent with opportunities across the UK.

With support from the Welsh Government, we completed the discovery and planning phase for a new Refugee Employment Marketplace.

We established a Digital Advisory Group bringing together displaced professionals, employers, digital experts and jobs-board specialists, and co-designed the development brief around their needs for digital infrastructure that will connect employers with refugee talent, make employment opportunities and support easier to navigate, and strengthen REN's ability to improve and track employment outcomes at scale.



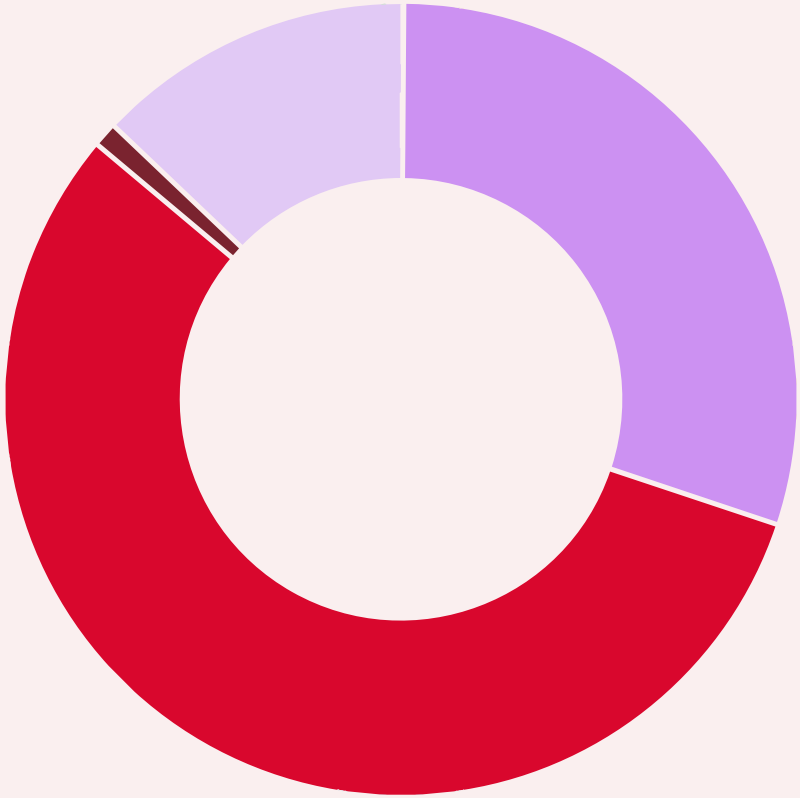
2. Strengthening the refugee employment ecosystem

An engaged national network

This year, our network grew by 12% to 404 registered members, with 54 new registrants joining. New members included Octopus Energy, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Newcastle City Council, Suffolk Refugee Support, DGP PLC and Migrant Help.

We also created more opportunities for members to connect and collaborate. Our new online REN Connect series brings members together to explore specific employment challenges, share experience and identify practical solutions.

Over three sessions, we engaged 170 people, covering work experience for displaced professionals, the Government's new proposals for Earned Settlement, and developments across the network.



Network composition

- 56% employers
- 30% refugee charities and support organisations
- 13% local authorities
- 1% other

Refugee employment summit

Our annual Refugee Employment Summit is the centrepiece of REN's convening work. It brings employers, displaced professionals, charities, local authorities and funders together for a day of learning, discussion and collaboration focused on advancing refugee employment. Participants explore emerging trends, research and evidence, share successful interventions and develop collective responses to common challenges.

Hosted by EY during Refugee Week in June 2025, the Summit convened 83 people from across the refugee employment ecosystem.

Following the event:

- **81%** better understood the barriers refugees face in accessing employment.
- **84%** better understood how their organisation could become more inclusive of refugee talent.
- **100%** were inspired to take further action to support refugee employment.

"As a small organisation, we often work in isolation, but the Summit gave me new connections, fresh perspectives and the confidence to reach out and build partnerships."

Betty Berthebaud, Director of the Community Lab Initiative CIC



97% of REN members feel part of a wider community advancing refugee employment

3. Creating inclusive workplaces, industries and policies

Inclusion schemes

To bridge the gap between employers and refugee talent, REN launched two targeted initiatives this year:

Unlocking Refugee Talent Training

Hosted by professional services firm Aon in March 2026, REN launched a new training programme co-developed with UNHCR and five experts by experience, who'll be paid to co-facilitate its delivery. Alongside their experience of forced displacement and finding work in the UK, they bring professional expertise in HR, recruitment and employment support. The sessions give HR, talent and hiring managers practical guidance about refugees' right to work, the barriers displaced people face and the changes organisations can make to recruit and support refugee talent in the workplace.

"I didn't know hiring refugees was legal." Hiring Manager

Aon Displaced Workforce Impact Programme

Through a new headline partnership with Aon, REN delivered a two-cohort programme for 78 displaced professionals rebuilding careers in finance, law, risk, tech, and professional services. Despite 94% having previous corporate experience, 77% were unemployed entering the programme. We brought them together for three days of intensive workplace immersion, 1-to-1 CV support, and networking with Aon employees to help them learn about the UK insurance and professional services markets.

The impact of the DWIP programme went both ways. Aon colleagues gained direct access to an overlooked pipeline, leading to direct hires and plans to scale the model across Aon's European business.

Over three days:

- Interview confidence jumped by over **40 percentage points.**
- Understanding of the UK job market surged from **11%** to **75%**
- Confidence applying for corporate roles more than doubled to over **70%.**
- In the January cohort, understanding of the UK job market increased from **11%** to **75%**, while confidence in professional networking rose from **8%** to **63%.**



“Those involved were struck by the talent, ambition and professionalism of the participants. These are skilled, resilient and highly motivated individuals who represent an overlooked source of talent for businesses.”

Tracy-Lee Kus, Co-CEO, Aon EMEA

“It opened my eyes to the possibilities within the corporate finance and insurance sectors and helped rebuild my confidence.”

Programme participant

Yuliia's story



"It's given me stability, confidence and security for the future"

Yuliia joined the Aon Displaced Workforce Impact Programme with a Master's degree and 15 years' experience as a market analyst. Fleeing to the UK, she struggled to secure a role matching her background due to language barriers, unrecognised qualifications, and a lack of professional networks.

"We arrived in a new country completely unprepared, with no local network to rely on," Yuliia says. "Programmes like this provide essential support, help us navigate the job market, and allow us to start building connections." After joining Aon's programme in October 2025, Yuliia received CV guidance from their talent team, applied for open roles, and successfully interviewed. She is now employed at Aon as a Research and Consulting Associate in its Strategy & Technology Group.

"It's given me stability, confidence, and security for the future," she shares. Her message to employers: "Displaced talent brings fresh perspectives, new approaches, and immense motivation."

Convening our network on changes affecting refugee employment

The Government's Earned Settlement proposals, in the Immigration and Asylum Bill could significantly affect displaced people's employment, progression and security, as well as employers' workforce planning.

In response, REN brought together 50 members from across the UK, including employers, refugee organisations, industry bodies and local authorities, to examine these implications with experts in immigration law and migration policy.

We consulted members to understand how the proposals could affect displaced people, employers and frontline services and the wider industries and sectors. We used this evidence to produce a briefing explaining the implications for refugee employment and supporting members to develop informed consultation responses, as well as submitting REN's consultation response informed by our members.

By bringing together different perspectives and translating complex policy into practical implications, REN helped members understand the proposals and respond with greater confidence.

4. Our finances & future ambitions

Finances

1

We tripled our income to £217,656

Providing the resources to sustainably grow REN's team, programmes and impact.

2

We secured five multi-year grants

Strengthening REN's financial resilience and enabling us to plan and invest for the longer term.

3

We invested in REN's infrastructure

Building REN's organisational capacity, with the addition of a full time member of staff and the discovery and development phase of the Refugee Employment Marketplace, digital infrastructure that will connect displaced talent, employers and employment support at scale.

Financial review

2025–2026 was a year of significant financial growth for REN. We tripled our total income in one year, increasing from £63,422 to £217,656. This growth was driven primarily by successful trust and foundation fundraising, and increased corporate partnership income and donations.

REN secured valuable multi-year support from funders including This Day Foundation, Postcode Society Trust, the Rayne Foundation, the Hilden Charitable Fund and the King Charles III Charitable Fund. This longer-term investment provides greater stability and enables REN to plan beyond individual projects, invest in organisational capacity and develop partnerships and programmes with the potential to achieve more impact at scale. Our expanded headline partnership with Aon also demonstrates growing corporate investment in REN's mission.

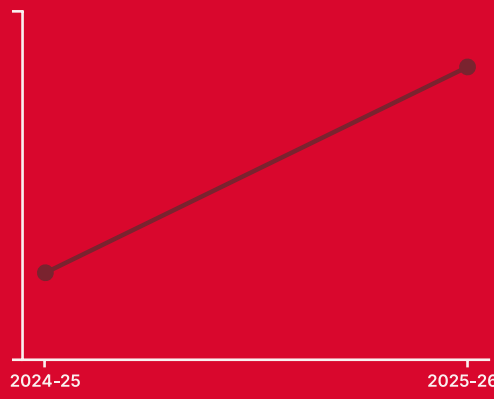
Expenditure increased to £188,607 as REN invested in staffing, programme delivery, stakeholder engagement and major initiatives including the Refugee Jobs Fair at St James's's Palace, Refugee Employment Marketplace and Refugee Employment Training. REN ended the year with a surplus of £29,048.

Unrestricted reserves sit at £90,168, representing approximately five months of operating costs and remaining within REN's reserves policy target of three to six months. Restricted funds of £81,609 reflect grants received for activity scheduled for delivery in 2026–2027.

Alongside income growth, two years of organisational development support from the Lloyds Bank Foundation have helped REN strengthen our financial resilience and governance, with improved financial controls and reporting as well as the development of a business and product plan focused on developing sustainable income streams through mission-aligned services and products. Together, these developments have strengthened REN's financial resilience and created a more stable foundation for long-term impact.

£217,656

*REN total income 2025-26
(Income for 2024-25: £63,422)



Looking ahead

Our priorities for 2026–27

We enter the next year in a difficult and rapidly changing political, social and economic environment. Our response will remain grounded in what we know: meaningful employment creates financial security, confidence, inclusion and belonging. Employers benefit from refugee talent and lasting change requires coordinated action.

If employment becomes increasingly central to settlement in the UK, REN's mission is more vital than ever. We must continue scaling our reach and impact, ensuring refugees across the UK can access the support, networks, mentors, and employers needed to secure suitable and sustainable paid work.

Launch the Refugee Employment Marketplace

We'll launch the Refugee Employment Marketplace as the UK's centralised digital hub for refugee employment. It will connect displaced people with employment guidance, live vacancies and local support, while enabling employers to share opportunities with a national refugee talent pipeline.

Strengthen industry partnerships

We'll build on our work in engineering and financial and professional services, while developing partnerships in new sectors. Working with more employers and professional industry bodies, we will remove or lower systemic barriers and create scalable pathways that accelerate displaced professionals' return to careers reflecting their skills and experience.

Build REN's expert by experience approach

We'll strengthen how experts by experience inform REN's strategy, governance and programme development. Subject to funding, we'll create more consistent, paid opportunities for people with experience of forced displacement to advise, challenge and shape our work, while continuing to recognise and value the professional expertise and wider identities people bring.

Expand refugee-inclusive workplaces

We'll roll out our Unlocking Refugee Talent training to HR, talent and hiring professionals, helping employers understand the barriers refugees face and develop more inclusive recruitment and workplace practices.

Grow REN sustainably

This year, we focused on building strong, stable foundations for REN. With organisational development support from Lloyds Bank Foundation, we are working with consultants to refine our Theory of Change and develop a stronger monitoring, evaluation and KPI framework. We will continue to grow responsibly by investing in key staff, digital infrastructure and impact tracking, while seeking multi-year funding, expanding corporate partnerships and developing paid services to support REN's long-term sustainability. These steps will give us the capacity to scale our work and deliver lasting, UK-wide impact

Strengthen our national network

We'll deepen member engagement and collaboration across employers, charities, local authorities, industry bodies and displaced professionals. By connecting knowledge, evidence and opportunities, we'll support more joined-up employment pathways and strengthen the collective voice of the network.

Support or partner with REN

If you would like to support our work or explore partnering with REN, please contact our Chief Executive, Jenny Walton:

hello@refugeeemploymentnetwork.org

or visit our website to find out more about our work

refugeeemploymentnetwork.org

From our CEO



Jenny Walton, CEO, Refugee Employment Network

Most of us want similar things in life: a safe place to call home, a secure future for our families, and meaningful work that allows us to take care of them. My family were refugees, so this mission is deeply personal to me. I know the impact of being forced to flee and rebuild a life can be felt across generations. But it should not take generations to rebuild a life and career. I am impatient about that, but also hopeful that we can do better.

Refugees bring valuable skills, qualifications and professional experience to the UK, but too many face persistent barriers to finding suitable and sustainable work.Half of the displaced people in the UK hold qualifications equivalent to A-levels or above, and nearly a quarter hold a Master's degree or higher. Connecting this population to the labour market addresses severe skills shortages, restores dignity, rebuilds lives, and strengthens the broader economy.
REN stays focused on practical, high-impact solutions. This year, we directly connected 704 displaced people with employers, jobs and dedicated support. And behind the scenes, we've strengthened our own foundations - tripling our income and securing multi-year funding to expand our national infrastructure.

Employment is central to successful economic and social inclusion in the UK. The talent is there. The opportunities are there. Our job is to connect them, and to do so at scale.

We're immensely proud of what we've achieved together. Our heartfelt thanks go to our Board of Trustees for their expertise, commitment and guidance throughout the year, and to our 400+ REN members, funders and industry partners who believe in our work and are strengthening their commitment to refugee employment at a time when it is more vital than ever.

Above all, we thank the displaced professionals across the UK whose lived experiences, expertise and ambition continue to drive and shape our mission.

We cannot do this alone. Lasting change requires collective action, and I look forward to continuing this work with you.

Thank you

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Unlock talent.
Employ refugees.
Rebuild lives.



REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

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