



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**  
—  
Business School



Beyond Employment:  
*Eight Years of Learning  
from Ingka Group's Refugee  
Inclusion Programme*



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## Authors

Prof. Betina Szkudlarek,  
University of Sydney Business School

Dr Eun Su Lee,  
University of Melbourne

Prof. Laurence Romani,  
Stockholm School of Economics

Dr Yijia Du,  
University of Sydney Business School

## Contact

Prof. Betina Szkudlarek  
+61 2 9351 4606  
Betina.szkudlarek@sydney.edu.au

## Image disclaimer

Unless otherwise indicated, photographs in this report are for illustrative purposes only and do not necessarily depict individuals involved in the programme.

## About Ingka Group

With IKEA retail operations in 32 markets, Ingka Group is the largest IKEA retailer and represents 87% of IKEA retail sales. It is a strategic partner to develop and innovate the IKEA business and help define common IKEA strategies. Ingka Group owns and operates IKEA sales channels under franchise agreements with Inter IKEA Systems B.V. It has three business areas: IKEA Retail, Ingka Investments and Ingka Centres. Read more on [Ingka.com](https://www.ingka.com).

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“You change the life  
of one person, it’s not  
only that person.  
It’s their aunt, their  
daughter, their grandmother,  
and so many more.”

Nicole Steger  
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Leader  
IKEA Austria

# Executive summary

As global displacement becomes increasingly protracted and public discourse around refugees grows more polarised, the role of business in advancing inclusive employment has become more significant than ever.

This report provides a systematic review of Ingka Group's experience over the past eight years in implementing refugee inclusion and employment initiatives, with a focus on how these efforts have been developed, adapted, and sustained across different national and institutional contexts. Drawing on semi-structured interviews conducted across Ingka Group's retail markets, the report examines the programme's evolution in practice, including the organisational conditions that have shaped its implementation over time.

Through sustained engagement with refugee inclusion, Ingka Group has accumulated substantial organisational knowledge. These insights are critical for the continued development of IKEA's own efforts and offer valuable reference points for other organisations seeking to design or strengthen similar initiatives. Through systematic reflection, the report supports organisational learning within IKEA and translates practice-based experience into knowledge with broader relevance.

The findings highlight a set of key success factors that underpin effective refugee inclusion, alongside a range of challenges that continue to influence implementation across markets.

Factors that consistently led to the programme's success include:

- foundational elements such as strong multi level leadership, a values based inclusive culture, and robust partnerships;
- implementation enablers including local adaptation, well prepared co workers, and accessible recruitment and onboarding; and
- impact accelerators driven by creativity and innovation across markets.

Factors that continue to challenge implementation across markets include:

- increasing polarisation in public discourse, creating reputational risks and affecting increasing polarisation in public discourse;
- pressures on financial sustainability;
- ongoing workforce mobility and the need for renewed internal buy in
- difficulties in measuring ROI;
- language barriers affecting early integration and performance; and
- uneven progress across markets.

Together, these insights illustrate the complexity of refugee employment in practice and clarify the conditions required for long-term sustainability.

In addition, the report presents **a selection of best practice cases from Ingka Group's retail markets**, grouped into five strategic areas. These cases are designed to support applied learning, facilitating cross-market exchange within IKEA and providing concrete examples that may inform the work of other organisations and partners seeking to advance refugee inclusion in diverse contexts.

This research was conducted in collaboration with the University of Sydney and Stockholm School of Economics, ensuring an independent, research-led perspective and credible, practice-informed insights with relevance beyond a single organisational or national context.

# Global Refugee Context and the Role of Business in Inclusive Solutions

## Background

The world is confronting the highest levels of forced displacement ever recorded. At the end of June 2025, **117.3 million people** had been uprooted from their homes, including **42.5 million refugees**, individuals who have crossed international borders to seek safety from conflict, persecution or other threats to their lives.<sup>1</sup> This growing humanitarian emergency, combined with widening funding gaps, places enormous pressure on global systems already stretched beyond capacity.

Public support for the right to seek safety remains resilient: across 29 countries surveyed by IPSOS in 2025,<sup>2</sup> **67% believe people fleeing war or persecution should be allowed to take refuge**, including in their own country. Yet this solidarity coexists with growing scepticism. **62% believe many asylum seekers are economic migrants**, and **49% support closing borders entirely to refugees**. Confidence in successful integration is also mixed, with fewer than half believing refugees will integrate or contribute positively to host societies.

At the same time, direct public engagement is declining. In 2025, **71% of people took no supportive action** towards refugees in the past year – a sharp rise in inaction fuelled by economic stress, geopolitical fatigue, and eroding trust in institutions. Despite this, expectations of systemic solutions remain high: **62% of people believe wealthier nations have a moral obligation** to increase financial support, and **35% believe current efforts are insufficient**.

## Why Scale Matters and Why Businesses are Essential

In this landscape of escalating displacement and diminishing public action, the role of large employers becomes indispensable. Governments and humanitarian organisations alone cannot meet the scale or complexity of the challenge. Large companies hold two forms of impact that are uniquely powerful: workforce integration and the change of narrative.

## Workforce Capability and Economic Integration

Large-scale employers have the infrastructure, training systems, and stable employment pathways required to support refugee upskilling and long-term labour market participation. These pathways provide not only economic opportunity but also dignity and the possibility of a new start for individuals rebuilding their lives. By embedding refugee hiring, upskilling, and entrepreneurship into business operations, large employers can also influence suppliers, partners, and competitors to re-evaluate their own practices, generating multiplier effects across industries and geographies.

## Narrative Change and Public Trust

In a context where nearly half the public questions refugees' legitimacy or potential contribution, large employers are among the most trusted institutions to demonstrate evidence to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> Each successful



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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. (2025). *Mid-Year Trends 2025*. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/mid-year-trends-report-2025.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> IPSOS. (2025). *World Refugee Day: Global Attitudes Towards Refugees*. <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2025-06/ipsos-global-attitudes-towards-refugees-2025.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Edelman. (2025). *2025 Edelman Trust Barometer*. <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2025/trust-barometer>

hiring outcome, each manager trained, and each team strengthened through diversity helps counter misrepresentation—showing refugees not as a burden, but as individuals who bring skills, resilience, and innovation. Each story shared underscores that behind every statistic is a person.

### A Moment That Demands Collaborative Leadership

The combination of unprecedented displacement, strained public support, and diminishing humanitarian budgets makes it apparent that refugee inclusion can no longer be treated as a peripheral social initiative. It requires coordinated leadership across governments, NGOs, and other influential global actors. Organisations like IKEA, with the capacity to **hire, upskill, mobilise industries, and shift societal narratives**, can play a decisive role in shaping sustainable, long-term solutions that benefit both refugees and the communities in which they rebuild their lives.

### This Report

This report responds to Ingka Group’s strategic intent to take stock of what has been learned over eight years of implementing its refugee inclusion programme and to make those insights explicit, transferable, and actionable. As the programme has matured, it has generated a depth of knowledge that is valuable not only for IKEA internally, but also for external stakeholders seeking to design or strengthen similar initiatives. By systematically reflecting on these lessons, the report aims to support organisational learning within Ingka Group while also contributing to broader field-building efforts in refugee inclusion. The collaboration with the University of Sydney and the Stockholm School of Economics provides an independent, research-led lens to analyse these experiences, ensuring that insights are both empirically grounded and analytically rigorous, and that they can inform practice, policy, and future partnerships beyond a single organisation or context.



# Refugee Inclusion at Ingka Group (IKEA)

Established in 2019, Ingka Group’s refugee inclusion strategy is built around two mutually reinforcing components: **Skills for Employment** and **Change the Narrative**. The *Skills for Employment* programme focuses on developing practical, language, cultural, and workplace skills that support refugees’ entry into the labour market, through hands-on experience, buddy-supported learning, and employability

preparation. Complementing this, the *Change the Narrative* initiative aims to shift public perceptions about refugees by amplifying individual stories, engaging policymakers and businesses, and promoting more accurate, human-centred narratives. Guided by a seven-step implementation framework,<sup>5</sup> these two pillars strengthen both the practical and the societal conditions needed for refugee inclusion.

## A. Skills for Employment

### 1. Initial design

The **Skills for Employment** programme is Ingka Group’s core pathway for supporting people with a refugee background as they prepare to enter the labour market. Its primary purpose is to **develop practical skills, build confidence, and support integration into local societies**, whether or

not participants ultimately join Ingka Retail as employees. Flexibility and market ownership allow the programme to respond to differing labour regulations, refugee demographics, and ecosystem conditions. The following core components comprise the programme’s initial design:

#### On-the-Floor Training and Work Experience

Participants gain hands-on experience through in-store or distribution-centre placements, working alongside a trained buddy. This model allows refugees to learn job tasks in real contexts, observe workplace behaviours, and gain confidence.

#### Language Development

Language is consistently identified as the first and most significant barrier to gaining employment in a new country. Markets therefore offer tailored language support, delivered through in-store classes, state-provided courses, or online tools and programmes. The objective is not only to improve communication but also to build the confidence needed to engage fully in the workplace.

#### Cultural Orientation

Short cultural modules introduce participants to workplace norms, communication expectations, and organisational values. This training also prepares managers and buddies to work effectively across cultural differences, reducing uncertainty and supporting smoother integration.

<sup>5</sup> IKEA’s seven steps include community understanding, internal evaluation, initiative design, rollout, measurement, improvement, and narrative shaping. See Ingka Group. (2025). *Unlocking Talent: A Toolkit for Supporting Refugee Employability – A How-to Guide for Opening Pathways to Decent Work for Refugees*.



“IKEA was a real driver when it comes to refugee integration ... They are a stable, reliable actor, with a solid programme showing that it pays off to take in refugees ... There are dozens or even hundreds of other organisations hiring refugees, but they may not be supporting them as effectively through their programmes ... IKEA is one important player because it delivered these initiatives with a high level of quality and coherence, in line with recognised best practice.”

Ruth Schoeffl, Spokesperson  
UNHCR Austria  
(Partner Organisation of IKEA Austria)

## 2. Evolution

Across the 14 markets studied, the Skills for Employment programme has **diversified far beyond its original internship model**. Some markets have transformed it into a *long-term employment pathway*, others have added credentialing and licensing opportunities, and a few have shifted away from core components such as language training. While some markets amplified commitment, others scaled down. To this end, the implementation of the programme across different markets now spans **short-term internships to direct hiring**, with wide variation in duration, remuneration, and the degree of integration into IKEA’s workforce strategy. While several markets have become **high-performers**, others have struggled to activate the programme, highlighting the need for stronger foundations, partnerships, and local commitment.

The key evolution points include:

- **The programme now exists in five distinct forms**, ranging from brief internships to fully paid long-term employment models.
- **Internship durations span from 50 hours to 6 months**, showing major differences in depth of skill development.
- **Placement arrangements vary in terms of remuneration structures**, depending on local policies and funding structures.
- **Engagement varies**: several markets are leading with ambitious, expanded models, yet others have not implemented the programme in any form, due to multiple reasons.
- **Local innovation is a major driver of success**: markets have piloted new approaches and initiatives, all of which magnify the programme’s effectiveness.

Model Type	Number of Markets	Detailed Description
Internship Only (Original)	5	This is the original model. Refugees are offered a short-term internship within IKEA.
Internship to Employment (Extended)	3	This is an extension of the original model. Refugees begin with the short-term internship, but the host unit may offer a paid long-term role after the internship.
Mixed Model 1 (Original + Extended)	1	This market implements both the original internship-only model and the extended internship-to-employment model.
Long-term Employment (Alternative)	4	This is an alternative model. Refugees are directly hired into paid roles without an internship phase.
Mixed Model 2 (Original + Alternative)	1	This market implements both the original internship-only model and the alternative long-term employment model.

## B. Change the Narrative

### 1. Initial design

The **Change the Narrative** initiative is Ingka Group’s global commitment to shape public understanding of refugee inclusion and influence perceptions at both the policy and industry levels. The initiative aims to shape the narrative around refugees by highlighting individual experiences, strengths, and contributions, helping to counter misconceptions and stereotypes and foster a more accurate and human-centred understanding of this group. IKEA recognises that shifting narratives is necessary not only for societal acceptance but also for strengthening the policy and business environments that support refugee inclusion efforts.

The Changing the Narrative strategy is brought to life through a wide range of initiatives, including panels, workshops, conferences, and business-to-business sessions. The intention is to create a “butterfly effect,” in which each engagement inspires more organisations to begin or strengthen their own refugee inclusion efforts, while also enabling individuals to gain a more accurate, human-centred understanding of the refugee experience. While global teams lead overarching strategy, markets are encouraged to create local stories that reflect their own contexts and experiences. This decentralised approach strengthens authenticity and ensures the initiative resonates with local audiences and stakeholders.



## 2. Evolution

Across the 14 markets studied, the *Changing the Narrative* strategy has evolved into a broad set of initiatives aimed at shifting perceptions of refugees both internally and externally. Some markets have demonstrated strong leadership in shaping public discourse, engaging policymakers, and elevating refugee stories, while others have focused primarily on internal awareness-building. As with Skills for Employment, engagement is uneven: several markets have embraced the strategy with creativity and ambition, and 4 out of 14 markets received awards for their efforts in refugee inclusion, whereas others have only partially activated it or remain in early stages of adoption.

Overall, the implementation now spans **internal education, stakeholder engagement, and external visibility initiatives**, with noticeable variation in depth, reach, and strategic integration.

“We are working to change the narrative. Even if we succeed in creating the best possible working environment for these people within our organisation, they do not exist in isolation or within a closed bubble; they continue to live within the wider community. If societal attitudes remain negative, they will still not feel safe. For this reason, advocacy and activities aimed at changing the narrative, particularly the public narrative around refugees, are a crucial part of our work.”

Judyta Rozmus  
Refugee Support Project Leader  
IKEA Poland

Dimension	Model Type	Number of Markets	Detailed Description
Internal education	Internal awareness-building	13	Markets implemented internal training and communication initiatives to build awareness and understanding of refugee employment.
Stakeholder engagement	Employer-to-employer engagement	9	Markets engaged with other employers to share experiences and practices, strengthening peer-to-peer learning and influence on refugee employment.
	Policymaker engagement	4	Markets engaged policymakers to share employer perspectives on refugee employment and contribute to policy-related discussions.
	University engagement	2	Markets collaborated with universities through research partnerships or educational activities related to refugee employment.
External visibility	Social media communication	7	Markets increased external visibility of refugee employment initiatives through social media channels.
	Store-level awareness activities	5	Markets designed locally specific, store-level activities to raise public awareness of refugee employment.
	Corporate toolkit development	3	Markets created or contributed to corporate-level toolkits and resources to support refugee employment practices.



“We invite partners because they are the experts. They have the knowledge, an understanding of the social context, and direct contact with people who need support. We do not. We rely on them while bringing scale, resources, and operational capabilities.”

Igor Stypa  
Communication Business Partner  
IKEA Poland

# Key Success Factors

Successful refugee employment programmes rely on more than goodwill – they involve a coordinated set of organisational, cultural, and structural enablers.

Across Ingka’s implementation, several interconnected success factors consistently emerged. Together, they illustrate how global companies can build sustainable, scalable, and human-centred approaches to refugee inclusion.



## A. Foundations

### 1. Leadership and Cross-Level Commitment

Leadership commitment – at all levels – proved to be a fundamental driver. While a single committed programme leader can catalyse change, sustained progress is often secured through aligned leadership across the organisation:

- **Global commitment** provided strategic direction, legitimacy, and initial funding that enabled local teams to launch and stabilise their programmes.
- **Market-level leaders** played a pivotal role in designing and executing the initiative as well as building the support network of partners to amplify impact.
- **Local champions and co-workers** (often acting as buddies) offered day-to-day support, embodying the values needed to welcome and integrate refugee colleagues.

Markets with dedicated programme leads performed better, highlighting that leadership energy, focus, and relational commitment are core determinants of success.

### 2. A Values-Based, Inclusive Organisational Culture

IKEA’s values and its emphasis on Togetherness was instrumental in enabling refugee inclusion to take root.

A culture built on trust, openness, and care helped:

- cultivate empathy among existing co-workers;
- reduce resistance to change;
- support more inclusive ways of working;
- encourage co-workers to actively assist refugee colleagues.

Because these values are deeply embedded in IKEA’s identity, they are not automatically transferable across organisations, underscoring the importance of cultural readiness and tailored approaches when expanding to new markets or partners.

### 3. Strong Partnerships and Collaborative Model

Partnerships with NGOs, public agencies, and other stakeholders were central to delivering impact. Effective partners contributed to:

- candidate identification and pre-employment training,
- onboarding support and continued mentorship,
- cultural and community insights,
- access to government funding and subsidies,
- amplifying public awareness and shifting narratives.

As partnerships matured, they delivered increasingly tailored and context-sensitive support, enhancing programme performance and reach.

## B. Implementation Enablers

### 4. Local Adaptation

While global direction set the overall ambition, local adaptation proved critical for implementation and long-term sustainability. Markets tailored the programme to:

- specific labour market dynamics,
- refugee demographics and legal systems,
- organisational capabilities and staffing structures,
- cultural norms and integration challenges.

This balancing act allowed each market to design solutions that were both feasible and contextually relevant, contributing to programme continuity beyond the pilot phase.

### 5. Preparation of Co-Workers

Preparing existing teams was essential for building workplace readiness. Customised training on working inclusively, understanding refugee experiences, and navigating cultural differences helped:

- foster buy-in and reduce uncertainty,
- equip co-workers with practical tools to support refugee colleagues,
- create more welcoming and psychologically safe environments.

In many cases, these trainings extended benefits beyond the refugee context, strengthening inclusion across IKEA's multicultural teams more broadly.

### 6. Accessible Recruitment and Onboarding

Refugee candidates often face barriers unrelated to capability. Instead, their challenge is the capability to navigate the maze of unfamiliar recruitment systems. Successful markets simplified and tailored processes by:

- reducing documentation requirements,
- offering language support,
- providing culturally aware onboarding,
- pairing new hires with buddies or mentors.

These practices ensured fair access and smoother integration into the workplace.

“We want to make sure coworkers know that IKEA works together with refugees, and that we have a space to receive these people, and to prepare the local job to receive them, and to be a safe and good place to restart again.”

Alessandra Fuenzalida  
IKEA Portugal





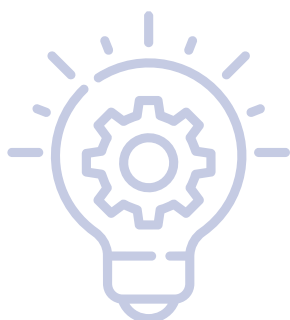
## C. Impact Accelerators

### 7. Creativity and Innovation

A key strength of Ingka Group's implementation was its openness to experimenting with new models and creative solutions. Markets advanced innovative practices in:

- diversifying support pathways (e.g., bridging roles, language-inclusive tasks),
- engaging industry peers to build collective momentum,
- using communication and narrative-building to humanise refugee experiences.

This creativity allowed teams to navigate complex barriers and find solutions that were both practical and transformative. More importantly, those creative solutions enabled several markets to amplify their impact far beyond their initial targets.



“We want to be an inclusive company ... it is part of our strategy. If there are people, such as refugees, who have a distance to the Belgian labour market, we want to elevate them. This is part of our inclusion strategy and part of our broader sustainability strategy towards fair and equal social impact.”

Laura De Boeck  
Sustainability Leader  
IKEA Belgium

# Key Challenges and Emerging Responses

Refugee inclusion programmes operate within complex environments shaped by public sentiment, organisational dynamics, and day-to-day operational realities. The following section presents the main challenges identified

by market leaders, organised into three domains, along with emerging responses that demonstrate how teams are adapting and innovating.

## A. External Environment Challenges

### 1. Increasing Polarisation in Public Discourse

Growing polarisation around migration and refugee issues in several markets creates reputational risks and can slow programme adoption. Negative public narratives may influence workforce attitudes and reduce the willingness of external stakeholders to engage.

#### Emerging Response:

#### Amplify Commitment and Strengthen Partnerships

In response to heightened scrutiny, several markets expanded and amplified their communications and deepened collaboration with trusted NGOs, community groups, and public agencies. Strong partnerships improve credibility, counter misinformation, and reinforce that refugee inclusion is both socially responsible and economically valuable. Clear, purpose-led communication and visible leadership commitment also help maintain momentum during moments of public tension.

### 2. Financial Sustainability in Changing Funding Landscapes

As initial global and national funding diminishes, some markets face challenges in sustaining programme activities. Reliance on internal budgets alone may limit scale and continuity.

#### Emerging Response:

#### Build Funding Pathways Through Partners

Markets are increasingly working with partner organisations to identify and access public funding streams, grants, and subsidies. Upskilling partners in fundraising and joint case-building helps demonstrate to governments the mutual benefits of collaborative employment models. This approach enhances programme resilience and reduces dependence on centralised budgets.

“IKEA has an impact on people’s lives in so many different ways. They are dreamers, but they don’t gaslight you with beautiful words and phrases. They know the difficulties, they work on them, and for me, that is really important.”

Joana Vilela, Territorial Coordinator –  
Lisbon Metropolitan Area  
CAIS – Associação de Solidariedade Social  
(Partner Organisation of IKEA Portugal)





“We continue to look for solutions to ensure that we do not limit refugees to only the simplest positions. Instead, we aim to offer them the same equitable development pathways within the company, so that they are not hired below their level of competence.”

**Judyta Rozmus**  
 Refugee Support Project Leader  
 IKEA Poland

## B. Organisational Readiness & Capability Challenges

### 3. Workforce Mobility and the Ongoing Need for Internal Buy-In

Staff turnover requires continuous rebuilding of awareness, understanding, and support for refugee inclusion. New co-workers may be unfamiliar with the programme or hesitant due to limited knowledge.

#### Emerging Response:

#### **Integrate Inclusion into Leadership and Learning Pathways**

Embedding refugee inclusion into leadership development, standard training modules, and onboarding ensures continuity regardless of workforce shifts. Some markets are experimenting with innovative learning approaches, such as gamification, to build empathy and maintain high engagement levels across the organisation.

### 4. Measuring ROI and Demonstrating Impact

A lack of shared metrics (within and across markets) makes it difficult to articulate the programme’s internal value, compare progress across markets, or secure long-term leadership support.

#### Emerging Response:

#### **Develop Long-Term and Episodic Measures of Success**

Markets are beginning to consider building measurement frameworks that capture both long-term outcomes (retention, advancement, well-being) and episodic indicators (training completion, impact of “Change the Narrative” initiatives). Some markets are also piloting partner-driven assessments to capture broader social impact. In parallel, some markets are increasingly experimenting with internal storytelling tools, such as short videos, posters, and co-worker testimonials, to showcase the programme’s impact in a compelling, human-centred way. These communication formats help bring data to life, deepen internal engagement, and reinforce organisational pride in the programme’s achievements.

## C. Operational Delivery Challenges

### 5. Language Barriers Affecting Integration and Performance

Language proficiency remains a significant challenge, affecting confidence, communication, and early productivity. Even when skills are strong, hesitancy to speak can delay full integration.

#### Emerging Response:

#### Expand Informal Buddying and On-the-Job Language Immersion

Several markets are increasing conversational practice opportunities through informal buddying, social interactions, and low-pressure workplace immersion. Evidence suggests that even short periods of on-the-job language exposure can meaningfully improve both proficiency and confidence in language acquisition.


### 6. Uneven Progress Across Markets

Implementation varies due to differences in leadership engagement, partner capabilities, labour market conditions, and resource allocation. Some markets advance quickly, while others struggle to activate or sustain momentum.

#### Emerging Response:

#### Targeted Mentoring and Incentive Structures

Action-oriented mentoring pairs advanced markets with those needing support, enabling practical knowledge transfer and real-time problem-solving. Consideration is also being given to seed funding distributed via an expression-of-interest process to help under-resourced markets restart or accelerate their initiatives.



“We finance language training, because we see this as a huge gap in the markets. People need advanced language classes not only to be hired, but to secure meaningful work and to progress into roles such as team leader or manager.”

Martina Hlisnikovska  
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Leader  
IKEA Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia

# A Selection of Best Practices

Across the participating markets, a diverse set of practices has emerged that illustrates how businesses can engage in refugee inclusion in ways that are both context-sensitive and strategically aligned. While these practices vary in scope, maturity, and resource intensity, many are deliberately designed to be adaptable and transferable across organisational and country contexts. Collectively, they demonstrate that refugee inclusion can be advanced through multiple entry points depending on local needs and organisational capabilities.

The selection of best practices presented in this section is not intended as a checklist or a one-size-fits-all model. Rather, they serve as sources of inspiration for businesses seeking to initiate, deepen, or refine their engagement in refugee inclusion. By organising the practices according to their underlying strategic intent, the section highlights different levers through which companies can contribute to more inclusive labour markets and stronger social cohesion.

The practices are organised into five categories reflecting their primary strategic intent and encompass a holistic view of Inlga Group's commitment to refugee inclusion.

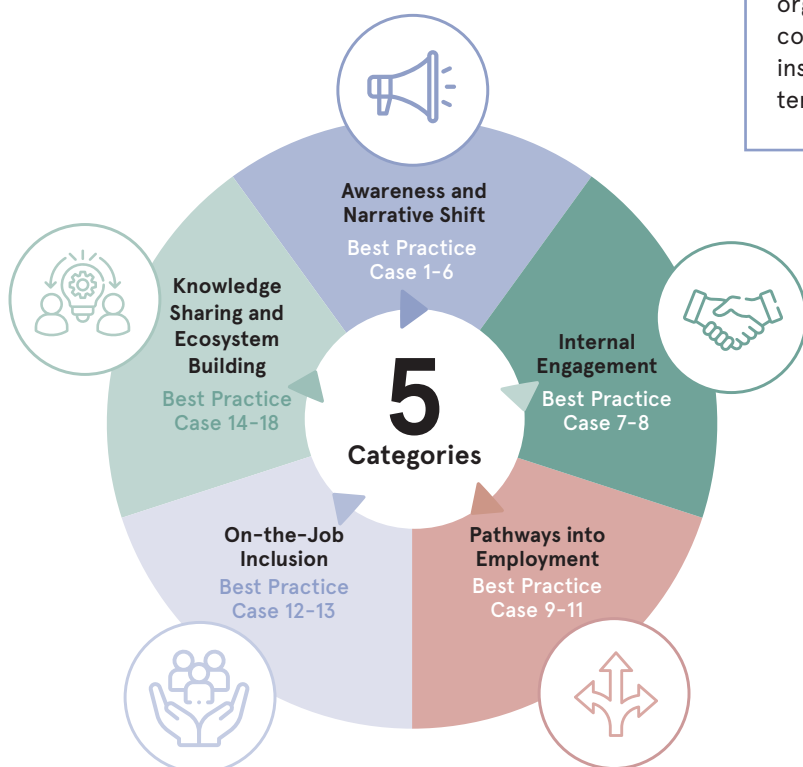
**1. Awareness and Narrative Shift** refers to initiatives aimed at influencing perceptions, language, and public or internal discourse around refugees, with the goal of reducing stigma and fostering understanding.

**2. Internal Engagement** encompasses efforts that mobilise employees and internal stakeholders, strengthening organisational ownership of refugee inclusion and embedding it into everyday practices and culture.

**3. Pathways into Employment** includes initiatives designed to lower entry barriers and create accessible routes into work, addressing structural obstacles in recruitment, skills recognition, or preparation for employment.

**4. On-the-Job Inclusion** focuses on practices that support refugees once employed, ensuring psychological safety, wellbeing, development, and sustained participation in the workplace.

**5. Knowledge Sharing and Ecosystem Building** captures initiatives that extend beyond individual organisations to promote learning, collaboration, and collective capacity across companies, sectors, and institutions, thereby supporting scale and longer-term systemic impact.



# Strategic Objective 1: Awareness & narrative shift

# 1

## *Responding to Harmful Media Narratives on Refugees*

### Best Practice Case 1: Media Monitoring and Intervention

#### 1. Overview

In Poland, the public debate on migration shifted over time. Initially sympathetic towards Ukrainian refugees, public attitudes hardened under the influence of nationalist rhetoric and state-controlled media, especially against more marginalised groups such as the Roma community. Mainstream media often reproduced dehumanising language and used visuals that portrayed refugees as anonymous masses. This not only shaped public opinion but also undermined IKEA's commitment to inclusivity. To address this, IKEA Poland invested in media monitoring and journalist interventions, aiming to diagnose harmful narratives and encourage more empathetic reporting.

#### 2. Objectives

- **Identify harmful discourse:** Systematically track negative and dehumanising terms in national media.
- **Quantify representation gaps:** Analyse the use of images and narratives, highlighting how refugees are depicted as faceless groups.
- **Intervene directly:** Engage with journalists and editors, offering alternative language and awareness training.
- **Protect vulnerable groups:** Ensure that reporting on refugees is more balanced and humanised.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** Dedicated budget for media monitoring, linked to IKEA's wider "Changing the Narrative" programme.
- **Human resources:** Corporate communications team coordinated the work; external agencies and NGOs provided methodological expertise and facilitated journalist contacts.

- **Tools:** Monitoring platforms and content analysis systems were used to track keywords, framing, and imagery.
- **Transferability:** The model can be adopted in other markets facing politicised migration debates, provided there is access to reliable monitoring tools, partnerships with credible NGOs, and corporate willingness to support but not dominate the discourse.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Establish a media monitoring process** to systematically track how refugees are portrayed in national and mainstream media, with a focus on identifying harmful or misleading language about refugees.
2. **Engage journalists and editors directly** by sharing monitoring findings, suggesting alternative wording and providing follow-up support (around 150 journalists engaged).
3. **Share monitoring insights internally** so employees understand why the company addresses public narratives on migration.
4. **Disseminate findings externally** to NGOs, journalists, and at public events to raise awareness and encourage narrative change.
5. **Use insights from media monitoring to inform the development of the Lexicon of Good Language** (see practice 2).



## Providing Practical Language Tools for Inclusive Communication

### Best Practice Case 2: Lexicon of Good Language

#### 1. Overview

At the onset of the Russia–Ukraine war, Polish society expressed strong solidarity with refugees. Over time, however, public attitudes shifted under the influence of populist media narratives and political campaigns, increasingly turning hostile – particularly towards the most vulnerable refugee groups. IKEA Poland’s media monitoring revealed that roughly one in three news articles on refugees contained negative framing, and about one in four related images evoked fear or disgust. This highlighted the need to humanise language and promote individual, empathetic stories.

#### 2. Objectives

- **Improve media discourse:** Reduce dehumanising terms and promote respectful, empathetic alternatives.
- **Shape positive narratives:** Replace group-based labels with individual stories to enhance empathy.
- **Risk management:** Disseminate Lexicon mainly via NGOs, foundations, and credible experts, reducing reputational risk for the corporate brand in a polarised political environment.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** Dedicated budget lines were established by IKEA Poland for narrative change and Lexicon activities. The project was also part of a wider *global* “*Changing the Narrative*” initiative.
- **Human resources:** Led by IKEA Poland or Ingka Group corporate communications team, with NGOs and foundations providing expertise and training.
- **Materials:** Printed versions of Lexicon were distributed at events and forums; an online version was also made available, though corporate channels were used cautiously.
- **Transferability:** The model can be replicated in other markets, provided there is collaboration with credible local NGOs and experts, context-sensitive communication strategies that avoid overreliance on corporate channels, and a balanced focus on internal training and external messaging to ensure consistency and sustainability.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Engage approximately 150 journalists and media professionals** through online and offline workshops, providing lists of problematic terms, suggested empathetic alternatives, and follow-up feedback based on ongoing media monitoring.
2. **Conduct internal workshops for IKEA employees** to explain why the Lexicon was created, enabling frontline staff to respond to customer questions and act as “ambassadors” of corporate values.
3. **Integrate the Lexicon into store-level team meetings**, supporting employees to communicate inclusive messages during daily customer interactions.
4. **Disseminate the Lexicon through NGO and community networks**, rather than relying solely on corporate-owned channels.
5. **Conduct systematic national-level media monitoring**, generating findings on negative reporting and fear-inducing imagery that informed the Lexicon’s development.
6. **Develop the Lexicon through an expert-led process**, with NGOs and media experts responsible for content and training. A well-known linguist supported the initiative as campaign ambassador.
7. **Embed the Lexicon within IKEA Poland’s broader social engagement strategy**, which also focuses on vulnerable groups such as the Roma community.
8. **Present the Lexicon at conferences and forums** and distribute it through NGOs, while content creators and influencers voluntarily shared it on social media; IKEA supported additional channels, including podcasts, radio programmes, YouTube content, and public panel discussions.

## Humanising Refugee Experiences Through Dialogue

### Best Practice Case 3: Human Library



#### 1. Overview

In Poland, public discourse around refugees grew increasingly hostile under the influence of right-wing media and political campaigns. Misconceptions and stereotypes about refugees, migrants, and vulnerable groups (e.g., Roma) were widespread. IKEA Poland sought to counter stereotypes by creating direct encounters between employees/customers and refugees. The Human Library offered an opportunity for people to “borrow” a refugee or minority individual as a “living book” and engage in personal conversation. Instead of abstract campaigns, the Human Library uses interpersonal storytelling to foster empathy and reduce prejudice.

#### 2. Objectives

- Break down stereotypes and prejudices by creating face-to-face encounters.
- Strengthen employee and customer understanding of diversity and inclusivity.
- Provide refugees and minority group members with a platform to share their own voices and experiences.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** Supported by IKEA’s national diversity & inclusion budget, with contributions from NGOs for expertise.
- **Human resources:** NGO staff helped to train refugees. Store HR and communications teams managed logistics.
- **Materials:** Simple physical set-up (tables, chairs, badges, communication materials). Low material cost, but high human resource investment.
- **Transferability:** The model has high applicability in other markets, particularly where negative stereotypes are widespread, provided there is close collaboration with trusted local NGOs, careful preparation of “living books” to avoid retraumatisation, and strong facilitation to ensure respectful and safe dialogue.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Select IKEA stores as pilot sites** to host Human Library sessions.
2. **Identify and prepare participants (“books”)** with NGO support, ensuring appropriate safeguarding measures, ethical standards, and participant readiness.
3. **Prepare store staff through diversity briefings.**
4. **Host Human Library sessions in stores**, where employees and customers can “borrow” a book and engage in guided, one-on-one or small-group conversations.
5. **Collect feedback from participants and audiences.**
6. **Share insights internally and externally** to promote broader inclusivity.

## Sharing Refugee Voices Through Personal Storytelling

### Best Practice Case 4: Refugee Diaries

#### 1. Overview

IKEA Poland and its NGO/media partners experimented with cultural interventions to counter negative narratives about refugees. As part of this work, they collaborated with the magazine *Kontakt* to organise a competition for people with refugee and migration experience to share their stories in their own languages. Selected entries were translated and published together as a book titled *Refugee Diaries* (*Dzienniki Uchodźców*).

#### 2. Objectives

- Provide refugees and migrants with a platform to tell their own stories.
- Preserve linguistic diversity by accepting entries in participants' native languages.
- Share these stories more widely with Polish audiences in translated form.
- Channel financial support to humanitarian efforts at the Poland–Belarus border through book sales.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** Costs for the competition and translation are supported by IKEA in partnership with *Kontakt*.
- **Human resources:** Editors and translators prepared the book.
- **Materials:** The physical publication *Refugee Diaries* was produced and made available for sale.
- **Transferability:** The model can be adapted to other contexts by partnering with local media outlets and NGOs, provided authenticity is preserved by allowing refugees to write in their own languages with careful translation for wider audiences.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Launch a storytelling competition**, organised in collaboration with a media partner, inviting refugees to submit diary entries.
2. **Collect diary entries in multiple languages.**
3. **Select and translate chosen entries into Polish**, coordinated by the media partner to prepare content for publication.
4. **Publish the book** *Refugee Diaries*.
5. **Distribute the book for public purchase**, with proceeds donated to Border Group.



## Creating Awareness Through In-Store Exhibit

### Best Practice Case 5: The Suitcase Room Exhibit

#### 1. Overview

The Suitcase Room was a symbolic in-store installation designed to evoke empathy and reflection about the realities of refugees' forced displacement. Using the minimalist visual of a single suitcase placed in an otherwise empty showroom space, it invited customers to reflect on the reality of displacement. This message was further strengthened by a simple yet powerful image: a suitcase containing all that remains of the lives and homes of those forced to flee. IKEA Italy used this visual metaphor to convey that, for many refugees, the sense of home is carried within a suitcase. The message resonates deeply because it comes from a company that has spent decades helping people furnish their homes, the very spaces they consider safest. As the message displayed on the wall of the installation stated, what remains of a refugee's home is a suitcase, and this is something that could happen to anyone.

#### 2. Objectives

- To trigger emotional awareness and solidarity among customers regarding refugee experiences.
- To reposition the retail space as a platform for reflection and social engagement.
- Encourage customer action and solidarity through accessible donation mechanisms.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** The project required collaboration with a creative agency, extensive in-store preparation by staff, internal communications alignment, and partnership building with local NGOs, as well as coordination of donation collection and delivery.
- **Materials:** Resources included exhibit design, use of in-store display space, donation logistics, and communication materials, including social media dissemination.

- **Transferability:** The campaign can be replicated by other retail brands or IKEA markets in different countries, provided it uses low-cost, high-impact visual metaphors, combines an emotional narrative with a tangible action such as donation, and can be scaled across different store sizes and local partnership structures.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Design the spatial and narrative concept** by transforming a typical showroom into a minimalist space featuring only a suitcase and narrative placards. The display used the suitcase as a visual metaphor for the emotional and material reality of forced displacement and was rolled out across stores in the context of World Refugee Day.
2. **Prepare in-store staff to support consistent messaging**, to ensure alignment and shared understanding of the exhibit's purpose.
3. **Engage customers through emotional contrast**, using the stark, empty room to create a strong visual and emotional impact that contrasts deliberately with IKEA's usual abundance.
4. **Promote the initiative** through a coordinated communications push via physical stores, website, and social media (reaching over 10 million people nationwide).
5. **Invite customers to donate essential goods**, such as blankets, pillows, and toys, to assemble "welcome kits" for refugee families.
6. **Collaborate with local NGOs and institutions** to coordinate refugee aid, distribute donated items, and support the implementation of welcome kit initiatives.



## Making Refugee Experiences Visible Through Photography

### Best Practice Case 6: Photo Exhibition

#### 1. Overview

At the conclusion of the three-year *Living and Growing Together* programme, IKEA France organised a large-scale photo exhibition across all units. The exhibition presented portraits and interview quotes of refugee employees who participated in the programme. It functioned both as an internal communication tool and a customer-facing storytelling device, aiming to foster empathy and change perceptions.

#### 2. Objectives

- To celebrate and visualise the achievements of the first refugee integration programme.
- To raise awareness among employees and customers about refugees' contributions.
- To create emotional impact that mobilises support within IKEA and beyond.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** IKEA collaborated with an external photographer/company for professional production.
- **Materials:** Resources were invested in visuals, sound montage, and installation in stores.
- **Transferability:** The model can be adopted by other markets by linking local refugee or inclusion stories to corporate values, and can be scaled at the store, national, or regional level, depending on resources, provided there is professional storytelling to ensure credibility and quality.

“Emotions matter. I realised that it is important to connect emotions with people, both customers to raise awareness, and decision-makers in positions of authority, who have the power to support these actions and truly understand them.”

Melinda Corret  
Employment Integration Manager  
IKEA France

#### 4. Implementation Steps

- **Collect portraits and testimonials** from refugee employees, coordinated by HR, Diversity and Inclusion teams, and store managers.
- **Work with external photographers** to create a photo reportage and montage.
- **Organise a multi-store exhibition** at the programme's conclusion.
- **Integrate the exhibition into both internal events and customer-facing store spaces.**



# Strategic Objective 2: Internal Engagement

# 2

## *Strengthening Employee Engagement Through Gamified Learning*

### Best Practice Case 7: Internal Gamification Platform – MUNSBIT

#### 1. Overview

Many IKEA Poland employees had heard of Lexicon, Skills for Employment or social engagement campaigns, but did not fully understand *why* the company was doing them. This knowledge gap limited employees' engagement and ability to act as ambassadors of the initiatives. To address this, IKEA Poland used **MUNSBIT**, an internal gamification platform designed to increase corporate engagement and make corporate values, social initiatives, and diversity/equality commitments engaging and easy to learn about. MUNSBIT ("snack" in Swedish) reflects the idea of delivering *bite-sized knowledge portions* through interactive, game-like formats that are accessible to employees at all levels. The theme of refugee inclusion was one of many covered through MUNSBIT. To measure the impact, IKEA Poland conducted pre- and post-tests assessing employees' awareness of the refugee-focused campaigns and the company's actions. Employees' awareness among co-workers increased from **36 per cent to 73 per cent** (based on two surveys: N=2102 before the campaign and N=2027 after the activities). Qualitative feedback further indicated that many co-workers expressed a need for further education. This indicates that the campaign not only increased awareness but also sparked meaningful reflection.

#### 2. Objectives

- **Increase employee awareness** of IKEA's social responsibility and diversity initiatives. Increase employee engagement.
- **Empower frontline staff** to confidently respond to customer questions (e.g., "Why does IKEA engage in refugee support rather than only selling furniture?").
- **Promote engagement** through gamified, fun, and repeatable learning methods instead of traditional training sessions.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** Part of IKEA Poland's strategic communication budget.
- **Human resources:** Managed by HR and internal communications teams
- **Technical resources:** Investment in a digital gamification platform, accessible to staff via secure login.
- **Transferability:** The model can be applied across IKEA markets or adapted by other companies, provided that content is locally tailored to national debates and workplace cultures, and that the material is integrated into regular employee routines such as team meetings and HR platforms.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Coordinate the platform** through IKEA Poland's HR and internal communications teams to manage content and rollout.
2. **Enable employees to engage with MUNSBIT** directly on their devices through modules that include quizzes, storytelling tasks, and role-play scenarios on topics such as inclusive language, refugee employment, and sustainability.
3. **Encourage voluntary participation through gamification**, including points, leaderboards, rewards, and team challenges.
4. **Integrate MUNSBIT into store-level team meetings**, where departments may use results to promote friendly competition and recognition.
5. **Align MUNSBIT activity launches with major campaigns** (such as the Lexicon launch) so internal engagement mirrors and reinforces external communication.

## Fostering Connection Through Shared Food and Storytelling

### Best Practice Case 8: Cooking & Eating (In Development)



#### 1. Overview

IKEA Poland explained that its corporate strategy operates on a three-year thematic cycle. After focusing on storage and then sleep, the theme from September 2023 onward is “cooking and eating”. Food is a universal medium for building social bonds. Cooking and eating together was identified as a way to bring employees, customers, and refugees into shared spaces, enabling natural dialogue and reducing social distance.

#### 2. Objectives

- **Use food** as a medium to promote intercultural understanding.
- **Create informal spaces** for employees and refugees to meet and interact.
- **Strengthen IKEA’s inclusivity message** by linking it to everyday practices.
- **Explore integration with existing IKEA activities**, such as

living libraries and community events.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** To be aligned with IKEA’s national thematic cycle budget (2023–2024).
- **Human resources:** Corporate communications and HR teams, in collaboration with NGO partners, will coordinate workshops and events.
- **Materials:** Use of office kitchens and IKEA stores as venues; ingredients and catering services to be procured.
- **Transferability:** The model can be adopted in other IKEA markets, particularly where food plays a central cultural role, provided there is safe and inclusive facilitation, collaboration with refugee communities willing to share recipes and stories, and integration into wider thematic strategies to ensure visibility.

#### 4. Implementation Steps (Planned)

1. **Develop pilot workshops in IKEA office kitchens** with refugee cooks, with NGOs identifying refugee participants and providing cultural mediation, and IKEA offering venues and logistical support.
2. **Facilitate sessions**, where food preparation is combined with personal storytelling in a “living library” format.
3. **Explore community-facing events in stores** as the “cooking and eating” theme unfolds.
4. **Collect participant feedback** to refine and scale up the model towards a wider rollout.

# Strategic Objective 3: Pathways into Employment

# 3

## *Linking Training to Formal Certification for Job-Ready Placement*

### Best Practice Case 9: Certification-Linked Training



#### 1. Overview

IKEA France's refugee employment programme integrates job-specific training directly linked to recognised vocational certifications within cohort-based training classes. Certification is embedded as a core component of programme design, with the explicit aim of supporting integration through employment. Training is organised at the regional level and delivered in partnership with external organisations, with certification requirements aligned to specific job pathways (e.g. logistics).

#### 2. Objectives

- To link training outcomes directly to employment integration, using certification as a formal validation of job-related competence.
- To align refugee training programmes with existing labour market and regulatory requirements.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** Operational involvement from store-level managers to validate roles linked to certification pathways; External expertise provided by partner training organisations responsible for delivering certification-linked training.

- **Financial resources:** Funding covers both the delivery of certification-oriented training and participant income during the training period.
- **Transferability:** This practice is highly transferable in contexts where similar certification systems exist and where roles are governed by formal skill or safety requirements. It is most applicable to sectors such as logistics and other operational roles in which certification functions as a recognised entry requirement.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Identify job roles** with mandatory or widely recognised certification requirements.
2. **Design cohort-based training classes** that embed certification preparation within the training phase.
3. **Partner with external training organisations** capable of delivering certification-aligned technical training.

## Building a Refugee Talent Pool in Partnership with Government

### Best Practice Case 10: Expanding Refugee Talent Pool

#### 1. Overview

The Refugee Talent Pool is one of the core initiatives of the IKEA Spain refugee employment programme. It was established in cooperation with the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion and Migration to provide refugees with a structured way to register their personal data and skills, making them visible for potential employment opportunities at IKEA.

#### 2. Objectives

- To provide refugees with a formal channel to submit CVs and personal data.
- To enable IKEA to identify and recruit refugees who match store-level vacancies.
- To ensure that refugees outside of the training programmes still have employment pathways into the company.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources only:** HR staff manage applications and contact candidates; The Ministry submitted lists of refugee candidates every two months.
- **Transferability:** The model can be replicated in other markets, provided there is strong collaboration with national government bodies, supported by dedicated

structures that address barriers such as phone-based interviews for candidates with limited language proficiency and the reduced attractiveness of temporary or part-time contracts, and by a personalised approach that enables an effective talent-pool mechanism.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Establish formal cooperation** through an agreement between IKEA Spain and the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion and Migration.
2. **Refer candidates through the Ministry's national system**, with the Ministry selecting approximately 15 refugees every two months from across Spain and inviting them to submit CVs.
3. **Support candidate preparation**, with NGO partners assisting refugees in developing CVs and preparing job applications prior to employer contact.
4. **Collect candidate information** to support effective screening and matching.
5. **Screen and match candidates to vacancies**, with IKEA HR teams contacting candidates to assess job readiness and align profiles with available roles.
6. **Proceed to employment placements**, with HR teams making final hiring decisions and coordinating onboarding into IKEA stores or units.

“Everybody wants to speak with IKEA... Other companies contact us and want to learn about the programme because they want to do it as well.”

Narda López  
Project Leader Refugees  
IKEA Spain



## Creating Direct Employer–Candidate Connections to Support Inclusive Hiring

### Best Practice Case 11: Open Days for Refugee Candidates

#### 1. Overview

IKEA teams in Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary organised Open Days in collaboration with local NGO partners. Refugee candidates were invited to visit IKEA stores, learn about available job roles, and receive basic orientation on the company's culture and recruitment process. These events aimed to help candidates better understand expectations and to prepare them for potential interviews.

#### 2. Objectives

- To prepare refugee candidates for the labour market and build their confidence before formal job interviews.
- To familiarise candidates with IKEA's value-based recruitment approach and workplace expectations.
- To provide hiring managers and employees with opportunities to meet and understand refugee candidates directly.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** IKEA HR teams and store staff organised and facilitated the Open Days, with NGO partners supporting candidate outreach, preparation, and interpretation where needed.
- **Financial resources:** Limited financial investment was required, as activities were conducted within existing store spaces and relied primarily on staff time and NGO support rather than additional funding.
- **Transferability:** The model is easy to replicate in other markets. It requires minimal resources and builds direct bridges between refugees and employers. The approach also proved valuable for training hiring managers to interact more confidently with diverse candidates.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Coordination with NGO partners** to identify suitable refugee candidates with basic language readiness and interest in retail employment.
2. **Prepare candidates prior to the event**, with NGOs organising language or job-readiness training and briefing participants on IKEA's workplace culture and recruitment process.
3. **Deliver store-level recruitment events**, including guided store tours, informal discussions with employees, and trial interviews, with IKEA recruiters providing feedback to candidates.
4. **Conduct post-event evaluation and follow-up**, with NGOs and IKEA HR teams jointly recording attendance, sharing observations, and tracking candidates who progressed to formal application or hiring stages, while NGOs continued to support participants after the sessions.



# Strategic Objective 4: On-the-Job Inclusion

# 4

## *Supporting Workplace Integration Through Personalised Coaching*

### Best Practice Case 12: Individual Coaching Sessions

#### 1. Overview

As part of the *Working and Growing Together* refugee programme in IKEA Belgium, individual coaching sessions are provided to each refugee participant. These are one-to-one sessions facilitated by external coaches (I-Diverso) and are a central pillar of the programme. They ensure personalised guidance, provide emotional and practical support, and allow participants to reflect on their progress in a safe space.

#### 2. Objectives

- To tailor the programme to the individual needs of each refugee.
- To provide structured training on giving and receiving feedback.
- To offer a confidential space for participants to process challenges.
- To strengthen confidence and readiness for employment beyond the internship.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** Professional external coaches (I-Diverso).
- **Financial resources:** Coaching costs are included in the €4,500 per refugee budget.
- **Time resources:** Minimum of 4 sessions (once per month), with flexibility for additional sessions if needed.
- **Transferability:** The model is highly replicable in other refugee training contexts, provided trained external coaches are available, dedicated funding supports personalised coaching, and organisations recognise coaching as an integral rather than optional component.



#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Assign an external coach to each refugee participant**, with coaching delivered by I-Diverso, which designs and facilitates sessions and ensures intercultural sensitivity.
2. **Conduct monthly one-to-one coaching**, with a minimum of four monthly meetings focused on participants' individual needs, workplace integration, and progress tracking.
3. **Complement coaching with a group training session.** Participants also attend structured group sessions on how to give and receive feedback.
4. **Adapt coaching intensity where needed**, allowing additional one-to-one sessions to be arranged on a case-by-case basis if participants require further support.
5. **Integrate coaching insights into the overall programme**, feeding into the broader training and buddy system.

## Embedding Mental Health Support into Workplace Integration

### Best Practice Case 13: Mental Health Support

#### 1. Overview

IKEA Austria collaborated with Pro mente Austria, a mental health organisation, to provide psychological and trauma support for refugee co-workers. Recognising that many participants had experienced trauma or post-traumatic stress, the initiative introduced a clear structure of professional counselling and internal first-response support.

#### 2. Objectives

- To provide timely and professional mental health assistance for refugee employees.
- To define clear boundaries between company-based support and external clinical counselling.
- To ensure that employees can access help quickly, bypassing long public waiting lists.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** Mental health professionals from Pro mente Austria delivered counselling and training, while IKEA Austria's HR and People & Culture teams coordinated the programme and supported store-level implementation through trained "first mental aid helpers."
- **Financial resources:** The initiative was initially financed through IKEA Global's *Skills for Employment* budget. It is now maintained through IKEA Austria's internal HR and well-being resources.
- **Transferability:** This model can be adapted to other markets with refugee employment programmes. It requires partnership with a credible mental health organisation, a peer-support training component, and company-level commitment to ongoing wellbeing funding.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Establish collaboration with a specialised mental health organisation**, with IKEA Austria working together with Pro mente Austria to provide professional psychological and trauma-informed support.
2. **Offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**, coordinated by IKEA Austria's HR and People & Culture teams, allowing employees to access psychological counselling anonymously and free of charge, thereby avoiding long public waiting times for therapy.
3. **Train internal "first mental aid helpers" at the store level**, with Pro mente Austria delivering training to selected staff so they can provide initial support to colleagues and identify cases requiring professional intervention.
4. **Coordinate the programme at the national level**, with a designated project lead ensuring consistent cooperation with Pro mente Austria and implementation across all IKEA units in Austria.



# Strategic Objective 5: Knowledge Sharing and Ecosystem Building



## *Supporting Refugee Women Through Social Enterprise*

### Best Practice Case 14: Refugee Women's Social Enterprise

#### 1. Overview

IKEA Poland highlighted a growing focus on supporting social enterprises employing refugees. This included both catering and sewing services. IKEA sought to use its brand power to strengthen refugee-led businesses, not through charity, but by becoming a paying customer and integrating them into corporate supply chains. For example, IKEA purchased catering services from Wandering Women, a refugee women's social enterprise, and collaborated with the social enterprise Kraina Foundation in Warsaw to establish a sewing workshop for refugee women. Through this initiative, participants could learn sewing skills, provide services to the local community, and potentially supply IKEA stores with sewn products. Building on these initiatives, IKEA Poland is now scaling up its cooperation with Kraina by developing a new model that would allow all IKEA units to purchase wardrobe props and clothing sewn by refugee women using recycled (second-hand) fabrics. Kraina is already included on IKEA's approved supplier list and is participating in a business acceleration programme to support its continued growth.

#### 2. Objectives

- Provide real employment opportunities for refugee women.
- Support the development of refugee-led social enterprises.
- Connect refugee women's services (catering, sewing) with local community demand.
- Explore integration into IKEA's store operations (e.g., clothing props, sewn materials).



#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** IKEA supported social enterprises by purchasing services (catering, sewing).
- **Human resources:** Refugee women trained and employed in catering and sewing workshops, facilitated by partners.
- **Materials:** Sewing workshop facilities and event catering provided by social enterprises; IKEA provided demand.
- **Transferability:** The model can be implemented in other markets, provided there is a strong NGO partner to manage training and safeguarding, genuine market demand in areas, and integration into corporate procurement processes to ensure continuity.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Identify and collaborate with refugee-led social enterprises**, particularly in areas aligned with business needs such as catering and sewing.
2. **Integrate refugee-led services into IKEA's procurement processes**, for example, sourcing sewn items for store use.
3. **Promote refugee social enterprises through IKEA's visibility.**
4. **Pilot small-scale product collections**, such as pillowcases, produced by refugee women, with a view to testing scalability and broader supply integration.

## Using Food to Build Ongoing Community Connection

### Best Practice Case 15: Social Kitchen



#### 1. Overview

At the end of November, a new community centre will open in Kraków, located in the former Tesco space. As part of this development, IKEA Poland is creating a Social Kitchen. The aim is to align local resident needs with the broader agenda of refugee integration and multiculturalism. The Social Kitchen is designed as a space where people can get to know one another through culinary exchange and shared food experiences.

#### 2. Objectives

- Enable local residents and refugees to get to know one another through sharing their home-country cuisines.
- Provide cooking-based workshops for children from local schools, helping them learn about multiculturalism through practical, engaging activities.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Funding:** Fully financed from the #ChangingTheNarrative budget.
- **Facilities:** The Social Kitchen is located inside the newly opened community centre in the former Tesco space.
- **Transferability:** The model can be adapted to other contexts, provided there is access to community centres or similar shared spaces that can host community-building activities.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Establish the Social Kitchen** within the new community centre.
2. **Design and deliver cooking-based activities** that bring local residents and refugees together.
3. **Organise multicultural cooking workshops for children from local schools**, with schools participating by sending students to engage in hands-on learning activities focused on diversity and inclusion.
4. **Use the Social Kitchen as a platform** to support multiculturalism and community connection.

## Overcoming Hiring Constraints Through Shared Training and Recruitment

### Best Practice Case 16: Initiation of Cross-Company Collaboration



#### 1. Overview

To address challenges of organising full training classes (minimum ~15 participants) in regions with limited job openings per store, IKEA France collaborated with Each One, which initiated contact and facilitated cross-company discussions. Through this model, multiple companies, such as Leroy Merlin and Saint-Gobain, joined IKEA in hosting shared training classes for refugee integration.

#### 2. Objectives

- To pool resources among companies facing similar labour demands (e.g., logistics, sales).
- To ensure sufficient participant numbers for class funding and implementation.
- To share responsibility for hiring, with each company committing to employ a portion of the trainees.
- To strengthen corporate advocacy by demonstrating multi-company solidarity in refugee inclusion.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** Each company allocates HR and operational managers to supervise trainees.
- **Financial resources:** Training funded by public employment agencies with company co-investment.
- **Coordination resources:** Each One as an intermediary ensures smooth collaboration, candidate distribution, and training alignment.

- **Transferability:** The model can be applied in regions where single companies cannot guarantee minimum class size and is replicable across industries with similar operational needs, such as retail, logistics, and hospitality, provided there is an NGO or neutral facilitator to coordinate trust and commitments across firms, while recognising that scalability becomes more complex as partner numbers increase.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

- 1. Identification of regional need:** Recognition that smaller stores could not host full classes.
- 2. Initiate cross-company coordination through an NGO intermediary,** with Each One convening discussions among companies with overlapping sectoral needs (e.g. retail, logistics, construction).
- 3. Agree on a shared training and recruitment model,** with participating companies jointly committing to co-host training classes and co-recruit participants.
- 4. Design the joint training programme,** funded by public institutions and aligned with labour integration frameworks, including French language training, soft skills development, and relevant technical certification.
- 5. Allocate trainees across partner companies,** with participants assigned according to available job offers and operational needs at IKEA, Leroy Merlin, Saint-Gobain, and other partners.
- 6. Recruit graduates following training completion,** with each company hiring a proportion of participants to ensure concrete employment outcomes.

## Supporting Long-Term Integration Through University Partnerships

### Best Practice Case 17: Collaboration with the Higher Education Sector

#### 1. Overview

The IKEA Australia Skills for Employment programme partnered with a leading Australian university to embed a PhD researcher who systematically investigated the programme's effectiveness and impact. The collaboration established a structured mechanism for collecting real-time data on participant experiences and programme outcomes, thereby strengthening evidence-based decision-making within IKEA. The collaboration enabled IKEA Australia to improve the delivery of its programme as it was rolling out the initiative across various stores. Beyond advancing IKEA's programme outcomes, the study's insights were featured in two management textbooks, contributing to the "Change the narrative" initiative.

#### 2. Objectives

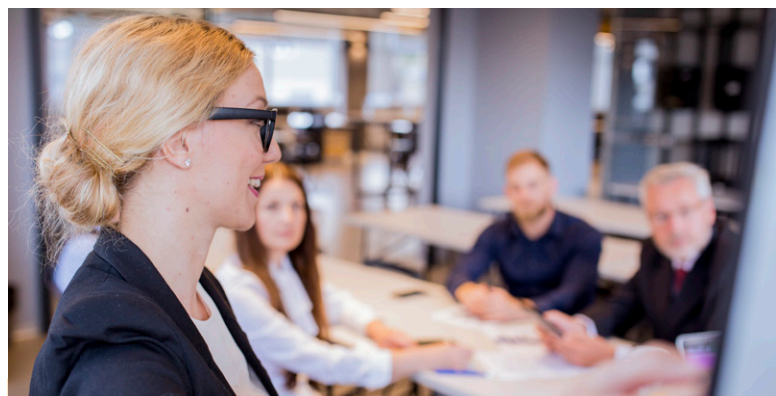
- To generate an independent evaluation of the Skills for Employment programme's implementation and impact.
- To provide real-time insights that could inform modifications to programme rollout.
- To contribute to broader knowledge creation and shift public and managerial narratives around refugee employment.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** IKEA provided access and coordination support for engagement between a) the researcher and the participants b) the researcher and the line managers. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.
- **Academic resources:** The PhD researcher conducted data collection, analysis, and reporting.
- **Financial resources:** No additional funding required, as the researcher was supported through their university programme.
- **Transferability:** The model is highly replicable across other contexts, particularly for companies seeking rigorous, low-cost evaluation mechanisms, provided that research timelines are carefully aligned with operational timelines, staff have the capacity to engage in evaluation activities, and embedded research roles are supported through clear communication channels and iterative feedback mechanisms.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

- 1. Establish partnership:** Agreement formed between IKEA Australia and the university to support an embedded PhD research project.
- 2. Fieldwork design:** The researcher mapped the study's design (in collaboration with IKEA) to ensure that both the corporate and research objectives were met.
- 3. Data collection:** Ongoing interviews and analysis of programme processes and participant experiences.
- 4. Create real-time insights:** Frequent feedback loops enabled programme adjustments during rollout.
- 5. Knowledge dissemination:** Findings contributed to organisational learning and were later included in a management textbook.



*“Collaboration with the University gave us valuable insights from programme participants and their line managers at a pivotal time in the evolution of the programme. Understanding these unique perspectives enabled us to refine our model in real time, maximise our investment, and ultimately provide a better experience for everyone”*

**Harriet Pope**  
Refugee Workforce Inclusion Leader  
IKEA Australia and New Zealand



## Sharing Practice to Enable Refugee Hiring Across Industries

### Best Practice Case 18: Industry Mentoring

#### 1. Overview

In collaboration with Community Corporate, a leading Australian social enterprise, IKEA Australia plays an active role in mentoring and inspiring other employers to adopt refugee-hiring initiatives. As part of this partnership, the IKEA Australia project lead engages directly with interested employers through one-on-one meetings that offer personalised guidance, practical insights, and candid reflections on how to design and implement inclusive employment programmes.

#### 2. Objectives

- To encourage and support other employers in developing refugee employment pathways.
- To provide tailored, experience-based mentoring on how to set up and operationalise similar initiatives.

#### 3. Level of Resource Allocation and Transferability

- **Human resources:** Time commitment from the IKEA project lead and Community Corporate coordination efforts.
- **Knowledge resources:** Sharing tools, templates, implementation experiences, and lessons learned.
- **Financial resources:** No additional funding required beyond staff time and coordination.
- **Transferability:** Highly replicable in any context where a leading employer is willing to act as a hands-on role model. This peer-to-peer model strengthens ecosystem-wide impact by spreading practical know-how and reducing perceived risks for new adopters.

#### 4. Implementation Steps

1. **Identify employer interest**, with Community Corporate engages employers and identifies those seeking deeper guidance.
2. **Arrange one-on-one mentoring**, with IKEA's project lead meets individually with employers to understand their needs and context.
3. **Share practical knowledge and experience.** IKEA provides insights on where to start, programme design, recruitment pathways, and onboarding approaches. Discussions address specific barriers, concerns, and operational pitfalls to avoid.
4. **Provide follow-up encouragement and support**, with Community Corporate acting as the implementation partner for newly engaged employers and supporting knowledge transfer as employers initiate or refine their own refugee employment programmes.

“There are many employers who do good work in the background, but who do not want to take a public position ... I think this is where IKEA stands out: they are very proud of what they believe in and of their values, and when they think they need to speak out, they do so in a considered way. They are not hiding in the shadows.”

Carmen Garcia, CEO/Founder  
Community Corporate  
(Partner Organisation of IKEA Australia)

# Appendix

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-country case study design to examine how Ingka Group implements the two core components of its refugee inclusion strategy: *Skills for Employment* and *Change the Narrative*, across diverse national contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted across 14 IKEA markets. These markets were purposively identified by IKEA to reflect substantial variation in programme maturity and implementation capacity, ranging from early-stage to highly institutionalised initiatives. The study involved a total of 57 participants, comprising 35 IKEA co-workers at global and national levels, 20 representatives from partner and support organisations involved in programme delivery, and two refugee participants. To support contextual understanding and enhance analytic robustness, relevant organisational documents related to both programme components were also reviewed and used to triangulate interview data.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Coding was conducted iteratively, with themes compared within and across markets to identify recurring patterns, implementation mechanisms, and contextual variations. This cross-market comparative analysis enabled the identification of both common practices and market-specific adaptations shaping the implementation of refugee inclusion initiatives.

All interview data were collected and analysed anonymously. In instances where specific locations or authorship are disclosed, this was done only following explicit consultation with and approval from the interviewees.

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

## About the authors

**Betina Szkudlarek** is a Professor of International Management at the University of Sydney and Strategic Consultant with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). A leading expert on inclusive workplaces, she is the lead editor of the SAGE Handbook of Contemporary Cross-Cultural Management. Her insights on global mobility regularly appear in national and international media outlets, including the Wall Street Journal, Harvard Business Review, and BBC. Betina's impactful research has earned multiple honours, such as the 2022 Academy of Management Research Impact on Practice Award and the 2023 UN PRME Award for Excellence in SDG Integration.

**Eun Su Lee** is a Lecturer in Management at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests lie in the fields of international human resource management and global mobility, focusing on migrants' integration journeys in foreign countries. Her work has been published in top-tier international journals, such as *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, and *International Journal of Management Reviews*. Eun Su has won numerous international awards, including AIB Insights Award for Actionable Insights (Academy of International Business, 2022), NBS Research Impact on Practice Award, and International HRM Scholarly Award (Academy of Management, 2022).

**Laurence Romani** is the scientific director of the Center for Migration and Integration Research at the Stockholm School of Economics. Her work centres on organisations' contribution to inclusive societies, for example, with their recruitment programmes, with a focus on how the representation of persons with a migration background is done in recruitment processes. She has published articles in journals such as *Organisation*, *Organisational Research Methods*, *Journal of Business Ethics* and the *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management* and multiple book chapters in international handbooks and edited volumes.

**Yijia Du** is a Research Associate at the University of Sydney Business School and a Sessional Lecturer at the University of Sydney. She holds a PhD in Gender and Cultural Studies from the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on refugee workforce integration, social cohesion, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that bridges management studies, gender and cultural studies, and qualitative research. Her work has been published in top-tier international journals, such as *International Migration Review*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *Sexualities*.

## Disclaimer

This report is based on qualitative insights. The practices and examples presented are intended to be illustrative rather than prescriptive and do not represent universally applicable solutions. The report does not constitute legal advice. Readers are encouraged to consider their own organisational, regulatory, and local contexts when interpreting and applying the content.



“The full aim of the programme is not only to support the refugees we work with directly. It is also to show that the programme works and to inspire other businesses to do the same.”

**Caroline Gastaud**  
Social Impact Leader  
IKEA Global Retail Operations



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