UNHCR ACNUR
La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados

HIRING REFUGEES IN BELIZE: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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This guide gives companies, associations, unions, chambers, and other private sector actors the regulatory framework and practical tools needed to hire recognized refugees in Belize.

Hiring a recognized refugee who holds a valid Social Security card **is legal**. It is equivalent to hiring any Belizean national, provided standard labour legislation requirements are met.

Under Article 13 of the Refugees Act[1], every recognized refugee in Belize:

> *a) shall be entitled to the rights and be subject to the duties contained in the Convention as if the references therein to refugees were references to recognized refugees;*
> *(b) shall be subject to all laws in force within Belize; and*
> *(c) shall be afforded a reasonable opportunity to work and contribute to the development of Belize.*

Hiring recognized refugees is an economic opportunity. For businesses and host communities alike, it provides access to a motivated workforce, increased tax revenues, stronger local demand, and potential entry into new markets.

This guide equips employers to hire responsibly, stay compliant with regulations, and build inclusive workplaces.

[1] Belize Refugees Act, available at the following **link.**

Who is an Asylum-Seeker?

Under Section 10 of the Refugees Act, an "asylum seeker" is:

A person who applies for recognition of refugee status, and who remains under that designation until a decision has been made on the application and, where applicable, the person has had the opportunity to exhaust the right of appeal provided under that section.

Who is a Refugee in Belize?

Under Section 4 of the Refugees Act, a refugee is a person who meets the criteria set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the broader definition of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration:

- ***Owes a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion; and***
- ***Is unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of that fear.***
- ***Owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, he is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.***

A **recognized refugee** is a person formally recognized under the Refugees Act.

! Only recognized refugees holding a Social Security Card (SSC) are legally authorized to work in Belize.

Considerations for Hiring Refugees

REQUIREMENTS	ASYLUM-SEEKER	RECOGNIZED REFUGEE	PERMANENT RESIDENT
LEGAL STATUS	Temporary status	Granted refugee status under the Refugees Act of Belize	Regularized permanent resident
IDENTITY DOCUMENT	Asylum certificate or Asylum stamp	Refugee Certificate (ID) issued by the Ministry of Immigration and SSC	Permanent Residence Card issued by the Ministry of Immigration and SSC
SOCIAL SECURITY	No legal right to obtain social security	Employers register employees on fixed-term contracts with the Social Security Boards, for access to all benefits on par with nationals	Employers register employees on fixed-term contracts with the Social Security Boards, for access to all benefits on par with nationals
WORK PERMIT	No legal right to work	Legal right to work. SSC valid for employment for 3 years	Legal right to work. SSC has no expiration date

How to Formally Hire a Recognized Refugee?

PHASE 1: Verification – Standard Due Diligence

Before hiring, confirm the candidate holds a **(1) Refugee Card** issued by the Refugees Department, confirming status and lawful stay, and a **(2) Social Security Card (SSC)** confirming eligibility for formal employment.

Verifying both documents is standard due diligence and the employer's responsibility.

The following pages shows each card with practical guidance for verification.

SSC is Valid for Employment	Recognized refugees have the legal right to work. A valid SSC is sufficient for employment; no work permit is required.

Employees are responsible for registering with Social Security and presenting a valid SSC when seeking work. Employers are responsible for confirming that every employee has a "valid for employment" SSC before work begins, completing registration at the start of employment and ensuring contributions are paid from the first day of work.

Background checks	Recognized refugees have undergone thorough background checks as part of the asylum process.

Standard health requirements	Under the Labour Act[2], Chapter 297, health requirements for hiring refugees follow standard procedures applicable to all workers.

"Every worker who enters into a contract shall be medically examined at the expense of the employer[3]."

How to verify Government-Issued Certificates?

Refugee Certificate

FRONT

Issuing Authority on both sides

Name of the Individual

Personal data

Photo of the Individual on both sides

Applicable law

Unique Card Number

BACK

Issuing and Expiration date

"Principal" refers to the primary applicant on the asylum claim.

QR code*

First line: Unique Card Number

Third line: Name of the Individual

Second line: Date of Birth, Sex, Date of Expiration, Nationality

[2,3]Belize Labour Act, available at the following **link.**

*Currently the QR code is not readable, pending system finalization and launch. Will be utilized in the future for verification.

Social Security Card (SSC)

FRONT

Issuing Authority

Signature of the Individual

Unique SSC number

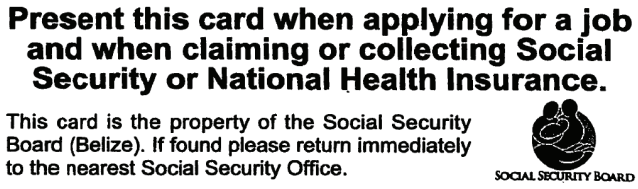
Personal data

Issuing and Expiration date

Confirms eligibility for formal employment in Belize

BACK

Reverse side instructs the holder to present this card when applying for work.



PHASE 2: Formalization of Employment

Employment is formalized through a written contract in accordance with the Labour Act, Chapter 297. This includes compliance with applicable standards on wages, working conditions, and mandatory social security contributions.

Under Articles 32 and 51 every employer shall provide the worker with work in accordance with the contract. The contract must set out the rights and obligations of both parties.

PHASE 3: Standard Obligations of Employer

Present the contract to the Commissioner	Under Article 52, employers must submit the contract to the Labour Commissioner within seven days of execution.
Social Security contributions	Employers must ensure that contributions are paid from the first day of work.

PHASE 4: Commencement of Employment

Once all administrative and legal requirements are met, the individual may begin work.

Once employed, recognized refugees are subject to the same occupational health and safety standards as all other employees. Employers are responsible for safe working conditions and compliance with applicable labour and health regulations.

In Belize, hiring a recognized refugee follows the same process as hiring a national.

BENEFITS FROM INCLUDING REFUGEES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

- **Corporate Social Responsibility** through inclusive practices.
- **Increased productivity** through workplace **diversity.** Diverse workforce brings skills, talents, and languages.
- Promotes **social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.**
- **Lower turnover costs** thanks to committed and stable workers.
- **Contribution to the national economy** through formal integration: tax revenues and higher local demand.
- **Adaptability and resilience.**

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM COMPANIES

EMPLOYMENT

Hiring refugees who meet the job requirements and providing them with formal labor.

VALUE CHAINS

Refugees strengthen value chains as employees, suppliers, or entrepreneurs, improving flexibility, local sourcing, and business resilience.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Strengthening skills and abilities of refugees allows rapid and strategic integration into the labor market.

AWARENESS AND GOOD PRACTICE SHARING

As an inclusive employer, raising awareness among other companies, and demonstrating leadership in corporate social responsibility and diversity.