Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Top tips for involving refugee volunteers

These Top Tips were produced by the Scottish Refugee Council, Volunteer Scotland, and the National Inclusion in Volunteering Group.

At Scottish Refugee Council our vision is for a Scotland in which all people seeking refugee protection are welcome. It is a place where women, children, and men are protected, find safety and support, have their human rights and dignity respected, and are able to achieve their full potential.

We hope that reflecting on the following points will help make your volunteering offer more inclusive:

1. Firstly, ask yourself: what would be some of the positive outcomes of involving refugee volunteers in your group or organisation? For instance, will it help you provide services to other asylum seekers and refugees? Can it enable you to plan joint projects and/or enter into partnerships with refugee support groups and organisations? Can the language skills of refugees be useful in making your group or organisation more accessible to a wider variety of people? How about advertising for Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin, Tigrinya, Vietnamese, or Kurdish-speaking volunteers?

2. Spread this message throughout your group or organisation: refugees and people seeking asylum at all stages of the asylum process (including post-refusal) have the right to volunteer in the UK, as expressed clearly in current Home Office guidance. Ensure that your volunteer recruitment staff are consistently trained and embed this message in the volunteering programme of your group or organisation as part of a wider 'refugees welcome' message.

3. Recruit with confidence, knowing that refugees and people seeking asylum can obtain disclosures at all levels, including PVGs. Most will have Home Office-issued photo IDs that Disclosure Scotland is happy to accept (ARC – Applicant Registration Card, BRP – Biometric Residence Permit, or Convention Travel Document), and can provide letters from the Home Office, NHS, or rental contracts as proof of address. You can consult the Scottish Refugee Council's Guidance for Disclosure Applications for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum Who Want to Volunteer for more information.

4. Make it explicit that you can be flexible with references – character references can be obtained from ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) tutors, community members, caseworkers at refugee support groups or organisations, lawyers or members of a faith group.

5. Recruit actively, seeking opportunities to meet refugees and people seeking asylum face-to-face in their own contexts and networks. Contact and visit your local refugee support groups and organisations. Find out if there is a refugee support or resettlement team in your local authority, or ESOL classes for refugees in local colleges, and get in touch. You can consult Scottish Refugee Council's **New Scots Connect Map** for details of refugee sector groups and organisations in your area.

6. Make it easy to engage with your programme: do not be over-reliant on a single mode of recruitment. Online adverts and volunteering registration forms can exclude anyone whose first language is not English, and who cannot afford regular access to the internet. Ask applicants for their preferred mode of contact. Texting or WhatsApp are often preferred forms of communication over email.

7. Plan pathways to access volunteering in your group or organisation. Invite people seeking asylum and refugees, using existing networks, to your events, then ask attendees to volunteer at ad hoc events, which can lead to longer-term volunteering.

8. Create 'refugee-friendly' volunteer roles, support systems, and progression routes: create volunteer roles that are suitable for an individual with limited English, with a view to the person progressing to other roles once their English improves and they are confident in your group or organisational context. You can ask current volunteers if they would consider partnering with or mentoring a refugee with, as yet, limited English at the start of their volunteer experience.

9. Make it explicit that you will reimburse expenses, and make sure you reimburse daily, easily, and, when necessary, in advance. People seeking asylum receive around £7 per day to cover food, clothing, hygiene, and travel costs. If accommodated in hotels, this amount goes down to £9.95 per week. A return bus ticket is therefore a significant, sometimes unaffordable cost. People in the asylum process cannot legally be paid, but expenses can be reimbursed, or travel tickets can be issued in advance. Many refugees are on benefits and will need to be reassured that volunteering will not interfere with their benefit entitlements – you can consult the **DWP guidance on volunteering and benefits** for more information.

10. Have a conversation with your volunteer about their individual life circumstances and be flexible about volunteering times. Many refugees and people seeking asylum have unstable living conditions and can be moved to other accommodation at no or short notice. People also have multiple demands on their time, such as attending lawyers' appointments and immigration interviews, Jobcentre appointments, and ESOL classes, and they

may also have complex health issues. Newly granted refugees are often adjusting to mainstream benefits requirements and may be trying to arrange for family members to join them in the UK. Both refugees and people seeking asylum are likely to have insecure, multi-occupancy housing and change addresses frequently. They will often be attending English courses at college every morning or every afternoon – this is one of the requirements for receiving welfare benefits.

Need some more help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this guide, please contact us:

- **https://scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/**
- Telephone: Volunteer Scotland 01786 479593
- Email: **knowledgegateway@volunteerscotland.org.uk**

Knowledge Gateway

This resource was created in partnership with:

National Inclusion in Volunteering Group

scottish refugee council

The Knowledge Gateway is created and led by **Volunteer Scotland**

Volunteer Scotland

This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates, please email Volunteer Scotland at **hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk**