

## **Asylum seeker and refugee dentists – information for the resolution to be taken to the AGM on 4 July 2023**

### **Introduction**

One of the BDA Benevolent Fund's values is; "A generosity of spirit towards potential and current applicants, our beneficiaries and our colleagues." The Board of Trustees believes that asylum seekers and refugee dentists are part of the dental family. They could also make a valuable contribution to the delivery of dental services in the UK and are a potential resource at a time when the country needs more dentists.

As an organisation already supporting dentists who are struggling financially, the Board felt the Charity is ideally placed to consider helping asylum seekers and refugees. This is because they are supported inconsistently elsewhere through their profession i.e; specific status as being a qualified/ registered dentist. Refugee dentists want to use their skills and give something back to the country which has given them sanctuary and the Charity wants to support them with this effort.

This paper outlines some queries and give guidance to the members in advance of the proposal of the Charity to expand its remit to include supporting asylum seeker and refugee dentists, to be taken as a resolution at the Annual General Meeting on 4 July 2023.

### **How will the BDA Benevolent Fund help asylum seekers and refugee dentists?**

The Board understands the difficulties asylum seekers and refugee dentists must overcome to become financially independent, through working as a dentist or otherwise. Therefore, we aim to help those eligible in ways that benefit them the most – the same as how we already help dental students, dentists, and their families. Upon application, this can be with grants for essential living costs (rent, food, and bills) or for equipment (white goods, laptops), or grants to enable them to become registered as a dentist in the UK (Annual Registration Fees, indemnity, support with CPD, travel to meetings or training etc.)

Asylum seeker and refugee dentists will also be able to utilize the additional support systems including signposting (individually and through the [Wellbeing Support for the Dental Team](#) guide), money management and budgeting information as well as access to a 24/7 helpline, app, and online portal for legal and mental health services through Health Assured.

### **Who is an asylum seeker?**

Individuals must first claim asylum if they want to stay in the UK as a refugee. Applicants must be outside of the EU, have left their country and be unable to return to their home country because they fear persecution. <https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum> . They will have

an interview and then will be informed of the decision. This should be within 6 months but there are reports of this taking longer. The decision will range from Permission to stay as a refugee/ Permission to stay as humanitarian reasons/ Permission to stay for other reasons/ No reason to stay <https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum/decision>

If their asylum application is successful, they receive refugee status and have 'leave to remain' in the UK for 5 years (or 2.5 years if they are given temporary refugee permission). After 5 years they can apply to 'settle' in the UK.

### **Who is a refugee?**

"Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. " ([United Nations High Commission for Refugees](#))

Pending approval from the members, the BDA Benevolent Fund, will only have permission to support asylum seekers, or refugees. We will be unable to assist individuals without either of these statuses or who aren't/weren't dentists who are/ were already on the dental register in the UK. This includes EU or other international dentists who aren't seeking asylum and those living outside the UK.

### **How do we know that they are dentists?**

Individuals seeking support from the Charity will need to prove their eligibility as a dentist – as is currently the case for dental students or UK dentists/ their dependents. This would also be the situation should they wish to go on to register with the GDC to work as a dentist in the UK. We appreciate there may be difficulties in providing documentation. Therefore, we will work collaboratively with third party organisations as well as taking a pragmatic approach, managing risk but still being supportive.

### **How many dentists are asylum seekers and refugees?**

The numbers of potential applicants are unknown. This is because professional qualifications are not consistently recorded and some organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees who are dentists might be assisting people that have accessed multiple services. Fewer than one hundred asylum seekers and refugee dentists are accessing the BDA's free membership offer. It is clear therefore, that it is lower than the total number of possible dental students or dentists seeking assistance.

### **How will you finance this additional group?**

The Charity is in a robust financial position and the Trustees will continue to monitor its income and expenditure, continuing to use its resources wisely to ensure we help as many people as effectively as possible.

### **Links**

We are aware of and intend to work with other organisations already supporting asylum seeker and refugees more generally and those specifically assisting dentists. A list of the

majority is below but note this is not exhaustive. Collaborative working should ensure the most appropriate support and resources are offered to those that can benefit from our assistance. It will also help people know where to come to.

- Al-mizan Charitable Trust - <https://www.almizantrust.org.uk/apply-for-support>
- BDA - <https://bda.org/join/asylum-seeker-and-refugee-membership>
- BMA - <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/international-doctors/getting-a-job-in-the-uk/help-for-refugee-doctors>
- BMA Charities - <https://bmacharities.org.uk/>
- Bridges Programme (Glasgow) <https://www.bridgesprogrammes.org.uk/>
- Council for at-risk Academics (CARA) <https://www.cara.ngo/>
- Dental Mentors <https://dentalmentorsuk.com/>
- Displaced People in Action (Wales) <https://www.dpia.org.uk/>
- Health Education England - <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/global-engagement/refugee-asylum-seeker-healthcare-professionals%E2%80%99-transitions-experiences-working-nhs>
- Investing in People and Culture (Tyneside and Teeside) <https://i-p-c.org/>
- Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (London) <https://www.lrmn.org.uk/our-work/>
- Lincolnshire Refugee Doctor Project - <https://lincsrefugeedoctors.co.uk/>
- National Zakat Foundation - <https://nzf.org.uk/>
- NHS Education for Scotland - <https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/our-work/refugee-doctors-programme/>
- Reache Northwest - <https://www.reache.org.uk/>
- RefuAid <https://refuaid.org/>
- Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit RAGU (London Metropolitan University) - <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/services-and-facilities/refugee-assessment-and-guidance-unit/>
- Refugee Council, Building Bridges Programme (London) - <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/projects/helping-refugee-health-professionals-to-join-the-nhs/>
- Refugee Women's Association <https://refugeewomen.org.uk/Aboutus%20services>
- Restart Refugee Support - <https://www.restartrefugeesupport.org/>
- Royal College of Surgeons <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/careers-in-surgery/international-trainees-and-surgeons/refugee-surgeons/>
- Student Action for Refugees - <https://star-network.org.uk/>
- Wales Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors and Dentists (WARD) via Health Education and Improvement Wales (previously Wales Deanery) <https://heiw.nhs.wales/support/professional-support/support-available/support-for-refugee-doctors-via-ward/>