



Win-win? Assessing the role of non-profit organisations in co-creating new pathways for asylum-seekers and refugees with the Japanese labour market

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Abstract

This research is one of the first attempts to discover the emerging phenomena of nonprofit organisations (NPOs) creating a complementary pathway by facilitating the employment of asylum-seekers and refugees as high-skilled workers in Japan, historically known for its stringent refugee policies.

Taking a case study at NPO WELgee, the sole advocator for “refugees as talents” in Japan, this study explores the motivations behind companies hiring refugees who are not immediately “ready-to-work”, the NPO’s dynamic process with the employers in co-creating new positions, and the state’s stance on this new pathway.

Primary narratives are obtained through semi-structured qualitative interviews with eleven NPO staff and pro-bonos, three corporate executives and one staff from the government-related organisation to capture the ongoing phenomenon.

The findings illustrate that a seemingly neo-liberalistic win-win approach between the NPO and employers is, in fact, essential for a sustainable, reciprocal relationship between the refugees and their employers. This study sheds a positive light on the economic inclusion of refugees as contributors rather than as a beneficiary of compassion or pity. It demonstrates the NPOs’ pivotal role, which may lead to a third way out of the long-held status quo of the Japanese asylum policy.

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List of Abbreviations

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DA Visa	Designated Activities visa
DE&I	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
ESHI Visa	Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services visa
ISA	Immigration Services Agency of Japan
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JICE	Japan International Cooperation Center
JILPT	The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training
JISR	Japanese Initiative for the Future of Syrian Refugees
METI	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PR	Public Relations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

Aims and Scope

This research examines the new phenomenon of non-profit organisations (NPOs) introducing refugees as high-skilled workers for companies. Notably, this is happening in Japan, a country historically criticised for its strict refugee policy and low refugee recognition rate (Welcome Japan and Owls consulting group, 2022). The study aims to understand the company's motivation to hire refugees, whether it is an act of altruism or self-interest, the role of NPOs in communicating with companies to create a new job post for the refugees, and what implications this phenomenon has on the refugee themselves and the state's stance over the refugee issue.

"Highly educated, high-skilled refugees are becoming the one who saves the companies" (Horio, 2023). Online news published this January 2023 highlights the employment of a Congolese refugee by a major Japanese corporation. It is seen as breaking news since refugees are now hired as high-skilled workers rather than filling the demand for dirty, dangerous and demeaning 3D jobs (Banki, 2006; Koizumi, 2014). For a long time, refugees found it challenging to find jobs matching their previous experiences in Japan, primarily due to language barriers and the lack of recognition for their previous education and professional qualifications (Obi, 2013). For asylum-seekers, white-collar jobs will open a way to switch their asylum-seeking status to an occupation-based visa, which permits their stay in Japan even if their asylum claim is rejected. This is especially significant in Japan, where the refugee recognition rate has been under 1% for most of the past decade (ISA, 2023a).

NPOs play a considerable role in connecting the refugees to companies in Japan. WELgee, an NPO established in 2018, has taken on the challenge to create a new pathway for asylum-seekers in collaboration with administrative scriveners and supportive companies (Kankolongo, Watanabe, 2023). The outcome was remarkable: a first asylum-seeker could switch their designated activities visa to a working visa in 2019, previously considered almost impossible (WELgee, 2023c). Japan Association for Refugees (JAR) and Certified NPO organization Living in Peace (LIP) are called upon by the government to provide career support for students on scholarship programs led by the government and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Robo Co-op and Welcome Japan assist economic self-reliance of displaced Ukrainians while providing solutions to the lack of human resources for digital transformation in Japan (Robo Co-op and Welcome Japan, 2023).

NPOs emphasise the win-win approach; refugees could rebuild their careers while contributing their skills to the Japanese industry in demand for high-skilled workers. This win-win approach is in parallel with the corporation's explanation. Rather than as an act of compassion, recruiting refugees is explained as a strategic move for the company in the search for human resources with unique skill sets. "Recruitment is based solely on the individual. We did not intend to hire people for humanitarian aid just because they are refugees," said Yumi Fukunaga, executive officer of the Human Resources & General Affairs Department at MOL Logistics Co., Ltd., one of Japan's leading logistics companies. (Horio, 2023).

Due to the new initiatives by NPOs some studies have recently been conducted on refugees' economic inclusion in Japan. However, these researches are either capturing only the refugee's needs and missing the employer's motivations (Welcome Japan and Owls consulting group, 2022), mainly focused on the refugee's career after their employment (Kabe, 2023), or targeting "ready-to-work" refugees who have lived long years in Japan, with recognised refugee status,

education qualification in Japan, and are already equipped with N1/N2 Japanese ability, a level which is generally required to study in Japanese universities (Nishizawa, Isbell and Suzuki, 2022, p. 495; NPO Living in Peace et al., 2022).

However, many refugees who have just arrived in Japan are not “ready-to-work”, with no adequate language skills. Additionally, discrimination is still prevalent in the hiring process, prioritising Japanese nationals (Igarashi and Mugiyama, 2023). Even foreigners and refugees born and raised in Japan struggle under the current process (Living in Peace et al., 2022). For job positions that require cross-cultural communication, language skills and adaptivity to changes, companies in Japan prefer to either educate their employees, hire multilingual Japanese returnees, or subcontract this work rather than hiring a foreigner or refugees (Living in Peace et al., 2022). This leaves us to question why companies hire refugees who are not “ready-to-work” when there are already high barriers to foreign workers with full skillsets. This research addresses these gaps by focusing on the role of intermediaries and exploring how they co-created new pathways with the companies to welcome refugees who are not “ready-to-work”.

One research recently published in March illustrates the challenges of a refugee’s unclear career path after getting hired at Japanese companies (Kabe, 2023). A question will also be posed whether this is a win-win only for the companies and the NPOs or if this is also a “win” for the refugees integrated into the Japanese labour market.

Research question

What role did the non-profit organisations (NPOs) play in influencing the companies to make new job positions for refugees and creating a new pathway to stabilise their visas?

Sub questions

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and altruism. What motivated the companies to hire refugees? Is it from altruism, for better corporate image, or demand for high-skilled labour?
- Role of the NPOs in building the trust between the refugees and the companies. What message do they communicate to the corporates?
- How did the state influence this emergence of a new pathway? Was their absence, a laissez-faire approach, that made the third sector substitute the roles? Is the state encouraging or hindering this new approach?

Gaps in the Previous Literature

Across the globe, intermediaries “linking” to support job attainment have been researched on labour migrants. However, only recent studies focused on refugees (Dunwoodie et al., 2020). Studies in the US and Brazil emphasise the vital role of the resettlement agencies for refugee integration (Campbell, 2018; Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Da Silva et al., 2022). Rushing to link refugees to the job market, regardless of their preferences and prior skillsets except for English language proficiency, limits the refugee to downgraded occupational opportunities, leading them trapped in “survival jobs” (Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). However, little has been discovered regarding the dynamic procedures on how NPOs provide career support for refugees in collaboration with corporates (Baran et al., 2018; Lee and Szkudlarek, 2021).

One prior study focused the intermediary's role and communication towards the refugees in reshaping their identity and managing their expectations towards their possible careers in Canada, linking them to high-skilled jobs (Nardon et al., 2021). This research will add to fill in the gap, focusing on the other side of the coin, intermediaries' communication process towards the corporate side. The outcome will also contribute to unfolding the job attainment process of high-skilled refugees where there are no existing job posts to link the refugees.

Pro-bono culture existed since the establishment of NGOs in 1980s (Dean and Nagashima, 2007). Up to this date, NPOs are managed by few full-time staff members, supported by numerous pro-bonos. Social proximity, group attachment, higher education, and socioeconomic status lead to more altruistic behaviour towards others. A study demonstrates that while these three factors all provide impact; group attachment is the biggest driver for individuals to take action for refugees (Giugni and Grasso, 2019). Group attachment occurs when exposure to in-group members fosters a favourable perception of the whole group as more amicable, truthful and reliable than others (Yamagishi and Kiyonari, 2000). The study will analyse the possibility that NPOs and their pro-bonos provided this group attachment for the corporate decision makers to act towards refugees.

Emerging studies shed light on refugees' multiple barriers in job attainment. Institutional, organisational and individual factors create a complex multi-layered "canvas ceiling" in refugee's labour integration (Lee et al., 2020). These include refugee's lack of language skills and sociocultural understanding (Guo, Al Ariss and Brewster, 2020), undervaluation of previous culture capital (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018), and psychological, emotional, and socioeconomic traumas (Newman et al., 2018). Nevertheless, research into the hiring motivations of the host country employers is still in its infancy (Lee et al., 2018).

While many seek to do so, only a few Northern European employers perceive hiring refugees as an immediate benefit of hiring itself. Significantly, larger corporations hire refugees from CSR motivations, from social causes. Language barriers, cultural differences and traumas of forced displacement often override the recruitment benefit (OECD & UNHCR, 2016). Empirical studies from Australia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany all confirm that the majority of employers see hiring refugees as CSR rather than as a business case (OECD & UNHCR, 2018; Schena, 2018; Knappert, Van Dijk and Ross, 2019; Szkudlarek, 2019).

CSR factors include human resources management, branding/marketing, and altruistic motivations to contribute positively to society (OECD & UNHCR, 2018). Traditional understanding of CSR is a method to benefit the company and its internal and external stakeholders (Abbott and Monsen, 1979; Clarkson, 1995). Social issue statements could be utilised to enhance corporate value through branding and marketing, aligned with the stakeholder theory (Brammer and Pavelin, 2006; Turner et al., 2019), or contribute to human resources management and employee attraction, retention and motivation based on the social identity theory (Wang and Chaudhri, 2019). Selecting refugee employment as CSR can be seen as controversial, and hence, it may have a more substantial impact on attracting specific types of employees, such as millennials (Turner et al., 2019).

In Japan, on the other hand, the "win-win" approach of NPOs and corporates co-creating new pathways for refugees sounds like a neo-liberalistic approach, as a commercial case rather than out of altruism or CSR. However, their actions indicate a disparity from traditionally risk-averse hiring practices prioritising Japanese or "ready-to-work" foreigners with Japanese cultural

capital. This study will deeply examine the companies' motivations, whether from commercial benefits, altruism, or CSR perspectives.

In Japan, research on forced displacement has historically concentrated on macro-level policy due to its stringent policy against refugee acceptance (Hitomi, 2020). Due to being the trigger for Japan's introduction of refugee policy, multiple studies focus on Indo-Chinese refugees, their resettlement schemes and the challenges they face in Japanese society (Banki, 2006; Strausz, 2012; Mori, 2013; Koizumi, 2014; Törngren, 2015; Lee, 2018; Phillimore et al., 2021) Some authors provide attention to Turkish (Kurdish) asylum-seekers. (Fujibayashi, 2018; Tsuchida, 2018; Avci, 2020). Although some research exists regarding refugee's legal status, statelessness, and the role of education and religion in Japan, studies outside of policy and legal debates are generally under-researched (Hitomi, 2020). This research will contribute to the studies on refugees' labour integration in Japan, including those outside Indo-Chinese or Kurdish. The study also aims to examine how the relationship between the Japanese government, the NPOs and the private sector affected the emergence of the new pathway.

Research Context

Japanese Asylum Policy

This chapter will offer an overview of the Japanese asylum policy, providing essential context on the environment in which these novel approaches originated, demonstrating the historical uniqueness of their emergence, and underscoring the significance of its unexpected survival and resilience within Japan's challenging asylum policy landscape.

Japan accepts displaced population through three systems: conventional refugee recognition, resettlements from South East Asia, and other humanitarian protections (Takizawa, 2022b). From the signing of the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1982 until the end of 2022, Japan has received 91,664 asylum applications and accepted 1,117 conventional refugees. Meanwhile, for Indo-Chinese refugees (refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) and resettled refugees (Burmese refugees from Malaysia and Thailand), Japan has welcomed 11,548 cases in total, dating back from 1978 up till 2022, more than ten times the number of conventional refugees (ISA, 2023a). Besides accepting as recognised refugees, Japan has permitted residence status to 5,049 people on humanitarian grounds.

Japan employs a quasi-closed-door policy for conventional refugee acceptance (Osa, 2022). During the past decade, from 2012 to 2021, Japan's recognition rate for conventional refugee status determination has been around 1%, or in most cases lower. In 2022, the rate slightly improved to 2%. However, this was due to rise in recognition mostly for Burmese and Afghans (ISA, 2023a).

Japan provides "Special Permission to Stay on Humanitarian Grounds" as a complimentary measure. Myanmar, Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine are mentioned explicitly as countries where this measure applies (ISA, 2023a). From July 2023, Sudan is added to this list (ISA, 2023c). Several scholars argue that Japan's asylum policy has reached a turning point to one with open routes outside of conventional refugee acceptance. In 2022, this humanitarian permission was granted to 1,760 individuals, accounting for 47% of 3,772 asylum claims. The same year, Japan welcomed almost 2,200 displaced Ukrainians with open arms (Hotta, 2022; Takizawa, 2022c). However, we must note these measures are concentrated on the five nationalities mentioned

above. Notably, 96% of this 1,760 humanitarian permission was offered to Burmese and Afghans (ISA, 2023a). Many other nationalities face the same stringent conventional asylum system in Japan.

Japan offers the right to work under a six-months "Designated Activities visa" (DA visa), which can be renewed while asylum-seekers await their decision. Depending on the perceived viability as a conventional refugee or humanitarian measure, asylum-seekers can start working either two months or eight months after the asylum application (ISA, 2018; MOJ, 2018). Refugee status determination usually takes, on average, three to four years (ISA, 2022b, 2023a). Most asylum-seekers have been working in Japan for several years by the time they receive their decisions.

After the rejection of their asylum claims, asylum-seekers could reapply to protect themselves from deportation. In 2022, 32% of the asylum applicants have applied at least once previously in the past, and there were some in their eighth time to apply (ISA, 2023a). The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) was sceptical that many of the asylum-seekers are economic migrants in disguise. Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition law has turned to a stricter policy through amendments in 2015 and 2018 to filter out those suspected to be system abusers (ISA, 2018; Oh, 2022). In June 2023, the Japanese parliament approved another controversial revision to the law allowing forced repatriation of asylum-seekers after their second denial of their asylum claims (NHK, 2023). This will cut off all the asylum-seekers who are not accepted as recognised refugees or given permission to stay on humanitarian grounds. Switching from a DA visa to an occupation-based visa is now the only way to avoid detention and deportation, besides obtaining a visa through marriage with Japanese nationals or staying clandestine as illegal migrants (Avci, 2020).

Need for Labour, Immigration Law

Contrary to the country's image of anti-immigration policy, the number of immigrant workers in Japan has increased to an all-time high of 1.8 million in 2023 by almost three times since 2010. The increase in number is the strongest among the high-skilled workers, accelerating by more than four times during the same period to 479,949 people (MHLW, 2011, 2023; Shibasaki, 2022). The Japanese cabinet placed the welcoming of high-skilled foreign professionals as an important part of the national growth strategy in their 2009 report, defining these professionals as those who foster innovation and a catalyst for growth. Based on "Future investment strategy 2018", Japan External Trade Organization ("JETRO"), a government-affiliated organisation under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), launched a website "Open for Professionals" in 2018 to welcome high-skilled foreign professionals (Koyama, 2022).

NPO WELgee (WELgee)

WELgee, an NPO, questioned whether there could be a way for asylum-seekers to stabilise their status other than leaving hope to the slim possibility of obtaining refugee recognition. They saw the labour demand for high-skilled foreign workers in Japan as a chance for the refugees to find companies to sponsor their visa change.

Refugees in Japan have a high academic background. 78% out of 69 online survey respondents (Welcome Japan and Owls consulting group, 2022) and around 76% of the 259 refugees who registered their academic background with WELgee hold bachelor, master or doctorate degree (WELgee, 2023c). This is strikingly high compared to the global average of 6% (Sarrado et al., 2022). This is partly due to Japan's geographical location; those with enough socioeconomic

capacity can obtain a tourist visa to fly and enter Japan. Over 90% of 388 refugees registered with WELgee come from Africa (34.1%), Middle East (33.1%), and Europe (26.4%) while only 5.77% are from Asia (WELgee, 2023c). As the paper “I went as far as my money would take me” illustrates, asylum destinations are more or less determined by the resources and human capital one can mobilise (Van Hear, 2004). Apart from the COVID era in 2019 and 2020 with high restrictions against overseas entry, approximately 50% to 70% of asylum-seekers enter Japan with a short-term tourist visa (ISA, 2020, 2021, 2022a, 2023a).

Employers could sponsor the conversion of asylum-seeker’s DA visa to an “Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services visa” (ESHI visa). ESHI visa provides legal grounds to stay in Japan, even if their refugee claim becomes rejected. This visa has a longer period of one year up to five years before renewal, bringing in other rights such as family reunification and ease of travelling out of Japan. After several years of working in Japan, candidates will also be eligible to apply for permanent residency (ISA, 2023d)

Since its establishment in 2016, WELgee has been providing support to 396 people with forced displacement backgrounds. Since the launch of the job matching service in 2017, WELgee has supported providing 31 cases of work or internship opportunities, of which 23 people have obtained a full-time job, and almost half of these members, 11 people, have successfully changed their DA visas to ESHI visas since October 2019 (WELgee, 2023b).

Methodology

Interviews, Resources and the Analysis method

From June to August 2023, I conducted a research placement internship at WELgee. WELgee supported me in identifying most of my interview participants while some were recruited directly through personal connections. The research includes below resources:

- Semi-structured interviews with eleven NPO staffs and pro-bonos, three executives from the companies that recruited refugees through WELgee, one staff from government-related organisation with duties related to labour policy for foreign nationals. See Table 1 for details. Most interviews lasted between one to two hours, while with Mr. Okamoto and Rocky, the interview extended to three hours and six hours. Mr. Kawahara’s interview was conducted together with a television coverage at City Computer Co., Ltd.

Table 1: List of interview participants

Name	Organisation	Joining year	Role at the organisation
Sayaka Watanabe Kankolongo (Jess)	NPO WELgee	2016	Founder & CEO
Nana Yamamoto	NPO WELgee	2017	Board member (Director), Career Program Manager

Shohei Hayashi	NPO WELgee	2018	Public Relations Manager
Saki Watanabe	NPO WELgee	2020	Board member (Director), Resource Department Manager
Yuki Sakashita (Chilli)	NPO WELgee BonZuttner Welcome Japan	2018 2019 2022	Career coordinator Founder & CEO Board member (Director)
Yusuke Takei (Rocky)	NPO WELgee Self-employed Social Venture Partners	2020 2017 2021	Career coordinator Bilingual Career Consultant, Headhunter, HRM Consultant Partner of an organisation providing fund and management support to WELgee
Sayaka Ono	NPO WELgee Bright Legal Office	2021 2022	Pro-bono at mentorship programs Administrative scrivener in support of refugees changing their DA visa to ESHI visa
Yuko Terasaka	NPO WELgee	2022 (2023)	Pro-bono, then became Career coordinator in 2023
Person A	NPO	2022	Career coordinator
Person B	NPO	2020 (2023)	Pro-bono, then became Promotions team leader in 2023
Yiqun Gong	Certified NPO organization Living in Peace LIFULL Co., Ltd. Welcome Japan	2015 (2018) 2010 2022	Representative Director from 2018 Business manager of FRIENDLY DOOR, providing residential support for refugees and other socially disadvantaged people. Conducts career support for refugees on pro-bono basis Board member (Director)
Masatomo Kawahara	City Computer Co., Ltd.	-	President and Representative Director
Hiroyuki Okamoto	City Computer Co., Ltd.	2020	Head of overseas business development department
Tatsuki Adaniya	Adawarp	2017	Founder, President, and Representative Director
Person C	Government related organisation	-	Employee at the department promoting support in welcoming foreign human resources and multicultural conviviality in Japan

- In addition to the above, Nentrys Co., Ltd. (Nentrys), a private company, and Plan International Japan, an international NGO, kindly agreed to use their unpublished interviews and seminars previously conducted with WELgee in this study.
- Participatory observation at WELgee helped develop and form my understanding of the NPO and corporates' dynamic process and communication in realising refugee employment. This includes WELgee's event, "Refugee Career Demo Day", on 15 June 2023, where 56 business leaders from 40 companies and 20 refugee talents joined to interact in person and over 10 media representatives attended to cover the event. 13 industry-leading companies sponsored, including Seven-Eleven Japan Co., Ltd. and PwC Japan LLC. as main sponsors. I joined as one of the 15 WELgee members hosting the event as a facilitator and interpreter at one of the 10 discussion tables between corporate decision-makers and refugee candidates.
- In-person placement at WELgee and personal connections provided opportunities to conduct informal discussions with a senior member of UNHCR Japan, and a board director of government-related program promoting foreign workers inclusion in Japan. Although I cannot include these discussions as direct quotes in the dissertation, this provided me with further understanding and knowledge on the government's involvement and their perspective on the NPO's initiatives.
- Access to WELgee's unpublished meeting minutes, and webinars over 5 years, and especially interview scripts with 8 companies who offered employment to refugees and internal zoom sessions conducted by founding members to share past footsteps of WELgee on 15, 22 July and 29 August 2023 have provided an insider's perspective on the employment process. This was used to triangulate with the findings from the interviews.
- Online news articles, video clips and company publications were reviewed to compare the employers' and WELgee's public communications against the private process and perspectives held by individuals and corporations regarding refugee employment.

The research mainly involves primary data to capture the current ongoing phenomenon (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Qualitative interviews are chosen to collect the original, detailed narrative from participants. Since interviews are a well-established method familiar to the participants, it would help to align expectations and construct a productive outcome (Skinner, 2020, p. 11). The information gained through participatory observation during the internship and secondary data are used to triangulate the interview findings. Interview questions include (a) refugee employment process, (b) the employer's motivation and WELgee's communication with these employers, and (c) Japanese society and actors' views on refugee employment. In addition, WELgee directors and managers are asked about how their organisation came about, their strengths and how they cooperate with other NPOs and government actors.

The study aims to understand a new phenomenon that is unique in terms of the historical and regional context. WELgee is at the centre of this research, as the only NPO actor currently focusing on matching high-skilled jobs for refugees excluded from beneficiaries of UNHCR or government-related programs. Most organisations and NPOs providing career support to refugees focus on providing "survival jobs". Such as the Refugee Assistance Headquarters (RHQ), commissioned by the government of Japan to offer resettlement programs to recognised refugees. Japan Association for Refugees (JAR) the most renowned NPO supporting refugees

in Japan, matched 27 jobs in 2021 (JAR, 2022; Kabe, 2022). Those supporting refugees' job attainment to high-skilled jobs are limited to WELgee and below two actors:

1. Certified NPO organization Living in Peace ("LIP"): Providing career support for recognised refugees applying to the Refugee Higher Education Program (RHEP), a scholarship program managed by UNHCR. The main participants are 1.5 or 2nd generation recognised refugees in Japan. Provided service to 5 individuals in 2021, of which three have found employment through their service (Living in Peace, 2021). LIP also provides mid-career job change support, including survival jobs for all refugees.
2. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA):
 - a) Career support for Syrian students accepted through the Japanese Initiative for the Future of Syrian Refugees (JISR) program run by JICA and UNHCR. JICA appointed Mr. Kabe, integration support manager in JAR, who works in collaboration with LIP, LIFULL Co., Ltd. (LIFULL) and Deloitte Tohmatsu Group (Deloitte Japan). Since 2017, 73 students have studied at graduate schools throughout Japan, and 51 have now graduated. 44 found a job in Japan, and some successfully switched to ESHI visas (JICA, 2023; LIFULL HOME'S ACTION FOR ALL, 2023).
 - b) Career support for Afghan students was accepted through PEACE, JICA's overseas development aid (ODA) project. Several NPOs, including Mr. Kabe from JAR, are appointed for career support.

Ethics and Positionality

This research is conducted in alignment with the University of Sussex's Ethical Review process (ER/MK828/1). I have obtained informed consent from the participants before the start of the interview.

As a Japanese national, speaking Japanese as a mother tongue, I have full access to local resources. These aspects will aid me in obtaining profound insights in qualitative interviews by understanding subtle nuances. This is helpful, especially in a country with a "High-context" culture (Hall and Hall, 1990; Money, Gilly and Graham, 1998). My previous experiences at WELgee as pro-bono from March 2021 and working experience in the Japanese private and quasi-public sectors will provide me with understanding of Japanese organisations and help build an insider relationship with the participant during the interview. Although I am aware that this positionality limits my understanding from the outside view, the findings from local understanding published in English shall contribute to the relatively small number of forced displacement research written in English regarding the Japanese context. My position as an intern at WELgee may affect how the interviewee presents their opinions. I tried to mitigate this by explicitly stating that the research is independent of the NPO and by ensuring the anonymity of the data collected unless they provided consent to show their names.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Altruism

Case Study at WELgee

The types of companies engaged with WELgee and their prime motivations have changed over below three stages:

- Stage 1 (2016 - 2019): Preliminary stage, making first cases of refugee employment and switching asylum-seekers' DA visa to ESHI visa
- Stage 2 (2019 - February 2022): Streamlined program portfolio to career support program, after several successful cases
- Stage 3 (March 2022 onwards): After the government's announcement to welcome displaced Ukrainians

Stage 1 (2016 - 2019)

Companies that cooperated to be the first cases were supporters of WELgee since its inception. These individuals had personal connections with WELgee founders and shared the same altruistic mission but also needed to consider pragmatic business benefits to partake as a corporate entity. The first employment was through the founder's friend, a start-up CEO looking for talented individuals to build the company together:

I didn't hire because he was a refugee [...] I once taught programming to about ten people introduced by WELgee who were interested in us, but he was the only one who passed the exam (Mr. Adaniya, Adawarp)

In another case, inspired directors, CSR department and corporate planning members tried to find a job position in their company looking for dedicated employees: "This position was struggling to hire and retain employees [...] I think this was also seen as a first try to see if they train this foreigner, he will stay in the company, then there could be such ways going forward" (Sayaka, WELgee and Bright Legal Office)

Stage 2 (2019 - February 2022)

After several successful cases, another type of company emerged. These were innovators looking for new challenges and wishing to change their corporate culture and explore the overseas market by hiring international workers. In many cases, these companies are pioneers in diversity or are planning to become more diverse:

Our atmosphere of being open to hiring foreigners and welcoming everyone who fits in with City Computer, regardless of their background, matched very well with WELgee's business and intentions (Mr. Kawahara, City Computer)

These two groups from stage 1 and stage 2 have been WELgee's leading partners in creating previous successful cases. From these experiences, WELgee targets "Empathetic and warm-hearted corporate executives", curious about the world and willing to contribute to social issues. Many of these also tend to have overseas experiences, have empathy towards people in trouble, and are interested in trying out something new.

Hiring Process

The hiring process for refugees are usually created separately through communication between WELgee and the executives in the company. All 15 interviewees responded to this question, including four corporate decision makers who replied that the hiring decision is made in a top-down approach, through executive's initiatives, or by someone who has a strong tie with the decision maker:

Even for relatively large listed companies, the decision making is almost always at the top management, almost at board members or executive officers level [...] If the key person was a section manager, this person will always have a strong connection with the top executive member in the company (Chilli, WELgee, BonZuttner and Welcome Japan)

After the decisions are made, the matching process will be passed on to the director level, involving the head of human resources and the department with the possibility of creating new positions for refugees. This route completely differs from the usual recruitment process for Japanese or other international candidates.

Refugees are filtered out in regular recruitment channels. Japanese language skills lie as the most significant barrier. All five engaged in career coordination and one promotions manager at WELgee, the representative director of LIP and staff at a government-affiliated organisation confirmed the previous research that most companies look for N1/N2 level Japanese language level (Living in Peace et al., 2022; Welcome Japan and Owls consulting group, 2022). Foreign-affiliated firms that commonly hire foreigners also require the same Japanese language level as local Japanese companies. They also hire based on equality rather than equity with other foreigners, which filters out refugees (Living in Peace et al., 2022):

There are many very talented people, but they have been chased out of their countries, so not everyone could build up their careers for decades in a straightforward way [...] some companies are saying they are willing to accept several applicants if they can compete on an equal footing with others. (Person B, NPO)

For the above reasons, annual business-as-usual hiring by the human resources department usually does not work out well. Executives who consider business a big picture can envision refugees contributing to the company by co-creating new positions. What sparks the interest of these key decision makers in hiring refugees is that it is simply exciting and something new. Employers are intrigued by WELgee's information that refugees are people with talents, different from the media's image of those with nowhere to go: "We would always want to meet anyone that matches our company, regardless of nationality. But at the same time...I have never met anyone who is a refugee before, so I was very curious to meet" (Mr. Kawahara, City Computer), Two employers and two career coordinators restated this view.

Companies consider new positions based on skills in demand, such as IT engineering, or hire refugees from a region where the company plans to expand their business. However, only a few cases were made solely through skill-based matching. Corporate executives are open to hiring regardless of Japanese language skills, but the departments where refugees will work are reluctant to change their Japanese-only work environment. Refugees are requested to improve their Japanese skills and understanding of the corporate culture, even if their professional skills are brilliant.

In most successful cases, candidates have some relevant academic or professional background. However, previous work experiences are not a must; candidates are hired based on motivation,

future goals, and willingness to learn. Several WELgee members mentioned the similarity to the usual Japanese hiring style for second-new graduates, hiring based on potential. Second-new graduates are those under three years after graduating from a final academic institution (MHLW, 2014). Two other interviewees outside WELgee and four employers also agreed about potential-based hiring. Due to the industry tradition of lifetime employment, Japanese companies train individuals for many years as an initial investment and do not place too much importance on the previous speciality as long as the candidate is relatively young and willing to learn. For new graduates and second-new graduates, passion and motivation are the top qualities companies look for in candidates. Even for mid-career, these qualities are listed as secondarily important after previous work-experience (JILPT, 2008).

It's more like 'let's grow together', so they look at previous backgrounds but more about the future, their passion, dreams and the candidate's character, [...] One of the NPO members mentioned 'third new graduates'. Indeed, it's not completely mid-career employment, but many candidates have more experience than second-new graduates. (Rocky, WELgee)

Every case is different; some are where candidates fit perfectly as 'ready-to-work' mid-career employment. However, most are closer to second new graduates hiring, where firms provide some years of training as affirmative action [...] Many cases are on the premise that they will be able to contribute if they can acquire Japanese corporate culture on top of their specialities. (Chilli, WELgee, BonZuttner and Welcome Japan)

Several opinions are provided regarding the employer's final decision in hiring each individual. The majority, four WELgee members and all four employers, mentioned the candidate's match with the company regarding personality and future goals. For example, an IT company with a vision to initiate an agriculture business in Africa found their perfect candidate: "Skilled in IT but interested in agriculture, really a best match [...] and the fact he wants to run his own business in the future, it's like destiny, amazingly great match" (Mr. Okamoto, City Computer).

Personality match is not always about assimilation to Japanese characteristics. Some mentioned punctuality, diligence, politeness, and teamwork "to fit into the company (Person A, NGO)" but others mention the daring spirit and ambitiousness: "SME founders feel like they are looking at their younger-self" (Rocky, WELgee). It is hard to generalise what kind of personality is preferred and depends highly on each company: "Such "an incredibly nice guy", I really wanted to work with this person [...] while gentle and flexible, I feel his strong determination." (Mr. Okamoto, City Computer). Conversely, two WELgee members and two interviewees outside WELgee mentioned that IT engineer positions have less emphasis on personality matches due to the demand for this skill and the nature of its work.

There is also an aspect that these innovative companies and executives give it a try because of their nature as pioneers:

Pioneers or early adopters are people who just give it a go because it's new and interesting, not because they know the outcome 100%, in a sense, they try because something is fun or interesting (Chilli, WELgee, BonZuttner and Welcome Japan)

Stage 3 (March 2022 onwards)

A significant turning point arrived on 2 March 2022, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida called for support in welcoming displaced Ukrainians (NHK, 2022). Numerous private and public actors rushed to support Ukrainians, causing a "boom for aid" (Takizawa, 2022a). By the end of the

same month, 591 contacts were made to the immigration bureau offering support, of which private companies were the biggest group, with 275 cases (The Sankei News, 2022).

WELgee used to identify companies one by one through personal connections. After Kishida's announcement, WELgee started to receive incoming messages from companies. WELgee received almost 100 inquiries expressing interest in refugee employment from March 2022 until June 2023, around six times more than in 2021. The majority of these inquiries emerged due to media exposure. Almost a third of these inquiries raised web media, and 22% raised TV as to how they got to know about WELgee. This surge of interest continued to 2023 when media coverage of WELgee became fourfold compared to the same period in 2022. However, these inquiries are primarily focused specifically on displaced Ukrainians. In an online article, WELgee founder explains, "I told them there were also other refugees from other countries looking for work, but there were two main responses. One response was, '(Still) we would like to hire about 20 Ukrainian refugees,' and the other was, 'I didn't know there were refugees (in Japan) at all. I had no idea' " (Kaneko, no date).

These companies came under altruistic motivations: "Rather than if the candidate is good then we hire, it was more like we would like to hire as long as there is something we can do as a company, and unless the candidate is terrible" (Yuko, WELgee). A shift was seen in the size of the company and how they framed the refugee issue. With the government's green light, larger corporates motivated by CSR aspects in trend such as SDGs, ESG, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) and Business and Human Rights started to engage in refugee issues. NPO members claim that companies were reassured that it is politically safe to be involved in refugee issues in Japan:

About 7 or 6 years ago, some companies asked whether it was illegal to be involved in refugee issues or would make the company negatively marked by the government. The bigger the company, the closer they were to the government and the more hesitant and anxious they were. After Prime Minister Kishida announced that Japan would accept Ukrainian refugees in 2022, of course, the SDGs have been spreading, and companies have been changing, but there was a change in momentum (Nana, WELgee)

A vast rise in corporate interest has resulted in the striking increase of corporate donations by almost ten times in fiscal year 2022 to 24 million JPY, in comparison to the previous year (WELgee, 2022b, 2023a). Over 40 industry leading corporations joined WELgee's event for Refugee Week on 15 June 2023. However, giant corporations tend to take more time to hire refugees, facing difficulties in connecting their existing CSR activities or corporate mission with refugee issues. Companies have an incentive to focus on CSR activities related to their core business to maximise the return on financial performance (Brammer and Pavelin, 2006; Serafeim, 2015; Wang and Chaudhri, 2019). This will be explained in detail in the CSR part in the following section.

Corporate Motivations: Altruism / Business case / CSR

Altruism / Business case

Successful hiring cases show a mixture of both altruism and business motivations. Those based on 100% altruism, or a cost-benefit approach are either intentionally avoided or not sustainable in the long run. Based on five respondents, employers on both ends of the spectrum, either from labour shortage or purely altruistic motivations, tend to offer positions needing labour, such as care workers or physical labour in manufacturing, agriculture, or service sectors.

WELgee screens them out because these usually do not meet the required job description to apply for an ESHI visa. WELgee is also concerned with the psychological effects of linking high-skilled workers to jobs below their qualifications: “If WELgee starts to introduce such jobs to the candidates, it will be discouraging, making them think that these are the only jobs available to them” (Nana, WELgee). Most importantly, WELgee avoids working with companies with no resonance with the social mission, to protect the refugees from exploitation or stranded from support:

Dealing with people with refugee backgrounds, who are closer to socially vulnerable, we shouldn't send to employers and companies who are not interested in those issues [...] We decline to engage with organisations when we sense that they just want a cog in the wheel. (Chilli, WELgee, BonZuttner and Welcome Japan).

On the other hand, when employment is done solely on a humanitarian basis, it is usually not sustainable in the long term:

The company will have to continue paying salary [...] for other employees in the same company, it could lead to discontent, thinking why only this person is endlessly offered support, and also for the one being offered support, they are very grateful about the job position but at the same time does not give them a strong incentive to work hard (Shohei, WELgee)

All other actors also emphasise the importance of communicating with the employers that refugee employment is the same as hiring any other individuals: “After all, it is the companies that are responsible for the trial-and-error process when refugees enter their organisation. We have to ask them to consider that point before hiring” (Person C, government-related organisation). Hiring without business motivations is at risk of becoming the first to be cut at financial difficulty (OECD & UNHCR, 2018).

Overall, respondents from NPO, companies, and government-related organisations all agree that it should be a hybrid of business case with some altruism that helps accommodate necessary affirmative action, such as extra time to acquire Japanese language and cultural understanding. “We do not unconditionally hire people because they are refugees; that would be like volunteer work and wouldn't last long” (Mr. Kawahara, City Computer). Career support program director at WELgee explains that around 70% of the successful cases are a mix of rational and social reasons: “If both are there, the relationship will last long, and both parties will be grateful to each other, and I think that is the healthiest way”. (Nana, WELgee).

CSR

Preceding research explains CSR as the core motivation for European companies in hiring refugees (OECD & UNHCR, 2018; Schena, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019). Conversely, in Japan, explanations based on CSR usually face challenges in obtaining internal approval. A huge leap is needed from identifying and inspiring individual executives to make it into a corporate-wide action.

For CSR to take off, employees wish to understand the link between the social issue and the company's main services (Du et al., 2010). WELgee founder reflects, “We look into each company's corporate mission, skimming through integrated reports [...] We need to find some common ground, to say your company needs to support refugees” (WELgee 現在地共有会 ~ ファンドレイジングと PR 戦略編 ~, 2023). It takes years to develop momentum. One company

succeeded in converging their CSR aims with corporate missions over five years, through various events co-hosted with WELgee:

We encouraged them to publish in the company newsletter, for example. It will become known that they have collaborated with WELgee, and then you can go on to the next collaboration or donation [...] or, in some cases, recruiting refugees (Shohei, WELgee)

CSR benefits companies perceive through refugee hiring

Two potential benefits emerged from the interviews: corporate branding and employee engagement. Opinions split on whether refugee hiring can be a method for external corporate branding. Five NPO respondents believed companies start to see refugee hiring as a marketing opportunity, especially for SMEs who can stand out as doing something unique. One member added that branding motivation is more prominent for hiring Ukrainians. While this is not the direct reason for hiring, one employer at SME also used this perceived benefit to obtain internal approval to employ refugees.

On the other hand, three NPO respondents disagreed, thinking it is not cost-effective as a corporate branding strategy: "It's very costly to hire somebody [...] it's much easier to just say we have been reducing carbon dioxide" (Person A, NGO). Additionally, one company expressed their concerns about being perceived negatively by the public: "It a risk for the company to be perceived as if we exploit refugees [...] That's why we do not make it a big deal that we are hiring refugees" (Mr. Adaniya, Adawarp), while the actual public response has been positive: "We get appreciated for hiring refugees, even more so, recently." (Mr. Adaniya, Adawarp). Although employers of refugees receive amplified media attention especially since the Ukraine issue, it's doubtful these companies anticipated it as their primary motivation for hiring. Such decisions are not straightforward in Japan, where both legal and cultural factors make employee layoffs challenging.

Conversely, benefits on human resources management were evident drivers in hiring refugees. The respondents primarily identified three key effects on internal stakeholders: advancement of DE&I initiatives, heightened employee motivation, and enhanced employee retention. Four NPO members and three employers mentioned DE&I as corporate motivations: "When we assessed diversity and inclusion in our company two years ago with an external organisation, one of the issues that came up was the lack of foreign nationals joining our staff." (Ms. Nagashima, Plan International Japan). Similarly, four NPO members and four employers saw it as a catalyst to motivate other employees: "We have also heard comments from the development side, 'We have a foreigner in our office who is working insanely hard! (This person) learns surprisingly fast!' This is having a positive impact on the organisation." (Mr. Miyata, Nentrys).

Many executives see refugee employment as a chance to communicate corporate philosophy: "To express the company's philosophy, culture [...] In that sense, there is a great deal of internal PR. Especially for larger corporates, this connects to stronger employee engagement." (Nana, WELgee). When refugee employment aligns with each company's corporate mission, it fosters better employee retention by keeping up with its social commitment (Turner et al., 2019; Shen & Benson, 2016). The younger generation and altruistic individuals have greater identification and commitment towards companies acting on controversial CSR rather than conservative CSR activities (Turner et al., 2019). One CSR manager from WELgee's June event expressed a desire to prevent new hires and motivated employees from leaving the company within a few years.

These employees felt that the company is not engaging enough with the corporate mission supporting social issues.

Role of the NPOs

Creation of the First Cases

In the face of unchanging asylum policy, WELgee's concern was to consider an alternative pathway for asylum-seekers in Japan. WELgee started as a voluntary organisation, with three university students teaching Japanese to refugees in 2016. In the first few years, WELgee was operating programs including share-house, shelter provision, and seminars where refugees share their experience at universities and companies as contributors to society. However, asylum-seekers' future in Japan was closed off due to the minimal chance of refugee recognition.

What should be our goal? Is it improving the refugee recognition system? I have been hearing stories of many seniors working on this project for 20 years [...], and 27 refugees were certified that year [...] In our third year, we decided to focus on our hypothesis to create an exit other than just refugee status. (Jess, WELgee)

In 2017, an administrative scrivener proposed a hypothesis to WELgee that an asylum-seeker's DA visa may be able to switch to an ESHI visa through employment. Based on this hypothesis, WELgee launched a career support program in 2017. However, in 2018, the amendment of the asylum law intensified border control. There was a rumour that the immigration office unofficially ordered their staff not to provide any work-related visa applications to asylum-seekers. "People in the (refugee support) industry were telling us it was now practically impossible" (Nana, WELgee). Despite this adversity, WELgee continued: "It was to crack down on fake refugees, but people we support are not fake refugees" (Nana, WELgee), "The law didn't mention it wasn't possible, it didn't say it was possible either so we just had to give it a try" (Jess, WELgee).

WELgee applied for their first few visa changes with the asylum-seekers and their employers who dared to take the challenge. The administrative scrivener pre-negotiated with immigration office managers to exempt non-fake refugee applicants from the uniform prohibition. As a result, the first two successful cases were created in 2019 and 2020 (WELgee, 2023c). Although asylum application and visa application are separate legal processes, no one knew whether switching visas impacted the asylum application. The new pathway was created with all those involved taking the risk, especially the asylum-seekers:

They have risked their life and visa, provided their time to cooperate with someone who is dozens of years younger than them [...] the existence of first members who sympathised with WELgee's vision and staff's passion, made the examples come to life (Nana, WELgee)

Advocator of "Refugees as Talents"

WELgee's narrative in publicising refugees as talents and actual hiring examples strived to break the stereotype against refugees as people needing support. Many companies were not aware that refugees existed in Japan in the first place. Communicating refugee's existence as a high-skilled work candidate expanded private sector involvement in refugee issues: "Of course, it is a double-edged sword, so I cannot say that it is 100% good, but it's true that this helped to bring in people whom we couldn't get involved before." (Chilli, WELgee, BonZuttner and Welcome Japan). Since November 2019, WELgee charges fees from corporates as providers of human

resources at the same rate as recruitment agencies. The career coordinator explains that charging a fee is essential for having a sustainable relationship with the company and sending the right message about the refugee candidates:

If you make it free, it will send a message like "Since they are refugees and there's nowhere to go, we do it for free and really just need your help," which is not beneficial for either side. Since we do it as a fee-charging job placement agency, we are serious about it and want to send good candidates. (Rocky, WELgee)

From the early stage, WELgee placed importance on media presence. In 2018, a month before its official establishment as NPO, WELgee hired a full-time staff as promotions manager (WELgee, 2020c). In fiscal year 2019, WELgee communicated 27 times through TV, radio, online and printed articles (WELgee, 2020d). There were 122 media exposures in fiscal year 2022, further increased by multiple times throughout 2023, as noted in the previous chapter (Hayashi, 2023).

This business-type approach is novel for a Japanese NPO. Not only do Japanese NPOs commonly have restraints in financial and human resources to conduct effective marketing or fundraising to start with, but they also have a negative opinion towards using business-oriented methods associating them with terms like "greedy" (Ito and Pilot 2015).

The "refugee as talents" narrative is also communicated through employers' press releases and media interviews, usually explaining that the hiring was based on personal skills, not because they were refugees. This seemingly neo-liberalistic representation is partly the result of WELgee and companies' intricate communication. Companies worry about being seen as exploiting workers through unnecessary media exposure. WELgee explains that internal and external communications on refugees' contributions are not harmful but, in fact, helpful to the refugees:

Companies say, 'Sorry, this must sound commercial and insincere,' but WELgee can give reassurance to them that we can connect these commercial motivations to refugee empowerment [...] WELgee is not a business, so we would say no to promotions that seem good on the surface but actually exploitative, pretentious (Nana, WELgee)

It is a win-win-win strategy for the company, WELgee and most importantly, for the hired refugees. WELgee effectively caters to the company's desire to use employment to transmit executives' messages to their employees. Broadcasting the refugees' contribution and their talents spreads the narrative across to more companies, which is also important for the dignity of the refugees to be recognised as contributing actors rather than as beneficiaries of compassion or pity.

Filter to Avoid Bad Matching for Both Sides

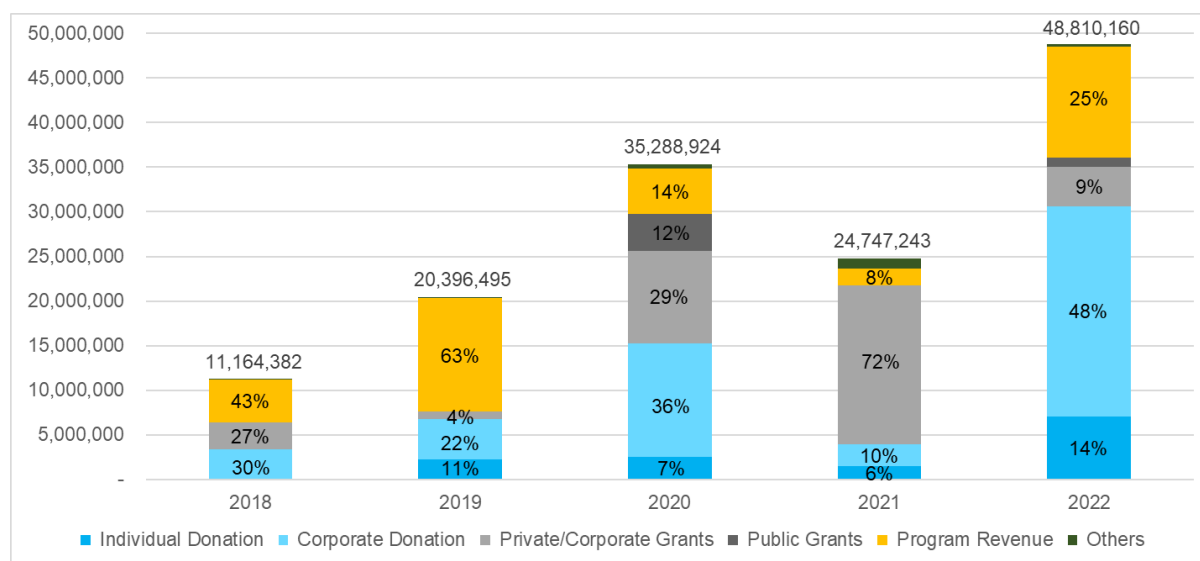
While catering to corporates using a business approach, WELgee also acts as a filter to avoid exploitative employers by sieving out companies that do not resonate with WELgee's social commitment. Simultaneously, WELgee also selects refugee candidates based on their readiness. WELgee waits for both sides to be ready: "Even if they (the companies) are very motivated, it is not always possible to find candidates that match [...] It's about timing when both are 'hot'-'hot'" (Person B, NPO). WELgee operates training programs for the refugees, on Japanese language and career development in Japan. Mentorship programs are provided as a kickoff to ignite refugees' motivations and cater better to Japanese job-hunting culture. It is common to support candidates over several years:

I check if they are determined to commit. If this part seems loose, I won't start matching because even if they matched, I know they will quit very quickly [...]. We take into consideration the growth of the company and the growth of the individual and then read the best timing (Rocky, WELgee)

WELgee provides follow-ups after employment as a safety net. As a result, less than 30% have left their job, and the first refugee has been working for six years in the same company. Considering that WELgee-supported refugees have been employed for three years on average, this is the same retention rate as Japanese workers who just graduated from university (MHLW, 2022b), indicating that less than 10% have left their jobs yearly. Although further research is needed to see whether refugees are satisfied with their career or they feel obliged to stay, the retention rate is extremely high in comparison to other foreign workers. 28% of foreign workers experienced quitting their job within one year (AIMSOUL, Inc, 2021), and around 35% to 45% were laid off in 2019, even before the COVID era (MHLW, 2022a).

This long-term approach is based on their philosophy but also due to the financial stability that helped WELgee from compromising what they believe is crucial. Refugee-supporting organisation's reliance on the government's short-term funding pushed refugees into quick employment rather than what is considered best for their careers (Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Nardon et al., 2021). Thanks to their flexible funding without specific terms, WELgee was able to support refugees over an extended period.

Figure 1: WELgee's annual revenue in Japanese yen since its foundation as NPO



(WELgee, 2020b, 2020a, 2021b, 2021a, 2022b, 2022a, 2023a, no date b, no date a)

While many other Japanese NPOs depend on government grants (Ito and Pilot, 2015), grants only became significant for WELgee during 2020 and 2021 when COVID-19 heavily affected their program revenue, as shown in Figure 1. WELgee deliberately puts more effort into increasing program revenue or incoming donations, which is free from limitation of fund usage and period: "Fund usage is limited for these grants so, we prefer having income that let us use flexibly" (Saki, WELgee) To increase flexible income, WELgee allocates 50% of their resource to career support programs, and 40% for fundraising.

WELgee's financial independence stems from a strong private sector relationship, providing a consistent 80% to 90% of funding. During COVID-19, WELgee streamlined their program to career support and quit all other IT skills training and share-house programs. This, in turn, led to an increase in successful refugee employment, building stronger relationships with private sectors:

We were supported by huge donations from a Buddha-like corporate person, but it was really based on the relationships we had built up and on the success of our program, even if there were only two cases [...] compared to 2018 when we had nothing to show except our vision. (Saki, WELgee)

As a result of these efforts to build firm relationships with corporates and to generate flexible funding, the career support program could continue functioning as a filter to avoid bad matching without worrying about the overhead cost incurred over many years.

Link between Company Decision Makers and Refugee Candidates

Employers get to know and start engagement with WELgee's activities mainly through the four routes below:

1. Media coverage: TV, news articles, web seminars
2. Personal connections, word of mouth and SNS
3. WELgee events
4. WELgee's founder giving pitches at private seminars

Summarising the comments from 10 WELgee members, incoming interests from A. only became significant these one or two years due to heightened public attention on refugee issues. On the other hand, B. and D. always had the highest possibility of leading to actual hiring. All three employers in the interview also connected through personal connections or word of mouth.

These personal connections pave the way for the first contact. From many examples, refugee hiring kicks off when decision makers meet the refugees and becomes a supporter, joining the "WELgee family":

The most important thing in collaborating with the corporates is how to ignite the fire of key people [...] one of the most important things is for them to have a direct dialogue [...] with refugees who have talent (Shohei, WELgee)

This aligns with the study that group attachment theory, identifying oneself as a member of the voluntary associations supporting refugees is the biggest driver in supporting actions for refugees through emotional attachment (Giugni and Grasso, 2019).

However, it raises a question of how this NPO, established by university students without professional experience in the private sector, succeeded in reaching out to corporate executives. Before WELgee hired two new staffs in 2023, all four existing full-time members were newly graduated university students who joined WELgee in their early twenties. In the beginning, WELgee reached out to these top management directly through private seminars and personal connections:

In the initial stage, we met key persons who used to study international relations, who have interest in refugee issues [...] those working on sustainability as corporates [...] just keep on attending such private seminars, extending personal connections, attending as much as possible (Shohei, WELgee)

WELgee's founder noted she met ten people daily to gain trust and network. Founding members believe decision-makers become supporters when WELgee could share the feeling of excitement and surprise that the private sector could address this issue. Several WELgee members used onomatopoeia "Waku-waku" and "Kira-kira" as what makes people fans of the organisation. "Waku-waku" explains the feeling of excitement, and "Kira-kira" illustrates the NPO as shining due to its youth and novelty.

People who sympathise deeply with WELgee's mission are those who are intellectual or those with foreign friends or experiences living abroad: "The largest individual donor to WELgee was someone interested in the origins of humanity, the existence of borders, the meaning of borders [...] Also, those who say 'I was backpacking in Syria when I was young', 'I was studying abroad before' [...] something connects from 30 years ago in their life" (Jess, WELgee).

Along with group attachment, social leadership and social proximity also impact motivating individuals to engage in refugee issues: people with higher education and higher occupational status or those with friends or families with the concerned group are more likely to act altruistically towards refugees (Giugni and Grasso, 2019). Career coordinators and other member adds that a similar layer of people also support WELgee as pro-bonos and advisors: "One of the keywords is that they all have overseas experience, and I think they want to give back to the world because they have been helped in various places away from Japan [...] They are people who really care about other people's happiness." (Rocky, WELgee).

All four core members unanimously agreed that WELgee's success was thanks to the robust network of supporters. "The width and depth of the supporter's network is our strength" (Shohei, WELgee) These supporters include corporate executives, the refugees, the numerous pro-bonos, interns and advisors. From its foundation in 2018 until 2022, WELgee had only 4 to 6 full-time staff. However, these core members were surrounded by auditors, advisors, administrative scriveners, and supporters working as pro-bonos and interns. For example, the two part-time career coordinators are both business owners of a recruitment agency for global candidates and a social enterprise hiring displaced Syrians. They brought in existing social capital they have been accumulating in their own business, as well as know-how to win employers' hearts through profound insights into the pros and cons of employing foreign workers.

In 2023, with the addition of two full-time staff and three part-time career coordinators, WELgee now holds 14 staff, supported by 85 pro-bonos and 6 interns. These volunteers contributed to expanding the web of supporters through word of mouth and SNS postings through "amoeba sales": "Kind of like invading when someone joins as a pro-bono or intern, they start spreading the word at the company they belong" (Rocky, WELgee). Employers confirm that it was their long-term friend, a WELgee supporter, who introduced them to hiring refugees:

My drinking buddy [...] said, 'There is an engineer who is a refugee. Will you be interested in hiring him?' [...] I immediately responded, "Yes, I am interested!" [...] Soon enough, my friend, WELgee, and I ended up having a meeting (Mr. Miyata, Nentrys)

Founding members explain that in the beginning, people became WELgee's fans because people got fascinated by the novelty, where young people are striving to create something new, using the power of media and the friendly, positive light they shine on the otherwise daunting

issue of refugees. But people stayed because WELgee was giving results, having a win-win for those who were involved:

For the fans to stick with us, it's important to produce results that are win-win for the stakeholders as a whole [...] In some part, I think joining WELgee is like jumping on the bandwagon; it makes you think that you will also be able to shine together if you get involved (Saki, WELgee)

State's Influence on the Emergence of this New Pathway

State's Approach to Asylum-Seekers as High-Skilled Workers

According to the respondents, the Japanese government seems to employ a laissez-faire approach regarding this new pathway. Ministries concerning foreign workers, asylum-seekers and refugees include MOJ, METI, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

MOJ and its Immigration office has the strongest border control perspective, but they do not seem to hinder this new pathway. In fact, two interviewees reported stories of immigration officials recommending asylum-seekers to consider cancelling their asylum application and switch to worker's visa:

It's probably just something that the immigration officials on the frontline who care about each individual saying, 'Have you thought about that possibility?' I was talking with a former immigration official, and he also said that the Ministry of Justice's Immigration Bureau [...] works like a large company, thinking about how they can simplify their task, [...] like we are happy for you to apply to another working visa, if you can cancel your refugee application [...] As long as they are not working illegally. (Nana, WELgee)

WELgee always remind asylum-seekers that they can keep their asylum case even after they obtain ESHI visa, because these two applications are separate.

METI supports the recruitment of high-skilled foreign workers. However, currently, refugees are not in their target scope due to the small number: "There are not enough refugees to make METI think that refugee recruitment is a sweet deal. We are talking about 100,000 people in Europe. (In Japan) we are talking about 20,000 asylum-seekers." (Jess, WELgee)

State's Influence in Advocating for Support

Nevertheless, government indirectly supported refugee employment to become main stream by diminishing the political risk and provided incentives, especially for the large corporations and media to be involved: "Since the Japanese government says they will do it, it is an issue that can be addressed, not a criticism of the government or the immigration system" (Jess, WELgee). For example, much more corporate support was seen than in 2021 for Afghans, where academic institutions primarily sponsored their alumni Afghan students and their families to flee to Japan (SUGIYAMA, 2022; Kyushu University, 2023).

Thanks to the government's reassurance, the media became another advocate for "refugee as talents": "I think it was around two years ago that media exposure increased significantly regarding 'refugees as talents, refugee employment'" (Nana, WELgee). WELgee started getting many contacts from companies, foundations and municipalities willing to provide support.

WELgee also contracted a project from the Japan Foundation specifically to support Ukrainian evacuees in finding jobs.

Emergence of State-led Alternative Pathways

Recent years indicate possible shifts in Japanese refugee policy, opening alternative routes for certain nationalities. On top of displaced Ukrainians, MOFA responded to several projects which gradually became complementary pathways. As a result, NPOs are called for by the MOFA to support the integration, including employment of the people brought to Japan through various government initiatives.

In May 2016, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that Japan would accept 150 Syrian students over the next five years (Abe, 2016; MOFA, 2016), in response to the United Nations Humanitarian Summit held immediately before the G7 Ise-Shima Summit (MOFA, 2017). This program, later named as JISR, offers post-graduate education opportunities in Japanese universities. Applicable candidates are Syrian refugees between the age of 22 and 39, fluent in English or Japanese with a bachelor's degree (JICA, no date).

JISR program is managed by JICA, a government-related organisation under MOFA as an ODA program, but was approached by and managed in cooperation with UNHCR: "The Syrian program is not a bilateral cooperation program, but a program implemented in cooperation with the UNHCR" (Person C, government-related organisation).

In the beginning, Japanese government expected these students would return to Syria after their graduation. However, the Syrian conflict continued and students were stranded in Japan, facing trouble searching for employment. Mr. Kabe, who initiated the refugee employment support project in JAR, was appointed deputy general manager in the JISR program to provide career support for these Syrian students. LIP, LIFULL and Deloitte employees, joined in to support on a pro-bono basis from 2020, when the first batch of students started job hunting in Japan. One year of Japanese language course was added to the JISR program from the third batch to boost students' employability in high-skilled jobs (LIFULL HOME'S ACTION FOR ALL, 2023). With the support of Mr. Kabe and pro-bonos, 44 members out of 51 JISR graduates have found employment in Japan. (JICA, 2023). Since 2017, 121 Syrian students have come to Japan through JISR and another government-financed scholarships. Almost eight times as many Syrians as those recognised as conventional refugees during the same period (ISA, 2019, 2023a, 2023b).

JICA operates another ODA project called Peace, accepting over 600 master's and Ph.D. Afghan students from 2011 to 2019 (JICE, 2021). The peace program started as ODA but turned to alternative pathway after the Taliban's takeover. "Various circumstances changed during the project, so the framework of the project changed accordingly" (Person C, government-related organisation). JICA collaborates with several NPOs and other MOFA and JICA-related organisation Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE), providing employment support for 3 to 6 months after graduation.

MOFA also has been influential in accepting refugees in mass from humanitarian aspects. The news on 12th July 2023 broadcasted that for the first time in Japanese history, 114 people were accepted as refugees at once, all JICA local Afghan staff and their families (Fuji News Network, Inc., 2023). Government-run organisations will provide integration support, and WELgee was also asked to support their employment. WELgee director, representative director of LIP and member of government-related organisation all agreed that it will be a big issue if these people

invited to Japan by MOFA's actions were not supported and left destitute. Hence, despite the complexity and political issue of accepting them as refugees, MOFA is incentivised to step in or ask NPOs for support.

WELgee's Future Goals

WELgee plans to be a receiving end for the refugees that could not be addressed through MOFA and JICA-related schemes. Since WELgee operates independently from public funding, there is flexibility in determining the support period and the individuals to include. Beneficiaries of government programs come knocking on WELgee's door for further support:

JICA's programs [...] have a deadline and need to show results by numbers and land somewhere no matter what, compared to WELgee, running by its own funding to address this difficult task. People can visit us after two years, for example [...] I think we can keep on facing the most marginalised people (Nana, WELgee)

WELgee targets METI and Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) to expand the alternative pathway to a wider audience. Three of the founding members explained the next step is to increase the actors involved and make a collective impact: "To cooperate with other foundations and consulting firms to incorporate into local government schemes. If this scheme expands in the future, it may be possible to accommodate dozens or hundreds of people" (Nana, WELgee). WELgee places its mid-term plan, targeting to make 100 cases by 2025. Together with the group of business actors, WELgee aims to propose the alternative pathway to be implemented in the national scheme and eventually have an impact on improving the asylum policy itself by making momentum:

By making 100 cases with companies, we propose to Keidanren or some business committees to include this as their agenda [...] maybe not 10/10 amazing improvement, but we can say how about we take it to this point for now [...] hoping to eventually lead to the changes in the core national (asylum) system (Jess, WELgee)

WELgee acknowledges that the narrative of portraying refugees as high-skilled candidates has its issues. Not all refugees can meet the requirements. Legal status, academic and professional background, and personal circumstances, including gender or age, filter out the most disregarded members from the alternative pathway.

Once you have decided on this strategy, you have to go for it [...] Regardless of whether we want to call them "refugee talents" or not, if we don't enter the market that way, companies may not pay attention to you. (Jess, WELgee)

WELgee is aware that the asylum system and its stringent refugee recognition rate is the fundamental issue but believes there needs to be a third way out of the binary opposition between the immigration officials and the civil society that has lasted over the years without any clear solution. A member of UNHCR Japan noted that while Japan is often seen as tough on refugee issues, the government is open to supporting projects framed as potential win-win scenarios for both the government and the industry. Both government and corporates need to be approached in consideration of their benefits to act.

UNHCR also recognises the potential of this alternative pathway to reshape the dynamics in Japan:

Such as JISR, through ESHI visas, Peace and other programs too, trying to expand the acceptance of refugees in a different way. The United Nations, or rather UNHCR, seeks to collaborate with various companies, governments, NPOs, and academia as "whole-of-society", where we all work together to build a container for accepting refugees, so they are back sponsors of Welcome Japan, from its initiation (Yiqun, LIP, LIFULL and Welcome Japan)

JETRO's online portal for high-skilled foreign professionals calls out for companies to provide internship opportunities to JISR students (JICA and JISR, 2023). Although these Syrians are framed as international students, it shows a glimpse of possibility in the government becoming another actor advocating for "refugees as talents".

Conclusion

This research is groundbreaking, representing one of the pioneering efforts to explore the emerging dynamics of how NPOs have played a pivotal role in establishing a novel pathway for refugees to achieve legal stability as high-skilled workers. It will be a rare addition to the research on refugee issues, especially in Japan where most prior research focused on its stringent asylum policy.

The unique findings cast a positive light on the private actor's roles. Employers hired refugees who are not "ready-to-work" based on potential, with the expectation that they would acquire Japanese language and cultural understanding to contribute their skills in the future. In successful cases, Japanese companies hired refugees for a mix of business motives and altruism. While some saw branding merits, most companies perceived benefits such as the opportunity to hire high-skilled workers, promotion of DE&I, and enhancement of employee motivation and retention.

WELgee created first cases of the alternative pathway, building the narrative of "refugees as talents" through effective media use, breaking the stereotypes and attracting involvement from more business-oriented actors. Utilising their social capital, their youth and the novelty of the approach, WELgee staff, pro-bonos and interns identified corporate executives to include as the WELgee family in support for refugees.

WELgee filters potential exploitation and facilitates a healthy employer-refugee relationship by emphasising that employment is not a charity. Although seemingly neo-liberalistic, it ultimately upholds refugees' dignity as contributors, fostering a sustainable win-win relationship among stakeholders.

Similarly, a sustainable relationship between Japanese society and refugee inclusion requires a balance between business benefits and altruism:

If it's by noblesse oblige, it will be an initiative immediately cut off when there is no longer any room for it. [...] as seen in the individual cases of matching, as well as the refugees' involvement with the society at large. Japan is like a sinking ship, and it is in a crisis, but at the same time, I see this as an opportunity (Nana, WELgee).

Japan's demographic challenges of declining birth rate and ageing population are sustained drivers supporting promoting refugees' inclusion as economic actors. A win-win approach is also relevant to gain government support, as we see how UNHCR established complementary pathways through the JISR program. MOFA's initiatives in accepting Afghans through temporary protection also impact the number of refugees accepted through the conventional refugee

scheme. Over 100 Afghans were recognised as conventional refugees from these evacuees between August 2021 and August 2022 (Hotta, 2022). A controversial amendment of immigration law in June will provide more rights to those from countries where humanitarian measures apply, legalising their status as complementary protection shortly. However, this law amendment and MOFA's schemes only save displaced individuals from certain countries while further closing the doors for other asylum-seekers.

WELgee aspires to provide another alternative pathway for refugees to have legal stability as economic contributors. METI and Keidanren could be potential partners to engage the state to impact the Japanese core asylum policy in the future.

Of course, none of these alternative pathways are perfect. Neither the humanitarian status nor the ESHI visa could provide the same rights as refugee recognition. For asylum-seekers rejected of their refugee claims, continuous employment and eventual application to permanent residency is the only way to stay in the country, leaving them vulnerable to their employers. Hashimoto warns that mindlessly implementing new initiatives poses the danger of transforming asylum routes into a neoliberal immigration endeavour restricted solely to high-skilled and educated individuals (Hashimoto, 2021). ESHI visa is only open to those with relevant academic or professional backgrounds, leaving out those with less human capital. JICA's schemes only focus on young students, leaving out the elderly and vulnerable people needing protection (Hitomi, 2020). The complementary route is an alternative due to the absence of an official route. They should not replace the core asylum scheme based on humanitarian perspectives (Hashimoto, 2021).

Nonetheless, the most unfavourable result would be the persistence of the status quo. Nothing starts as perfect. Discussions are necessary to have mutual understanding, to find a middle ground, and to consider what can work for all stakeholders involved: "This society needs a facilitator, proposing a middle ground, a third option" (Jess, WELgee). The business approach can catalyse change in proposing the third way out.

For a "whole-of-society" approach, the government's involvement is essential in incorporating the emerged approach as a sustainable system to ensure continuity, not only relying on the social network of altruistic NPO members, pro-bonos and corporate executives. Japan was selected as one of the six co-conveners of the Global Refugee Forum at the end of this year, in December 2023. Co-conveners pledged in their joint statement to "go beyond the implementation of the existing pledges and initiatives - to truly bring the comprehensive approach to refugee situations to life." (UNHCR, 2022). This pivotal moment prompts us to closely observe Japan's demonstration of political will in supporting refugee inclusion and initiate a dialogue to move beyond its current passive stance towards refugee acceptance.

Appendix I – Macro data of WELgee-hired Refugees and their Employers

Table 2: Corporate profile of the companies who hired refugees through WELgee

Number of employees	Less than 10: 15.6% 10 - 299: 56.3% 300 - 999: 9.4% 1000 - 5000: 3.1% More than 5000: 15.6%
Type of business	IT/Internet: 40.6% Manufacturing: 34.4% Medical: 6.3% Construction/Real estate: 6.3% Others: 6.2%
Type of position	Marketing, Overseas sales, Geothermal engineering, IT engineering, Clinical laboratory technician, etc. (Science-related occupations 42% /Humanities-related occupations 58%)
Office location	East Japan, West Japan, Mid-Japan, etc

Table 3: Corporate profile of the companies who hired refugees through WELgee

Occupation contract	Full-time employment (both permanent and non-permanent contract): 23 cases Part-time employment: 9 cases
Job retention rate	70%
Age	Mainly in their 20s and 30s
Nationality	Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Ukraine, etc.
Japanese proficiency	Mostly basic daily conversation level (N4, N3)

Appendix II – Consent Form

The actual consent form also includes the researcher’s name and department.



CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Title of Project: < Assessing the role of social enterprises and non-profit organisations in linking asylum seekers and refugees to the Japanese labour market >
C-REC Ref no: <ER/MK828/1>

	<i>Please tick box</i>	
	YES	NO
• I consent to being interviewed by the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to allowing the interview to be audio-recorded (in-person) /audio-visually recorded on UoS MS Teams/UoS Zoom and stored within UoS servers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to making myself available for a further interview should it be required.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I have given my approval for my name and/or the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project, and in further publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I have read the information sheet, had the opportunity to ask questions and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that my personal data will be used for the purposes of this research study and will be handled in accordance with Data Protection legislation . I understand that the University’s Privacy Notice provides further information on how the University uses personal data in its research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name:

Signature

Date:

Template approved by URGC May 2018
 Name of Project and Version No. for Consent Form

Appendix III – Interview Questions

Interview Questions for NPOs

1. Name & Age
2. What kind of organisations do you belong to?
3. Which department do you belong to?
4. How long have you been working/volunteering for this organisation?
5. What role do you play and what kind of work do you do in relation to migrants and refugees?

(All info above to be anonymised at the research unless participant wishes otherwise)

HOW (hiring process)

6. Company's relationship with NPO/SE/WELgee
 - ◆ How did you get to know the company?
 - ◆ How did your organisation support the company on the refugee hiring process?
7. Pathways to recruit refugees
 - ◆ How do companies hire refugees? (e.g) Through support organisations, via recommendations, regular recruitment process
 - ◆ Who/Which department is in charge?
 - ◆ Do companies have any external support in the refugee hiring process? (e.g) Other corporates / NPOs and social businesses / government
 - ◆ How do these other groups help the company?

WHY (motivations of individual company)

8. Motivation in hiring refugees
 - ◆ What is usually the reason to spark the company's interest in hiring refugees? (e.g) personal passion, company mission, part of CSR initiative, diversity & inclusion aspect, skilled labour, etc.
 - ◆ Who or which department promoted for this? And for what reason? Was it top down or bottom up?
9. Corporate Decision making
 - ◆ How was hiring refugees possible? What was the turning point in corporate decision making? What were the challenges in making this happen?
 - ◆ Was this decision beneficial/risky to the company? Why? Do you think this decision will change the image of the company?
 - ◆ Was the decision based on such benefit/risk approach or more based on altruistic motivations of individuals/decision makers? *Is it from altruism, for better corporate image or demand for high-skilled labour, or any other reasons?
 - ◆ Any external support to make this happen? Did external relations give impact in this decision-making process? (e.g) NPO, government, etc

10. Explanations “Stories” (Inside / Outside)

- ◆ What is the story that convinced the decision makers to hire refugees?
- ◆ Is there any difference between the initial motivation, what is chosen as the story to explain internally, and what actually happened on the ground?
- ◆ Did external relations give impact in this change in story? (e.g) NPO, government, etc

11. Visas

- ◆ Does the provision of white-collar visa make it more challenging for the company to hire refugees, or does this make it more a stronger reason to support the refugees?
- ◆ How did this new pathway emerge in the first place? Welgee’s hypothesis? Who worked with you

12. Changes in company

- ◆ Is there any changes the company went through in accepting refugee candidates? (e.g) Making new job position for refugee candidates, changes in recruitment process? Could you explain in detail?
- ◆ Was WELgee or other NPOs involved in this change? If so, how?
- ◆ Do you translate refugee’s strengths to be desirable for the companies? If so, how? Do you try to influence the company to change, in order to support refugee candidate’s smooth integration?
- ◆ Do you believe that you support the company’s needs more (win-win style) or you challenge the companies (activist style)?

13. Expectations on the refugee candidates

- ◆ What kind of refugee candidate are companies looking for? Is there anything in particular that companies look for in refugee candidates? (e.g) Nationality, characteristics, skills, loyalty etc.
- ◆ Why refugees and not other international candidates or Japanese with international skills?
- ◆ What is the expected positive change / difficulties by hiring refugees?

14. Could you describe in three words, what refugee candidates mean to companies? Could you explain why you chose those three words?

HOW (NPO/WELgee specific)

15. What challenges do you face in matching the refugees with the companies?

16. How do you cooperate with other actors in the society in the refugee matching process or promoting refugees as high-skilled workers? (Government / other NGOs & Social enterprises / Media)

17. Which actors in the society do you think plays the biggest role in changing Japanese company’s perception of refugees?

WHY (society view on refugees as workers)

18. Government’s view

- ◆ What do you think of the government’s view on the refugees as workers?
- ◆ How do you think you are perceived by the government for supporting

- recruitment of refugees?
- ◆ Do you get any support from the government?
- 19. Do you feel there is a societal pressure / incentive to hire refugees? Or do you think there is any societal risk in hiring refugees?
- 20. Could you describe in three words, what refugee candidates mean to the Japanese society? Could you explain why you chose those three words?

Interview Questions for Companies

1. Name & Age
2. What kind of organisations do you belong to?
3. Which department do you belong to?
4. How long have you been working/volunteering for this organisation?
5. What role do you play and what kind of work do you do in relation to migrants and refugees?

(All info above to be anonymised at the research unless participant wishes otherwise)

HOW (hiring process)

6. Pathways to recruit refugees
 - ◆ How do you hire refugees? (e.g) Through support organisations, via recommendations, regular recruitment process
 - ◆ Who/Which department is in charge?
 - ◆ Any external support in the refugee hiring process? (e.g) Other corporates / NPOs and social businesses / government
 - ◆ If so, who is your counterpart department? How do they help you?
7. Relationship with NPO/SE/WELgee
 - ◆ How did you get to know / meet NPO/SE/WELgee?
 - ◆ How did NPO/SE/WELgee support you on the refugee hiring process?

WHY (motivations of individual company)

8. Motivation in hiring refugees
 - ◆ What was the reason to spark your company's interest in hiring refugees? (e.g) personal passion, company mission, part of CSR initiative, diversity & inclusion aspect, skilled labour, etc.
 - ◆ Who or which department promoted for this? And for what reason? Was it top down or bottom up?
9. Corporate Decision making
 - ◆ How was hiring refugees possible? What was the turning point in corporate decision making? What were the challenges in making this happen?
 - ◆ Was this decision beneficial/risky to the company? Why? Do you think this decision will change the image of the company?
 - ◆ Was the decision based on such benefit/risk approach or more based on altruistic motivations of individuals/decision makers? *Is it from altruism, for

- better corporate image or demand for high-skilled labour, or any other reasons?
- ◆ Any external support to make this happen? Did external relations give impact in this decision-making process? (e.g) NPO, government, etc
10. Explanations “Stories” (Inside / Outside)
- ◆ What is the story that convinced the decision makers to hire refugees?
 - ◆ Is there any difference between the initial motivation, what is chosen as the story to explain internally, and what actually happened on the ground?
 - ◆ Did external relations give impact in this change in story? (e.g) NPO, government, etc
11. Visas
- ◆ Does the provision of white-collar visa make it more challenging for the company to hire refugees, or does this make it more a stronger reason to support the refugees?
12. Changes in company
- ◆ Is there any changes the company went through in accepting refugee candidates? (e.g) Making new job position for refugee candidates, changes in recruitment process? Could you explain in detail?
 - ◆ Was WELgee or other NPOs involved in this change? If so, how?
 - ◆ Do NPOs translate refugee’s strengths to be desirable for the companies? If so, how? Do NPOs try to influence the company to change, in order to support refugee candidate’s smooth integration?
 - ◆ Do you believe that NPOs support the company’s needs more (win-win style) or challenge the companies (activist style)?
13. Expectations on the refugee candidates
- ◆ What kind of refugee candidate are you looking for? Is there anything that you look for in refugee candidates? (e.g) Nationality, characteristics, skills, loyalty etc.
 - ◆ Why refugees and not other international candidates or Japanese with international skills?
 - ◆ What is the expected positive change / difficulties by hiring refugees?
14. Could you describe in three words, what refugee candidates mean to your company? Could you explain why you chose those three words?

WHY (society view on refugees as workers)

15. Government’s view
- ◆ What do you think of the government’s view on the refugees as workers?
 - ◆ How do you think you are perceived by the government for hiring refugees?
 - ◆ Do you get any support from the government for hiring refugees?
16. Do you feel there is a societal pressure / incentive to hire refugees? Or do you think there is any societal risk in hiring refugees?
17. Other companies
- ◆ What do you think of the other company’s view on the refugees as workers?
 - ◆ What do you think would be their motivation to hire the refugees?

- ◆ How do you think you are perceived by the other companies
18. Could you describe in three words, what refugee candidates mean to the Japanese society? Could you explain why you chose those three words?

Interview Questions for Government-related Organisations

1. Name & Age
2. What kind of organisations do you belong to?
3. Which department do you belong to?
4. How long have you been working/volunteering for this organisation?
5. What role do you play and what kind of work do you do in relation to migrants and refugees?

(All info above to be anonymised at the research unless participant wishes otherwise)

WHY (society view on refugees as workers)

6. Government's view
 - ◆ What is the government's view on the refugees as workers? What kind of work, nationality etc do you imagine when you hear refugee workers
 - ◆ Is there any expectations on the refugees from the Japanese government / society in contributing to Japan?
 - ◆ Do you believe the government agrees to the statement "refugees as high-skilled workers"? Why?
 - ◆ What is the government's view on the companies supporting recruitment of refugees? Does the government think it is a beneficial move or a risk for the country/company?

HOW (hiring process)

7. Relationship with Companies/NPO/SE
 - ◆ Does the government provide any support to organisations or companies in hiring refugees? If yes, which department and how?
 - ◆ Does the government cooperate with other actors in the society in the refugee matching process or promoting refugees as high-skilled workers? (other NGOs & Social enterprises / Media / Corporates)
 - ◆ Does NPOs and SEs / Media / Corporates request for your support or challenge your organization in refugee related issues?
8. Do you feel there is a societal pressure / incentive to hire refugees? Or do you think there is any societal risk in hiring refugees?
9. Could you describe in three words, what refugee candidates mean to the Japanese society? Could you explain why you chose those three words?
10. Which actors in the society do you think plays the biggest role in changing Japanese company's perception of refugees?

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