

## Private Sector and Refugees in Brazil: Debate and Engagement

Human Rights and Labour Working Group  
Global Compact Network Brazil

On June 30rd 2016, the event 'Private Sector and Refugees in Brazil: Debate and Engagement' took place at the Sodexo auditorium in São Paulo. It was organized by the partners of the project 'Empowering Women Refugees<sup>1</sup>', an initiative of the Human Rights and Labour Working Group of the UN Global Compact Network Brazil.

There were around 50 participants including companies' representatives, civil society organizations and government. 10 female refugees that were a part of the first edition of the project 'Empowering Women Refugees' also participated in the event.

The purpose of the debate was to create awareness in the private sector on the gender and refuge themes, bringing forward concrete examples and national and international corporate good practices in the field. The participants debated on which are the possible actions that companies can take in Brazil in order to facilitate the male and female refugee's integration to the country in three main areas: Labor and Education, Awareness and Culture, and Health.

The outcomes of the event were as follow:

### Labor and Education

- Pilot Project: Companies can start by offering a single job, as a way of learning gradually and in practice how it unrolls the employment process of a refugee or asylum seeker, which are the particularities, the way to be follow, the ups and downs and the necessary changes to integrate them to a team;
- Access to company educational programs: Companies should offer opportunities specifically to refugees and asylum seekers, in order for them to be better incorporated in the organization or other companies in the area;
- Inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers within the company diversity programs;
- Employees engagement through corporative volunteering with aid organizations and promoting an active role of the employees in the hired refugee integration and adaptation processes in the organization;
- It was highlighted that is not enough to unsure a job for the refugee, it is equally necessary to cultural acclimate them in the company. In this scenario, the employee's participation is crucial and can foster a rich exchange of experiences. It was recommended to consider the refugee children's in this context, so that they can be included in this acclimatization process;

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<sup>1</sup> The project 'Empowering Female Refugees' is an initiative of the Human Rights and Labour Working Group of the UN Global Compact Network Brazil, the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Women, Caritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo, the human resources company Fox Time and the Support for the Refugee Relocation Program (PARR). The project also had the support of Lojas Renner, Itaipu Binacional, Sodexo and the Women's Consulate.

- Support to resettling programs: the companies would seek a desired profile in a refugee camp, place in which people's potential are not being fully realized. If the profile fits and there is an interest in being allocated to Brazil, at their expense the company would relocate the refugee and his family. In this instance, an experienced relocation company would provide the local integration of all, with Portuguese lessons, school search for children, among others. In the meantime, the company would be prepared to receive this professional. Locally, the Brazilian government would be committed to acknowledge the refugee status of the family as soon as they arrived in national territory;
- Flexibility within the recruitment process (revision of the necessary hiring documentation, taking into account that certain documents would not be available to the refugee), also regarding cultural and religion issues such as fasting, dress codes and prayers for instance.
- The access to housing is one of the main obstacles faced by the refugees and it must be regarded, the companies can consider to offer housing along with the job offer.

### Awareness and Culture

- Supply chains: Disseminate the theme and create awareness with your suppliers. Companies can come up with ways to include in their contracts a clause that encourages and even compels the hiring of refugees and asylum seekers. In a way, it is similar to the quotas that are already in place for minority groups, such as people with disabilities;
- It is necessary to have a greater media broadcast of the theme and more private sector awareness events, including governmental campaigns. Also necessary are measures that not only include human resources professionals but also organizations' leaderships. Companies must create permanent human resources awareness and help to bring the theme to business dialogue forums;
- Disseminate the theme to entities like the Brazilian Human Resources Entrepreneur Alliance and Commerce Chambers to empower the refugee theme;
- Creation of a booklet with informative language over the refuge theme. This material must include questions such as: Who is a refugee? What laws apply to them? Among others information regarding their hiring process and the Brazilian situation. The need of wide promotion in the business environment was also addressed.
- Promotion of the UNHCR booklet 'Working with Refugees'<sup>2</sup> in companies, schools, and other similar groups, to enhance the demand for job opening and elucidate on the document situation both requesters and refugees.

### Health

- Creation of a material to raise a broader awareness of hospital staff. Those must be updated and made available whenever there is a change in the hospital, health clinics, centers and stations staff, among others.
- Development of the refugees' booklet on health and rights in Brazil.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at : <http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/Documentos/portugues/Publicacoes/2015/10014.pdf?view=1>

- Health Companies can engage employees to present lectures to refugees and asylum seekers to inform about themes such as health, hygiene, and diseases prevention, for instance.

### **Gender Consideration**

- Women of the Muslim religion suffer prejudice constantly due to headscarves usage. In this case, the company role is to “break barriers”. It is necessary to educate and create awareness in people, internally in the company environment (employees) as well as externally (clients, suppliers and others). To that end, it is necessary to put in place security and health measures that must be followed, and differences must be respected;
- Women generally take on a lot of responsibilities regarding family and children. When it comes to women refugees, that can be enhanced, take into consideration the many hardships they face, like no available spots in daycares, and that many times they do not have a family support net in Brazil. In this case, it is also the role of companies to investigate and make other employees aware, in order to be more flexible. In general, women are paid less and do not hold many of the highest positions. It is the companies’ responsibility to promote hiring policies that take in consideration gender inequities and create a fairer environment, in both pay grades as in job opportunities presented.
- Perform a presentation of the women situation in Brazil to male employees (keeping in mind that refugees and asylum seekers have greater difficulties in accepting independent women and female managers);
- Create comparisons between Brazilian women and women refugees/asylum seekers, keeping in mind their nationality and therefore, the gender context in her own country, looking beyond the cultural issues.

### **Practical suggestions to companies:**

- Provide spaces within the company for debates and exchanges between refugees and employees or former employees, and to create a cultural and language exchange.
- Create a program in which the refugee can accompany, for a certain period of time, the activities of a similar job position to the one he/she used to hold in his country, as a way of supporting his access to those positions in Brazil.
- Invite refugee employees to give other employees lectures in the company, in the framework of the diversity agenda.
- Create a specific recruitment day for this audience.
- Mental Health professionals, such as those who work with human resources, can offer psychological support to the refugees, as a way of soothe the traumas involved in the forced migration process and aid in the adaptation within the company process.
- Taking into account the access to income of women promotes great impact in the families, it is suggested to create a programme aimed to ensure financial support to female refugees.