



5575 Boundary Rd.
Vancouver, BC V5R 2P9

T. 604 254 9626
www.mosaicbc.org

February 7, 2019

More needs to be done to help refugees find work.

By Olga Stachova, Chief Executive Officer

IKEA Canada's recent commitment to hiring 250 refugees in the next three years is welcome news indeed. Newcomer unemployment in Canada overall was at its lowest rate in 2017 in more than a decade but refugees continue to face real challenges finding work in Canada.

The unemployment rate for refugees has consistently been the highest among all immigrant groups. A number of factors contribute to this. Compared to other immigrant groups, they are less likely to speak English or French, to have postsecondary education and to have strong family ties in Canada. The educational institutions they attended and their training records may no longer exist, along with records of employment, training certifications, and references.

But refugees also bring with them the resilience, skills and talent to make significant contributions to Canada's economy and communities. And with 14-17% of newcomers to Canada expected over the next few years belonging to the refugee and humanitarian category of arrivals, a strategy for integrating refugees into the workforce needs to be developed in cooperation with the employer community.

A recent international study by the Hire Immigrants network described best practices for hiring refugees. Strong partnerships between employers and community organizations were seen as critical to refugees getting jobs as were programs and initiatives specifically aimed at refugees. The need for refugee-specific employment services was also identified in a recent study done for the Transatlantic Council on Migration which called for increased job training and on-the-job learning opportunities and improved services that match refugee jobseekers with potential employers.

A study done for the international Tent Partnership for Refugees found clear benefits for employers who hire refugees -- refugees stay with the same employer for longer than other hires and hiring a few refugees opens the door to recruiting many more which reduces labour shortages.

Canada needs more employers to see the potential contribution that refugees can make to their businesses. By 2034, newcomers to Canada are expected to account for 100% of Canada's population growth and an increasing proportion of our workforce.

In addition to working with IKEA on its new employment initiative, MOSAIC has partnered with Arc'teryx, the Canadian outdoor clothing and sporting goods company, which received MOSAIC's Employer Recognition Award in 2018 for the excellent work it does.

When Arc'teryx decided to keep making clothes in Canada, it realized that it was not going to find the workers it needed among those born here. They reached out to MOSAIC to connect with newcomer talent and they hired and continue to hire refugees. They have found hard working, passionate employees who are eager to show what they can do. Arc'teryx provides English language classes after work to their employees and has an Arabic-speaking administrator to help with interpretation and translation when required.

We need more employers like IKEA and Arc'teryx and we need programs that are specifically aimed at preparing refugees for employment and getting them jobs. Those programs need to provide skills and language training, as required, and on-the-job experience and learning. They need to be designed and delivered by immigrant serving organizations and employers and/or employer organizations working in partnership.

Not everyone has the resources or commitment that companies such as Arc'teryx and IKEA Canada have to hire refugees. Many companies see it as too risky, requiring extra support that they don't have. They're not sure how to evaluate refugees' experience and credentials. They wonder about refugees' English skills and whether they'll fit into the workforce.

The role of immigrant serving organizations can be crucial to the success and sustainability of more rapid integration of refugees into the workplace. In addition to identifying suitable candidates for work-related training, MOSAIC is able to provide refugee clients with language and settlement assistance, pre-employment and post-placement support, orientation about Canadian workplaces, and cultural integration assistance.

MOSAIC offered one such program with the BC Alliance for Manufacturing with the result that 85% of the refugee participants were offered jobs upon program completion.

MOSAIC is calling on governments to financially support refugee-specific employment programs, on all employers to see refugees as a rich talent pool and on immigrant serving organizations to partner with and support employers to hire refugees who are ready and keen to make a contribution.

Canada is seen as a global leader in refugee resettlement. Now we need to follow-up and do what's necessary so that refugees can fully contribute to Canada, its economy and its communities.

-30-

MOSAIC is an acronym for Multi-lingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities.

With over 40 programs, MOSAIC provides employment services, family services, language instruction, legal information, settlement services, and victim and family violence services from multiple sites in Metro Vancouver. MOSAIC also operates the WorkBC Centre for Vancouver Northeast catchment area, as well as MOSAIC Translations and Interpretations Services.