**WM Migration Network Opportunities Thematic Meeting**

**5th March 2024 (10:30-12:00)**

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

1. **Introductions**

SB welcomed all attendees & thanked them for their attendance.

1. **Updates**

* SB updated us that he’s been working on an equivalents table with the BAES & they have been finding big knowledge gaps surrounding how education works in the UK, particularly around work-based qualifications. This equivalents table should provide a useful resource. In its preliminary stages, it has been working with clients, especially in terms of explaining that university isn’t the only viable option to get well-paid jobs in the UK. Once fully developed, SB will share with the group.
* SB & Talat Khan (from the National Employer Partnership Team at DWP) have an agreement (in principle) with Birmingham Central Library to put on a jobs fair next month (April). **Action: *all members to invite any employers who may be interested in coming along* (if possible, with a focus on entry-level jobs).**

Note: this jobs fair open to refugees, migrants, BNO communities, ‘new communities’ from a mix of backgrounds/ ethnicities.

Date TBC – will be end of April.

1. **Training and Employment**

JT asked SB about interest in training schemes with guaranteed interviews (Maximus finding candidates aren’t as interested in these schemes) – SB said these schemes have always been a hard sell with longer-term unemployed, but RMC has had good success with Maximus’ adult skills budget (around 15/20 enrolled in training courses). If successful candidates, will be able to take as a case study to other providers to say with some reasonable adjustments, these people will be able to succeed in your course. AA, JT & SB spoke about employer / training providers needing to adjust and make provisions for candidates’ English levels & discussed successful stories/ strategies they have implemented with employers (using scribes/ exam adjustments/ picture-aided training/ limiting training groups to certain groups).

1. **Overseas qualifications**

Ehsan asked the group about funding opportunities (organisations willing to fund) ENIC statement of comparability across WMs. SB said from next year BAES will have some funding to help with this but universities often process internally & employers increasingly may not even accept statement of comparability – especially if UK national candidates. Lots of migrants needing to go back to university/ refresh degrees once here. AA & SB stressed relevant work experience more valuable than equivalated qualifications for employers. SB – qualification equivalation ‘isn’t the magic key everyone thinks it is.’

1. **Employment**

Ehsan shared own experience of looking for employment in UK & associated barriers (including verification of documents for DBS check). AA explained for refugees & asylum seekers there are some exemptions to this, but it is a difficulty for others. SB – DBS can be a barrier for employment for BNOs, too, and lots of other migrants.

1. **ESOL**

Ehsan raised concern over increasing pressures from job centre to get a job but candidates not having English proficiency or relevant qualifications from home country – makes it difficult to take lengthy ESOL courses to reach a level to do technical/ vocational courses. ESOL provision not meeting the real needs of people seeking employment ASAP/ job centre demands. SB – some hope in change in attitudes to Ukrainians – colleges delivering in effect full-time ESOL courses & other intensive ESOL courses that are ongoing. Attendees discussed the difficulties of ESOL provision to enter into workforce. JT flagged that Maximus provide pre-ESOL classes for those in their system in Birmingham.

1. **AOB**

AH – proposed we organise an event for this network with employers, sector groups, and education providers together to brief on the issues we are discussing, present evidence on successful case studies and hopefully start some conversations, including proposing solutions.

SB – RMC hosting a self-employment workshop next week & will evaluate the session in next meeting. AA asked if possible to refer service users in & SB said this one will be closed, but open up to collaboration in the future, could host one from BB office.

Ehsan mentioned other organisations that would benefit from and be a benefit to the group. **Reminder:** all members of the network can invite any organisations that would like to join. Any appropriate organisations are welcome to join.

1. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday 4th April at 10.30am.**