

A JOBS/SKILLS MARKETPLACE FOR REFUGEES

John Cameron
Cameron Foundation
<http://cameronfoundation.org/>
24 March 2016
Revised 27 June 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this proposal is to increase the intake of refugees by making it easier for those who have, or can acquire, marketable skills to find jobs and be accepted through a skilled migration process.

The proposal involves creating a website where refugees can post their skills and potential employers can offer employment. An NGO in the refugee's location and a (possibly different) NGO in the employer's location verify the good faith of both employer and potential employee. They also assist the refugee with their application, travel and integration into their new home country.

Ideally...

- The website is accessible to refugee communities wherever located.
- The employer pays a commission on job placement. That commission goes to the NGOs involved.
- The website itself is completely automated and takes no commission or payment of any kind.

The refugee crisis has reached something of a stalemate. Political solutions seem to have gone as far as they can because governments can't get the popular mandate they need to do more. This proposal empowers the private sector, that is companies who employ people, to act independently. All that is required of politicians is to allow skilled migrant visas to be granted in the case where a skilled job applicant happens to be a refugee. That should be possible without expending too much political capital.

An implementation of the website which comes close to the above ideal is proposed (in section "Marketplace Implementation").

INTRODUCTION

For many businesses, it is not unusual to recruit people from around the world who have useful skills. The immigration process can be slow but it is usually possible. The travel and legal expenses of the employee (and sometimes their family) are often paid by the employer.

This proposal is about making this form of immigration possible and practical for refugees. If a person has skills of value to an employer who wishes to employ them, it should be irrelevant whether the person is a Syrian refugee, for example, currently displaced or in other unfortunate circumstances.

This is identified as an important "avenue of admission" by UNHCR in its "Legal avenues to safety and protection through other forms of admission" - <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5594e5924.html>

For refugees with marketable skills, what is needed is an easy, accessible and secure way that they can advertise and demonstrate those skills to prospective employers, and processes where they can receive the special support they will need to undertake an offer of employment.

For refugees without marketable skills, in particular children, it is possible to acquire those skills through initiatives, described later, which deliver education programs to refugee populations. The jobs marketplace described in this proposal provides the incentive to develop those new skills. Many refugees are likely to remain in their refugee situation for years – <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4a54bc00d.pdf>. Without an incentive to pursue an education and acquire useful skills, these children risk becoming a lost generation.

Regional job marketplaces already exist for refugees who have managed to reach an employment destination. See the section “Regional Job Marketplaces” in the Appendix “Existing Job Marketplace Initiatives”. However, the focus of this proposal is on reaching out to refugees who are still stranded in camps or other temporary locations. A suggested implementation of this proposal is described below in the section “Marketplace Implementation”. It makes use of these existing local initiatives as well as an important and successful initiative, run by Talent Beyond Boundaries (see “Existing Job Marketplace Initiatives”) together with UNHCR, currently operating in several key refugee locations including Lebanon and Jordan.

JOB/SKILLS MARKETPLACE FOR REFUGEES

Online marketplaces are everywhere these days: Uber, Airbnb, eBay, Etsy etc. The proposal is to create an online marketplace (i.e. a website) where refugees can list the skills they have and potential employers can offer employment.

Marketplace software can be bought “off the shelf” (see Appendix “Marketplaces”) and examples of successful job marketplaces already exist, so there is no technical or conceptual challenge here. The problem is making it work in a refugee environment. The special challenges that arise include:

- Access to Internet and training
- Locating job candidates and validating skills
- Obtaining skilled migration visas
- Protection against exploitation by unscrupulous employers
- Relocation support

The following sections propose solutions to each of these challenges.

ACCESS TO INTERNET AND TRAINING

NetHope is currently working with partners providing “cell phone connectivity and charging along migration routes and in refugee camps, cyber security, a central information portal for refugees, and e-learning for young refugees.” - <http://nethope.org/project/emergency-response-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

Groups like SPARK <http://www.spark-online.org/> and Kiron <http://kiron.ngo/> can facilitate online training once connectivity is in place. Here is a good recent article on the current status of providing training to Syrian refugees <https://www.devex.com/news/getting-syria-s-college-students-back-into-class-88380>

LOCATING JOB CANDIDATES AND VALIDATING SKILLS

NGOs located on the ground in refugee camps or working with refugees in urban settings are in an ideal position to identify potential job candidates and assist them in registering their skills with the marketplace.

In more normal circumstances, employers like to be provided with some kind of reference. This is difficult when the individual is a displaced person. The local NGO can at least partially fulfill this role by attesting to the honesty and good character of a candidate. However, in the absence of a traditional reference or evidence of qualification, it is important to have some means of validating a candidate’s skills. There are several online services which can be used to fill this gap. They are described in the Appendix “Recruitment Process”.

OBTAINING SKILLED MIGRATION VISAS

The following report outlines the special obstacles faced by refugees when they apply for a skilled migration visa - <http://cameronfoundation.org/AustralianSkilledVisaForRefugeesAdvice.pdf>. The report is written by one of Australia's leading migration lawyers and refugee specialists. Although the context of the report is Australian, the obstacles described will apply in other countries.

For another recent study, see Section 2.2b of the following Australian Human Rights Commission report, "Pathways to Protection" - <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/pathways-protection-human-rights-based-response>

To overcome these obstacles, immigration authorities need to take into consideration the special difficult circumstances faced by refugees. NGOs will also have a role in assisting refugees with their visa applications.

PROTECTION AGAINST EXPLOITATION

There is a long sad history of vulnerable migrant workers being exploited by unscrupulous employers.

To protect against this, NGO's located in employment locations will attest to the good faith of each employer using the marketplace - just as NGO's attest to the bona fides of job applicants.

The marketplace must also have good security in place to protect the privacy of refugees. Refugee details will only be accessible to genuine potential employers.

RELOCATION SUPPORT

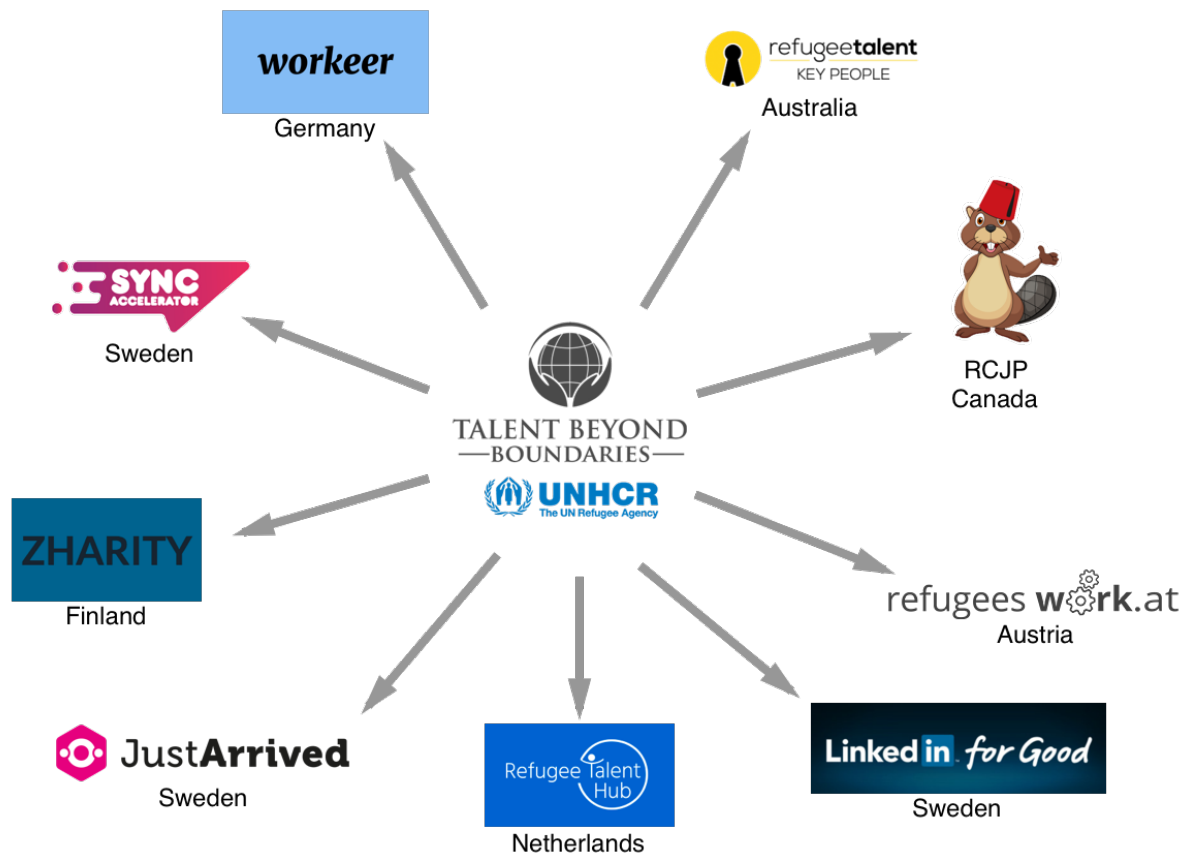
Although employers cover the normal travel and legal costs, a successful job candidate will need other assistance in moving from their current location and in resettling in their final destination. The source NGO can assist them in leaving their current situation and the destination NGO will have the knowledge and skills to assist the employer with the visa application process and help the candidate settle into their new environment.

SUMMARY OF PROCESS

- Refugee (vouched for by source NGO) posts skills
- Employer (vouched for by destination NGO) posts job
- Employer goes through recruitment process and decides to hire refugee
- Employer pays commission which goes to NGOs
- Employer sponsors refugee through destination immigration service and pays for refugee's travel and legal costs
- Source NGO assists refugee leaving current location and destination NGO assists refugee with settlement into new life.

MARKETPLACE IMPLEMENTATION

The proposal is to link existing refugee jobs marketplaces together in a “hub and spoke” architecture with Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) at the centre, connecting out to existing local job marketplaces like Refugee Talent in Australia, Worker in Germany, etc. This would extend the reach of the local marketplaces beyond their own regional boundaries into temporary unsettled refugee populations in places like Jordan and Lebanon. Local marketplaces would then be able to offer two kinds of job seekers - local and external.



This proposal leverages the strength of existing initiatives.

The great achievement of TBB, working closely with UNHCR, is its penetration and acceptance in the refugee populations of Jordan and Lebanon - source locations in the terminology of this proposal.

The regional job marketplaces provide contacts with local employers and local support agencies as well as being adapted to local languages, laws and cultures.

Access to the TBB refugee skills catalog would be through private, secure connections to approved local job marketplaces around the world.

IMPLEMENTATION COST

Because the proposal makes full use of existing initiatives, the cost of implementing it is low. The implementation cost consists of two parts:

- Linking local job marketplaces to TBB via a “web API” – this is mainstream, mature, publicly available technology widely used today by major players like Google, Facebook, Twitter etc. The work involved is straightforward and should not be expensive. Work needs to be done on TBB and each local marketplace. Once the work has been done for one marketplace, other marketplaces should be able to copy a lot of that work.
- Adding the ability in each regional job marketplaces to display remote job seekers.

The modest cost will be shared among the existing initiatives supplemented by philanthropy and/or government. Cameron Foundation is willing to help fund this work.

RUNNING COSTS

The proposal is built from existing initiatives whose running costs are already funded. No additional running cost would be expected.

APPENDICES

EXISTING JOB MARKETPLACE INITIATIVES

TALENT BEYOND BOUNDARIES

<http://www.talentbeyondboundaries.org/> - a US based organization dedicated to linking the global private sector to skilled refugees.

On 12 July 2016, they launched their “talent catalog” <https://www.talentbeyondboundaries.org/catalog/>, in Jordan and Lebanon. The talent catalog is an “online platform where refugees enter information about their work experience, education, and skills to enlist corporate partners who are interested in hiring refugees and reveal the diverse talents this population has to offer the world”. At the time of writing, with the assistance of UNHCR and refugee organizations there are [over 8,000 refugees who have created profiles](#) in the catalog with [a broad range of skills](#).

REGIONAL JOB MARKETPLACES

There are a number of regional job marketplaces. These are marketplaces in a particular country or location designed to help refugees who have already made it to the location in question where they are permitted to work and are seeking employment. Here is a list of some of them.

REFUGEE TALENT

Australia – created by a Syrian refugee and his Australian business partner. They have successfully connected to the Talent Beyond Boundaries database and can display skilled refugee job candidates to potential employers in Australia and around the world.

<http://refugeetalent.com/>

WORKEER.DE

Germany – created by two students from Berlin.

<http://www.workeer.de/>

Here is an English language article on this website: <http://www.dw.com/en/online-marketplace-to-help-refugees-find-work/a-18619290>

JOB ACTIVE

Australia – Australian Government job marketplace – but not specifically targeted at refugees. It is a portal for jobs posted by conventional job agencies (called “providers”), which will typically charge normal commission.

<https://jobsearch.gov.au/>

LINKED IN FOR GOOD – WELCOME TALENT - SWEDEN

Sweden - A LinkedIn Refugees Global Partnership -

<https://linkedinforgood.linkedin.com/programs/refugees/global-partnership>

<http://linkedinforgood.linkedin.com/welcome-talent-se>

JUST ARRIVED

Sweden - <http://justarrived.se/en/>

REFUGEE CAREER JUMPSTART PROJECT

Canada - <http://www.rcjp.ca/>

REFUGEE TALENT HUB

Netherlands - <https://www.refugeetalenthub.com/>

REFUGEE WORK AT

Austria - <https://www.refugeeswork.at/>

SYNC ACCELERATOR

Sweden (Stockholm) - <http://syncaccelerator.org/>

ZHARITY

Finland - <http://zharity.com/>

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Unlike a more typical recruitment process, this whole process needs to be carried out remotely. The process also needs to be applicable to the difficult circumstances refugees may find themselves in. For employers it needs to be scalable so that they can efficiently screen potentially large numbers of candidates and make informed, confident decisions on who they end up recruiting.

This proposal uses technology to address some of the above issues, breaking the process into the following steps:

1. Search - Employer selects initial candidates based on skills search
2. One way interview - Video of candidate responding to questions supplied by employer
3. Skills validation – Online testing of candidate skills
4. Two way interview – Traditional video interview between candidate and employer
5. Job offer/acceptance/confirmation

The following sections describe each of the above steps.

SEARCH

The employer searches the local jobs marketplace website (for example, <http://refugeetalent.com/> in Australia) for candidates with the required skills.

When the employer has selected a number of candidates of interest, a request is made for more information about those candidates. That request includes a number of questions supplied by the employer that they would like the candidates to answer in the next section – the one way interview.

ONE WAY INTERVIEW

A one way interview is a recorded video where the candidate responds to set questions supplied by the employer. This type of interview has become very popular among employers in recent years.

There are a number of online products which provide this service. For example, see <http://www.capterra.com/video-interviewing-software/>

The candidate records their response in their own time. They can record using their mobile phone if they wish. This kind of interview should be less stressful for the candidate. It allows them to prepare and rehearse their answers.

Here is a short article on one way interviews: https://www.job-hunt.org/job_interviews/handling-one-way-video-interviews.shtml

The source NGO (eg UNHCR) will verify that the video is in fact of the candidate in question.

The employer reviews the videos supplied by the candidates and then selects those candidates who will progress to the next stage – skills validation.

SKILLS VALIDATION

It is important to check that candidates have the skills they claim. Their skills can be verified using online tests. For example a candidate who claims to be a computer programmer with Java experience might be asked to solve some sample problems using Java.

Many employers will have their own online testing and can supply the selected candidates with a web site and log in details where they can complete the tests.

Employers who do not have their own online testing can use commercial services. For example, employers looking for computer programmers may use a service like Codility - <https://codility.com/>

The source NGO (eg UNHCR) will supervise the log in process to ensure that it is in fact the candidate taking the test, and not someone else in their place.

Candidates who have passed the skill validation tests can progress to the two way interview.

TWO WAY INTERVIEW

This is a traditional video interview between the candidate and employer using an online service such as Skype - <https://www.skype.com/>

JOB OFFER/ACCEPTANCE/CONFIRMATION

Following the two way interview, the employer may choose to offer a job to one or more candidates. The job offers will include all conditions of employment.

The destination NGO or local marketplace partner provides advice to candidates on fairness of each job offer to guard against potential exploitation.

Each candidate can choose whether or not to accept offers. If there are more acceptances than jobs on offer, then the employer will have to make a further selection and finally confirm the placement with each selected candidate.

OTHER RELATED INITIATIVES

SKILL SELECT

This is an online service provided by the Australian government to support its skilled migration program. It is a registry where an applicant can register their skills, and employers can view those skills.

<https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Work/Skil>

HABESHA PROJECT

Mexican initiative which makes it possible for Syrian students to travel to Mexico to pursue higher education.

<http://www.proyectohabesha.org/proyecto/english/index.html>

See also news item <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/08/students-war-mexico-welcomes-syrian-students-160816055053347.html>

CARA – COUNCIL FOR ASSISTING REFUGEE ACADEMICS

<http://www.cara.ngo/> - Cara's roots go back to 1933 and the Nazi era. It has extensive experience over many years of the challenges of relocating this special class of skilled refugee.

SCHOLAR RESCUE FUND

<http://www.scholarrescuefund.org/> - along the same lines as CARA.

REFUGEEINFO.EU

The International Rescue Committee (<http://www.rescue.org/>), together with partners, has created a website <https://refugeeinfo.eu/> based on Google's open source Crisis Info Hub project to "help refugees seeking asylum around the world by providing critical information for their journeys". However, it does not address employment. See <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/google-crisis-info-hub-refugees-151024061606185.html>

MARKETPLACES

Some interesting marketplace solutions.

AIR TASKER

Example of a traditional (non refugee focused) jobs marketplace.

<https://www.airtasker.com/>

SHARETRIBE

<https://www.sharetribe.com/>

Makes commercial marketplace software that can be used to construct any marketplace. They also will host your website for you. The software is open source.

CATCHAFIRE

<https://www.catchafire.org/>

A popular New York based skills/jobs marketplace designed for volunteers and non profits.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ARE THERE PEOPLE WITH MARKETABLE SKILLS IN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES?

Prior to the war, Syria was a fully functioning modern society with the usual range of professions and skills. But have all those with marketable skills already managed to establish new productive lives elsewhere and avoid finding themselves in a refugee community? Apparently not. This UNHCR survey in December 2015 found that 86% of refugees recently arrived in Greece “had a high level of education, at secondary or university level” - <http://www.unhcr.org/5666c8de6.html>.

ARE EMPLOYERS ON BOARD?

There is evidence from the success of regional websites such as Refugee Talent in Australia and Worker in Germany, that employers will get behind the idea. These websites make the point that former refugees make good employees - clearly grateful for the opportunity that they have been given. So it can be a win-win for the employer - they end up with good employees at the same time as doing their bit for the refugee crisis.

In Australia, leading members of the business community formed the Friendly Nation Initiative <http://fni.org.au/> “to increase employment, mentoring, training and internship opportunities for refugees”.

Also in Australia, the NSW state government has taken a lead engaging the private sector with encouraging results. See <http://www.nsw.gov.au/refugee-settlement/employment-support>. However, the focus is on refugees who have already managed to get to Australia.

IS THE PROPOSAL PRACTICAL AND SUITABLE FOR THE NGO'S INVOLVED?

NGO's, both in refugee populations and in employment destinations, are absolutely critical to the proposal. It will not function without them. The important roles they have to play could be an unscalable load on their limited resources. However, NGOs are supported in their efforts by the commission paid by employers for each job placement.

For NGOs who are already active in refugee populations, in daily contact with refugees, this provides another way that they can help individuals and their families. It is also a potential source of funding for that work through their share of employer commissions.

For NGOs in destination countries - particularly those already providing support services to immigrants or other groups with special needs - the proposal offers some funding from their share of employer commissions. It also builds contacts for the NGO into the local business world through the NGOs role as employer sponsors. As described in the proposal in the section entitled "Protection against Exploitation" all employers must be vouched for by a local NGO.

COUNTRY NOTES

AUSTRALIA

The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection provides this overview on skilled migrant visas - <http://www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/48helping>

There is clear room for improvement in Australia's existing skilled immigration pathways. The recent "Australians Today" report <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/australians-today/> from the Scanlon Foundation highlights skilled immigration among its key issues, noting that "Those in the Independent Skill and some other visa categories are able to meet the requirements for entry into Australia, but encounter significant difficulties when seeking employment in their area of qualification and work experience, or in obtaining employment at all."

According to the Immigration Department's own research - <https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/research/Cohort1-Report-Change-in-Outcomes-2014.pdf> - quoted in the Scanlon Foundation's 2015 Social Cohesion report - <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-Mapping-Social-Cohesion-Report.pdf> - more than a quarter of skilled migrants end up in non-skilled jobs – not the occupations that had enabled them to gain permanent residence in Australia.

So the process, described in this proposal, of involving employers in the selection of potential migrants before they actually migrate has merit even outside the special case of refugee migration.

Regarding skilled migration visas for refugees, temporary visas (such as the popular 457 visa) are not suitable because, by definition, refugees don't have a place they can return to when a temporary visa expires.

The 186 and 187 visas are the standard employer sponsored skilled migration visas. However, refugees face the special obstacles described in this report - <http://cameronfoundation.org/AustralianSkilledVisaForRefugeesAdvice.pdf> - by one of Australia's leading migration lawyers and refugee specialists.

A new pathway was announced by the Prime Minister in September - <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2016-09-21/leaders-summit-refugees-0>. In his speech, he referred to "a Community Support Program, where communities and businesses can sponsor applications and support new arrivals". Here is the website of the original pilot program - now closed - <https://cpp-apo.net/>. Here is an article on it that came out just before the PMs announcement - <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-19/private-resettlement-a-way-for-australia-to-lift-refugee-intake/7857988>

The details of how exactly this new program will work, particularly relating to business sponsorship, are still being developed.