



## Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Network Meeting (TSAN) #14

### Exploring media responses to refugee services and unemployment

25 November 2015 2-5pm, Stockwell Resource Centre, SW4 6RA

#### Participants (A-Z)

---

TA, Mechanical Engineer, **Transitions candidate**  
SAM, Business Manager (Oil/Gas), **Transitions candidate**

Simin Azimi, **CEO Refugee Women's Association**, speaker  
Kevin Bowsher, Diversity & Inclusion Manager **Network Rail**  
Andrew Connelly, **journalist**, speaker  
Rachel Fairfield, Community Affairs Executive **Sainsbury's**

MH, Petroleum Engineer/Trainee IT Engineer, **Transitions candidate**  
Sheila Heard, Director & Employment Advisor **Transitions**  
Vicky Johnson, Employment Advisor **Transitions**  
Morlai Kargbo, CEO **Moracle Accountancy and Moracle Foundation**  
PS, IT Engineer, **Transitions candidate**  
IS, Political Economist, **Transitions candidate**

#### Apologies

Christopher Bean, Internal Communications Manger, **Oliver Wyman**  
Maurice Blisson, **BBC** journalist (retired)  
Tristan de Bourbon Parme, **journalist**  
Carole Claridge, **Cass Business School**  
Neil Cox, Resourcing Business Partner (Direct Hire), **National Grid**  
Denise Donovan, Partnership Manager London & Home Counties (Social Justice lead), **Jobcentre Plus**  
Yvette Duncan, IAG Officer, **Refugee Action Kingston**  
Adam Forrest, **journalist (The Guardian - published article featuring Transitions)**  
Amelia Gentleman, **journalist (The Guardian - published article featuring Transitions)**

Michael Glendinning, **North Korean Employment Support**  
Sally Guyancourt, **journalist (The Independent)**  
Estayeb Hassan, **CEO Stockwell Refugee Communities Forum**  
Emma Jacobs, **journalist (Financial Times - published article featuring Transitions)**  
Indira Kartallozi, **Refugee Employment Advisor & social entrepreneur**  
Richard Langlois, **Tuesday's Child TV production company**  
Joshua Neicho, **journalist**  
Nazek Ramadan, **Migrant Voice**  
Maurice Wren, **journalist**

#### Introduction

---

Sheila Heard introduced Transitions and the aims of the workshop (see also slides, available at <http://www.transitions-london.co.uk/good-practice/advisory-network-thanks>):

- an opportunity to exchange ideas on the media coverage of refugee issues; how does this coverage have an impact on refugees finding work. Can stakeholders influence this coverage?
- Transitions assists refugees into skilled employment; it is not a political organisation. However, it can be difficult to separate the impact of the political situation from Transitions' work.

#### Speakers

---

## Speaker 1: Simin Azimi, CEO Refugee Women's Association

The [RWA](#) has been in existence for 23 years, and sees 1,000 clients every year.

### What are the issues refugees face?

- **Barriers to employment:**
  - Immigration status (lack of awareness of on part of employers)
  - Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications
  - Poor access to affordable childcare - lack of child-friendly hours.
  - Isolation.
  - Negative media representation of refugees.
  - Out of date knowledge due to gap in employment (e.g. some medical professions)

RWA usually sees two types of clients: highly-qualified, or no/low educational attainment. For some ESOL (English for speakers of other language) students it is their first time in a formal study environment, however most are highly-qualified and may have to re-qualify or change profession if their qualifications are not recognised in the UK.

- **Other issues and consequences**
  - Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme pressures. Difficult to attend appointments when pressured to accept zero hour contracts. Sanctions are becoming more frequent. Highly skilled professionals are pressured to take unskilled work, e.g. a graphic designer (lectured in this subject at university) doing cleaning work, while a doctor is working in a fishmongers. This results in an:
    - Economic waste - for them and "UKplc".
    - Clients in unskilled and low-skilled work are getting stuck in a web of 'poverty in work.' The annual [London Poverty profile](#) notes that poverty in work is more prevalent than ever before.

### Simin's role within GLA (sits on Refugee & Migrant Advisory Panel) - raising issues faced by refugees

The Refugee & Migrant Advisory Panel raises issues on the ground to the GLA, which in turn feeds these through to strategic level (London Strategic Migration Partnership.)

Under Ken Livingstone the GLA developed a policy to help refugees to integrate. Boris Johnson was keen for this to continue, however in recent years (post-2009) the emphasis has changed from refugee-specific support to supporting all migrants, and more recently again to mainstream support for all Londoners rather than discrete groups.

The Panel has lobbied the Home Office to make its online information regarding refugee status and permission to work much clearer. At present it's difficult to find the information required. If there is doubt about a person's permission to work an employer may choose to employ someone else.

### Media perception of refugees

The media, particularly the tabloids, carry a huge responsibility. Refugees themselves feel that there is a negative perception of refugees in the UK. Some children of refugees feel that the word 'refugee' carries a stigma.

Media coverage of recent events has a direct impact on the public. After the images of Alan Kurdi there was a feeling of public sympathy towards refugees. This attitude has changed since the coverage of recent attacks in Beirut, Mali and Paris, but we have to keep trying to combat the negative perception of refugees.

We all need to work closely with the media to encourage positive representations of refugees. Why do we have unemployed refugee nurses and then recruit nurses from overseas? We could be making a very strong economic case. Consider joining Migrant Voice (offers training to refugees & migrants to tell their own stories.) Need to collaborate so we can give positive stories, and counteract the negative.

## Speaker 2: Andrew Connelly, freelancejournalist (Politico, Al Jazeera, Vice)

July - Sep 2015 covered peak of refugees entering in Europe, mainly because of conflicts. The most common nationalities involved are Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis and Eritreans. This has been going on for many years but has been largely ignored. Outpouring of sympathy after the Alan Kurdi photo, even from papers which demonise foreigners.

We are now in dangerous post 9/11 situation, with many people conflating two issues: humanitarian crisis with security threat. Even Germany and Sweden are now buckling under public pressure and imposing asylum limits.

Many people can't distinguish between refugees and economic migrants.

Impact of negative stories (e.g. the Sun's recently jihadi sympathisers headline):

- o Although misinformation can be quickly corrected most people won't see the correction
- o It's difficult to get the public to separate the different issues

What could help?

- o Consult UK business on its views , encourage business leaders to publicly comment on how they benefit from highly skilled refugees
- o Emphasising the message that Syrian refugees arriving as part of the government's resettlement programme will be vetted and checked.
- o Develop positive representation of migrants. Consider strategies for crowdfunding publicity campaigns. Use regular people and high-profile people. Get an ambassador to head up a media campaign.
- o Don't just preach to the converted. Need to convert the Sun and Mail readers.
- o Refugee organisations need to be where the stories are: get the messages out on social media - this is how news is shared.
- o Humanise issues. Use Instagram. Use case studies - see <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/08/calais-refugee-millionaire-man-story-150821072044537.html>.
- o Can't promote issue on an emotional level any more - emotion fatigue. Need to focus on what people can do once they're here, their professional backgrounds.
- o Power of soap operas: importance of getting a positive representation of refugees.
- o Attend Techfugees conference to ask interested parties about opportunities for employing refugees.

Comments:

- Businesses need to be more vocal about the benefits of employing migrants (ideally refugees), and open about accepting various statuses.
- Leading businesses to create a fund for work placements for refugees. Similar to Barclays LifeSkills programme.

## Small group discussions

---

1. How do the media (e.g. newspapers, online media) affect your and other people's experience of the job market? (e.g. employers, refugee job seekers, refugee agency staff.)

Very little positive representation at the moment. Many people still unaware that being granted refugee protection means having permission to work. We could be using the media to educate employers about the potential of refugees, to encourage policy-makers to fund refugee-specific support, and encourage collaboration between refugee organisations.

One employer is considering ceasing donations to a refugee charity because they fear negative publicity through association with refugees. Need to combat this.

**2. What initiatives with the media could contribute to increasing inclusion of refugee jobseekers in the market?**

Campaign to educate employers about refugee status and permission to work.

Social media campaign (see Simin's examples above) highlighting economic waste of under-employing skilled refugees.

Run a campaign using the successful adult children of refugees.

Campaign for subsidised work placements for refugees.

Have a 'one-stop-shop' refugee website which links to projects across the country. At present it's difficult to find out about employment support for refugees in different towns and cities.