

The information given here is intended to highlight some of the issues which can arise when volunteers are from the refugee community (including asylum seekers). If you would like more information on diversifying your volunteer base then please speak with a member of [our Team](#).

Although most asylum seekers are not permitted to take up employment in the UK, they are **entitled to volunteer** with a charity, voluntary organisation, community group or public sector organisation such as the local authority (Council) or the NHS. Refugees are entitled to seek paid employment as well as volunteering.

- There is no time limit to the number of volunteering hours anyone can do but the tasks cannot be a substitute for employment and should not commit the volunteer to any contractual obligations.
- As with all other volunteering, only normal out-of-pocket expenses should be reimbursed, such as travel and meals.
- You can find the **UK Government's Home Office guidance about asylum-seekers volunteering** [here \(see page 7 – link to GOV.UK download\)](#) The Home Office allows people to volunteer but uses the term 'volunteering' for this. Unusually - and in our view causing unhelpful and unnecessary confusion - it uses the term 'voluntary work' to mean something else: something that someone would normally be employed/paid to do as a job but which they are doing without pay (job substitution) which should be avoided.

### **PVG Scheme Applications**

Disclosure Scotland is able to issue all levels of disclosure certificates, including PVG (protecting vulnerable groups), to asylum seekers and refugees. A disclosure check only applies to the time an individual has lived in the UK. There is no contact made with anyone in an asylum-seeker's home country. People can use their [Application Registration Card](#) (ARC card), [Biometric Residence Permit Card](#) (BRP) or [Convention Travel Document](#) as official photo ID for disclosure applications.

### **Language Barriers**

Many (but not all) Asylum Seekers and Refugees come to the country with a range of skills but little knowledge of the English language. If, however, you have roles that do not require face-to-face work with the public there may be opportunities for you to include people with little or no English as volunteers with your organisation. Volunteering is a great way to develop English language skills and you would likely notice the difference in a relatively short period of time. If your volunteering opportunity requires a good standard of written and/or spoken English then it would be helpful if you could make that known when advertising your opportunity on the Volunteer Glasgow website.

If an interpreter would be appropriate for an initial appointment or an induction then Volunteer Glasgow may be able to assist with this.

### **Training for You and your Staff**

The Scottish Refugee Council is best placed to offer quality training to assist your organisation in understanding the issues experienced by refugees and, particularly, how these issues can impact on volunteers accessing and having a successful volunteering experience. Volunteer Glasgow can give you guidance on supporting diversity in your volunteering programme, generally.

## **Support in volunteering**

Here are a few suggestions when considering how best to support your new volunteer:

- buddying – pair the new person with an experienced volunteer. This can also help remove feelings of isolation
- bring a friend – have the new volunteer bring along a friend with better English who can volunteer and interpret for some time until the volunteer is settled
- tailor any induction to suit the literacy and language skills of your new volunteer
- timely expenses – asylum seekers particularly may have limited access to cash so it is very important that expenses are paid on the day or in advance. Don't allow the volunteer to have to ask for expenses as they will likely be too ashamed to do so and will just not come back, due to lack of funds
- make sure all staff and volunteers have a good awareness of any cultural, religious or gender appropriate needs of new volunteers.

## **Benefits to your organisation**

- Become informed about different cultures from your new volunteers
- Gain additional languages and other skills within your project to draw on
- Having a diverse workforce can open up your service to more people
- You'll find your new volunteers are often very keen, hardworking, committed and punctual

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