



# UNLOCKING TALENT: A TOOLKIT FOR SUPPORTING REFUGEE EMPLOYABILITY

A how-to guide for opening pathways  
to decent work for refugees



INGKA GROUP  
An IKEA retailer



**When you look at a refugee,  
what do you see?**

A neighbour, a customer, a potential  
co-worker? If you don't, you could be  
missing a key to your company's success.



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## Let's stand with refugees

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### Must we act?

In 2024, a staggering 122.6 million people were forced to flee the most important place in the world, their home. 43.7 million of these fled to other countries, meaning host nations have seen the arrival of large numbers of people, often needing support. They come from all over the world, from regions experiencing crises of all kinds. Arriving with high hopes and the expectation of building a new life for themselves and their families, refugees often experience a different reality. In many countries, integration proves to be difficult. As a result, the World Economic Forum Global Risk Report 2022 found that large scale involuntary migration is a top long-term concern for economies and societies.

Yet evidence suggests that, with the right support, refugees can help to solve skills shortages and create a positive impact both at work, and in their new communities. It has been estimated that giving all refugees and asylum seekers the same opportunities that were offered to Ukrainian refugees could generate an extra €2 billion in GDP over the next 10 years.

The message is clear: yes, we must act.

### Can we act?

Having a job is key for refugees' successful integration in their host country, and refugee integration is good for business and society. We know from our experience at Ingka that refugees are highly motivated and have skills, perspectives and experiences that can benefit societies and businesses. Refugees enrich company culture and expand our customer base. Through diversity of experience, thought and culture, they help us to drive innovation.

### Will we act?

At Ingka Group, our vision is to help make a better everyday life for the many people. We are committed to championing human rights, having a positive impact on people across our value chain and supporting resilient, thriving neighbourhoods in the communities where we operate. This includes supporting refugees who are members of our communities.

We have been supporting refugee integration for over eight years. Our Skills for Employment initiative has supported more than 3,700 refugees and asylum seekers in 26 countries and we are challenging ourselves to go further. Now we want to encourage our partners and other businesses to act too. It's more important than ever to work together across companies, society and governments to unlock opportunities for refugees, enabling them to support themselves and contribute to their new communities. We need to take action now, and by working together we can have a greater impact.

### Let's take action, together.

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## About this toolkit

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The private sector can play a crucial role in the social and economic inclusion of refugees – as employers and partners and as advocates for inclusive policies that support refugee communities. Supporting refugee integration is one way to make a meaningful contribution to local communities but the benefits are not one-sided. Refugees bring a diversity of experience, thought and culture, that can drive innovation and creativity.

At Ingka Group, we have developed a comprehensive approach over the last eight years to support the integration of refugees into our own workforce and to open up pathways to meaningful work with other employers. We aim to leverage our size and scale, and to work with trusted partners such as UNHCR to bring others from the private sector along with us. Together, we can prove that inclusive growth and positive social impact go hand in hand

Our Skills for Employment programme is designed for refugees who need support and skills development before they can find work. It includes 3-6 months of work experience, training and language lessons, making it easier to gain employment inside or outside our business. We've supported over 3,700 refugees through the programme since 2019 in 26 countries. We have now committed to supporting a further 3,000 refugees and asylum seekers into work by the end of 2027.

This toolkit shares some of the lessons we've learned. We hope it inspires you to act, too.



**Why Act?**



# Because it's happening now

Imagine being forced to flee your home, leaving everything behind. Refugees just want a safe place to rebuild their lives. With the right support, they enrich communities and strengthen society for all.

Refugees\* are people, forced to flee their homes because of the risk of violence, conflict, persecution or war and who have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. Most of them undertake dangerous journeys and sea crossings, risking their lives to try and reach safety. Some get stuck along the way, and some don't survive the journey. Many experience serious mental health challenges from the psychological impact of displacement, uncertainty about the future, and conflict they may have experienced.

High hopes meet hard realities Understandably, the people who do make it have high hopes and ambitions. They want to find work to support their families and give their children an education and good prospects for the future. For those who arrive safely, the difficult journey is not over. They can face frequent rejections and frightening uncertainty as to whether they can stay or will have to go back to homes that, in some cases, no longer exist.

The situation becomes even more fraught with bottlenecks in processing asylum applications and provision of care and accommodation.

## **Trapped in a cycle**

These circumstances can mean refugees are at risk of social and economic exclusion.

Their contact with the local population can be limited because of language and cultural barriers, which then makes it difficult for them to learn the local language and culture. Many feel dependent and, in that situation, their self-esteem can plummet.

## **Work is key for integration**

Access to stable employment and financial services is critical to breaking the cycle of dependency that refugees can find themselves in when they seek safety in a foreign country. It needs to take place here and now, and cannot wait for when conditions are ideal. In the end, it's very simple; the better the integration, the lesser the tensions in society.

Although work is key, some countries don't allow asylum seekers and refugees to work legally. In other cases, it may be legal to work but refugees can lack the experience required within the local labour market and working culture to get a first job in their new country – that's where employers can support them.

\* The International legal definition of a refugee as per the 1951 Convention is a person who, "owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality".

## Because it's good for business and society

Besides, helping people in need is the right thing to do.

### **Businesses have an opportunity**

Employment is essential for long-term and successful integration. We know that refugees do not want hand-outs. They want to work and contribute and build a new life for themselves and their families. The private sector plays a crucial role in the social and economic inclusion of refugees by providing employment opportunities, skills training, and entrepreneurship support, which can help integrate refugees into the local economy.

Businesses can also leverage their resources and influence to advocate for inclusive policies and contribute to sustainable solutions for refugee communities.

### **Refugees help strengthen the economy**

Employing refugees can help fulfil labour needs and counter ageing demographic trends. Studies show that the long term economic benefit of admitting refugees outweighs the initial costs and that soon after a spike in migration, the overall strength and sustainability of the country's economy improves — and unemployment rates drop.

### **Refugees bring diverse perspectives and experiences**

According to the Harvard Business Review, diversity unlocks innovation and drives market growth. Studies show that diverse and inclusive cultures lend companies a competitive edge over their peers — and that diverse companies generally perform better financially.

### **Refugees bring talent and skills**

They inherently have resilience and adaptability. Refugees also tend to stay with the same employer longer — contributing positively to higher retention rates.

We know from our own experience through our Skills for Employment programme that refugees are a source of talent and employing them is good for business.



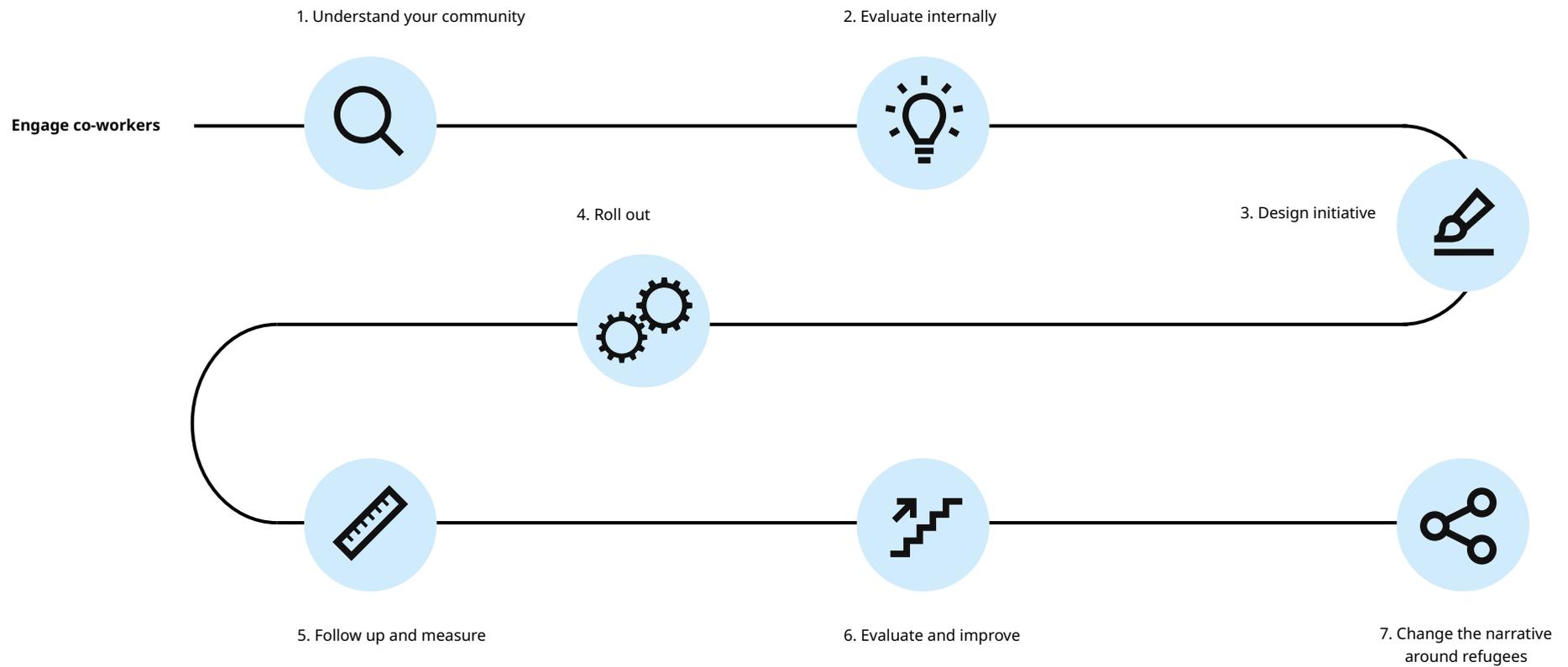
## HOW TO CREATE A PLAN

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# 7-step approach

This toolkit takes you through the 7-step process we've used at Ingka to build an initiative.





## 1. Understand your community

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First, you need to understand your local situation: the refugees, the local inhabitants, the organisations already involved and the legal framework. You need to identify local community needs and social challenges and fears as well as existing initiatives and opportunities.

### **The refugee situation**

Who are they, where do they come from, and what's their background, experience and cultural heritage? What's their employment situation? What resources are available in the country, region or city? UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has identified the following work-related challenges for refugees:

- **Language**

The biggest initial hurdle is language. Many refugees can't speak the local languages — and when language courses are offered, they generally only include the basics.

- **Diplomas, degrees and references**

Many refugees can't find work because they don't have the access to the "right" certificates or documents. Training that is required by the host country may be different from that of the

### **Refugee's home country.**

Even when refugees are highly qualified and have completed an apprenticeship, training course or degree, their qualification may not be recognised in the host country. Refugees have often had to leave their personal belongings behind when forced to flee, including the certificates and documents required for a successful job application, or these may have been lost or destroyed en route.

- **Time restrictions**

Refugees need to rebuild their lives and adjust to life in a new country. This takes time and may mean they are not able to commit to full-time training or work before they fully settle in. They may not be based close to potential employers requiring extra travel time and meaning they may need flexibility around working hours.



• **Fears**

Often, unconscious bias about people's personal backgrounds and individual differences plays a critical role in the way that refugees are perceived.

**The community situation**

What's the level of refugee integration in the community? How are refugees perceived? What are the social challenges of your local community overall? Are there other groups of people within the community experiencing poverty and inequality, unemployment or other challenges? Being fully aware of these things is very important for building a well-balanced community engagement strategy that will maximise the positive impact.

Contact the relevant local authorities and tell them about your plans. Often, migration offices and associated organisations responsible for integrating refugees at work show a great deal of interest. They are in favour of refugees becoming independent and are happy to provide information and support. It's important that the applicants are pre-selected by the authorities or partners. You should allow enough time to identify the relevant offices and organisations you will need to help you. Organisations such as UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and Tent Partnership are great partners to work with.

**The local stakeholders**

Who are the local stakeholders you can collaborate with? These may include non-governmental organisations, social businesses, local and country authorities or other businesses. Are there any local examples of refugee integration initiatives

What are the key legal considerations for hiring refugees? Are there any existing governmental initiatives supporting refugee integration?

In some countries, asylum seekers, and even recognised refugees, are not allowed to work. In such cases, the only course of action available may be advocacy to change these limitations.

# IN OUR EXPERIENCE

## Be informed

"Gathering information is key. In Oslo, we found that refugees were taking part in introductory programmes run by their districts, including language classes. We also found that the majority of unemployed refugees were women, mostly for social and cultural reasons. So, we made sure the number of women participating in our programme was high. This has helped decrease the unemployment rate amongst female refugees by 30 percent within the last three years."

*Dan, IKEA Norway*

## Collaborate with partners

"We couldn't run our programmes without strong national and regional partnerships. Our partners help us with the legal aspects of labour market integration and bring a deep understanding of the local community and the refugees' situations. They know us as a company, what we stand for, and what we offer, making them a crucial link to welcoming refugees into the right programme. This collaboration helps make labour market integration a positive and effective experience for refugees."

*Regula, IKEA Switzerland*

## Tackle the legal framework

"One of the main obstacles that the first stores in Germany met was a lack of understanding concerning legal and administrative frameworks. So, IKEA Germany created a guide on how to best deal with both. This allowed IKEA stores to set up initiatives more quickly and easily and was really well-received."

*Kai, IKEA Germany*



## 2. Evaluate internally

A successful initiative depends on commitment and resources. Is there a recognised need for action and is there a willingness and enough resources to carry out the initiative?

Research by the OECD and UNHCR found that employers can be reluctant to hire refugees: due to:

- Uncertainty about the legal situation and whether refugees are able to work
- Uncertainty about qualifications and skills
- Anxiety about possible poor performance and low productivity due to lack of local language skills
- Fear of discrimination in the workplace and uncertainty about refugees being accepted and included
- Fear of criticism from the general public for employing refugees or asylum seekers.
- It takes people to make the initiative successful and sustainable, so good internal communication and engagement can be key to addressing concerns and challenging misconceptions.

### Is your organisation on board?

Map your internal stakeholders and work out who needs to be involved and at which stage. Make roles and responsibilities clear, both at the country and unit level. You need people in key positions in the company to support the idea, to actively promote the project and to convince those who are critical. To ensure success the country and unit management must be on board and committed. It's vital to create awareness among all co-workers and have a communication plan. Openly explain why you want to do it, how you will do it and how this initiative works with your diversity plans and your engagement in the local community. Be transparent.

### How much do you want to invest?

Besides committed people, a successful project requires resources and time. So, you need to secure a budget. In making your initial estimate, think about the following:

- Duration of the initiative (we found that running the programme over three to six months each year for three years worked well)
- Number of participants per round
- Wages (how much you will pay the participants of the initiative)

- Additional training/coaching/instruction for refugees or your co-workers
- Additional headcount with corresponding workload, e.g. a project leader per country

There could be governmental funding schemes or subsidies available to promote refugees' labour integration in the private sector. Don't forget to explore these opportunities in your market and note that funds are sometimes available through joint partnerships with local stakeholders.



### Tips

- Organise a kick-off presentation to co-workers about the initiative, including its benefits, the timeline, costs etc. Allow plenty of time for questions from the project leaders or management
- Make the presentation shareable

## CHECKLIST OF REQUIREMENTS



- Is there willingness in the company to commit to supporting refugees?
- Are enough resources available for both the design and roll-out phase?
- Does a project leader need to be appointed?
- In which part of the company is the project based?
- What business needs do you want the initiative to support?
- Have you identified and established a relationship with local stakeholders, e.g. government, UNHCR, NGOs, etc who can help to develop the initiative?
- Are roles and responsibilities clear?
- Have you identified how much time should be invested in the project?
- Have you defined the budget? Is it available?
- Are you willing to deal with possible negative reactions, internally and externally?
- Is there a culture of inclusion to help refugees integrate?

Photo: TILLTALANDE, a handmade collection co-created with Jordan River Foundation, made by Syrian refugee women and Jordanian artisans.

The time you need to prepare for your project will depend on the size and scale. Use this preparation time to:

- Plan and define a budget (including potential governmental support funding)
- Identify how many participants you will take on in each round
- Identify possible areas of work practice for participants and job specifications
- Clarify responsibilities within the company during all phases of the initiative.

### What do you want to achieve?

The main purpose of this initiative is to give refugees a chance to gain experience in the local labour market and work culture to strengthen their employment skills. The skills and references they gain should make it easier for refugees to apply for jobs after the training, both within and outside of your organisation. Even during the initiative, participants who show enough potential can be encouraged to apply for available jobs through the regular recruitment process.

Before starting the detailed planning for a project like this, you need to decide within your country/unit, what your objectives are, e.g.:

- To play an active role in helping refugees to integrate
- To reflect local community demographics and customer base
- To acquire qualified co-workers
- To fill jobs that don't require specific skills.

Also, think about business needs that could be met by the initiative. Are there certain areas or times that are especially suited for a refugee initiative e.g. vacancies in specific departments or during summer vacation?

### Who do you want to focus on?

Once you know what you want to achieve, you can decide on the type of people you are hoping to appeal to with your initiative, taking into account that refugees in your community can be very diverse. You may consider focusing on the most vulnerable groups who have not yet gained any work experience in their host country or who lack local language skills.

### Are you ready for the unexpected?

As part of your preparation, you should also complete a risk assessment and check how you can reduce risks. Experience so far has shown that you will come across unexpected challenges. This is why management commitment is so important and why proactive communication with key stakeholders and co-workers at the start will pay off. So, before you begin your journey, make sure you're ready to deal with any possible challenges.

## IN OUR EXPERIENCE

### Prepare your teams

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“Commitment to our programmes is exceptionally high across all IKEA Switzerland. Our labour market integration programmes have become a movement that co-workers are proud of and genuinely support. However, we should never take this for granted. We continue to push for transparent communication and continuous dialogue about integration in our teams. We know we are better together, and it is crucial to involve all co-workers, support them, and show them how much we value their contributions to the success of our programmes, whether they are colleagues, vocational trainers, buddies, or leaders.”

*Regula, IKEA Switzerland*

### Stand together

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“At the Winnipeg unit we already had a refugee programme in place, but when IKEA Canada announced a Canada-wide refugee programme, the response from co-workers was even more positive. A feeling of organisational pride developed which helped the refugees become better integrated in all aspects of the job.”

*Janice, IKEA Canada*

### Find the right people and partners

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“Our store manager is very committed to social initiatives, which was hugely important for success. We have also developed a very good relationship with the local governmental labour agency, who was our main partner – we knew we could only make it happen by working together.”

*Niloufar, IKEA Sweden*

### Community engagement

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“Our programme has become a platform for creating new relationships with stakeholders in the local community while strengthening the perception of our brand as a large employer in the local area. It enables us to reflect the diverse cultures we serve bringing 23 cultures and 45 languages into our workforce around Australia.”

*Harriet, IKEA Australia*



### 3. Design your initiative

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Now it's time to design the initiative. Remember, the better you prepare, the easier rolling out the project will be. And don't do it alone. Build a relationship with the external stakeholders you've identified and work with them to decide who will do what. Spend time creating awareness and understanding in your own organisation.

#### **Length of the initiative**

We recommend making the programme three to six months long for each participant. This is the time usually required to learn about your organization, gain practical work experience and improve their local language skills. Planning with a three-year view is strongly recommended. Also, remember to use what you learn from each round in the next.

**Job requirements and candidate profiles**  
Another important task is defining job profiles for the roles refugees will carry out in their placements. Consider the following points:

#### **• Language skills**

The local language skills needed very much depend on the type of work. If the applicant is going to be in contact with customers, they need good language skills. If the work doesn't involve customer contact, the standard can be lowered. Local language skills of applicants can vary greatly so having a range of roles available can be helpful.

#### **• Physical requirements**

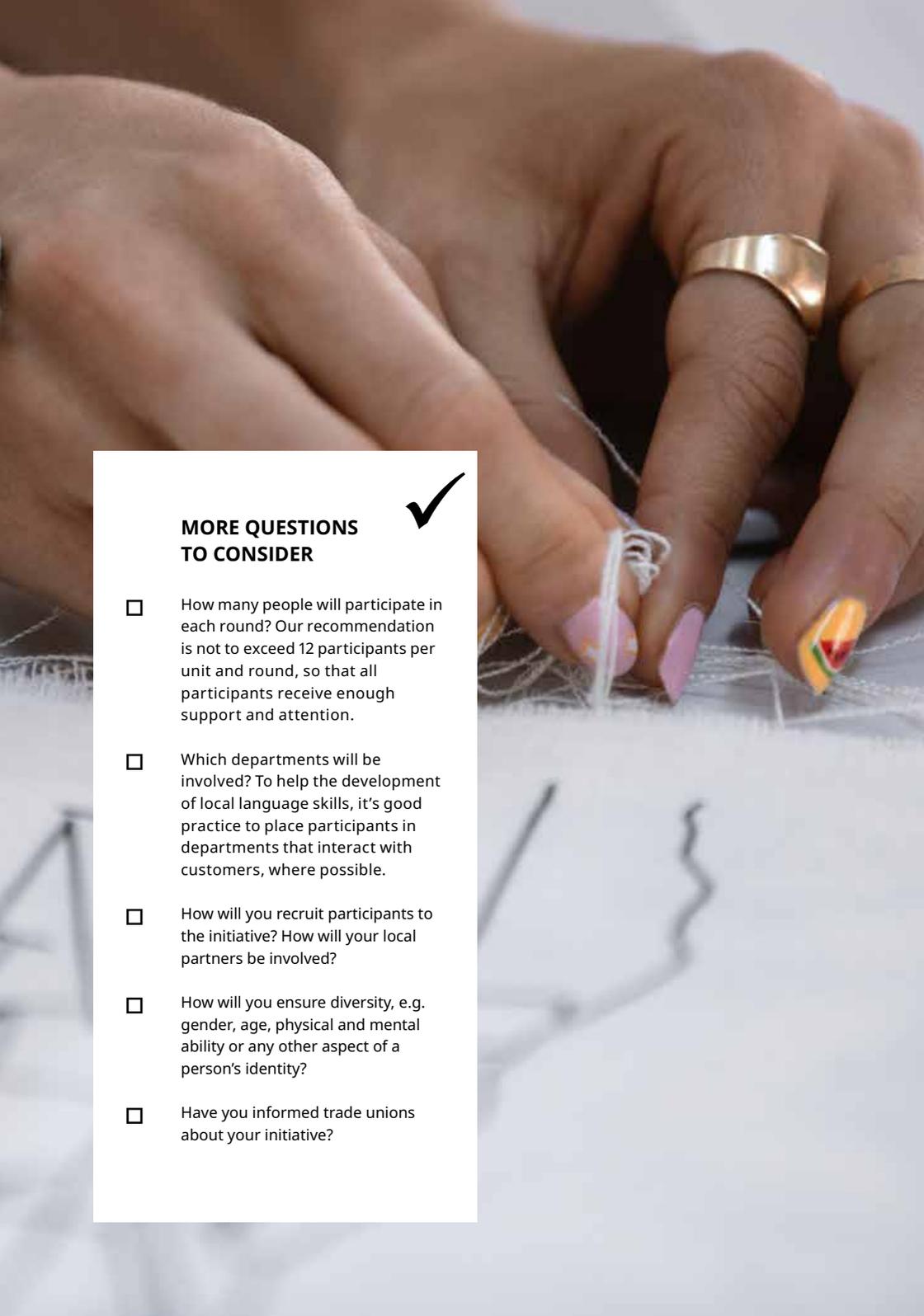
Depending on the area of work, physical requirements may be very important. It's crucial to remember that some refugees have been physically injured by war or during their journey, and may experience psychological impacts as a result.

#### **• Openness**

Openness towards the culture of the host country and the different cultures of other co-workers is required from possible candidates.

#### **• Teamwork**

Teamwork is not as common in some other cultures as it may be in yours. Some refugees may not be familiar with working in this way and need time to get used to it.



## MORE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



- How many people will participate in each round? Our recommendation is not to exceed 12 participants per unit and round, so that all participants receive enough support and attention.
- Which departments will be involved? To help the development of local language skills, it's good practice to place participants in departments that interact with customers, where possible.
- How will you recruit participants to the initiative? How will your local partners be involved?
- How will you ensure diversity, e.g. gender, age, physical and mental ability or any other aspect of a person's identity?
- Have you informed trade unions about your initiative?

### • Gender equality

It's important to put extra effort into attracting and supporting female refugees to take part in the initiative since it's generally more difficult for women to enter the labour market.

### • Motivation and commitment

Some refugees may find the local culture hard to understand. Many arrive with a high degree of motivation, but faced with the reality of their circumstances, some may lose motivation. This is an important issue that should be discussed at the initial interview.

### • Adaptability

The work culture is different from country to country. The way co-workers interact with each other, work in teams, make decisions, communicate and lead others can vary greatly. Some refugees may need time and support to adapt to a new way of doing things.

### • 50/50 approach

Depending on the possibilities and priorities in your community agenda, you could develop skills for employment initiatives which support refugees and local people who are far away from the labour market. Beyond being a well-balanced initiative, this approach could help newcomers to meet local people and build their network, which is a key component for social integration.

### Building in support

There are a number of practical things you can build into your programme to make sure participants have support to fully integrate. Here are some suggestions:

### • Introduction to your organisation

Customise an introduction for the participants. E-learning is not recommended due to a potential lack of local language skills.

### • Mentors

Assign volunteering mentors or 'buddies' to each participant to explain their role, answer questions and offer support along the way.

### • Intercultural training

This is highly recommended for participants, existing co-workers, People & Culture (human resources) departments, direct managers and other team members (especially mentors). We recommend that all co-workers complete training about equality, diversity and inclusion and unconscious biases.

### • Language

Organise local language lessons for people who need them. Some refugees may already take part in courses through local organisations, but it might not be enough. Learning a new language in a working environment has been proven to achieve good results.

### • Schedules

Make sure work schedules are aligned with other parts of the refugee integration initiative (e.g. language courses).

### • Support

Is there any practical support needed to help refugees participate? For example help finding childcare or navigating public transport.

## IN OUR EXPERIENCE

### Start with the basics

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“Going through a Skills for Employment process is a long and challenging process for a refugee. Simplifying the programme made things more successful in Canada. An initial introduction/training in the language of the refugee helped the participants to feel more comfortable. Also don't forget that refugees mostly don't own cars and depend on the availability of public transport.”

*Janice, IKEA Canada*

### Create a safe space

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““Intercultural training provides a safe space for programme participants to ask questions about both the host country and IKEA's work culture. It's also an opportunity to empower participants to envision their future and recognize the value of their experience and skills, both within our company and beyond. These visions of the future have the power to create change for the refugees, and for us as a company.”

*Regula, IKEA Switzerland*

### Provide a different perspective

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“The Spanish economy was in a precarious situation at that time and we were confronted with the possibility of staff members questioning the investment. We decided to spread awareness and increase the understanding by inviting NGOs to speak about the difficulties that refugees face when leaving their countries. This really helped to win over our co-workers and to create a much more welcoming environment”

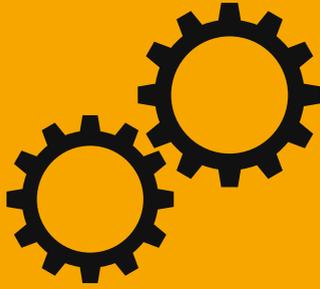
*Laura, IKEA Spain*

### Match the role to the candidate

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‘Different roles require different levels of local language, and we evaluated this as part of our planning process. For non-customer facing roles we are able to integrate more vulnerable people with lower levels of English confidence, allowing them time to build their confidence in a supportive environment. We have also seen that English proficiency improves quickly once people are in the business and interacting with teammates, absorbing the local lingo and learning industry jargon.’

*Niloufar, IKEA Sweden*



## 4. Roll out

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When you've made preparations and defined job profiles, it's time to start selecting participants. This stage should be well-planned and thought-through.

### Selecting applicants

Experience has shown that the initiative works best when local partners recommend applicants. This ensures the most suitable people receive the opportunity to improve their employability. Plus, an ongoing partnership will make it easier for your human resources department to recruit candidates who are ready for the commitment and requirements of having a regular job. Remember that refugees may not have a CV/ resume and may be unfamiliar with recruitment processes. Additional flexibility may be needed to support them through the selection process.

### Introductory interview

Many refugees are still developing their understanding of the unwritten cultural norms and rules in their host country. They may be extremely nervous or uncertain, so it's important to put them at ease and create the right conditions for them to demonstrate their personality and potential. Be prepared to simplify questions or re-phrase them in different ways to ensure a clear understanding. Take a values based recruitment approach and look for evidence of transferrable skills within their responses.

Consider arranging interpreters for certain applicants. Remember, some standard interview questions will not be appropriate, such as "Why do you want to work for our company in particular?" because the applicants are simply looking for work to support themselves and improve their local language and employability skills. This shouldn't be seen as a negative. It's best to avoid questions about why they had to leave their home or the details of their journey, as many refugees have survived extremely difficult experiences. An interview is not the right moment to talk about them.

### Contracts and work permits

A work placement or employment contract is usually prepared in the same way as it is for local co-workers. The process of applying for a work permit varies by country. For this reason, it helps to work alongside local authorities during the recruitment process.



### Tip

It's all about getting to know a person and building up mutual trust. Be sensitive, compassionate and avoid inappropriate questions.

During the application process and interview, bear in mind the background and the experience of the refugees. Remember that refugees may feel unwelcome and unproductive in their new host country, but want to contribute in any way they can.

### **Training and onboarding support**

Integration doesn't work by itself. It is essential to provide training and onboarding support, including intercultural training sessions for refugees and co-workers, as well as regular project updates to everyone involved. Consider whether a translator may be needed for key training sessions at the start of the process to ensure understanding. This may be particularly important for health and safety briefings.

A well-devised training and onboarding set-up helps to speed up the integration process. Refugees should be closely supported, especially in the initial period. Every participant is given an introductory timetable to structure the process and set dates for regular feedback and follow-up meetings. Each participant is also given a mentor to act as their point of contact during the introductory period – someone who looks after and supports them. If the introductory phase is carefully organised, it will take less time to reach the desired standard in participants' work.

### **Intercultural training**

Some rules and values vary significantly between cultures including concepts around punctuality, gender equality and the separation of work and private lives. Intercultural training is usually helpful, but you should expect it to take time and support for refugee participants to adjust to their new circumstances and host culture.

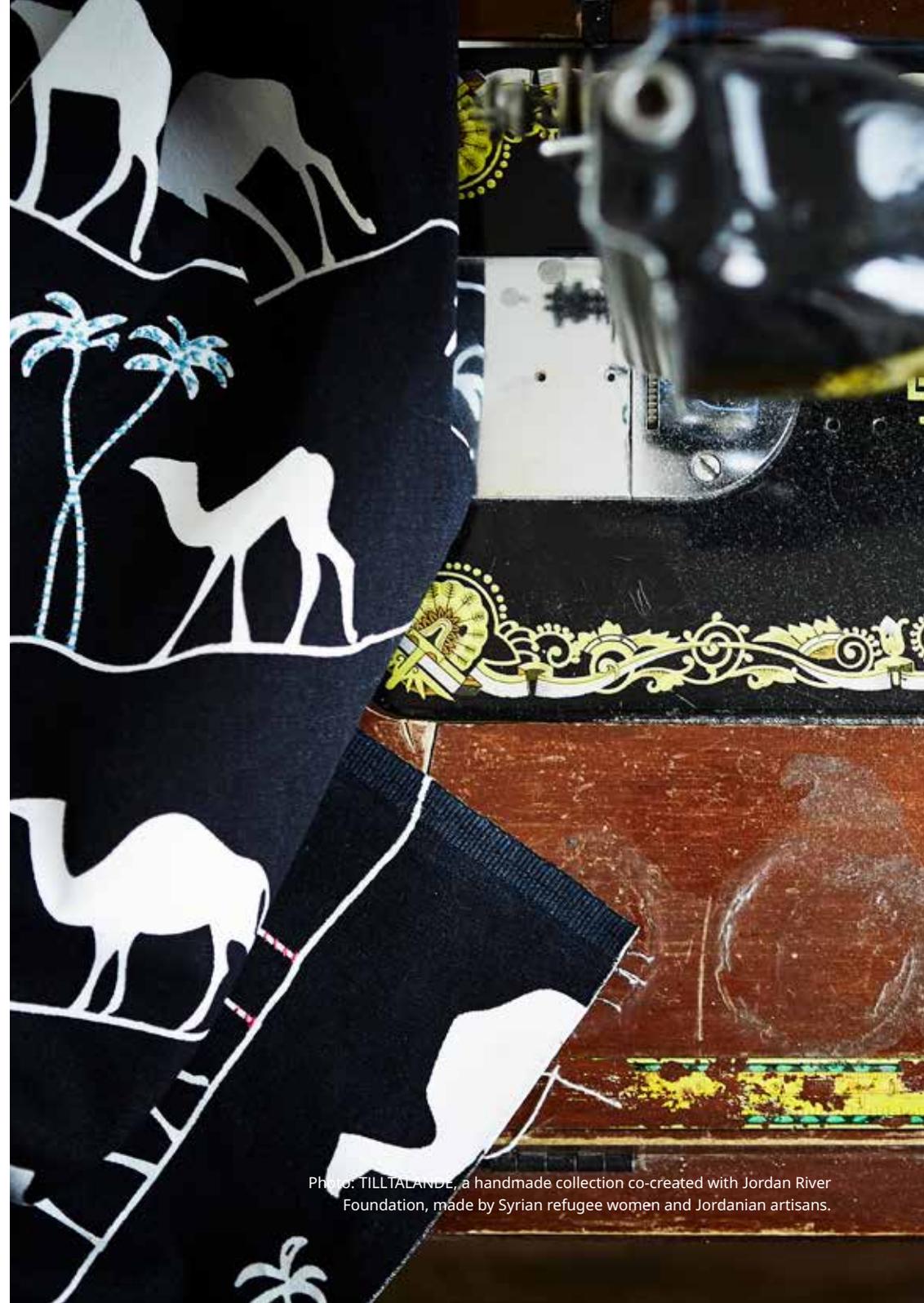
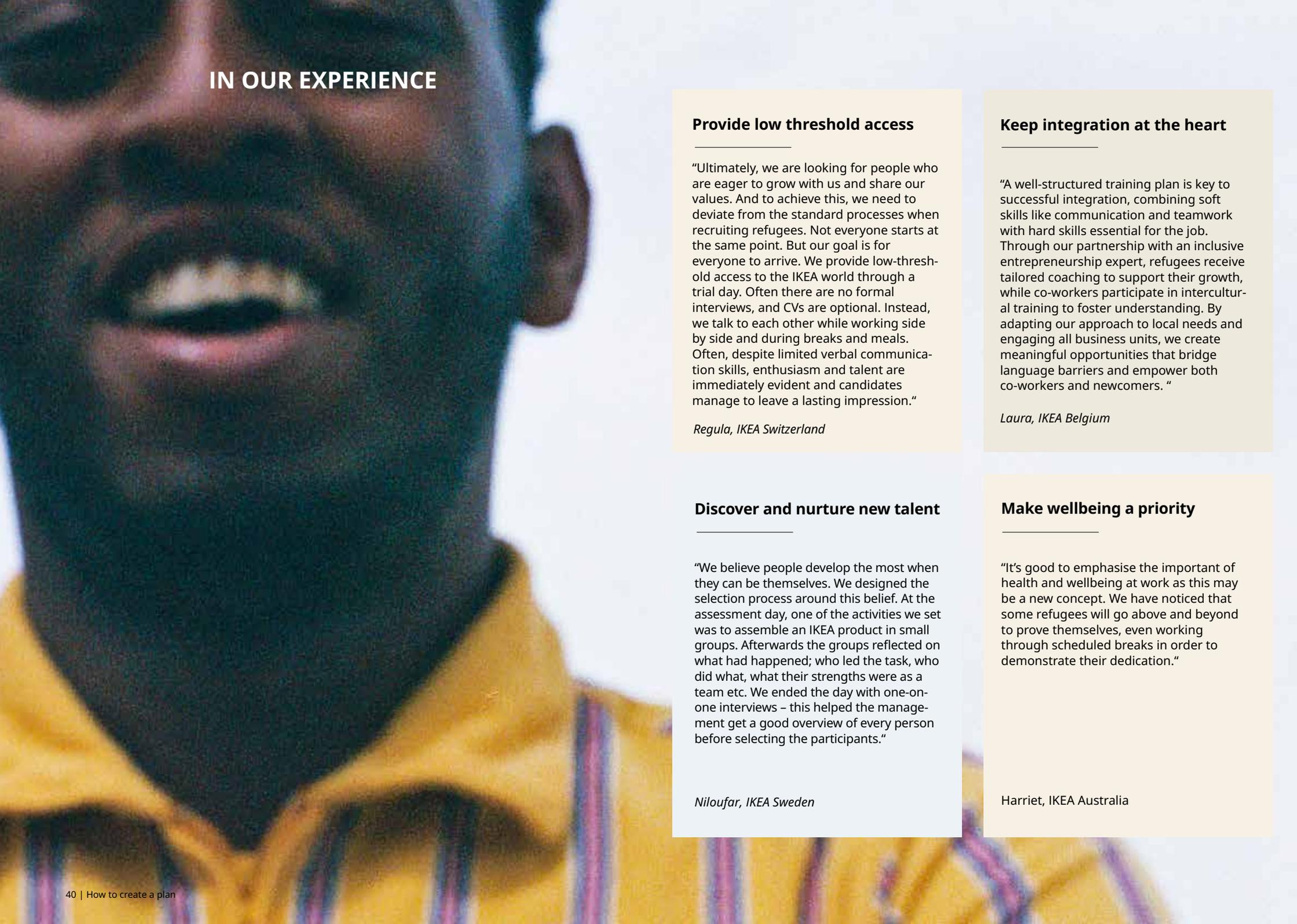


Photo: TILLTALANDE, a handmade collection co-created with Jordan River Foundation, made by Syrian refugee women and Jordanian artisans.



## IN OUR EXPERIENCE

### Provide low threshold access

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“Ultimately, we are looking for people who are eager to grow with us and share our values. And to achieve this, we need to deviate from the standard processes when recruiting refugees. Not everyone starts at the same point. But our goal is for everyone to arrive. We provide low-threshold access to the IKEA world through a trial day. Often there are no formal interviews, and CVs are optional. Instead, we talk to each other while working side by side and during breaks and meals. Often, despite limited verbal communication skills, enthusiasm and talent are immediately evident and candidates manage to leave a lasting impression.”

*Regula, IKEA Switzerland*

### Keep integration at the heart

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“A well-structured training plan is key to successful integration, combining soft skills like communication and teamwork with hard skills essential for the job. Through our partnership with an inclusive entrepreneurship expert, refugees receive tailored coaching to support their growth, while co-workers participate in intercultural training to foster understanding. By adapting our approach to local needs and engaging all business units, we create meaningful opportunities that bridge language barriers and empower both co-workers and newcomers.”

*Laura, IKEA Belgium*

### Discover and nurture new talent

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“We believe people develop the most when they can be themselves. We designed the selection process around this belief. At the assessment day, one of the activities we set was to assemble an IKEA product in small groups. Afterwards the groups reflected on what had happened; who led the task, who did what, what their strengths were as a team etc. We ended the day with one-on-one interviews – this helped the management get a good overview of every person before selecting the participants.”

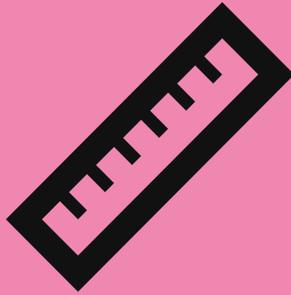
*Niloufar, IKEA Sweden*

### Make wellbeing a priority

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“It’s good to emphasise the important of health and wellbeing at work as this may be a new concept. We have noticed that some refugees will go above and beyond to prove themselves, even working through scheduled breaks in order to demonstrate their dedication.”

*Harriet, IKEA Australia*



## 5. Follow up and measure

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The participants are in place, now what?

Regular evaluation, such as written questionnaires, can help keep the initiative on track. The idea is to keep measuring the outcome both during the process and when it's finished.

This can help you to keep increasing the benefits of the programme for people, business and community over time.

### Follow-up

Remember, there will always be unexpected challenges. The more involved you are in the process, the quicker you can act. Once the project has been running for a few weeks, it's recommended that follow-up sessions are offered to all participants and people involved, such as buddies, direct managers, peers and local partners.

These sessions are an opportunity to share findings, positive experiences, potential challenges and any changes that may be needed. In short, it's a chance to find out how things are working on the ground. They also reassure co-workers that the project is well-managed and that they will be supported every step of the way.

### Suggestions for follow-up sessions:

- Working in a new country
- The unwritten rules of the local culture
- Social manners
- Tips for communicating
- Awareness of cultural differences (including gender equality)
- How integration works
- Conflict resolution

We recommend that the follow-up process is carried out in writing, using standardised questionnaires throughout and at the end of the programme. That way you get results that can easily be compared. These can be used in reporting on the programme outcomes and help you to apply learnings from one location to other units and countries.





### Measuring success

After establishing a clear purpose and setting the goals, it's important to decide how to measure the programme's success.

At Ingka Group, we used a framework called Theory of Change (ToC) to help us identify short- and long-term goals and define indicators for measuring progress.

We use two main types of indicators:

- Impact on people indicators – help us understand the effect of the programme on the lives of the participants, and how it's received by the rest of the workforce.
- Impact on business indicators - track the impact on recruitment, retention and reputation. These indicators can help you to keep making the business case for the programme within and beyond your business.

There are several sources of support online to help you set goals and identify indicators, including [www.theoryofchange.org](http://www.theoryofchange.org)

### Example indicators

These are some of the indicators you could use to measure the impact of your programme.

#### Impact on people

- 1 Absolute number of participants and buddies.
- 2 Percentage of participants who secured a job, either within or outside the organization, measured after completing the training.

#### Impact on the business

- 3 Retention rate of participants who obtained a permanent job within the organisation after completing the training.
- 4 Engagement and perception change among customers/consumers and communities.

## IN OUR EXPERIENCE

### Positive outcomes

“Our investment in refugee inclusion is generating many enduring benefits. As a business, we have unearthed a new talent pool with valuable skills, knowledge, and ambitions. Our data also reveals a high level of loyalty and lower turnover among this cohort. These outcomes provide a strong anchor for our storytelling with many audiences as we strive for greater social cohesion and a sense of belonging for all refugees”.

*Harriet, IKEA Australia*

### Build in extra structure

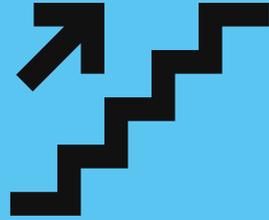
“IKEA Spain and its partners measured the success of the programme, including the employability of refugees participating. We divided our indicators in four phases, giving further structure to what should be measured and when it’s best to do so: selection of participants, employability programme, awareness campaign, post-programme monitoring.”

*Laura, IKEA Spain*

### Encourage conversation

“Throughout the programme training we invited people to share stories from different cultures, giving participants and co-workers new perspectives and opening up other ways of thinking. This contributed to a higher level of integration between co-workers and refugees, as well as an increase in awareness of the value diversity brings.”

*Sara, IKEA Italy*



## 6. Evaluate and improve

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Incorporating new findings is crucial for the initiative's success. Learning as you go is not only important during the process, but also afterwards. So don't forget to evaluate, learn and improve for the next round.

## IN OUR EXPERIENCE

### Adapt as you go

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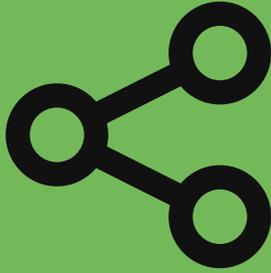
"Most important of all, we learned that there is no "one size fits all". We learned about the need to integrate language training, to offer flexible workloads, and not to forget the already well-qualified and experienced talents in our integration efforts. With three programs we are now not only able to welcome refugees at different stages of their lives and meet their different needs, but we are also able to secure additional talents for IKEA in a competitive labour market. Back in 2016, it was simply important for us to start. And we very much encourage others to do the same. From our side we are definitely not finished. After all, as IKEA's founder always said: Most things still remain to be done."

*Regula, IKEA Switzerland*

### Preparing for the next round

An evaluation is a useful way of looking back at how successful a project has been and will help to improve processes for next time. Ideally, you'll do this during the training round and at the very end of the programme.

On the pages 54-58 you'll find useful insights from parts of our business that have already introduced a refugee initiative.



## 7. Change the narrative around refugees

Through advocacy and communication activities we can have an impact beyond our own operations. We can help transform negative misconceptions about refugees by highlighting the value they bring to businesses, host communities and society at large.

### How we create, tell and share stories that matter.

We can help transform negative misconceptions about refugees by highlighting the value they bring to businesses, host communities and society at large.

The current narrative around refugees is often based on fear of the unknown and what it means for me. This means refugees are often perceived as 'disturbances' to the host community's equilibrium.

Yet refugees' contributions to society and businesses can be significant. They can help strengthen the economy, fulfil labour needs, and counter ageing demographic trends. When the rights of refugees are upheld, they will be better able to integrate and contribute to the economy by fulfilling local labour needs, paying taxes and buying local products and services as consumers. This will improve the social cohesion in the host communities.

Changing the narrative means showing that refugees bring value to host communities, businesses and society.

### Key movements for changing the narrative:

Communicate real life examples and case studies to inspire and engage people in the value of refugee integration.

Inspire and motivate businesses to utilise their capabilities to support refugees, by providing employment opportunities, utilising products and services, or through advocacy.

Improve awareness and perception of refugees amongst our co-workers, customers and neighbourhoods.

Engage and share knowledge with decision makers and opinion leaders.

Powerful storytelling and partnerships are key enablers for changing the narrative around refugees.

Focus on the value refugees bring.

Focus on the individual, not refugees as a group.

Always portray people in a positive way.

Always make sure you have their consent/ model agreement.

Follow-up of stories to see what happens after.

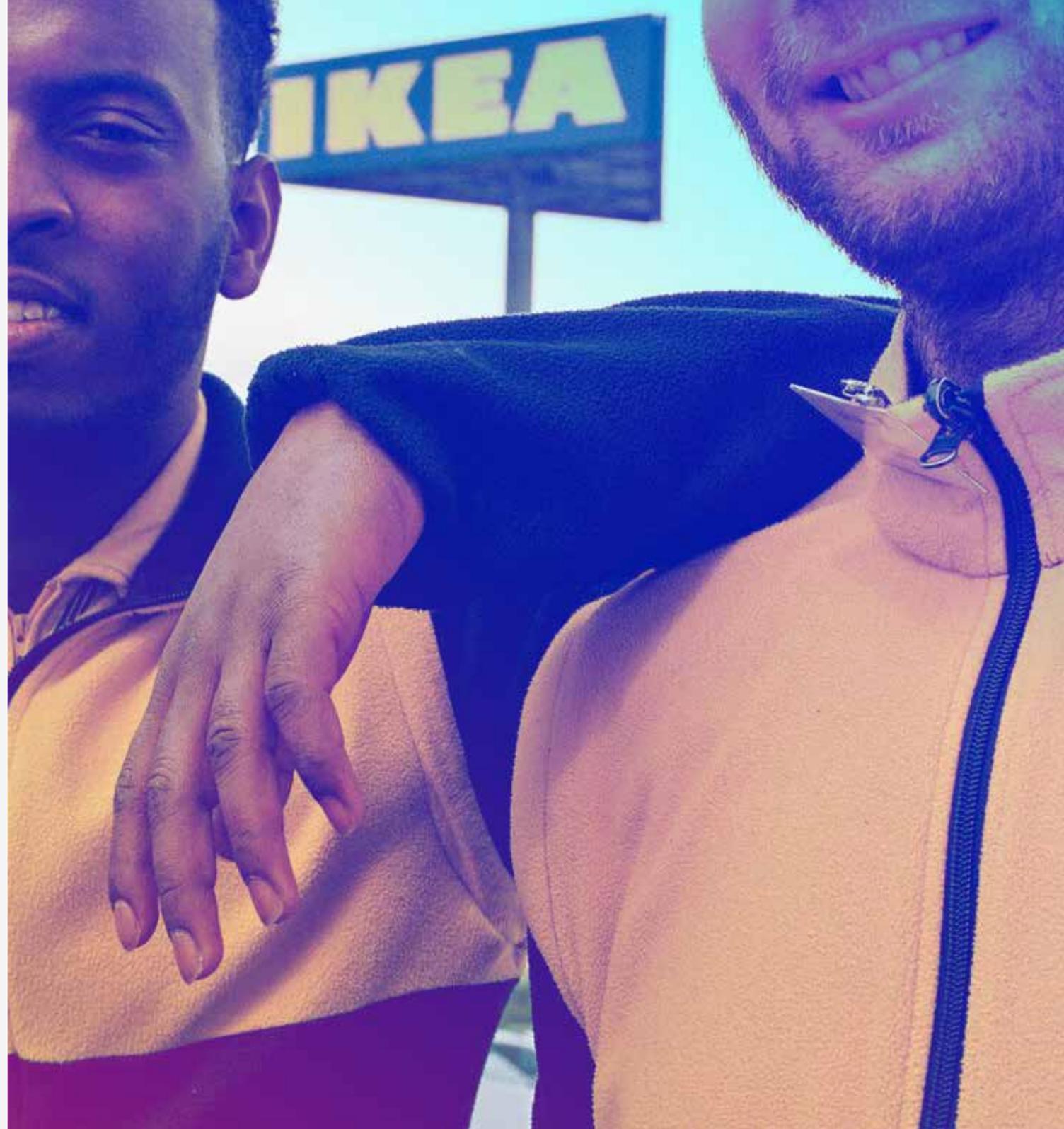
Prioritise what makes refugees similar to host communities.

Include a call to action where possible.

Co-create together with refugees.

**WHAT WE'VE  
LEARNED**

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## What we've learned so far

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Ingka Group units across 26 countries have been involved in our Skills for Employment initiatives since 2019. Here we share some of the valuable lessons we've learned along the way.

### **Internal communication is essential**

Clear and timely communication is at the heart of a successful initiative. For example, Q&A sessions that provide context for co-workers and enable them to discuss any concerns can be especially helpful. The relevant department needs to set out what has to be done to help refugees integrate into the workforce. It's especially important to communicate with managers, so they can respond to co-workers questions.

We have seen that there is great interest amongst co-workers to find out more about the circumstances and background of refugees. Creating a factsheet about the refugees' countries of origin was really appreciated and also helpful in preventing possible prejudices. Ideally the factsheet provides basic background information, including ongoing conflicts or crises, ethnicities, religions, human rights situations, etc.

### **Internal commitment is crucial**

Internal acceptance of, and support for, a refugee project is essential. A well-prepared initiative, when teamed with good communication, can help bring even critical voices on board.

### **Appoint a project manager**

Depending on the scale of the initiative, appointing a project manager may be necessary. If it's a national project that takes place in different units, you might need a person working full-time to set up and carry out the project.

### **Define responsibilities clearly**

It's important that responsibilities are clearly defined, both internally and with any possible partner organisations. Everyone who is involved must know what their role and responsibilities are. This is the only way to make sure everything runs smoothly.

### **Upskill your recruiters**

Upskill recruiters and your hiring community on inclusive practices to create a friendly and accepting context during the recruitment process.

### **Set up intercultural training**

Training for both refugees and co-workers is key to success with, the intercultural training considered particularly helpful and beneficial.

### **Sample questions for Q&A sessions**

- Why do people flee their country?
- What is the situation like for refugees in their host country?
- Do refugees have permission to work in their new country?
- Why are we getting involved?
- How is the initiative structured or what kind of commitment are we making?
- Who is responsible internally?
- Which parts of the company are involved?
- In which areas/departments will the refugees work?
- What happens to the refugees after the initiative?
- Will existing jobs be put at risk due to this initiative?
- Where is further information available internally?

### **Define responsibilities clearly**

It's important that responsibilities are clearly defined, both internally and with any possible partner authorities or organisations. Everyone who is involved must know what their role and responsibilities are. This is the only way to make sure everything runs smoothly.

It's important to secure the knowledge and competence to recruit refugees (refugee rights, legal issues etc.). Be aware that a digital recruitment process can also be a barrier for potential participants. It's essential to work closely with your local partner in the recruitment process to secure the best set-up.

### **Language is a big challenge**

In the questionnaires, all the participants expressed an urgent desire to improve their local language skills. However, often local language courses are only funded up to a very basic level, which in our experience, is not always sufficient for day-to-day work. One idea is to find people, such as retired teachers, who are prepared to volunteer. Providing access to online language training can also be helpful.

### **Support gender equality**

It can be more challenging for female refugees to participate due to cultural factors or caring responsibilities. There may also be more male than female refugees in some locations. To enable more women and refugees with caring responsibilities to take part, it's crucial to allow flexible working options (eg 50-70 % of working hours).

### **Buddies/mentors are a key success factor**

It's important to set up structured onboarding for the participants supported by trained buddies/mentors. Allow sufficient time for the buddies/mentors to be trained for their role.

### **Be prepared for a slower start**

The work performance of refugees may initially lag behind that of the regular workforce. We recommend that you treat your commitment to refugees as a social responsibility. Keep your expectations of their performance realistic and evaluate on a case-by-case basis while bearing in mind the long-term potential impact.

### **Don't underestimate cultural differences**

Employers may encounter views and values held by refugees that are different from their own. Changing habits takes time, so have patience. Everybody needs to be aware of these differences and accept them.

### **Have empathy**

Some people have the unreasonable expectation that refugees who have been granted asylum should express nothing but gratitude. Don't forget that refugees may be dealing with physical and psychological effects of the difficulties they have experienced and worried about family members who have been left behind - all while attempting to work and integrate in a foreign place. This would be a difficult adjustment for anyone and requires patience. It is important to have empathy.

### **There will be many win-win experiences**

Every IKEA country or unit that has carried out a refugees' Skills for Employment initiative has found it to be mutually enriching. It's about meeting as equals and helping refugees become independent in their new environment.

Co-workers and teams have said that the experience has broadened their mindset - now they feel they're truly living the values of equality, diversity and inclusion.

### **Be ready to adapt**

At Ingka Group, alongside our Skills for Employment programme, we've also implemented our Hiring Displaced Talent Framework, a pathway to IKEA recruitment for displaced people who are 'job ready' and don't need employment skills training. Initially introduced to support Ingka co-workers and their partners from Ukraine, it has since been extended globally. This framework helps displaced people find jobs in departments such as logistics, food and sales, and supports them during onboarding and adaptation to their new roles.



Photo: HANTVERK, a handmade collection co-created with social entrepreneurs from Jordan, India, Thailand and Romania.

## Success factors

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Here is some advice from our stores and markets who have already set up initiatives you may find helpful:

- **Ensure ownership** from country/unit management
- **Design processes** that fit with your existing way of doing things, such as using part of the existing onboarding/training processes
- **Secure balance** between newcomers and host community needs. The Skills for Employment initiative for refugees complements local community engagement, it doesn't replace it
- **Team up with local authorities**, non-governmental organisations and/or social businesses who can bring expertise to areas where your organization may lack knowledge and can support with extra administrative tasks. Where possible, seek out and learn from people who have been involved in previous initiatives either as participants or managers
- **Encourage passion**, solidarity, positive support and adaptation from our talented co-workers
- **Communicate with co-workers**, partners, participants and other stakeholders. Make them aware of the goals and outcomes. For example, after the initiative, some of the refugees will be invited to apply for vacancies that will be open to everyone
- **Present refugees as talents** with valuable experience and skills to contribute - share best practice
- **Commit to gender equality**. Make efforts to attract and enable women refugees to take part in the initiative



## GET INVOLVED

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# Let's take action, together.

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Helping refugees find work isn't just a humanitarian effort. It's good for business.

In June 2024, there were 43.7 million refugees who had been forced to flee their home country due to violence, conflict or persecution. Wherever they've come from, all refugees are people like everyone else. And they bring with them skills, talent and hope.

Supporting refugees' integration is something that everyone can get involved in, as an individual, society, government or business.

We believe more companies, big or small, have important and unique roles to play in the labour integration of refugees. Companies can choose to see opportunities, not threats. Refugees provide an opportunity to bring diversity, talent, innovation and resilience into your company. Work brings human dignity to people and enables individuals to participate in social and economic life, which is crucial to having a place to call home.

We see that refugees can bring great value to business and society – if we enable them to. We support refugees because it is the right thing to do and because it makes business sense.

When we developed our Skills for Employment initiative, we already knew that great things can be achieved when people work together toward a common goal.

That's why we believe everyone needs to be involved. **Including you.**

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For more information visit

<https://ingka.com/projects/skills-for-employment/>

**VERSION**

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**About Ingka Group**

Ingka Group is the largest IKEA franchisee, generating 87.8% of total IKEA Retail sales in FY24. Ingka Group is made up of three businesses, working closely together: IKEA Retail, Ingka Centres and Ingka Investments.

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