

North Yorkshire County Council Refugee Employability Project

(Report as at 17 May 2022)

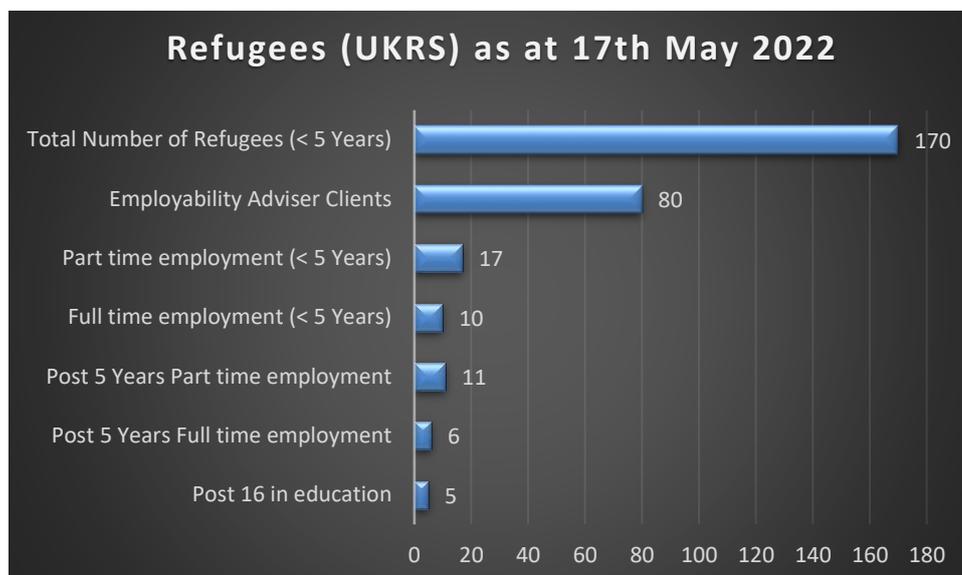
Overview

The Refugee Employability Project was set up to assist with the resettlement of Syrian refugees in North Yorkshire as part of the UK Government’s commitment to relocate refugees under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). Since 2021, new arrivals are now supported under the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), which provides the same level of support as the previous schemes.

In addition, we now have 25 Afghan families in the county, which equates to 59 Employability Adviser Clients.

The primary aim of the Employability Adviser is to support refugee clients into meaningful and sustainable employment and, through this, help them move towards full integration and independence. This also requires the provision of relevant training to validate existing skills and also to provide additional skills and training.

For the UKRS refugees resettled from 2021 onwards and VPRS and VCRS arrivals resettled between July 2016 and February 2018, the position as at 17 May 2022 was:



The 170 individuals, and 80 Employability Adviser Clients, detailed above are accounted for within 38 families who are still within their five-year support period. There are now 25 families (126 individuals), and 65 previous Employability Adviser Clients who are past their five-year support period.

Despite the issues around COVID, continuing language barriers and employer reluctance, the number of clients in either part or full time employment continues to show an upward trend. The number of post-16 UKRS refugees in education (5) has remained static.

Clients who are within the post five-year resettlement period are still monitored to measure the longer-term success of the project.

The figures on the chart account for all UKRS refugees families who arrived during 2021 and 2022, with additional families due to arrive in the summer and autumn of 2022.

Families from Afghanistan

The majority of Afghan families include at least one individual who supported the British government and/or troops with interpretation, translation, and other services during the occupation.

The table below indicates the current numbers and locations of Afghan Employability Adviser Clients:

Location	Number of Clients
Harrogate & Knaresborough	12
Northallerton	9
Richmondshire	24
Selby	10
Skipton	4
Total	59

There are currently 25 Afghan families, 122 individuals, being supported in the county through the Afghan resettlement programme.

There are currently eight Afghans in full-time or part-time employment but this figure has fluctuated as some adults have done agency work or are on temporary contracts.

Under the Afghan resettlement programme, support will be provided for up to three years. It mirrors the support provided to the UKRS families (5 years) but is of shorter duration because people arriving on the Afghan schemes are perceived to have better English skills and should therefore require less support to achieve employment and integration.

In reality, the level of English demonstrated by the Afghan arrivals varies tremendously and many will require higher levels of support than first anticipated. Most will require substantial help to integrate effectively into the UK. Those with higher levels of education and experience are seeking jobs in more professional and skilled sectors, which are very competitive. In some cases, this will make it more difficult to secure employment.

We have already commenced the process of obtaining 'Statements of Comparability' for the degree level, and above, qualifications held by many of the Afghan adults. This is being done through the NARIC scheme provided by Ecctis.

The Employability Adviser continues to meet with new families as they arrive and this activity has been simplified by the removal of COVID restrictions and the recommencement of the Refugee Council drop-in sessions. As with the other refugees resettled in North Yorkshire, they will continue to be supported to secure employment, training and with other work related activities.

Ukrainian Situation

There are already numerous Ukrainian refugee families in the county under the 'Sponsorship Scheme' but the Employability Adviser has not been required to provide any support. There are several hundred offers of sponsorship across the county although it is anticipated that the majority of the families arriving will be single women with children, which might limit the need for involvement from the Employability Adviser.

Self-Employment

Self-employment continues to be the aim of many of our refugee adults. In reality, few have the skills required to set-up and run a business in the UK whilst they are in their resettlement support period. The levels of control and legislation are much greater in the UK and, for those who wish to pursue this option, a substantial amount of support is required from the Employability Adviser.

The Employability Adviser will continue to seek financial support for clients from other organisations. For the Afghans families, one avenue of support that may be available is through the Armed Forces Covenant and this route is being looked into in respect of two clients.

There are currently five businesses being operated within the county. They are:

- Takeaway business in Scarborough
- Barber Shops (2) in Scarborough & Harrogate
- Tailoring business in Malton
- Carpet & Rug Shop in Northallerton

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships continue in the following:

- Hairdressing (2) in Scarborough
- Motor Mechanic in Harrogate

In 2021, the County Council provided an in-house apprenticeship in its HR Resourcing Solutions Team for a young Syrian refugee adult wishing to pursue a career in Recruitment/Human Resource Management. She went on to be a finalist in the Charity, Voluntary and Public Sector Apprentice 2021 BAME Apprenticeship Awards and subsequently secured a permanent position with the Council in October 2021.

Virtual Meetings for Employability Support

Zoom meetings, emails, WhatsApp, and telephone contact continue to be the main forms of communication between clients and the Employability Adviser. They ensure the most effective use of time but are now being supplemented with meetings at the recommenced Refugee Council drop-ins.

DWP Communications

The Employability Adviser has continued to maintain contact, with various offices of the DWP, in relation to issues with benefit claims, ESOL attendance, and employment.

Other Virtual Support

Support is provided to clients relating to:

- College, and training applications
- Online training
- DBS applications
- Qualification conversion (NARIC)
- Preparation for interviews
- Job applications
- Benefit related support
- New businesses and self-employment
- ESOL issues
- General advice

Work with Employers

Local employers have continued to express interest in supporting the new Afghan families and this has created a positive impact for earlier refugee arrivals in the county. The issues continue to be the skills match and, for many, their levels of English but work is being done with local employers to try to overcome these barriers. There have also been several enquiries relating to Ukrainian refugees and these are being logged for future discussions.

Recently the Employability Adviser has presented at three local employer forums, in Craven, Scarborough and Selby. As most success in securing work has been achieved when working with local employers, or through local organisations, this approach will continue.

Applications will still be made online, through agencies, and by networking with the Volunteers, the DWP Employer Engagement teams and employer organisations.

A new 'refugee' website, which can be used to promote the skills, experience and availability of all refugees across the County, is currently under construction. Once completed it will allow us to showcase the refugees seeking employment.

Volunteering

Volunteering continues to be a valuable method of improving English language and social skills and, albeit more slowly than other areas of the community, is now reopening for new volunteers following the lifting of COVID restrictions. Discussions with voluntary networks, and organisations such the Citizens Advice Bureaux, are ongoing.

Training & Education

Training during over the last two years has, mostly, had to be on a virtual basis with courses on Food Hygiene, Project Management and Lights Goods Vehicle theory training being secured. Moving forward, there is likely to be a mixture of both virtual and face2face options being used. A Forklift Truck training course scheduled for early June, will be the first face2face course offered.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Following a 'hybrid' phase, where ESOL was delivered both online and face2face, the provision is moving back to a full face2face delivery format.

Attendance in some areas, and with some clients, is still an issue and the Employability Adviser is supporting ESOL Tutors, and Refugee Council Advisers, to reduce the levels of non-attendance. As English language skills continues to be the most common barrier to achieving progression and employment, this is of great importance.

Key Challenges

The rapid increase in new families continues to impact on the level of one2one support possible. Even though some clients have lived in the UK for almost five years, their level of English continues as a barrier to them securing employment.

The level of English of some of the Afghan clients is lower than previously expected and they will require more intense support. Refugees are often competing for work against individuals with higher and more appropriate skills. For many, in both communities, the level of their English remains a distinct barrier.

The Employability Adviser will continue with virtual support and only arrange face2face contact for initial meetings and when it is required for specific activities. The increased client numbers mean that virtual meetings will be more effective and time efficient.

Key statistics 2021/22

- Continuing upward trend for those in employment
- Two new businesses launched
- Ongoing virtual support provided to all Refugees
- Recommended attendance at drop-in sessions
- Successful delivery of 'Zoom' meetings
- Level of part-time jobs and full-time jobs maintained, or increased
- Levels of employment for Afghans increasing
- Continuing successful delivery of digital courses
- Three businesses continue to operate and two new businesses commenced

Priorities 2022/23

- Continue to meet with all new Refugees
- Continue with virtual meetings using Zoom and telecom
- Visit face2face drop-ins for specific meetings
- Improve ESOL attendance
- Recommence appropriate face2face training options
- Continue to support and enable all Refugees to apply for, and secure, work
- Focus on the SMEs and support organisations in each area
- Develop 'Refugee' website

Neil Forster

Refugee Employability Adviser

17th May 2022