

Published: 21 July 2017

Country: UK



Breaking into journalism can be a real struggle for many in the UK. If you are a refugee, regardless of your talent and experience, this could be almost impossible.

With this in mind, [Vivienne Francis](#), Journalism Course Leader at London College of Communication, started the [Refugee Journalism Project](#), an initiative that supports refugee and exiled journalists to re-establish their careers in the UK.

At the [newsrewired](#)

event of

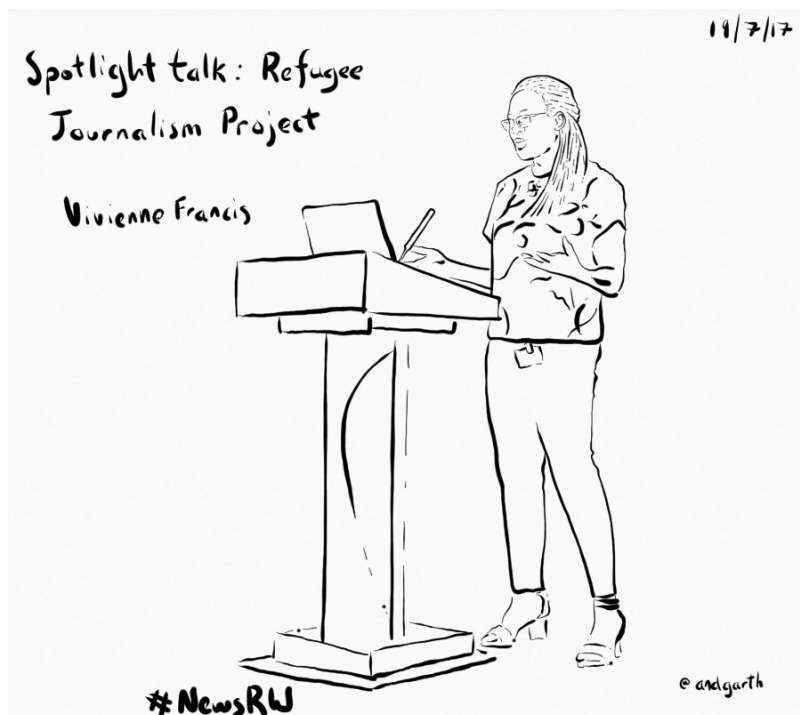
[Journalism.co.uk](#)

on 19 July 2017, Vivienne Francis shared the difficulties many individuals are facing how the project has offered a constructive response to the refugee crisis.

Studies show that governments policies were not responding adequately to the skills and professionalism refugees are bringing to the UK. Too much emphasis is put on medium jobs, basic English, basic trainings, and basic IT skills, producing a sense of loss and a negative impact on their ability to integrate in the UK.

In the journalism sector, barriers that many face to get a foot in are magnified for those who have foreign qualifications and experience, and no network to rely on.

“Anyone who tries to get into journalism or media knows that it’s about who you know,” said Vivienne Francis. You need to know how to make the approach, whom to speak to, and how to find jobs – for example going to events rather applying to a job advert for working on a paper. Likewise, to see your articles published, you need to know how to make a pitch, how to develop an idea, and the differences in publications in the UK. Recruiters also tend to hire people whose qualifications are easier to understand.



In addition to this, Vivienne Francis continued, there is the phenomenon of pigeonholing. When employers understand that the applicant is from Syria, then they assign them to a specific category: they want them to report on Syria and the refugee crisis. But, as a sport journalist, for example, why should you be defined by your status as refugee?

The Refugee Journalism Project, set up by the London College of Communication and the [Migrant Resource Centre](#), has helped refugee and exiled journalists through workshops (to learn new skills and brush up old ones), mentoring (with high profile journalists) and internships (within big and small organisations).

The project supported 35 individuals from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Yemen, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, and Cuba, with different skills and experience.

Abdulwahab Tahhan, from Syria, had applied for more than 100 media related jobs in the UK, with no success or feedback, despite his good level of qualifications, fantastic English, and brilliant research skills. The Refugee Journalism project managed to ensure an internship – which then became a job – at Airwars, a charity monitoring and assessing civilian casualties from airstrikes.

There have been challenges. “It has been difficult to separate the personal from the professional,” Vivienne Francis said. “Ultimately, who cares if the CNN gives you work if you don’t have anywhere to live, or you don’t know if your family is safe?”

From the beginning, it was clear that the project is not just about finding a job, Vivienne Francis said. Many refugees struggle for a dispersal system that moves them around or place them in communities where they would feel isolated.

“By us organising these key moments where they could meet and get together with likeminded individuals, they felt a sense that they were professional people again,” Vivienne Francis added. “It gave them that kind of respect and the sense that they are starting to rebuild their lives, sense of belonging and values.”