

Supporting migrants and refugees to thrive, not just survive

The PA Foundation Impact Reporting Series
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The PA Foundation

The PA Foundation aims to develop and inspire people facing disadvantage, through improved access to education, skills and employment opportunities.

Our work focuses on developing social and human capital, and future-proofing skills and careers, particularly in STEM-related fields. We are committed to helping people who experience inequitable access to opportunities, tools and resources within society by increasing their access to networks, role models and mentors, and raising their confidence and self-esteem.

To date, we have funded projects aiming to reach over **12,000 people** across the UK, US, Netherlands and Nordics. We have supported **41 charities and non-profit organisations** where there are opportunities for the skills and experience of PA people to make a real difference. We have distributed over **£3.3 million in funding** and, importantly, PA people are giving their time and expertise to the charities and non-profits that we fund.



£3.3m

funding distributed



12,000

people reached



41

charities and non-profits supported across the UK, US, Nordics and Netherlands

Introduction

The number of people displaced by conflict, violence, disaster, and other reasons has surged to the highest levels in modern-day records, reaching 117 million ([World Migration Report, 2024](#)).

The number of refugees worldwide increased from 27.1 million in 2021 to 35.3 million at the end of 2022, the largest yearly increase ever recorded ([UNHCR, Global Trends, 2023](#)).

These are startling statistics, illustrating the scale of global migration and displacement. However, it is crucial to remember that each one of these numbers is a human being. A daughter, a son, a parent, a friend – seeking safety, security and a better life.

Many of the journeys that these individuals take are arduous and fraught with danger, but the arrival in their host country does not mark the end of their adversity. Migrants and refugees face many barriers in their efforts to integrate and build security. Access to the labour market can be challenging and they can often find themselves unemployed or in jobs that are below their skill level.

Addressing these challenges requires policies and initiatives that promote inclusion, combat discrimination, and provide support to migrants and refugees as they seek to integrate into their new communities and contribute to their host societies.

Fortunately, there are a number of organisations working in this way, and some of these organisations – in Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA – are being supported through funding by The PA Foundation and through volunteers from PA Consulting. To date, we have provided over £400,000 for their programmes, PA colleagues have offered their time and experience as mentors, and we have collaborated on important new research.

This report looks at the challenges faced by migrants and refugees coming into these countries. It outlines the support that is being offered by four organisations: Sammen om en jobb (Norway), Nema Problema (Sweden), UAF (Netherlands) and Upwardly Global (USA). It highlights the impact that these organisations are having and the contribution that The PA Foundation is making to their vital work.

You will also read, in their own words, the perspectives of individuals who have been supported by these organisations and those who are working with them to ensure they are able to build the lives they desire and deserve.

The challenge

Whilst numbers of migrants and refugees are increasing, many of these newcomers are more educated and qualified than any other time in history.

45% of recently arrived immigrants in the USA have at least a bachelor's degree ([Migration Policy Institute, 2024](#)): yet, more than 2 million immigrants and refugees with degrees and professional work experience from their home countries are unemployed or underemployed ([Ibid](#)).

The barriers to entering the labour market faced by migrants and refugees are numerous. Some relate to the individual, and some to the context in which they find themselves. All of these barriers were reflected in the experiences that were shared with us by individuals who are being supported by the organisations with which we are working.



They include:



→ **Legal barriers**

Migrants and refugees often face complex and restrictive immigration laws that limit their ability to work legally. Obtaining work permits or visas can be difficult and time-consuming, especially for those fleeing conflict or persecution.



→ **Language barriers**

Language proficiency is crucial for finding employment, but migrants and refugees may struggle to learn a language quickly and proficiently.



→ **Discrimination**

Migrants and refugees frequently encounter discrimination and xenophobia in the job market. Prejudices against foreigners, cultural differences and stereotypes can lead to unfair treatment and exclusion from job opportunities.



→ **Lack of recognition of qualifications and experience**

Migrants and refugees often face challenges in having their qualifications and work experience recognised in their host countries. Differences in educational systems and professional standards can make it difficult for them to find work commensurate with their skills and experience.



→ **Trauma and mental health issues**

Many migrants and refugees have experienced trauma, including violence, persecution, and displacement, which can impact their mental health and ability to work. Addressing these issues requires access to appropriate healthcare services and support networks.



→ **Limited access to support services**

Many migrants and refugees lack access to essential support services such as job training, career counselling and social welfare programmes. Without adequate support, they may struggle to navigate the job market and overcome other barriers to employment.

The individuals who provided input to this report highlighted additional barriers, specific to their situations. The most important of these was a **lack of network and guidance**. In Norway and Sweden, in particular, the routes into work are often through ‘inside’ knowledge of employers and employment opportunities.

“Getting your foot in the door” and landing your first job within your desired industry was also seen as both challenging and crucial, as was breaking through what can often be a close-knit social fabric with a **limited knowledge of working life and culture**.

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Personally, I find it challenging to engage in discussions with Swedish colleagues on various topics as my background from Southeast Asia differs significantly in terms of interests and activities.

Son Nguyen, 27
Digital Marketing and Communications Specialist (mentored through Nema Problema, Sweden)

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Many times, immigrants and refugees need to rely on people whom they know from before and they get stuck in this bubble as there are no other options for them, so integration becomes very challenging.

Lorena Orlic, 29
Marketing (degrees in the field of education) (mentored through Nema Problema, Sweden)

The response

The PA Foundation is committed to tackling these challenges and meet its commitment to support those facing disadvantage.

In practice, when supporting migrants and refugees, this means not simply helping them to survive, but to thrive. Many of these individuals are highly skilled with substantial careers. They might be engineers, educators, IT specialists, marketing experts, medics. They have the capacity to fill gaps in many national labour markets, and we believe they should be given the opportunity to build fulfilling lives and earn a decent livelihood, with the prospect of promotion and advancement.

The organisations with which The PA Foundation works take a considerate and practical approach to addressing the problems they face. They recognise that valuable skills are lost because immigrants are not able to enter the labour market, which comes at a great cost to society, individuals and the business community. They also understand the frustration and disappointment of individuals who are keen to build better lives and fully use their talents, skills and experience.

These organisations are built on the values of respect, collaboration and inclusion. They take a personal approach by connecting immigrants and mentors – often with the same educational background or professional experience – in programmes that offer professional advice, career-seeking knowledge and access to networks. Importantly, they build relationships that develop language skills, self-esteem and a greater understanding of different cultures for both parties involved.

The organisations also work as advocates, collaborating with educational institutions, employers and local authorities to provide equal opportunities for migrants and refugees. They sometimes offer funding or loans for courses or bridging programmes.

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We recognise the profound challenges faced by refugees and are dedicated to supporting organisations that provide them with the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. By supporting organisations that assist refugees, we are investing in resilience and the potential for a brighter future. Our commitment is to ensure that every refugee has the opportunity to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their new communities.

Jack McMahon
Head of The PA Foundation

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We match immigrants with mentors from similar professional backgrounds and they embark on an eight-month programme together. During this time, they work on honing language skills, navigating the Swedish job market and boosting confidence.

It is all about creating a smoother path to employment and helping participants to weave into the fabric of Swedish society. But we also go beyond that as we actively dismantle the barriers of social isolation by creating welcoming spaces for interaction and promoting active community engagement. We tackle negative stereotypes head-on, using education and information to paint a true picture of migration and integration.

Our goal is to cultivate a society that is not just inclusive but understanding!

Petra Lindberg
Executive Director, Nema Problema

Making a difference

Who do we support and what is the impact?

Photo: PA people at their first group session with their mentees
Jonathan Emil Thun, Thea Berg, Tone Lill Wilsbeck,
Martin Frankendal, Hanna Melhus, Jad Löfwenhamn





→ Sammen om en jobb, Norway

Sammen om en jobb (SAJO) aims to increase employment prospects for immigrants by creating connections across cultures. They run a mentoring programme that connects mentees with mentors from the same field of expertise. The two follow each other for six months, bringing the mentee closer to an education-appropriate job.

SAJO also acknowledges that to solve the problem at scale, it is not sufficient to work with beneficiaries, but also change employer perceptions: they hold workshops and host network meetings with corporations.

The partnership between SAJO and PA Consulting has already developed positively and effectively.

So far, PA has provided 10 mentors who are taking part in their programme and we provide office space for collaboration and development workshops.

In 2022, SAJO's mentees increased from 81 to 144. Over the last two years, around 30-35% of the mentees have found a relevant job during the six-month programme, and the numbers increase to around 50% within the next six months.

SAJO also engaged with several companies in 2022, offering their expertise on the value and integration of international talent, and ensuring these companies can participate in and learn from SAJO's programme.

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We are already learning so much from our mentees and understanding how we can help to improve access to opportunities for everyone across Norwegian society. It's inspiring to see the impact we can have directly. Hearing that one of our mentees successfully found a job and is pursuing a meaningful career in Oslo makes it really tangible. The impact we can have on an individual's life is really profound.

Ali Rana
PA Partner, Norway'



PARTICIPANT VOICES →

Georgette

Georgette is 30 and came from Nigeria in 2020. She has a BSc. Microbiology. Georgette joined the mentorship programme offered by Sammen om en job in 2023.

“In terms of integration and employment, immigrants and refugees in Norway encounter significant challenges. Firstly, one of the greatest hurdles is the process of getting our education and certificates approved in Norway. This often takes years, delaying our entry into the workforce. Even after obtaining approval, the struggle continues as we face difficulties securing relevant employment. Many employers prioritise candidates with Norwegian degrees, making it challenging for us to compete in the job market. Consequently, opportunities to showcase our expertise and skills are limited, hindering our prospects of finding suitable employment.

Another huge challenge we face is learning the Norwegian language, which is the key to integration.

The approval of my certificate was relatively straightforward and swift compared to many other immigrants, however, I continue to face significant challenges in securing a job relevant to my field of study.

My engagement with Sammen om en jobb has been incredibly beneficial. It has assisted me in various ways. Firstly, it has brought me closer to the workforce by helping me expand my network through the mentorship programme. Additionally, I have gained valuable insights into job searching and work life in Norway. Overall, it has significantly boosted my confidence and motivation.

In the future, I aspire to secure a relevant job within my area of expertise. Additionally, I aim to further my education by obtaining a master's degree in Norway, thereby enhancing my qualifications and increasing my chances of attaining my dream job.

Private sector organisations play a crucial role in supporting programmes like this because they contribute to the overall societal and economic well-being. By supporting such programmes, private sector organisations demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility and community development. Additionally, these programmes help address pressing social issues, such as unemployment and integration challenges, which ultimately benefit society as a whole. Furthermore, supporting such initiatives can enhance the organisation's reputation, attract top talent and foster innovation through diverse perspectives and talent pools. Overall, it's essential for private sector organisations to support these programmes to create a more inclusive, equitable and prosperous society.

I am deeply grateful for the dedication and commitment of everyone involved in Sammen om en jobb. From the outset, I felt welcomed and supported by the entire team. The mentorship, training, access to the digital platform and networking opportunities have equipped me with essential skills and boosted my confidence in navigating the job market.

The support and guidance have been instrumental in my journey toward integration and employment. Their efforts have made a significant difference in my life and I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead.”



→ Upwardly Global, USA

Upwardly Global dismantles employment barriers for work-authorised immigrants, refugees and asylees with professional experience and international degrees by helping them secure thriving-wage jobs and promoting their inclusion in the US workforce.

The organisation encourages employers to develop their practices through diverse hiring and sharing resources and learning tools with front-line immigrant organisations and workforce providers — including government agencies and community organisations — through their Partnership programme. Their skill-building and networking programmes coach internationally trained professionals in rebuilding professional careers and US employers in accessing their talents with inclusive hiring practices.

To date, Upwardly Global has placed more than nearly 11,000 people, adding over \$600 million to the US economy.

As a direct result of The PA Foundation's financial support, Upwardly Global have assisted 1,000 people across its programmes since our partnership began in 2022. Alongside this, PA Consulting volunteers have delivered targeted workshops to increase knowledge of the US labour market and share experiences of the skills required to succeed in any job. Over the past year and a half, Colleen Boyle, Agile & Change expert for PA Consulting and the Community Partner Lead for Upwardly Global, has supported six people - from countries including Ukraine, India and Afghanistan - to help them enter the labour market in their specialist areas.

Photo: Upwardly Global, USA



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Volunteering with Upwardly Global has been one of the highlights of my time at PA Consulting. The mission of the organisation and the compassion of their staff is inspiring. They believe wholeheartedly in the potential and drive of those they serve in the job search.

It has also been an exercise in reflection, empathy, and critical thinking for me as I work directly with the Upwardly Global job seekers. Their stories are inspiring, and I find that our interactions are truly mutually beneficial.

I can bring my expertise in coaching, people development and industry. They can bring their wealth of knowledge in complex subjects, experience from different countries and grit from overcoming adversity. It has pushed me to be a better leader and resulted in fruitful next steps for them on their employment journey.

Colleen Boyle

Agile & Change expert for PA Consulting



→ Nema Problema, Sweden

Nema Problema is a non-profit organisation that focuses on integration projects in Stockholm. They help newcomers find relevant jobs through work-oriented mentorship programmes, where they are paired with individuals who are well-established in Sweden. Mentors are matched with a newcomer with a similar educational or work background and they meet every month for eight months, working towards securing a relevant job for the mentee.

Nema Problema organises mentorship programmes for 450 people annually. Over 1,800 newcomers have been involved in job training activities and 12,000 people have taken part in social events to develop wider professional networks and friendships.

To date, 35% of the mentees secured paid employment during the programme and an additional 50% have taken measurable steps toward securing a relevant job, such as crafting a CV or securing a job interview.

The programme is also having a significant impact on the mentors who now have a deeper comprehension of the experiences faced by newly arrived individuals in Sweden, an enhanced sense of meaning and improved leadership skills.

Photo: Nema Problema, Sweden





PARTICIPANT VOICES →

Son and Simon

Son Ngyen is 27 and came to Sweden from Vietnam in 2020. He is a digital marketing and communications specialist. Through Nema Problema's mentorship programme, he was matched with Simon Olsson, who is also 27, and is an account executive in the PR and media industry.

Son

My engagement in Nema Problema's programme has been immensely helpful. I've benefited greatly from my dedicated mentor's guidance. Simon offers valuable insights and advice tailored to my job search journey, drawing from his experiences as a Swede working in an international setting and studying abroad. His diverse perspective has enriched my understanding of Swedish norms and practices.

My life has changed significantly. I feel more confident knowing that I have support and guidance behind me, which has also made me more patient. Additionally, I'm motivated and encouraged to pursue opportunities that arise.

Simon

I think leveraging the mentor's knowledge of how the Swedish employment process works, and their network goes a long way. It is not an easy thing to find a job in a new country, so having someone local to guide you through it goes a long way.

It is shown over and over again that workplaces that promote diversity perform better, across more or less all metrics. Someone coming from a different background than "your typical employee" brings so much value that many times you did not even know that you were missing in the first place.

I think all people feel good when helping others accomplish something. I feel fulfilled by seeing my mentee growing, taking on new challenges, and working hard. I have also found a new friend that I genuinely enjoy hanging out with!



→ UAF, Netherlands

UAF are an independent foundation that represents the interests of refugee students and professionals. They offer refugees opportunities to further develop themselves in the field of study and work. They provide personalised advice, guidance, financial support and access to professional networks.

UAF identifies bottlenecks and acts as an advocate, working with educational institutions, employers and local authorities on equal opportunities for refugees so that they can further develop themselves and be meaningful in society. They share knowledge and experience, encourage regional cooperation and develop new, smart routes to the labour market in sectors where job opportunities exist, such as healthcare, technology and education.

To date, UAF has supported 40,000 refugee students and professionals from 80 countries en route to study or to a decent job on their own educational level. In 2023, UAF supported an average of 3,220 refugees. These students and professionals started with a coaching programme that matches their talents and ambitions and/or were supported financially.

The PA Consulting team in The Netherlands have supported UAF's work in a number of areas including awareness raising, mentor support and strategic advice. Building on this, and aligning with their core client work, PA Consulting went further to look at how to improve the experience of migrants in the Dutch labour market at a systemic level.

Photo: Recent PA Foundation visit to UAF.
Jack McMahon (PA Foundation), Jeroen Dubel (PA Consulting), Sait Gulsen (UAF), Jorden Vogel (PA Consulting), Ellen Vroonhof (UAF), Pauline Ebing (UAF), Martin Tillisch (PA Foundation)



Supporting important research

At the end of 2023, PA Consulting further collaborated with UAF and ProRail – the Dutch government organisation responsible for the maintenance and extension of the national railway network infrastructure – on some exciting new research aimed at expanding employment opportunities for technically trained migrants in the Netherlands.

ProRail is facing a shortage of technical personnel as their current workforce is ageing: they need to attract new talent. Their collaboration with UAF recognises that this talent may sit with newcomers to the Netherlands – but acknowledges that their awareness of, and ability to access this work can be limited.

A team from PA Consulting supported UAF and ProRail on a pro-bono basis to increase the opportunities for migrants to find work at ProRail through targeted research. This research clarified the current situation for ProRail and explored the ‘journey’ of these potential employees – identifying where the barriers to entry lay.

The ultimate goal was to draw up an annual plan for 2024 with pragmatic solutions. Three actions have been prioritised to be implemented this year:

- 01 **Improving the application process on the ProRail side to create a more formalised, streamlined and fair way to get migrants to work within ProRail.**
- 02 **Strengthening awareness and communication about status holders within ProRail, with the aim of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment.**
- 03 **Increasing the awareness of ProRail and the organisation's working methods among the UAF organisation and its clients, with the aim of achieving more placements.**

These actions should help to make the railway sector more attractive for technically trained migrants and develop a sustainable and scalable approach to successfully integrate them into ProRail.

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I am really proud to have supported UAF by leveraging both PA’s purpose to deliver a positive human future and our deep expertise across a range of industries. We can add the most value when we can work with charitable organisations at all levels, from volunteering to strategic pro-bono consulting support. The importance of supporting migrants into the Dutch Labour market has never been more important.

Jeroen Dubel
PA Partner, The Netherlands'

Next steps

Our engagement is having a tangible impact, but we want to do more.

We are committed to:

- Continuing and increasing funding to support refugees and migrants across our communities, particularly through new and innovative solutions.
- Building deeper relationships at a local level between charity partner colleagues/participants and PA people and investing for the long-term.
- Shaping new opportunities to add value through pro-bono consulting opportunities and research to improve the systems migrants and refugees find themselves having to navigate.

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This partnership has opened doors to PA Consulting's vast network of professionals who volunteer and share their expertise, enriching our mentorship programmes and broadening our community impact. I am really excited about the future, and we are aiming for a deep, long-lasting partnership with The PA Foundation that will not only sustain but expand our capabilities. We are looking to tap more into PA's network, bringing in a richer diversity of insights and expertise.

Petra Lindberg
Executive Director, Nema Problema

Get in touch or donate

If you would like to know more about The PA Foundation's work including upcoming funding opportunities through our Ingenious Investment Fund, please visit our website: <https://www.paconsulting.com/the-pa-foundation>.

If you would like to make a donation to The PA Foundation, you can do this either through our dedicated JustGiving page: <https://www.justgiving.com/the-pa-foundation> or by e-mailing us at enquiries@pafoundation.org.

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