

## **Currys plc Joins the UK Ukraine Business Consortium with RefuAid**

May 23, 2022



Since the conflict in Ukraine began, over 10 million people have been displaced. Business is keen to support access to employment opportunities and provide other help required to overcome any barriers that might prevent those fleeing the horrifying crisis from working.

100s of UK based employers want to support refugees to find suitable jobs and live independent, dignified lives. They are keen to offer language and resettlement support and jobs aware that English language and UK certification is vital to secure meaningful, long-term employment in the UK.

We are delighted to announce that Currys plc, along with 14 other businesses, has joined the scale up of the UK Ukraine Business Consortium's pilot program, first launched in March 2022, with PageGroup plc, PWC, FDM and Portman Dental Group.

15 companies have come on board to support the roll out, sponsoring RefuAid clients to learn English language, recertify and receive resettlement support. The UK Ukraine Business Consortium welcomes BP, Mulberry, TELUS, Currys plc, AerFin, Dunelm, Kier Group, Persimmon, OVO, Gleeds, finnCap, Gousto, Haysmcintyre, Seenit and Midcounties Co-operative. Supporters will not have the right to employ the clients at the end of their courses.

A third even larger cohort is due to be announced late summer.

There is little to no support for refugees to gain employment that corresponds to skills and experience on arrival, so many newly arrived refugees end up in survival jobs. It is here where the initial focus is being placed. Ensuring refugees can find work commensurate with experience is vital.

Most skilled professions require intensive English language tuition and UK re-accreditation to practice, which usually involves undertaking exams and/or further training. This process is prohibitively expensive for those who have sought sanctuary in the UK.

As a result, we have Neurosurgeons are working as Care Assistants, Marine Engineers driving us in the back of their cabs and Lawyers are stacking supermarket shelves. RefuAid aims to change that, providing an innovative, practical, scalable and sustainable solutions to employment for refugees in the UK.

Without structured, professional English Language tuition and employment support those who've sought sanctuary in the UK are unable to gain meaningful employment and, as such, are unable to rebuild their lives. Consequently, the UK labour market has an extremely high level of over qualification and underemployment among refugees. A 2017 study into Syrian refugees in Europe discovered a third were employed in either skilled work or professional services in Syria, yet 82% were unemployed in Europe.

### The Story So Far

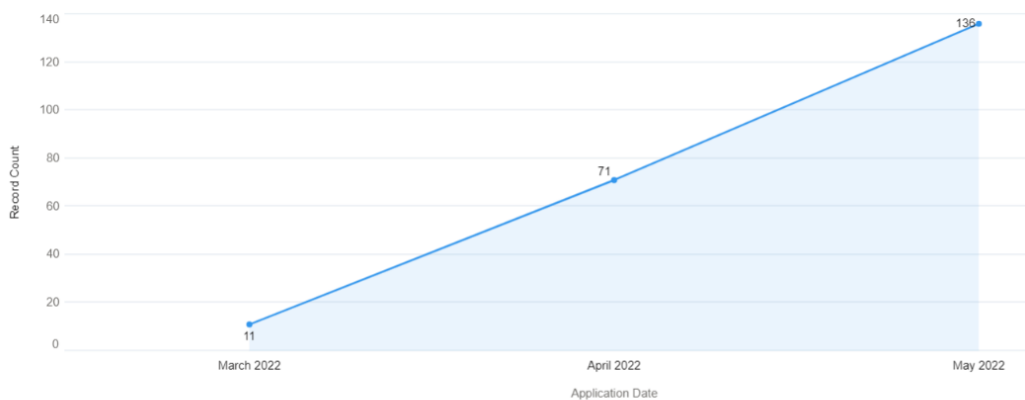
RefuAid began 2022 with 255 students studying. Thanks to the consortium and the expansion of their language programme, they now have 330 students – almost a 30% increase in capacity. Their target is to continue expanding and reach closer to 1000 students by the end of this year.

- Since the announcement of the cohort RefuAid have also received applications from hundreds of Ukrainians in the UK in need of support. They are currently supporting engineers and other skilled refugees applying for the first UK roles with consortium members such as Page, Atkins, Impellam, Aerfin, FDM, OVO, Persimmon, PwC, Kier Group and Gousto.
- In the last quarter, 218 Ukrainians have applied for RefuAid’s programmes (noting they support refugees of any origin). This will only escalate.

UKR by Profession



UKR by Application Date



- RefuAid currently have 19 people being supported with either pre-employment training or interviewing for specific roles via PageGroup, Kier and AerFin. An additional 3 candidates are lined up for roles at Gousto and Ovo, but the vacancies have not yet opened so do not appear on the attached.
- From discussion with RefuAid, companies such as AerFin has set up a “launch-pad” structure to give immediate employment options to RefuAid candidates at an entry level with an accelerated development framework to match skill sets and experience to commensurate roles within the business. In parallel, RefuAid have direct access to AerFin’s ongoing recruitment drives so that obvious CV via RefuAid is matched for existing and upcoming roles.
- This is in addition to 150 large companies (and many more smaller ones) who have engaged, keen to understand how they can be part of the solution, from Caffè Nero to Capital One, Domino’s Pizza to Dr Martens, Mitie to Mondelez, Nandos to Northumbrian Water, Sodexo to Speedy Services to Wincanton and WPP.

- Companies such as Page, Impellam and Robert Walters are supporting the recruitment desk with software, services and support.

### Quote from Emma Sinclair MBE

Emma Sinclair MBE comments: “My father’s side of the family came from Ukraine, fleeing pogroms and persecution. It is not surprising – but very uplifting – to see how quickly business has stepped up to fill an urgent gap in light of the Ukrainian crisis. There is an overwhelming desire to help refugees resettle and have meaningful lives, finding employment commensurate with experience.

The slow, bureaucratic process to set up a life in the UK needs to be sped up. This launch initiative is the first step towards significantly accelerating the pace that the United Kingdom can do that – and do that better. A second large wave of supporters has been assembled and we will shortly be ready to expand the program further. I hope through this consortium that we are seeing the beginning of much needed blue print for how to help refugees arriving on our shores to lead dignified independent lives, for all our benefit.

Over the last 3 years, RefuAid have supported over 800 people with access to language tuition, finance, and employment. We’re keen to see that grow – and fast. RefuAid have watched as lawyers have requalified and secured legal roles within companies such as Credit Suisse, have seen a mother living in a homeless shelter with her two daughters requalify over 3 years and join the NHS as a consultant on a 6-figure salary. We want to speed that up, and allow them to help more people, whatever their country of origin.”

Anna Jones, CEO, RefuAid: “Forced migration is one of the leading issues of our generation. Whilst governments must be called upon to provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary more support is needed to enable people to rebuild their lives in the new communities they find themselves. This consortium displays the amazing capacity businesses and the third sector have to create change by working together to support people and RefuAid are thrilled to be a part of it.

From ‘K’, a Ukrainian refugee currently considering a role with The Page Group: “For the first weeks of war me and my family were hiding in a village between Vasylkiv and Bila Tserkva. The sounds of frequent ballistic missile strikes and low flying fighter jets didn’t let us sleep at night, we realised it was way less chance to survive if our village would be occupied too. And so we had to quickly think of escape routes and which border it would be safer for us to get to. Our initial choice was Poland, I found it difficult to start a new life in Poland. There was already very heavy competition for jobs, as there were millions of Ukrainians in Poland in the same conditions. Finding RefuAid was like a miracle. And now I was able to work with a reliable, registered charity, who helped me with everything from finding a good host to applying for the Sponsorship Scheme. Now, since I came to London, also supports me in finding employment. I’m in touch with Kate and Steve almost every day and immensely grateful for their help! Their support means a world to me, because without them I wouldn’t have been able to apply for the Scheme and find a host here. Through them I met my wonderful host family, met their friends and neighbours who were also very keen to welcome me to the UK. I feel welcomed and accepted here, and I feel incredibly privileged to have experienced such kindness and support from people here.”

Paula Coughlan, Chief People, Communications and Sustainability Officer, Currys plc said: “With every passing day, the plight of refugees is becoming more urgent. For those coming to our country, we want to play our part in helping them adapt to life here as quickly and easily as possible. People want to feel a part of the society they’re in and make a contribution. Finding a job – the right job – is a major step on this journey and builds people’s confidence and sense of independence. As an employer that sees our colleagues as our magic ingredient, we know how important it is to attract and develop talent and to create a culture where everyone feels they belong. The people coming to our country are now a part of that talent pool and can make a huge contribution to the culture of any organisation they join. We believe that people should have

access to the same kind of roles they enjoyed in their home country, and we hope that our donation will help in some way towards making that happen, whether that's through gaining relevant local qualifications, or improving their language skills.”

RefuAid Consortium Video Link: <https://refuaid.org/businessconsortium>

### Other Launch Initiatives

There are a number of other initiatives that have emerged including:

The AA: the Drive Confidence Scheme announced by the AA, to give free lessons to Ukrainian refugees. The AA Charitable Trust is supporting Ukrainian refugees in the UK with free Drive Confident refresher driving lessons provided by AA Driving School. In the Ukraine people drive on the other side of the road and it is likely many will not be familiar with UK signs and restrictions such as the Congestion Charge or Low Emission Zones. Having worked on similar schemes with nervous drivers and elderly drivers, they are confident that several free lessons will help Ukrainian refugees gain more confidence to drive safely in the UK.

Vodafone: Vodafone has committed to connect one million people living in digital exclusion by the end of 2022. Its everyone connected campaign has already provided free connectivity to 250,000 people, via partners (including the Trussell Trust, Barnardo's and Good Things Foundation) and through its [charities.connected](#) initiative gives UK registered charities the opportunity to apply for free connectivity to improve their digital capability or help the individuals and families they support to get online. To find out more or get involved, search [Vodafone everyone connected](#).

Ahmed Essam, UK CEO, Vodafone, said: “The pandemic and cost of living crisis have highlighted the scale of digital exclusion, and in particular its impact on the most vulnerable in society. Digital connectivity is essential to access work, education, healthcare, finances and to keep in touch with family and friends, yet 1.5m households are living without internet access. “Our everyone connected campaign puts tackling digital exclusion at the heart of our business. Our goal is to provide connectivity and support to those in society who need it most.”

Link to hub launching to share updates: <https://ukbusinessconsortium.com>

### Additional Information About The Refugee Crisis

There are currently 84m displaced people in the world (UNHCR). The challenges around displaced people, forced to leave their own through no fault of their own, is not going away.

As of mid-2021 there were 135,912 people whose refugee status had been granted and 83,489 people with pending asylum cases in the UK. It is unknown how many of these individuals have training or qualifications as the Home Office does not release this data; however, RefuAid currently has registered on their books 316 engineers, 466 doctors, 102 nurses and 46 lawyers plus many, many other professionals. Throughout the UK this number increases on a daily basis. As they currently do little to no advertising of our services and rely on word of mouth alone to reach new clients, they can assume that this figure is a small proportion of a larger whole.

In addition, RefuAid are already supporting an influx of 12,000 people who arrived 6 months ago evacuated from Afghanistan as the Taliban took hold of the country in a matter of days. The government have recently launched the ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme, allowing households in the UK to ‘sponsor’ a person or family fleeing Ukraine to safely come to the UK. There is no numerical limit on the programme and so far, there have been over 150,000 households who've signed up, a fantastic commitment and one that could provide many thousands of people with a safe and legal route to the UK. Once in the UK those resettled on the scheme have the rights to work. People must

then begin the bureaucratic process to set up a life in the UK – find a job, set up bank accounts and apply for social security.

## Notes to Editors

### **About Currys plc**

Currys plc is a leading omnichannel retailer of technology products and services, operating online and through 832 stores in 8 countries. We Help Everyone Enjoy Amazing Technology, however they choose to shop with us. In the UK&I we trade as Currys; in the Nordics under the Elkjøp brand and as Kotsovolos in Greece. In each of these markets we are the market leader, employing 33,000 capable and committed colleagues.

Our full range of services and support makes it easy for our customers to discover, choose, afford and enjoy the right technology for them, throughout their lives. The Group's operations are supported by a sourcing office in Hong Kong, state-of-the-art repair facilities and an extensive distribution network, enabling fast and efficient delivery to stores and homes.

Our vision, we help everyone enjoy amazing technology, has a powerful social purpose at its heart. We believe in the power of technology to improve lives, help people stay connected, productive, healthy, and entertained. We're here to help everyone enjoy those benefits and with our scale and expertise, we are uniquely placed to do so.

We're a leader in giving technology a longer life through repair, recycling and reuse. We're reducing our impact on the environment in our operations and our wider value chain and we will achieve net zero emissions by 2040. We offer customers products that help them save energy, reduce waste and save water, and we partner with charitable organisations to bring the benefits of amazing technology to those who might otherwise be excluded.

Visit [www.currysplc.com](http://www.currysplc.com) for more information.

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