

## Minutes for Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Network meeting #4

### Theme: Exploring Media Influences on refugee unemployment

Date: Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2012 Time: 2.00 – 5.00

Venue: Stockwell Community Resource Centre, SW4 6RA

<http://www.stockwellcommunity.com/content/view/90/124/>

**Present & Apologies:** 28 colleagues present. 20 colleagues requested minutes.

**Present:** (A-Z)

Abdulkarimim	Addas	Transitions Refugee Graduate Client: Financial Services
Ahmedin	Ali	Transitions Refugee Graduate Client: Refugee Support Professional
G	A	Transitions Refugee Graduate client: International Development & Professional Interpreting
Tina Bedenik	Bedenik	Intern at Migrants & Refugees Forum
Justin	Brett	Transitions director
Adrian	Dimmick	Hounslow Refugee Floating Support Worker
Anna	Dixie	RMNS Sutton, adviser
B	F	Transitions Refugee Graduate client: Lawyer. Transitions Steering Group member
Belina	Gemeda	Transitions Refugee Graduate client: community development
B	H	Transitions Refugee Graduate Client: Electrical/Electronic Engineer
Sheila	Heard	Transitions director
Yemane	Kassa	Transitions Refugee Graduate client: Journalist
Kibreab	Kidane	Transitions Refugee Graduate client: Accountancy & Audit <u>Speaker</u>
Heather	Knight	Kingston Refugee Action
Andrew	Lawton	Refugee Employment Services Manager
James	Matu	Transitions Refugee Graduate client: ICT Engineer
Sharon	Millington	London College of Business Management & IT, community outreach
Fahira	Mulamehic	Refugee Council, Refugee Healthcare Professionals Programme
Tesfaldet	Okubayes	Refugee Professional: Economist
Alan	Palmer	Jobcentre Plus London, Southwark Borough Partnership Manager
Nazek	Ramadan	Director, Migrant Voice
Louise	Salmon	Refugee Health Professionals Programme Manager RAGU (The Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) London Metropolitan University
Cllr. Paul	Sathianesan	Labour Party Councillor, East Ham North
Tom	Shakhli	Policy and Projects Officer, Employability Forum
Amber	Shotton	A4E London Partnerships Manager, Work Programme provider
Jeanita	Snowdon	Employment & Training Officer, Cardinal Hume Centre
Roger	Townsend	Communications skills tutor
Sara	Wickert	Migrants Resource Centre, External Projects Co-ordinator
Azeb	Woldeab	Transitions Refugee graduate Client: Accountant

**Requested minutes: (A- Z)**

Yasmin	Alibhai-Brown	Journalist and refugee	Independent and others
Ernest	Antwi	Director	Refugee Aware
Dave	Atkinson	Head of Refugee integration	Home Office
Bill	Bolloten	Runs REFED yahoogroup	Consultant
Lucia	Dube	Chairperson	Zimbabwe Community Association
Roger	Garner	Independent Journalist – wrote article about asylum seeker children in schools doing well	Independent Newspaper journalist
Andy	Gregg	Chief Executive,	Charities Evaluation Services
Indira	Kartallozi	Senior Advice & Outreach Worker	CARIS Haringey
Jane	Kerr	Regional Media Communications Manager	A4E
James	Lee	Senior Policy & Projects officer, Immigration & Asylum	Greater London Authority
Amanda	le Poer Trench	Volunteer Coordinator Public Engagement and Learning	The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew Richmond
Henry	Makiwa	British Red Cross, Senior Media Officer	Unable to attend – looking for a colleague
Penny	McLean	Communications & Engagement Officer	Refugee Council
Eric	Nkundumubano	Service Coordinator British Red Cross - Refugee Support Service	British Red Cross, Leicester
Isar	Sarajuddin	Transitions Refugee Graduate client; Political Economist/journalist. Transitions Steering Group member	Afghan Political Journal
Joan	Smith	Unable to attend but supports the meeting. Provide minutes. Independent on Sunday journalist <a href="http://politicalblonde.com/index.php/joan-smith-is-political-blonde">http://politicalblonde.com/index.php/joan-smith-is-political-blonde</a>	Independent Newspaper journalist
Anne	Stoltenberg	Migrant Voice	Migrant Voice
Chris	White	Head of Refugee Strategy in London	Jobcentre Plus
Sylvia	Valasquez	Empowerment Worker,	Migrants Resource Centre
Wayne	Powell	<p>Mediawise <a href="http://www.mediawise.org.uk">http://www.mediawise.org.uk</a>  <a href="http://www.mediawise.org.uk/display_pagee27e.html?id=76">http://www.mediawise.org.uk/display_pagee27e.html?id=76</a></p> <p>I have spoken with Forward Maisokwadzo, former RAM Project and EJM co-ordinator who is now involved in Bristol City of Sanctuary. He has given me the following names to pass on to you:  Zrinka Bralo, Executive Director of Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum in London:  <a href="mailto:zrinka.bralo@mrcf.org.uk">zrinka.bralo@mrcf.org.uk</a>  Beth Crosland at MRCF :  <a href="mailto:beth.crosland@mrcf.org.uk">beth.crosland@mrcf.org.uk</a>  Nazak at Migrants Resource Centre  Penny Mclean at Refugee Council, RCO Connect or their BASIS Development Worker in London  Henry Makiwa, Senior Media Officer at British Red Cross: <a href="mailto:HMakiwa@redcross.org.uk">HMakiwa@redcross.org.uk</a>  Lucia Dube, Zimbabwe Community Association  <a href="mailto:mantombie@aol.com">&lt;mantombie@aol.com&gt;</a>  Wayne Powell MediaWise</p>	University of West of England

- 1) **Welcome and introductions.** Short powerpoint presentation by Transitions on objectives/structure/outcomes to date of Transitions. Highlighting that Refugee Status dates back to the 1951 UN Convention on refugees, has saved millions of lives and no country has ever withdrawn from it. This message is often lost in media images of refugees in the UK.

**Our key question in the meeting was: How are the London jobs market trends listed below by employers and statutory bodies being influenced by media attitudes? Why? What is our response?**

**These are some of the very challenging subjects that we asked for views and suggestions from the participants. The media appears to be largely silent on the points below. We wanted to know participants' views on them - and what changes can be made so that employers can better access the skills of refugees.**

1. The Equalities Act 2010 does not specifically support or protect refugees in the jobs market or in any aspect of their life in the UK. **Why not?**
2. Therefore no employers and no statutory bodies are required to specifically assist refugees to function on a level playing field or even to monitor how many refugees apply for jobs or register for mainstream services. **Why not?**
3. In our experience, many employers argue that refugees require no 'double tick' equalities approach. We observe that even employers who carry out work with refugees take this approach when it comes to recruitment.
4. Around 7 out of 10 refugees are unemployed. No-one knows the exact figure because no agencies are required to monitor services for refugees.  
**Why not?**
5. Following intense media coverage in the 1980's employers now often use the Equalities based double tick system to level the playing field for disabled job applicants. This has changed the lives of many disabled people in the labour market and increased the diversity of workplaces.
6. Refugees face severe multiple barriers to employment that are not of their making and are not short term. These include the effects of widespread misinformation about what refugee status is (ie protection from persecution), their rights to employment, education and other services, cross-cultural barriers between employers & refugees, longterm homelessness, lack of access to IT, extreme labour market disorientation & lack of relevant information & advice, miscommunications about transferability of overseas qualifications and experience, lack of UK work experience – and straight discrimination.

## 2) Powerpoint presentations by 2 Transitions clients; experienced accountant and experienced NGO Emergency Relief professional. (pls request copies)

- Both clients explained that they faced barriers of lack of information, advice and work experience.
- This is compounded by media messages which confuse employers and other labour market decision makers. Many employers think refugees are not permitted to work. Many employers also overlook refugee applicants as having unsuitable overseas skills and experience.
- Both clients observed that there are positive refugee business & employment role models that the media can refer to: key employers such as Marks & Spencer and Saatchi and Saatchi have refugee backgrounds. Refugees bring international skills and perspectives in a global economy.

### Q&A's/Comments:

- Migrant Voice newspaper is a forum for celebrating these positive role models and success stories
- Refugees are grouped along with BAME's in the wider public and media eye. This confuses issues and confuses reporting. Media articles often focus on 'foreigners' message and reinforcing confused stereotypes.
- Media confusion is a circular, self-fulfilling loop: negative public opinion....negative media....negative public opinion.
- Does the media have a responsibility to be more informed, more objective, more detailed, more opposed to discrimination and labour market exclusion of refugees? Should they be worried about the impact of disproportionately high unemployment on refugees?
- Subtle linking in the media of overall UK unemployment with immigration. Rather than skills and diversity.
- Often articles in newspapers about refugees are laid out against UK unemployment or other negative articles on the same page.
- Refugees themselves are encouraged to train and work as journalists. Yasmin Alibhai Brown is a journalist and came to the UK as a refugee.
- The community radio and TV channels are limited to those communities by the community languages that they use to broadcast.
- The 5 year limit on Refugee Status is not an incentive to employers or to journalists to engage in longterm integration stories.
- The 'Borders' TV programme is funded by the Home Office. It seems to have a negative message. It could broadcast on integration, internationalism, global economics and diversity, by documenting positive role models of refugees who have successfully found employment and become contributing citizens.
- Is the Government using the negative media images on refugees to deflect from other issues? Eg Cost of longterm unemployment of refugees/associated healthcare costs of depression & PTSD, lack of investment in refugee services/wholesale closure of the sector's services/growing equalities issue.
- Last election, Refugee Council succeeded in a widescale MP/candidate pledge not to use refugees as a negative tool.
- MP refer to their own refugee/migrant/BAME background when it suits them. There is a need more informed objectivity.
- Is there a defensible reason why the media is so quiet on high levels of refugee unemployment and wholesale closure of refugee services? Perhaps the lack of information holds journalists back from reporting? The issue is under the radar.
- Mediawise was an energetic project but closed 6 years ago.
- Do journalists trust refugee agencies?
- **Why is journalism about international crises of such high quality when the same people in those stories who flee to the UK are then ignored?**

**Yasmin Alibhai Brown sent her apologies to the meeting, due to a family emergency.**

## 3) Small group notes: ( 6 groups) Question1:

**In your experience, or in your view, how do the influence and activities of UK media (newspapers, radio, TV, social media) affect un/employment of refugees? – either directly or indirectly.**

- Negative stories, often repeated and re-inforced, have led to a mainstreaming in society of lack of understanding and negative assumptions about refugees in the jobs market
- Many journalists have in-depth understanding of international issues, yet they do not report on what happens to those people who are forced to come to the UK – often from influential jobs.
- Do they have a responsibility to make this link? We believe they do
- The general public tend to take the negative media message on refugees in the UK as reasonable and informed.
- Mainstream assumptions that refugees are 'illegal' and in the UK for economic reasons
- Media continues to write on this 'illegal' story because it feels the readers want to read that. Circular reporting that creates poverty, long-term unemployment and social exclusion of refugees.
- Very rare examples of differentiating between migrants and refugees in the jobs market. Refugees have refugee specific rights and entitlements and are part of UK society.
- The media does not appear to question the grouping of migrants with refugees. Refugees have a right to work and do not need a visa. They are a legitimate part of UK society but are not treated as so.
- This means that employers are not encouraged to see refugee job applicants as a resource.
- And leads statutory body staff within Jobcentre Plus, for example, to often behave unhelpfully and without understanding of the issues that refugees have faced and continue to face.
- Mainstreamed attitudes of 'guilty' until proven innocent prevail for refugees
- The media forms part of the political agenda and influences move between media and political players.
- Media focuses more on immigration 'problem' and less on the skill needs of the UK in a globalised economy.
- Lack of media focus on the skills of refugees
- Few journalists are refugees, therefore the media message is often uninformed and biased.
- How interested is the media in publishing good news?
- Media often uses confused statistics and terms to refer to refugees. Often confusing asylum seekers and refugees, who have different entitlements.
- Lack of reporting on high refugee unemployment and almost non-existent statutory employment services for refugees means that the issue is off the public radar.
- Is the role of media to confirm or challenge public opinion?

## **BREAK**

### **Small group notes: ( 6 groups) Question2:**

**In your experience, or in your view, how can issues around negative media influences on refugee un/employment be addressed?** (ie to allow more employers and refugees to move into employment relationships)

See Actions recommended on next page.

1. **Link with reporters on international development/ humanitarian disaster relief /war zones and assist them to connect their reporting with the situation of forced migrants who come to the UK directly because of the same issues.**
2. **Network widely with editors and journalists to increase the trust and confidence between them and refugee supporting agencies**
3. **Create a brand for fair reporting on migration and refugees**
4. **Provide more information/case studies about refugee un/employment to good journalists. There is a lack of data on wholesale closure of refugee employment services, critically high unemployment, no statutory employment services for refugees. Refugees appear to be off the journalism radar. A 'media' tab on the Transitions website. Contribute to easy availability of online refugee resource for journalists (ICAR has closed. Mediawise has closed). Connect with update/relaunch existing resources for journalists eg Refugee Council website. Pages on Mayor of London (GLA) website. Migrant Voice newspaper and New Londoners (Migrants Resource Centre).**
5. **Collaboration rather than reinventing wheels**
6. **Encourage refugees to train and work as journalists. Internships. Apprenticeships. Target no/ of journalism work experience placements for Transitions to initiate**
7. **Lobbying of Government and public bodies as well as of media, to enhance employment services and messages about refugees in the jobs market**
8. **Make use of social media to lobby and celebrate success. Eg a Transitions Blog (being designed) and maintain use of Twitter, LinkedIn and facebook**
9. **Increase employer awareness of the employment rights of refugees, perhaps via newspaper and journal articles by professional bodies**
10. **Create a TV programme on a role-reversal: British people being forced to leave UK with nothing and how they coped. Get people thinking & empathising about the reality**
11. **Establish relations with local media. Local stories**
12. **London Mayor campaign, Support for a more equitable London labour market for refugees**
13. **Childrens' events, which are reported. Todays children are tomorrow's media readers and writers**
14. **Encourage media to put pressure on Home Office to provide more information to employers about the entitlements of refugees**
15. **Articles can have a role to highlight the waste of skills and cost of not supporting refugees into employment.**
16. **Create a journalists' forum for refugee issues; physical and online**
17. **Create/contribute to a lobbying group, with a focus on lobbying media. A pool of individuals willing to contribute, with guidelines.**

- 18. Use of blogs, websites and newsletters to encourage refugees to speak for themselves and challenge the status quo.**
- 19. Peer to peer lobbying of colleagues, as well as policy level lobbying**
- 20. Develop a project aimed at enhancing UK media approach to refugee employment and apply to fund it.**
- 21. Encourage programmes such as 'Borders' (funded by Home Office) to celebrate integration, diversity, internationalism by using case studies of refugees now in employment and an active citizen.**
- 22. Link with Cities of Sanctuary to learn from their success (London is not a City of Sanctuary. Hackney Borough is keen to be a COS borough)**

We are pleased to also report that Jobcentre Plus colleagues announced at the meeting that Transitions and the Refugee Council have successfully been funded by the JCP Flexible Support Grant to deliver a pilot series of Jobsearch orientation workshops to refugees in south London. We are very pleased to learn this and look forward to delivering the programme.