**WM Migration Network Opportunities Thematic Meeting**

**16th January 2024 (10:30-12:00)**

**Chair: Steven Bayliss (Refugee and Migrant Centre)**

1. **Introductions**

SB welcomed attendees and they introduced themselves and their organisations.

1. **Aims**

SB said that following constructive conversations in December’s meeting discussing the common barriers and challenges to opportunities, the network should now be focusing on solutions and actions to tackle these barriers.

1. **Employment**

SB outlined that the RMC held two workshops in which people discussed what jobs they have done in their country of origin and what jobs they are looking to get in the UK. The aim of these discussions was to find pre-employment training opportunities for these individuals. The main findings from these workshops was that individuals’’ work experience didn’t necessarily correlate with the jobs they wanted to get in the UK, with a lack of understanding of the length, cost and effort of re-training. JT said the workshops aimed to promote hospitality positions across the West Midlands, but the majority of participants were either highly qualified or not interested in working in hospitality. SB, JT, and TK talked about the challenge of getting these individuals into employment whilst they train or re-train into professions. AA and JH said they have faced similar issues with managing individuals’ expectations and finding jobs for the meantime, whilst they are getting training and degrees, etc. JH said she encounters individuals who want to go back into college courses etc., but that this can be a mask because they aren’t confident enough to find a job.

TK said as organisations there should be a push for quality one-to-one tailored support, putting together career plans for individuals. SB, AA, NC and JH talked about the growing need for more rounded employment support, as issues with housing etc. crop up alongside the need for employment advice. NC said that a lack of education can mean individuals can’t fulfil tenancies. One solution was a ‘moving on’ course which encompassed financial education, tenancy skills, and employability and professional house shares.

1. **Self-employment**

SB and TK noted that self-employment was perhaps the second most popular career choice of the individuals at the workshop. Individuals aren’t in need of ‘traditional’ self-employment advice – i.e. business plans – but are looking for admin support and in-work support throughout the first 12 or 18 months of self-employment. AA agreed - BB see individuals who are self-employed but need administrative help and advice with fees, taxes, etc. AA and SB talked about the cultural barriers to self-employment – explaining to individuals that in the UK self-employment is seen as your own risk so there is a lack of funding and support once you have decided to go self-employed. AH asked about mentoring opportunities for the self-employed and TK said himself and SB were going to Birmingham Central Library to see if they could deliver enterprise courses in the mother-tongue languages. AA said BB offer volunteer mentors but only works if individuals can communicate freely with these volunteers. SB and AA stressed the need for interpreters in these mentorships, so information doesn’t get lost in interpretation.

1. **Education and qualifications**

SB mentioned the RMC are finding that in general, individuals are misunderstanding education levels in the UK and the requirements needed for certain professions. This also includes misunderstanding the student loan system. SB asked the network – how do we educate individuals on the education levels in the UK? AA and SB stressed the importance of advice and guidance being consistent across the board. SB and TK mentioned the network could work collaboratively to produce a table of equivalents – to be able to compare qualifications, their weighting, and requirements - as a reference point to use within organisations for individuals.

1. **Overseas qualifications**

PD said that the ESOL hub can provide some help for individuals who are almost ready to get back into their profession through a bursary scheme which is about to launch for people who want to put their qualifications through ENIC. This will help individuals in two ways – paying for people to verify overseas qualifications and taking professional exams (once the ESOL hub have assessed that they are ready to take this exam). PD will share further details about this bursary scheme once it is ready. SB said that one important thing to remember is that employers don’t have to recognise qualifications that have ran through ENIC and more often than not, they don’t – ENIC holds more value from an academic perspective.

1. **Funding**

SB and TK have been finding it difficult to access adult skills budget funding to do pre-employment training. To get pre-employment training funding there has to be 60% into work ratio off the back of it, which is a risk. PD said that people are reluctant to do these swap programmes because of the associated risk. The BAES runs some swap programmes, but they only really work for individuals with a high level of English so there may be need for pre-swap ESOL course to give learners proficient English with a vocational slant. There might be funding with some providers for this pre-swap programme, but TK & PD believe there would need to be a ready-made group of individuals to ‘pilot’ this idea to see whether it works. TK said one challenge will be recruiting a cohort that could be sceptical to the idea initially and an employer who will be patient enough for the initiative. JT raised awareness of the AB programme by West Midlands combined authority with Maximus which provide support similar to swap; guaranteed interview with the aim of securing a job at the end.

1. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday 5th March at 10.30am.**