



MiFriendly Cities Research Briefing No. 1

Results from Survey of
Employers in Coventry



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Foreword

The MiFriendly Cities Research Briefing No. 1 presents the results from a survey of employers in Coventry. It is produced by Coventry University, on behalf of MiFriendly Cities. The online survey was conducted by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce. It is an in-depth exploration of the recruitment difficulties faced by employers in Coventry, along with the barriers to employing refugees and non-EU migrants. It seeks to form a basis to strengthen the workforce of the West Midlands, creating an infrastructure which opens opportunities, offering ongoing support and increases contact between communities in the workplace.

“Coventry is a city with a proud history of recognising and celebrating cultural diversity. However, more needs to be done to better connect employers in the region with currently under- and unemployed refugees and migrants. At the same time employers are experiencing a skills gap which needs to be addressed in order to increase skills and increase those in employment. This is a challenging climate for companies to recruit staff in. We need innovative ways to address the recruitment difficulties employers face, especially as this situation is likely to worsen after Brexit, due to the significance of the EU workforce in the region. Further education and support for both employers and potential employees could help refugees and non-EU migrants find work, encourage integration and help companies meet the workforce skills gap.

The MiFriendly Cities project recognises the valuable contribution refugees and migrants make to our communities and how we can all benefit from their integration to build a more united and prosperous future for the West Midlands region. Over the next three years, MiFriendly Cities will address some of the challenges faced by employers, refugees and non-EU migrants through a two-way approach to employment related activities. In this way, we're proud to be reaching out a welcoming hand to migrants and refugees, and to be creating an example for other areas of the country, and the continent, to follow.”

Professor John Latham,
Vice-Chancellor,
Coventry University



Executive Summary

In October 2017 the EU's Urban Innovative Actions fund awarded more than £4m to Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton for the MiFriendly Cities project, a 3-year initiative that will look to develop innovative, community-led and sustainable approaches to enhancing the contribution of refugees and migrants¹ across the West Midlands region. By bringing together 11 partner organisations – including the local authorities from each city – the project will deliver an exciting programme of activities designed to create opportunities and to push the boundaries of what has been previously attempted in the EU. Some of these activities are specifically focused on better connecting un- and under-employed refugees and migrants with employers.

In a recent UNHCR report², for most refugees, integration is most dependent on having a job. Being introduced to different paths that will lead to employment is the most valuable help to achieve this. For governments, employment is equally key for the integration of refugees. For refugees, finding employment is not only essential for the purpose of autonomous and independent living, but it can also address other needs that many refugees might have: it improves language skills, increases cultural awareness, builds local and social networks, increases social participation and improves physical and mental health. This positive social impact alone is a strong argument for businesses to hire refugees, but it is not the only aspect to consider. Refugees are often skilled, and hold qualifications and practical experience across various areas of work. As well as bringing in new talent, hiring refugees introduces new ideas and perspectives that can enrich any workplace.³

This research briefing reports the findings from a survey of employers in Coventry conducted by Coventry University, on behalf of MiFriendly Cities.⁴ The aim of the survey was to ascertain Coventry employers' current level and type of vacancies, as well as why they are finding it difficult to recruit. Survey findings form part of the baseline evaluation of MiFriendly Cities, as well as contributing to the development of programme activities including activities to better connect employers in the region with currently under- and unemployed refugees and migrants. The online survey was conducted by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, disseminated to their members during July 2018. The survey received 200 responses from employers in the private sector (85.3%), public sector (7.8%) and voluntary sectors (5.4%). This figure is comparable to the employment composition within the city (private sector is 82% for Coventry⁵). Respondents were from a range of sectors, most significantly manufacturing, engineering and hospitality.

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1. The MiFriendly Cities programme includes a programme of activities with which refugees, third country nationals (non-EU migrants) and EU nationals can get involved with. It is important to the ethos of this project that we take a 'whole community' approach which means that some of our activities are open to all local residents.
 2. www.unhcr.org/5adde9904
 3. https://i.forbesimg.com/forbesinsights/StudyPDFs/Innovation_Through_Diversity.pdf
 4. www.mifriendlycities.co.uk
 5. ONS 2017



Key Findings

- Over 80% of employers in Coventry who responded to this survey told us they are 'definitely' or 'somewhat so' currently experiencing vacancies that are hard to fill.
- Sales and customer service roles are the most difficult to recruit for, with almost one third of respondents finding this challenging.
- 65% of employers who responded reported not being able to fill their vacancies due to being unable to find candidates with the right job-specific skills and experience.
- 34.3% also reported not being able to find candidates with the right generic skills (communication skills and the (perceived) ability to work as part of a team).
- Less than 5% of respondents currently employ refugees / former refugees. However, 34% reported not seeing any barriers to them employing refugees in the future.
- That said, almost a third of respondents (27%) had not considered employing refugees.
- Almost all (96.1%) of respondents reported that they lacked confidence in employing migrants (including refugees) from *outside the EU* as they had not received training on the validity of documents which tell them who has the right to work.
- For almost two thirds (64.2%) of these respondents, lack of confidence acts as a deterrent to them employing refugees and non-EU migrants.
- Over half (52.2%) of respondents reported that they would like more information about who has the legal right to work.

These findings compare with those from a recent report by Warwickshire County Council⁶, which suggests that there is indeed a skills issue in Coventry and

Warwickshire. Their report found that 3 in 5 businesses reported that skills are a problem within their firm, with the majority putting this down to a lack of workers with the right skills. Businesses experiencing a skills shortage for this reason were most likely to be looking outside the workforce and at graduates/apprentices to plug skills gaps. A similar picture exists nationally, with a third of vacancies in the UK (33%) considered hard to fill.⁷ The Employer Skills Survey 2017 reported that when employers struggle to fill vacancies, this is often due to a lack of the required skills, qualifications, or experience among applicants. Collectively these are known as 'skill-shortage vacancies'.

The skills shortage issue brings together a complex mix of policy fields, including education, labour regulation (including immigration) and workplace incentives for training. Due to the significance of the EU workforce in the region, the UK leaving the EU is likely to worsen the skills gap and associated labour shortages. At the same time, there are untapped skills amongst refugee and [non-EU] migrant populations which could help employers meet these gaps. Finding a relevant job for a refugee in a company with recruitment needs is a win-win for both employers and jobseekers. Going forward, close collaboration between local authorities, migrant support services/ organisations and employers is crucial to successful labour market integration of refugees and non-EU migrants. By recognising and nurturing the skills and passion of refugees and migrants, as well as working directly with employers, MiFriendly Cities hopes to create a region where everyone is given the opportunity to thrive. Its aim is to create a network of 'Migration Friendly Employers' whose common goal will be to strengthen the workforce of the West Midlands, creating an infrastructure which opens opportunities, offering ongoing support and increases contact between communities in the workplace. The project will seek to address some of these challenges and opportunities through a two-way approach to strengthening the economic success of the West Midlands by offering:

6. Skills Shortages in Coventry and Warwickshire
7. Employer Skills Survey 2017

- “Employment Brokers” based within RMC (Refugee and Migrant Centre, Black Country and the Midlands) and CRMC (Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) whose job it is to better connect employers with un- and under-employed refugees and migrants, and to educate employers about the availability of skills and qualifications within these communities.
- Work with local and national employers to create sustainable work placements and apprenticeships.
- A mentoring programme, with existing and retired employees supporting refugees and migrants through placements and towards employment.
- Weekly employment sessions in the most deprived areas of each city to help *all* citizens achieve their goals.
- A digital guide and business forums to help West Midlands employers connect with refugee and migrant communities.
- Employment rights awareness guides and employment-related advice for refugees and migrants.
- CUSE (Coventry University Social Enterprise) training up to 40 participants recruited through RMC and CRMC to support them in setting up viable social enterprises in the West Midlands.

These activities are situated with the wider context of Coventry and Warwickshire LEP and Coventry City Council’s activities.



Introduction

In October 2017 the EU's Urban Innovative Actions fund awarded more than £4m to Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton for the MiFriendly Cities project, a 3-year initiative that will look to develop innovative, community-led and sustainable approaches to enhancing the contribution of refugees and migrants across the West Midlands region. MiFriendly Cities includes the three local authorities of Coventry, Wolverhampton and Birmingham; leading regional and national NGOs: Refugee and Migrant Centre Black Country and the Midlands [RMC], Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre [CRMC], Central England Law Centre, Migrant Voice; MigrationWork (a national not-for-profit consultancy set up to help communities, practitioners and policy-makers to respond to migration); Coventry University Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations [CTPSR]; Coventry University Social Enterprises [CUSE] and leading West Midlands employer, Interserve. Refugees and migrants have also been integral partners in developing this project, helping to decide what it is that makes a 'Migration Friendly' city. The foundations of the project will focus on jobs, skills, citizenship, start-ups, and long-term community investment.

The West Midlands is home to a dynamic, growing economy with a strong manufacturing history and track record in economic innovation. It houses 6,000 advanced engineering firms and accounts for 25% of all automotive production in the UK.⁸ For Coventry, there are signs that the number of jobs in the city is growing and Coventry demonstrated strong growth in resident employment levels in the last year. The gap between the local unemployment rate and the national rate has closed over the last two years, and business stock is growing well, qualification levels are going up and labour market measures are positive.⁹ However, whilst there are some reasons to be positive about the future, the city and wider region faces some serious challenges, notably the uncertainty around the impact of the UK leaving the European Union¹⁰, low productivity compared with the rest of the UK, and lower than average wage levels amongst residents in work.¹¹

We also know that local employers are struggling to fill vacancies. A recent survey conducted by Coventry & Warwickshire County Council found that in 2017, one in three businesses believed recruitment difficulties to be a barrier to their growth.¹² This was especially the case for respondents in the manufacturing sector. Respondents to that survey attributed this to a localised skills shortage, competition between local businesses over skilled workers, as well as an inability to afford the higher wages necessary to attract individuals with the right skills. Coventry has a lower unemployment rate than the UK (2.9% compared with 5.4%), as well as a larger proportion of the working population lacking qualifications than the UK as a whole (12% compared with 10%) and a higher percentage of young people not in training, employment education than nationally, posing some of the challenges for employers.

Access to the skills, ideas and talent which overseas workers bring adds to the high employment rates of UK nationals by ensuring that firms operating in the UK can be competitive with their global rivals. Concern amongst businesses about this access has been steadily rising, even before the EU referendum. Between 2012 and 2015 the proportion of firms reporting access to overseas workers as a threat to the competitiveness of the UK more than doubled, rising from 6% to 16%.¹³ Since the UK's decision to leave the EU, this concern has escalated significantly.¹⁴ In 2016, 31% of firms saw access to highly skilled migrants as a threat to competitiveness, with even more (35%) concerned over access to labour supply.¹⁵ This will be further exacerbated as the EU exit date (currently 29 March 2019) draws closer. Indeed, recent research¹⁶ has shown that almost one million EU citizens who work in the UK, many of whom are highly qualified, are planning to either leave the country or have already decided to do so following Brexit. Locally, uncertainty surrounding Brexit also appears to be an issue with Coventry and Warwickshire identified as one of four LEPS nationally to be most 'exposed' to Brexit.¹⁷ This is supported by the Economic Outlook Index for

8. WM Strategic Economic Plan

9. Source: Coventry's Economic Growth and Prosperity Strategy 2018-2022

10. <https://www.cw-chamber.co.uk/news/brexit-has-already-impacted-the-economy-warwickshire-audience-told/>

11. Coventry's Economic Growth and Prosperity Strategy 2018-2022

12. Warwickshire County Council Skills Report November 2017.

13. Employment Trends Surveys, CBI/Accenture, 2012-2015

14. CBI Brexit Industrial Strategy

15. Employment Trends Survey 2016

16. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2017/08/the-brexit-effect-on-eu-nationals.pdf>

17. Economic Outlook, Brexit: Uncertainty and Opportunity 2016

Coventry and Warwickshire for the 2nd quarter of 2018, which has seen a second successive deterioration.¹⁸

Coventry City Council's jobs and growth strategy is seeking to combat these uncertainties and concerns around skills by securing job opportunities through investment, helping people get jobs and helping improve the skills of local residents- working with local schools, colleges, universities, training providers and businesses to ensure that people are equipped with the skills that businesses need.¹⁹ There is also a focus on young people, particularly those not in education, employment or training (NEET) – supporting them with skills development and route ways into work.

Getting people into work locally is an important challenge which needs to be addressed further. MiFriendly Cities also believes that there are currently untapped skills and resources within particular communities within the West Midlands. Nationally, BAME workers with a degree are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts.²⁰ Non-EU migrants are the largest migrant group in Coventry, and only 49% of them are in paid employment, which is significantly below the regional average and the city's population as a whole (62% and 70% respectively).²¹ Discriminatory hiring is highly likely to be the cause of this.²²

Coventry also has a thriving refugee and migrant population. The 2011 Census tells us that 1 in every 5 people living in Coventry (21%) were born outside the UK, and over 35% of births in 2011 were to non-UK born mothers.²³ Over the last 5 years, Coventry has seen annual increases in the numbers of international migrants moving into the city, and overall the second

highest number of international arrivals, after Birmingham. Between 2012 and 2015, there were higher numbers of EU migrants than non-EU migrants moving into the city, although this trend has now reversed. The highest number of EU arrivals to Coventry in 2016 were from Romania and Poland, with the highest number from outside the EU coming from China, India and Nigeria.²⁴

Refugees and non-EU migrants are especially likely to be un- and under-employed. In Birmingham, up to 65% of male refugees and up to 80% of female refugees face unemployment.^{25 26} Many refugees who come to the UK hold professional qualifications or have years of experience of working in a particular profession. Refugees who arrive in the UK with skills in demand in the UK economy such as teachers, doctors and nurses, often do not practice professions in the UK.²⁷ This un- and under-employment is likely to be due to them facing a number of barriers, such as, the erosion of skills for those who have waited a long time before a decision on their asylum claim, lack of confidence in skills and gaps in CVs, insufficient English language skills or a failure in recognising previous skills and education and unfamiliarity with the UK market.²⁸

Yet, it is widely recognised that employment is a key component for the successful integration of refugees in countries of asylum.²⁹ Employment increases both economic and social integration and offers the opportunity to gain self-esteem, financial support, to facilitate new social contacts, provides emotional well-being and facilitates learning or improvement of English language skills. However, the frequent changes to immigration and asylum regulations and rights over the past decade and a half have created confusion about refugees' (and more

18. British Chambers of Commerce. Quarterly Economic Survey. Coventry and Warwickshire Results. Q2 2018.

19. http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/153/employment_support/1204/coventry_jobs_and_growth_strategy/1

20. https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/trajectory-and-transience_Nov2015.pdf?noredirect=1 and <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/bame-workers-third-more-likely-be-underemployed-finds-tuc-report>

21. ONS Annual Population Survey 2017

22. See <https://race.bitc.org.uk/news-opinion/news/ethnic-minorities-are-not-benefiting-employment-growth-show-latest-statistics> and <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/pms-blind-spot-on-2020-vision>

23. ONS Census 2011

24. ONS Local Areas Migration Indicators 2017

25. <https://rise-project.eu/ie/analysis/>

26. No comparable data is available for Coventry

27. https://www.ippr.org/files/ecommm/files/making_it_work.pdf

28. Refugee Council 2016

29. See Valtonen 1999; Bloch 2002 and Ager and Strang 2004



generally non-EU migrants') legal rights and entitlements to work.³⁰ Moreover, employers face increasingly punitive civil penalties for employing those who do not have the right to work in the UK. Thus, although refugees have an unrestricted legal right to work, employers remain wary of confused by taking on refugees and the administrative burden of checking eligibility.

Over the next three years, MiFriendly Cities is trying to address some of these challenges through a two-way approach consisting of the following employment-related activities:

- "Employment Brokers" based within RMC (Refugee and Migrant Centre, Black Country and the Midlands) and CRMC (Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) whose job it is to better connect employers with un- and under-employed refugees and migrants, and to educate employers about the availability of skills and qualifications within these communities.
- Work with local and national employers to create sustainable work placements and apprenticeships.
- A mentoring programme, with existing and retired employees supporting refugees and migrants through placements and towards employment.
- Weekly employment sessions in the most deprived areas of each city to help *all* citizens achieve their goals.
- A digital guide and business forums to help West Midlands employers connect with refugee and migrant communities, as well as educate them about the validity of right to work documents.

- Employment rights awareness guides and employment-related advice for refugees and migrants.
- CUSE (Coventry University Social Enterprise) training up to 40 participants recruited through RMC and CRMC to support them in setting up viable social enterprises in the West Midlands.

MiFriendly Cities is aiming to create a network of 'Migration Friendly Employers' whose common goal will be to strengthen the workforce of the West Midlands, creating an infrastructure which opens opportunities, offering ongoing support and increases contact between communities in the workplace. By recognising and nurturing the skills and passion of refugees and migrants, as well as working directly with employers, MiFriendly Cities hopes to create a region where everyone is given the opportunity to thrive.

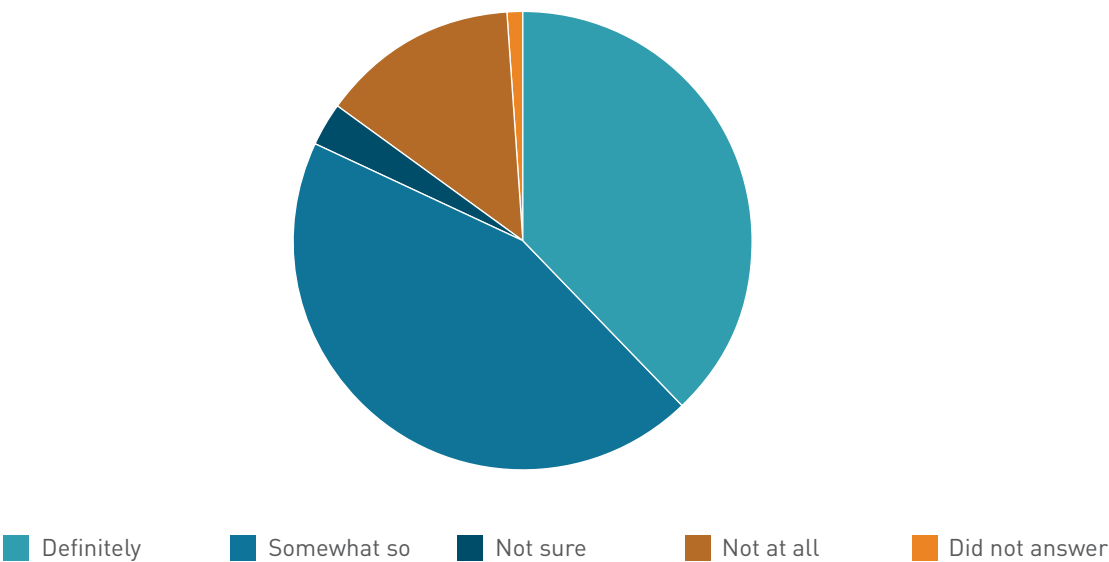
The online survey, on which this report is based, was conducted by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce which distributed it to its members during July 2018. The survey received 200 responses from employers in the private sector (85.3%), public sector (7.8%) and voluntary sectors (5.4%). This figure is comparable to the employment composition within the city (private sector is 82% for Coventry³¹). Respondents were from a range of sectors, most significantly manufacturing, engineering and hospitality.

30. Refugees' Right to Work and Access to Labor Markets- An Assessment. Part II: Country Cases.

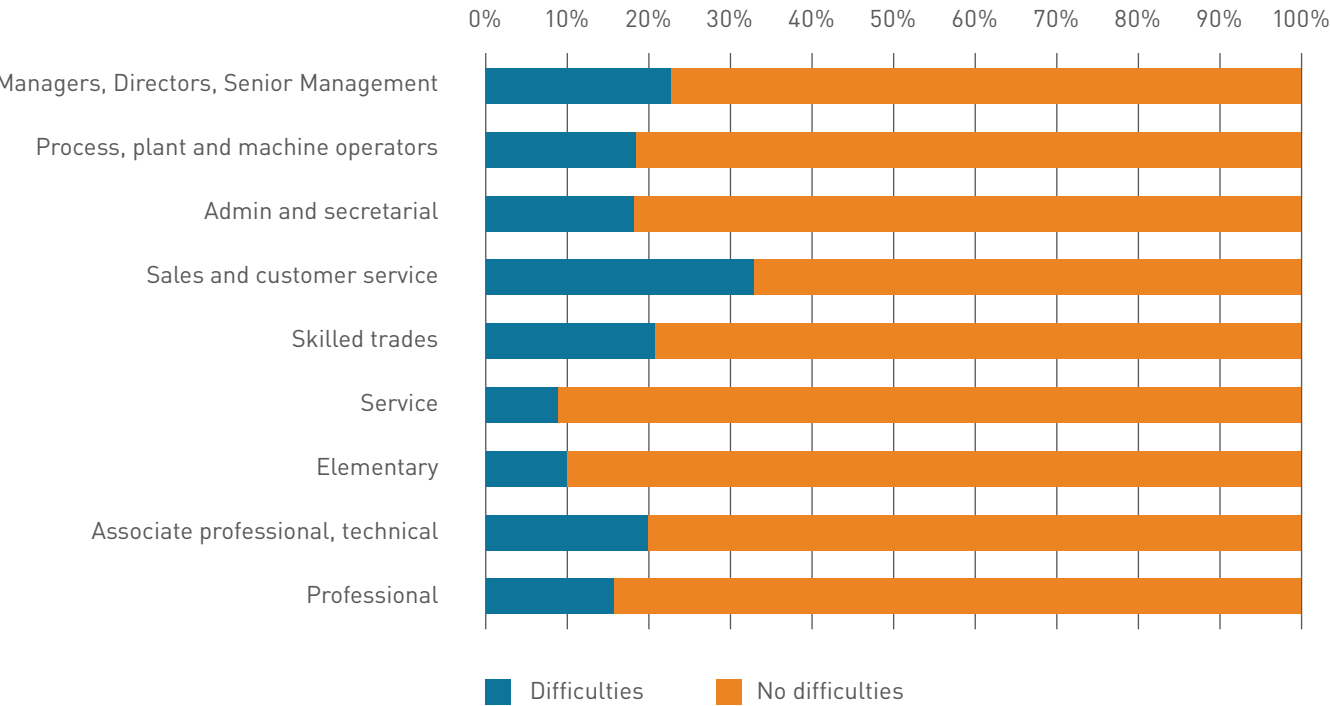
31. ONS 2017

Recruitment Difficulties

Employers experiencing recruitment difficulties



Difficult to fill roles

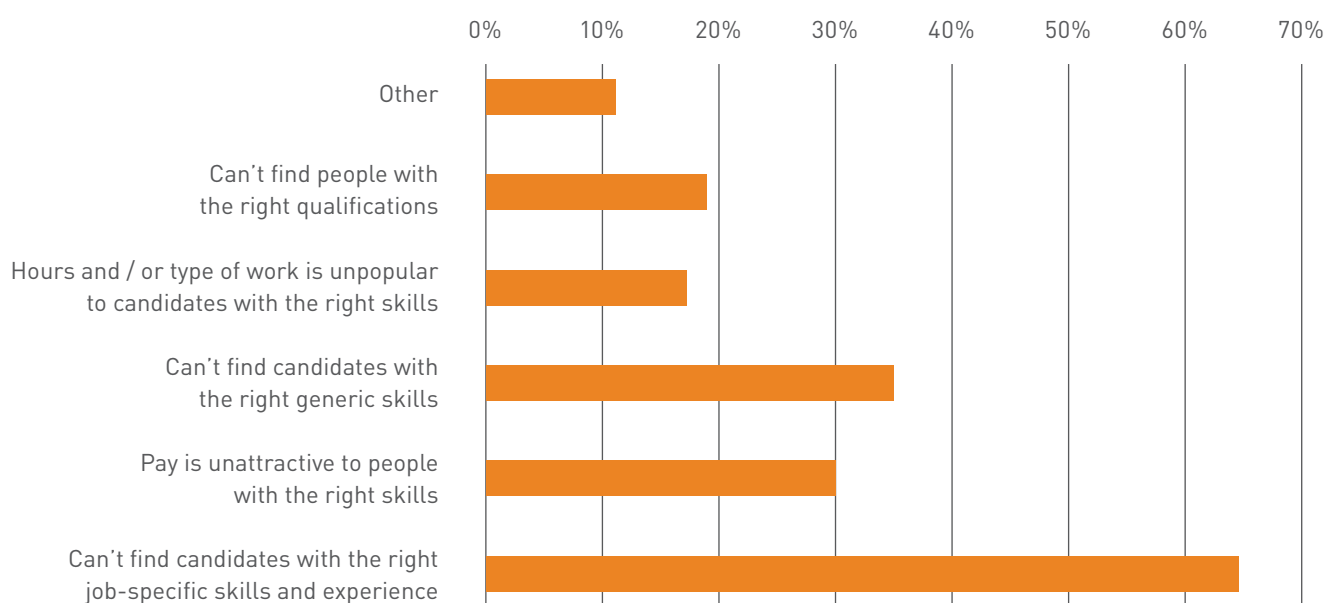




The initial questions of the survey focussed on whether employers were experiencing recruitment difficulties, and if so, in what roles. Over 80% of employers are currently 'definitely' or 'somewhat so' experiencing hard to fill vacancies. Only 14.2% reported experiencing no difficulties in filling vacancies. Looking at this by job role indicates that 'Sales and Customer Services' is the role most hard to fill, with almost a third of employers finding it difficult to recruit staff. This includes occupations such as sales managers and customer facing roles. Such recruitment difficulties were experienced by manufacturers, accountants and those in creative industries. This supports local data into skills

demands in Coventry with Customer Services being the most in demand role in the last 12 months – it accounts for 4.5% of all skills requested by employers.³² Difficulties were also reported for filling 'Managers, Directors and Senior Management' roles (22.1%) and 'Skilled Trades' (e.g. cooks and gardeners) (20.6%). Service roles (such as home carers and auxiliaries) were the easiest to fill with only 7.4% of employers reporting difficulties. Those employers experiencing difficulties in filling roles were attempting to respond by upskilling their current staff, recruiting through agencies, or by offering apprenticeships. However, these strategies were insufficient and recruitment difficulties were still reported.

Reasons for staff shortages



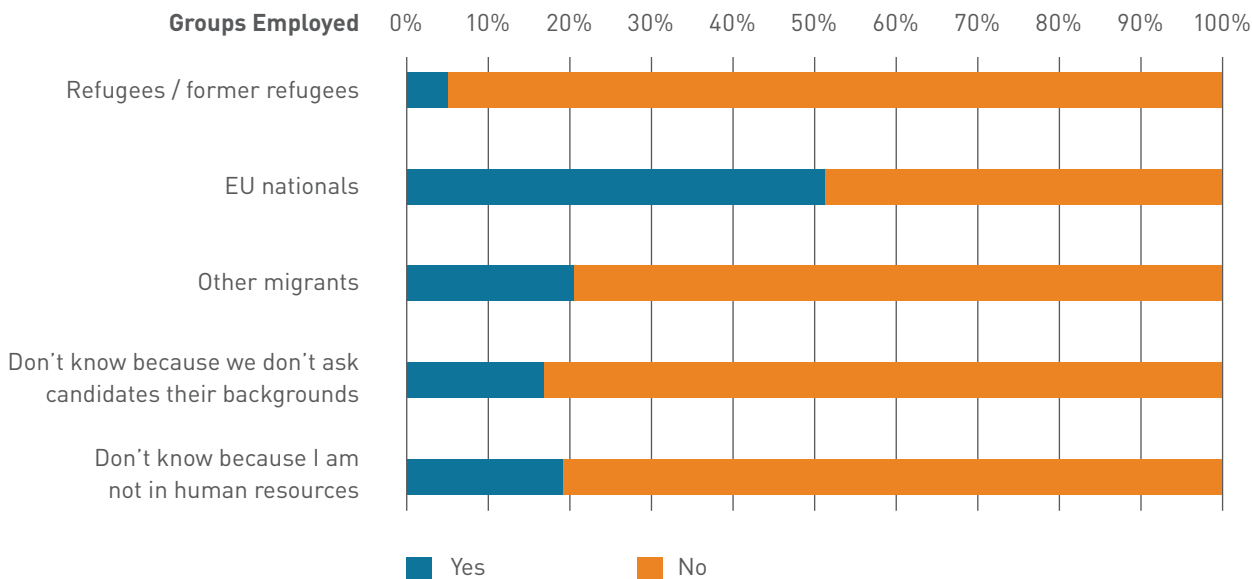
32. Labour Insight 2018

Employers were then asked what they considered to be the reasons for these shortages. 64.7% of employers reported not being able to fill their vacancies due to being unable to find candidates with the right job-specific skills and experience. This was for roles that required specific qualifications, knowledge or training. A third of those not being able to find candidates with the right skills were looking to fill admin or secretarial roles. Around a third also reported not being able to find candidates with the right generic skills. Generic skills include communication skills and the (perceived) ability to work as part of a team. A third of employers reported that for those who have the right skills, pay was unattractive, pointing to a need to raise wages and the attractiveness of the jobs on offer. Almost a fifth could not find people with the right qualifications.

This data points to a skills gap which needs to be addressed in order to increase skills and increase those in employment. Over the past ten years, evidence³³ from

the UK has shown there is a significant and widespread increase in the skills gap across regions. In particular, the UK is characterised by a shortfall in intermediate level skills and a high occurrence of those with fewer skills. Local and regional statistics show that in Coventry and the West Midlands this proportion of those with fewer skills is higher than nationally, and also that employment rates are lower than average. Reducing the skills gap would help support people to reach their full potential while at the same time helping employers best utilise the local available labour force. Coventry City Council is already attempting to address this through their jobs and growth strategy opportunities focussed on investment, helping people get jobs and helping improve the skills of local residents. MiFriendly Cities will extend these activities by nurturing the skills and passion of refugees and migrants, as well as working directly with employers. As part of this they will run weekly employment sessions in the most deprived areas of each city to help *all* citizens achieve their goals

Barriers to employing refugees and non-EU migrants

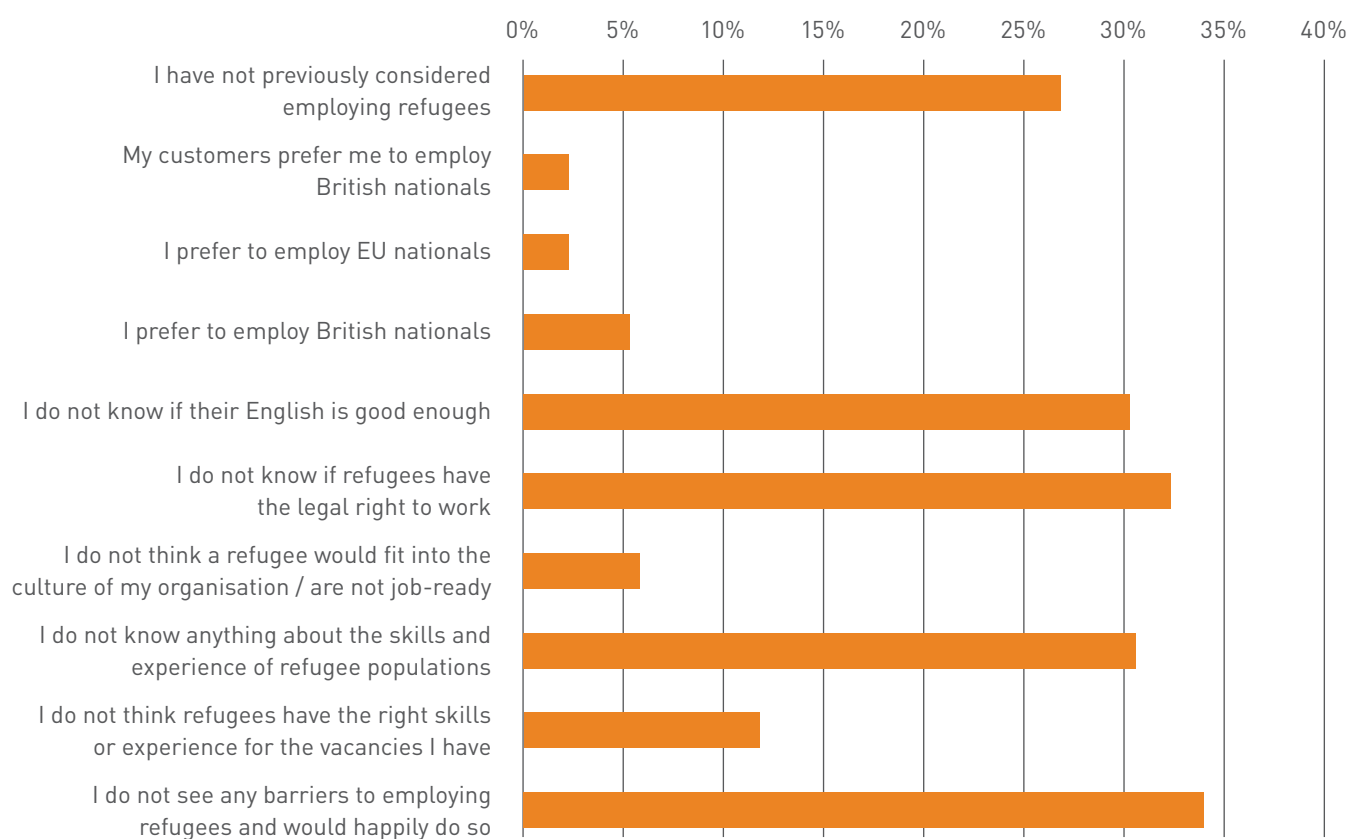


33. <https://blog.bham.ac.uk/cityredi/mind-the-gap-qualification-shortages-in-the-west-midlands/>



Employers were then asked about their experiences of, and barriers to employing refugees and non- EU migrants. Refugees and former refugees were only employed by less than 5% employers. However, more than half (52%) employed migrants from the EU, and 20.6% employed non-EU migrants. This supports research that refugees are more likely to be unemployed than other migrant groups.³⁴ The high levels of employment of EU migrants also raises concerns for the skills gap potentially being widened by Brexit, if EU migrants chose to leave the UK. Indeed, recent research³⁵ has shown that almost one million EU citizens who work in the UK, many of whom are highly qualified, are planning to either leave the country or have already decided to do so following Brexit.

Barriers to employing refugees



34. https://www.ippr.org/files/ecommm/files/making_it_work.pdf

35. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2017/08/the-brexiteffect-on-eu-nationals.pdf>

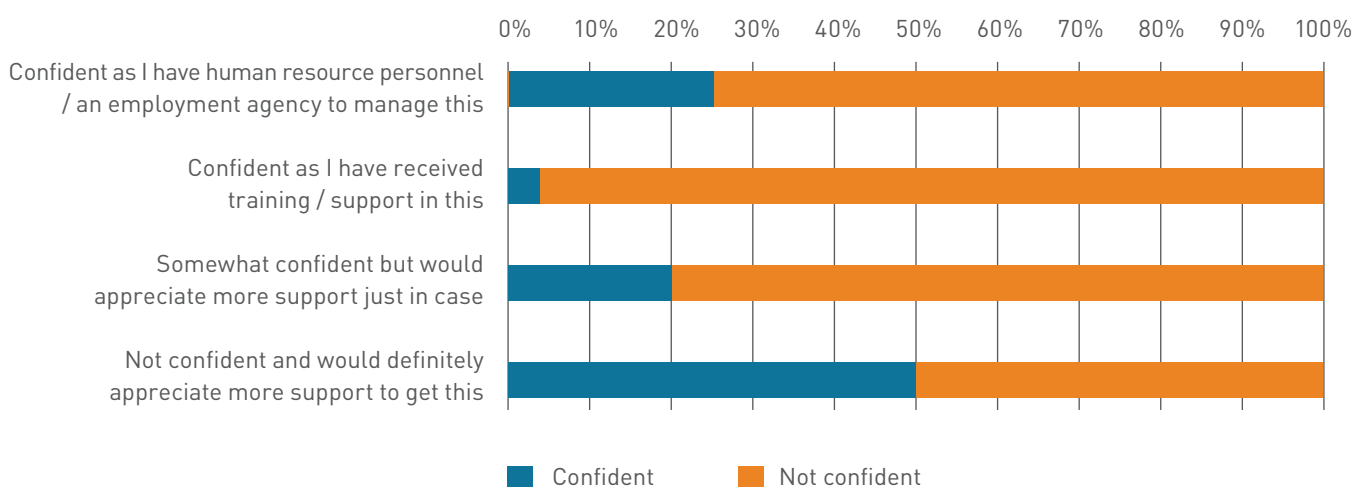
Only a third of employers reported not seeing any barriers to employing refugees. That said, the remainder reported some kind of barriers, or had not considering the employment of refugees. Indeed, refugees often experience a number of barriers to employment and these contribute to low employment aspirations. A third of employers cited not knowing if refugees have the legal right to work as barrier to their employment. This suggests a need for employer education into the process of employing refugees. MiFriendly Cities will address this through a digital guide and business leader forums aimed at reducing employers' fear of employing refugees and migrants, as well as increasing, their awareness of the benefit of so doing, as well as the available skills within the population.

A further third (30.9%) reported not knowing anything about the skills and experience of refugee populations. In addition, 30.4% did not know if the English language skills of refugees would be good enough. 27% of employers had not even considered employing refugees. This points to a need for greater engagement with employers in order to educate them over the skills that the refugee population can offer. At the same time, refugees also need to be equipped with the right skills. Those that do not have the right skills could be upskilled through education or apprenticeships. This could also be the case for other migrant groups.

Various MiFriendly Cities activities are seeking to address the skills issue. As part of their drive to create 3m new apprenticeships by 2020, from April 2017, all UK employers with a wage bill of over £3 m/year, are required to pay an 'Apprenticeship Levy'. This represents an opportunity for MiFriendly Cities to integrate migrants and refugees into these opportunities as well as to encourage employers in the West Midlands to create new apprenticeships. MiFriendly Cities partner, Interserve, will create between 10-15 work placements for refugees and migrants as a means of progressing into apprenticeships. The pilot will be evaluated to determine the effectiveness of work placements for progression into apprenticeships, scaled up and promoted by Interserve to other employers in the West Midlands region.

MiFriendly Cities will also train 300 refugees and migrants in advanced manufacturing techniques. The West Midlands Strategic Economic Plan's³⁶ principle objective is to become home to the biggest concentration of advanced manufacturing in Europe, however the region's workforce currently lacks the skills required to meet this vision. MiFriendly Cities will seek to address this through this training. In order to further enhance skills and training CUSE (Coventry University Social Enterprise) will also offer training up to 40 participants recruited through RMC and CRMC to support them in setting up viable social enterprises in the West Midlands.

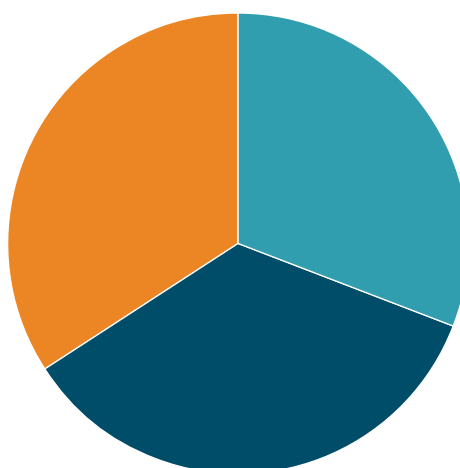
Level of confidence with the law on employing non-EU migrants



36. <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/strategy/>



Level of confidence in the law on employing migrants



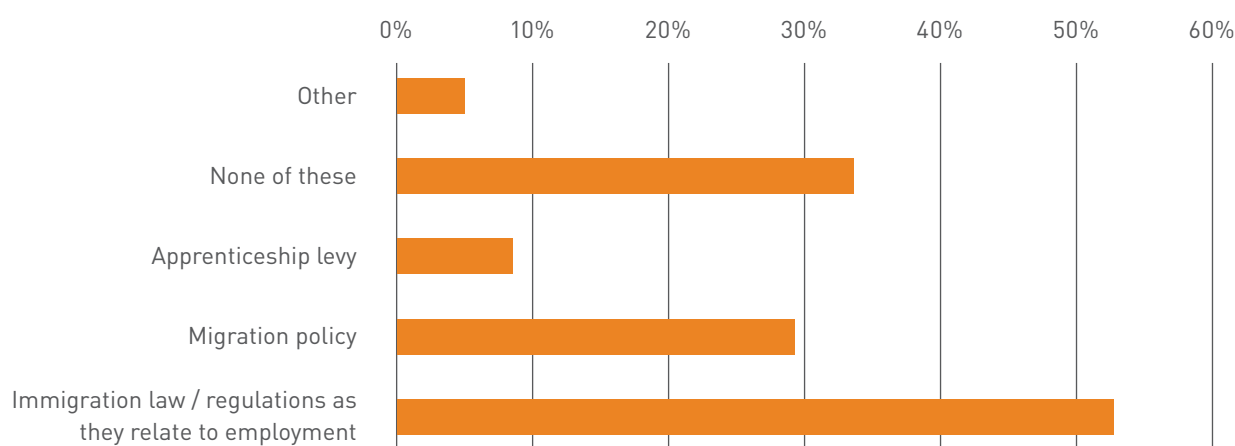
■ Definitely acts as a deterrent

■ Somewhat acts as a deterrent

■ Does not at all act as a deterrent

Employers were also asked about their confidence in employing refugees and non- EU migrants. Nearly all (96.1%) employers were not confident in employing non-EU migrants including refugees who are based in the UK, and who do not have a UK passport, due to not receiving training or support on this. This suggests that adequate training and support for employers is critical in order to facilitate the employment of refugees and non-EU migrants. Only a quarter of employers felt confident due to having human resource personnel or a recruitment agency to manage the recruitment and right to work of non-EU migrants and refugees. Half of employers reported not feeling confident at all. As such, 64.2% of employers' confidence in the law on employing migrants 'definitely' or 'somewhat' acted as a deterrent to them employing them.

Areas employers would like more information about



Unsurprisingly, over half (52.2%) of employers would like more information on immigration law/ regulations as they relate to employment and almost a third (28.9%) would like more information on migration policy. A system of penalty fines was introduced under the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act for employers hiring staff without the appropriate documentation. This adds an additional structural barrier as it can make some employers reluctant to employ refugees because of the burden of checking this information, confusion around the law, or because they are concerned that they might be in breach of the legislation.³⁷ In order to assist employers in employing refugees and migrants from outside the EU, and to improve their confidence, education and support needs to be provided for employers so that they are aware of the legalities involved in employing such groups, along with more information on migration policy. This should also focus on making employers aware of the skills, experience and language skills of these populations in order to increase the number of employers who consider employing refugees and also to increase their confidence in doing so. This support and education could come in the form of in house training or through regional initiatives to educate employers.

MiFriendly Cities will seek to address this need through recruiting “Employment Brokers” based within RMC (Refugee and Migrant Centre, Black Country and the Midlands) and CRMC (Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) whose job it is to better connect employers with un- and under-employed refugees and migrants, and to educate employers about the availability of skills and qualifications within these communities. The project will also work with local and national employers to create sustainable work placements and apprenticeships. In addition, a digital guide and business forums will help West Midlands employers connect with refugee and migrant communities, as well as educate them about the validity of right to work documents. These will be accompanied by employment rights awareness guides and employment-related advice for refugees and migrants.

37. Refugee Council 1999



Key challenges and opportunities

The skills shortage issue brings together a complex mix of policy fields, including education, labour regulation (including immigration) and workplace incentives for training. Due to the significance of the EU workforce in the region, the UK leaving the EU is likely to worsen the skills gap and associated labour shortages. At the same time, there are untapped skills amongst refugee and [non-EU] migrant populations which could help employers meet these gaps. Finding a relevant job for a refugee in a company with recruitment needs is a win-win for both employers and jobseekers. For refugees, finding employment is not only essential for the purpose of autonomous and independent living, but it can also address other needs that many refugees might have: it improves language skills, increases cultural awareness, builds local and social networks, increases social participation and improves physical and mental health.

Going forward, close collaboration between local authorities, migrant support services/ organisations and employers is crucial to successful labour market integration of refugees and non-EU migrants. Adequate conversations, tailored support programmes and adapted skills requirements are pivotal to increasing refugee employment, but perhaps are also the biggest challenge to achieving employment. Understanding labour shortages and employers' needs in the labour market is also crucial to help local authorities and organisations to review and adapt training, service provision and job matching. Where refugees and non-EU migrants do not already have the skills required, apprenticeships could also play an integral role in tackling the skills gap problem, to drive the growth of a young, skilled workforce, where on-the-job experience affords employers the ability to instil the skills greatly needed. Critically, refugees must be made part of the process in identifying solutions to the obstacles they face and in replicating those good practices they identify.

MiFriendly Cities will seek to address some of these challenges and opportunities through offering support in filling vacancies; access to MiFriendly Cities coaches who can integrate candidates into workplaces [e.g. with English language, cultural integration in organisation and wider]; access to an 'Employers Guide' – a free source of advice on compliance with immigration regulations when hiring non-UK staff; and advice on turning the apprenticeship levy into a benefit rather than a cost.

About this survey

85.3% of organisations that responded to the survey were private sector. 7.8% were public sector and 5.4% were voluntary sector. The remainder did not specify. 30.2% of employers had 10 or under employees. This figure is far lower than the figure for Coventry as a whole, where 89% of businesses are micro (9 employees or under) enterprises.³⁸ A range of employers responded to the survey. The most significant industries were: 7.4% were in manufacturing, 5% were in engineering and 4.9% were in hospitality. Other industries who responded to the survey included healthcare, accountancy, education and the automotive industry.

This report has been prepared by Dr Catherine Harris from the Centre for Peace, Trust and Social Relation, Coventry University. The research was conducted by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce. The survey forms part of the MiFriendly Cities project.

If you would like to discuss this research, please contact Catherine.Harris@Coventry.ac.uk

11 partners, 3 cities, 1 initiative

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38. Annual Population Survey 2017





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