



Linking the Global Labor Market to a New Talent Pool

Talent Beyond Boundaries' Submission to UNHCR on the Global Compact for Refugees

The international community has long agreed that for the millions of refugees stuck in protracted crises¹ and living in poverty in host countries where they have few, if any, rights, the traditional solutions for providing long-term protection and that enable refugees to lead productive self-reliant lives are insufficient. Indeed, for many decades, academics and policy makers have been discussing labor mobility as a potential solution to move refugees with portable job skills from precarious settings to new countries where they can restart their careers and contribute to economic development. However, until Talent Beyond Boundaries was created in 2015, no organization had attempted to open global labor mobility pathways for refugees.

Talent Beyond Boundaries is working to be a catalyst for the development of systematic solutions to the barriers that have kept refugee talent hidden from international employers, and we are currently the only organization in the world seeking to demonstrate that labor mobility is a viable pathway for skilled refugees to complement other humanitarian efforts. TBB joins with other NGOs and endorses the call, in the GCR for States to, within three years, increase the availability and predictability of other pathways for admission, including via labor mobility.

According to the World Economic Forum, increased talent mobility will be a critical component of addressing the complex workforce challenges of the 21st century. Projected talent shortages worldwide require innovative ways to make sure qualified workers can gain access to the global labor market. TBB is creating an effective framework for refugees to contribute to the global economy.

The foundations for building a complementary labor mobility pathway require (i) identifying skills and talents within refugee populations; (ii) linking employers to that talent; and (iii) facilitating the availability and predictability of visa pathways to give refugees access to international employment opportunities and labor mobility, consistent with local labor needs.

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

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Building complementary pathways requires a dynamic relationship between States, civil society, refugees and the private sector - in host and third countries. For this reason, in this submission, TBB looks to the GCR to more clearly articulate the roles that not only States, but refugees, civil society, the private sector and academia play in host and third/destination countries, to create complementary pathways to protection, via labor mobility. TBB's submission reflects what we have learned since our initiative commenced.

TBB's submission addresses aspects of the following sections of the GCR: *Key tools for burden- and responsibility- sharing; Reception and admission; Meeting needs and supporting communities; and Solutions.*

Mapping refugee talent

So that refugee skills are visible to employers and refugees have the opportunity to reach solutions via labor mobility, it is imperative to map and document the extent of talent that exists within refugee populations in host countries. The data collected by UNHCR, in addition to being variable across host countries, is limited. That is, UNHCR does not collect data about refugees' occupations, qualifications, work history and experience. It certainly does not collect sufficient data to complete a resume for use in job recruitment processes.

In 2016, TBB set out to create an online Talent Catalog that allowed refugees living in Lebanon and Jordan to document their skills, work experience, educational background, language abilities and certifications, in order to be considered for job opportunities in third countries. Within a year TBB assembled a first-of-its-kind searchable database of refugee talent and had more than 10,000 refugees register in the database. The data collected in the Catalog is geared towards showcasing refugees' qualifications and work experience, as in a resume, suitable for use in recruitment processes. It is thus more detailed than the data collected by UNHCR at the time of registration. Further, not all refugees are registered with UNHCR. Those refugees similarly require somewhere to document their skills, qualifications and experience.

The private sector may have a role in collaborating with UNHCR to create the necessary platforms whereby refugees' qualifications, skills and work histories may be recorded in UNHCR systems. Along with refugees' biodata, this data could be made portable for refugees to provide - themselves - to civil society actors that deliver education, livelihoods training, professional and vocational skills development and enhancement, and labor mobility programs, obviating duplication of bio and socio-economic data collection.

In par 49 of the GCR, TBB recommends the inclusion of education, qualifications, work experience and language abilities, in "the collection of quality registration data, disaggregated by age, sex, specific needs, and location"

With a focus on solutions and the more in-depth data, the above-mentioned programs can map refugee talent, and thus better target their programs to enhance refugees' timely employability in home, host or resettlement countries, and enhance their chances of meeting economic visa requirements in third countries, while making skilled refugees visible to international employers.

Making refugees visible to employers

A refugee candidate told TBB, “What Talent Beyond Boundaries is doing is exactly what the world needs. We are smart and educated people and can contribute professionally but are being denied the opportunity because of something we cannot control. I know that if you just give me the chance, I can compete with my skills and maybe even outshine other candidates. But what is happening is most companies when they see where I am from do not want to even take a second to consider me.”

TBB has demonstrated that refugees have skills and qualifications that are in high demand around the world, yet they have few opportunities to access the global labor market. They have limited information about international job opportunities, and they are rarely visible to recruiting employers. TBB is demonstrating that civil society has a role to play in making refugee talent visible to employers, and in doing so, it is showing that as refugee talent is made visible to global employers, employment opportunities for refugees grow. For example, in less than one year, the number of employers for which TBB has been sourcing potential recruits has grown from five or six to more than three dozen companies with approximately 50 refugee candidates in various stages of consideration by them. As of April 2018, employers have made 10 job offers. Further, through TBB’s efforts, increasing numbers of employers are finding out that skilled refugees are extremely competitive in the global skills market and more than capable of filling skills gaps the local market cannot fill.

Civil society has a role both in prospective destination and host countries. For example, TBB has staff in Canada and Australia reaching out to businesses, industry associations and chambers of commerce to make refugees visible to prospective employers. Employers articulate their labor needs to TBB, and TBB searches the Talent Catalog for candidates with the qualifications and skills that most align with employers’ needs.

In addition to corporate outreach, civil society actors can, as TBB does, add value by assisting refugees to bridge cultural differences in recruitment practices. TBB has found that candidates for international employment generally down-play their skills and experience. They are not necessarily versed in resume writing or interview techniques for the purposes of international recruitment. Nor do many have experience using information technology to prepare and load profiles, resumes or evidence of their qualifications. Civil society can play a role in bringing together technical experts who may offer guidance to refugees about how to best frame and describe their particular qualifications, skills and work experience.

TBB welcomes the recognition in the GCR of the contribution the private sector can make in responses to refugee crises and protracted situations. We urge UNHCR and States to acknowledge in the GCR, the role the private sector can play in opening complementary pathways via labor mobility, by globally recruiting skilled refugees for hard to fill jobs. The private sector role in host countries goes beyond investment in job and supply chain creation. Its contribution in the plan of action should include searching the skilled refugee talent pool in host countries to fill skills gaps elsewhere.

TBB recommends, in part IIIA, 3.2, recognition of the role that private sector plays in recruiting skilled refugees living in host countries to fill skills gaps, and contributing to the creation of labor mobility as a complementary pathway to protection.

Access to labor mobility

The third foundation of complementary pathways via labor mobility is access to legal and safe economic visa pathways. As part of burden- and responsibility-sharing and in anticipation of crises and response to protracted situations, States can make economic migration accessible to skilled refugees, through innovative and flexible regulations and policies that both (i) maintain integrity in visa systems and (ii) take account of the multidimensional impact of displacement on refugees' lives, including loss of proof of identity and qualifications, to long-term loss of employment and income.

Among the steps that potential destination countries could take are to :

- Consider the means by which to make labor mobility pathways accessible to refugees, by identifying which apparent barriers and evidentiary requirements would need to and could be removed, reduced or reconsidered by administrative, regulatory or legislative means;
- Consider if and how such pathways do/could maintain protection of refugees, particularly from *refoulement*, and if they do not, how to assure such protection;
- Establish alternative ways to meet evidentiary requirements for visas/entry permits, to take into account realities such as loss of documents during flight, expiration of validity of identity documents, protection risks in seeking documents from country of origin.

The matter of identity is of particular concern for all stakeholders. TBB urges UNHCR to work with States and the private sector to develop the means to establish, confirm and protect identity that facilitates integration in host country communities and that anticipates identity verification for the purposes of the use of complementary pathways, as well as voluntary repatriation or resettlement.

It is imperative, as the GCR indicates, that refugees have the right to work and to education. Access to labor mobility, in a number of States, may be dependent on candidates not only producing documentary evidence of their qualifications, but also continuous employment in their field for a specific period of time. Wherever possible, refugees should have the opportunity to work in their chosen occupations. In addition to being less of a drain on host countries and the international community, until solutions are found, it enables refugees to maintain their skills and enhance their employability to fill skills gaps in third countries. Without the right to work in host countries, skilled refugees' chances of using existing labor mobility pathways to protection are reduced.

Further, States, civil society, academia and the private sector all could play roles in creating opportunities for refugees to reclaim robust futures by moving on economic entry visas. In addition to creating jobs, vocational and livelihoods training in host countries, they can invest in programs to help refugees maintain their professional and trade skills, improve their language abilities and provide professional and vocational bridging programs that facilitate qualifications and skills recognition. These kinds of investments can facilitate labor mobility as a complementary pathway to protection and timely employment, to fill skills gaps in new destination countries.

TBB recommends that the GCR reflect a commitment by UNHCR and other stakeholders to invest in identifying and verifying the diversity of refugees' skills and educational attainment and deliver programs that support maintenance and enhancement of existing occupational skills, professional development, attainment of professional and vocational qualifications for the purposes of labor mobility, and language training.

TBB recommends in par 40, the GCR include investment on the part of other States and relevant stakeholders that enables refugee hosting States to research skills gaps and mismatches in their local economies, in which suitably qualified refugees may be deployed, while facilitating continuity of work experience that:

- *may be relevant to refugees' eligibility for labor mobility to third countries;*
- *may enhance timely employability in resettlement countries; and*
- *anticipate timely voluntary repatriation.*

TBB recommends that UNHCR, as part of the plan of action, share with States, civil society and refugees, the governing principles that inform the creation of complementary pathways, its expectation of the role each can take in creating complementary pathways, and to commit to researching and publicizing good practices.