



TENT

Recruiting Refugee Talent

A Resource for
HR/ People Teams



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Who is a refugee?

- ▲ A **refugee** is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution or violence, e.g. a civil war or ethnic violence.
- ▲ An **asylum seeker** is someone who has left their country and has formally applied for refugee status in your country but is waiting for an official determination by the government.

Who would be considered a refugee?

- ▲ Someone fleeing civil war in Syria.
- ▲ Someone who is Buddhist fleeing religious persecution in China.
- ▲ Someone who is LGBTQ fleeing persecution in Iran.
- ▲ Someone fleeing persecution in Eritrea for protesting for democracy.

Why hire refugees?

In addition to changing the course of a refugee's life, there are also business reasons to hire refugees:

- ▲ Refugee employees have lower turnover than other workers.*
- ▲ Refugees are considered to be exceptionally motivated, resilient, and loyal employees.
- ▲ Refugees are typically more willing to relocate for decent work.
- ▲ Refugees make your workforce more diverse, which drives innovation and financial performance, among other benefits.**

"Refugees provide us with an amazing talent pool – they're skilled, dedicated, loyal and engaged."

— Rohini Anand, Former SVP of
Corporate Responsibility & Global Chief
Diversity Officer

Sodexo

*A study found that, for example, in the manufacturing sector, refugees turn over at 4 percent per year, compared to 11 percent for others (Fiscal Policy Institute, *Refugees As Employees: Good Retention, Strong Recruitment*, 2017). ** Studies have found that diversity unlocks innovation, drives market growth, and increases financial performance (Harvard Business Review, *How Diversity Can Drive Innovation*, 2012; Harvard Business Review, *The Other Diversity Dividend*, 2018).

Why should I adapt my company's recruitment practices for refugees?

Refugees face structural barriers when trying to enter the workforce, making them seem less competitive in a standard recruitment process. For example,

- ▲ Refugees may be unfamiliar with online job boards where your positions are advertised.
- ▲ They may lack professional networks to access job opportunities or connect them to employers.
- ▲ And when refugees apply, they may be inadvertently screened out because of gaps in their resume or foreign education and certifications are unfamiliar to your HR department.

While a refugee candidate might be a good fit for the job, they may not succeed in a conventional hiring process.

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How to recruit refugee candidates

This section will cover:

- ▲ Working with local partners.
- ▲ Advertising vacancies through refugee community networks.
- ▲ Considering relocation.



Working with local partners

Refugee job seekers may not be aware of vacancies at your company:

- ▲ Recently-arrived refugees typically aren't tapped into professional or social networks to link them to jobs.
- ▲ They may also not be aware of common ways of finding jobs in their new country, such as online job boards or platforms.

Working with local partner/s can help you to reach refugee job seekers, so they don't miss out on opportunities at your company.

Watch out: Most potential local partners will focus on a specific city or region, rather than on an entire country. (Even national or regional organizations often have relatively independent local offices and programs.) If you need support more broadly across a national market, you may need to work with multiple partners. Tent can help facilitate this!

Why should my company work with a local partner?

- ▲ It's the most efficient way of building a pipeline of refugee candidates.
- ▲ In some cases, local partners can pre-screen and provide a shortlist of refugee applicants for the roles you are looking to fill.
- ▲ Some organizations may also offer other support services for your refugee hires, including language training.

Building local partnerships

Partnerships built on trust and shared values are vital.

You'll want to be sure that the organization/s you choose to work with understand/s your operational needs and is/are able to help you recruit the best candidates.

Steps for kickstarting successful local partnerships:

- ▲ Reach out to Tent to help you identify organizations in your locations of interest.
- ▲ With Tent's help, determine which organizations can best meet your company's needs and get introduced.
- ▲ Connect with the organization/s directly to confirm that they have the services and capabilities to meet your specific needs.
- ▲ Consider running a pilot with the organization, then scale up to a longer-term partnership, incorporating learnings along the way.

Advertising vacancies through community networks

Refugee communities are often tight-knit, so it may be possible for you to market job opportunities to them directly, in addition to working with local partners on outreach:

- ▲ Refugee community networks could include word-of-mouth networks, as well as community and religious organizations (e.g. churches, mosques), outreach centres, radio programs, newspapers, and social media groups.
- ▲ Translating job descriptions into the local languages of refugees (e.g. Arabic, Ukrainian) in your area may also help.

In some cases, “marketing” through refugee community networks may be organic – research shows that if a refugee has a positive experience with an employer, other members of their community are likely to seek employment at the same company.*

*A study of companies in the United States found that organizations that hire refugees experience positive recruitment effects (Fiscal Policy Institute, *Refugees As Employees: Good Retention, Strong Recruitment*, 2017).

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Adapting the recruitment process

You should plan to adapt your standard process for assessing a candidate's suitability for the job or placement to make it more accessible for refugee candidates. Luckily, some of the most effective things you can do are likely already part of your process!

- ▲ Ensure that your standard recruitment process is focused as much as possible on assessing the candidate's behavior, attributes and potential to do the job.
- ▲ Evaluate skills and competence during on-the-job training through skills profiling tools.
- ▲ Test for any technical skills that are a prerequisite for doing the job (*for example, numeracy, computer skills, experience operating heavy machinery, or business-level written English*).
- ▲ Manage expectations about the nature of the work. Consider providing a workplace tour as part of the recruitment process, to ensure candidates understand what the job entails.

Challenge your team to assess the level of local language (e.g. English/French) proficiency that's required for the role, and then tailor the interview process accordingly.

Some refugee candidates, especially those who have recently arrived in Canada, may not be proficient in English or French. Many companies require a level of local language proficiency in the interview process that is higher than that required for the work itself.

Navigating language barriers in the recruitment process

You can use the following strategies to help overcome language barriers during the recruitment process:

- ▲ See if your local partner/s can assist with interpretation and paperwork completion for the initial screening and interviews.
- ▲ Ensure clear communication by speaking clearly and avoiding raising your voice or using idiomatic language (*for example, avoid using phrases like “give it a shot” or “it’s a piece of cake”*).
- ▲ Instead of asking yes/no questions, check for understanding by asking clarifying questions (*for example, ask “What time is your next interview taking place?” instead of “Do you know what time your next interview takes place?”*).



The resume review

When reviewing refugee candidates' resumes, be mindful of factors linked to their status, such as:

- ▲ Gaps in employment.
- ▲ Mismatched or out-of-date skills and experience.
- ▲ Lack of local experience or references.
- ▲ Lack of familiarity with job application norms in your country.

As you review, do your best to:

- ▲ Determine if and how gaps in experience can be managed.
- ▲ Evaluate if overseas work history or qualifications could indicate candidates' potential or relevant skills and experience.
- ▲ Consider using an independent agency or online resources to verify educational and skills equivalence from foreign institutions.

Do not reject a person for an entry level job solely because they appear “overqualified.”

- ▲ Many highly skilled refugees are unable to practice their profession when they are resettled and seek out lower-skilled roles.
- ▲ These candidates may decide to eventually leave to resume a career in their former fields – or they may be great candidates for fast-tracked responsibilities.

Adapting the recruitment process

As you schedule and conduct interviews, try to:

- ▲ Train interviewers to be aware of their unconscious biases and give them tools and information to overcome these, such as background information on refugees.
- ▲ Consider diversity when composing interview panels to further mitigate unconscious biases.
- ▲ Encourage strong two-way communication between interviewers and candidates to ensure they fully understand each other. Do not assume that refugee candidates' silence is confirmation of their understanding.
- ▲ Explain to interviewers that refugee candidates may not always adhere to certain norms – especially those concerning body language – and that this is a sign of cultural differences, not disrespect. *(For example, some cultures do not practice eye contact or handshakes between men and women.)*
- ▲ Be open about the local business culture and ensure that candidates are comfortable with the behavioral expectations at your workplace.

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Addressing challenges for refugee employees

If you're looking to recruit refugee talent, you're probably also thinking about how you can support refugee employees post-hire. This final section covers employers' most frequent areas of interest:

- ▲ Overcoming language barriers on the job.
- ▲ Addressing cultural differences.
- ▲ Accounting for transportation issues.

Note that challenges related to the topics above are usually resolved within a few months, once employees are acclimated to their new role and workplace!



Overcoming language barriers on the job



Many refugees will not be fluent in English or French when they join your company. But that doesn't mean that they can't start contributing right away!

In fact, there are plenty of workarounds that you can put in place to support your refugee employees as they build up proficiency in your local language, including:

- ▲ Translating signage and other critical materials into refugees' local language/s (e.g. Punjabi, Arabic, Chinese).
- ▲ Getting bilingual colleagues to help with interpretation.
- ▲ To learn more, check out Tent's training on *How to Overcome Language Barriers*.

Did you know that the workplace is almost always the best place for refugees to improve their local language skills? You may end up being pleasantly surprised by how quickly employees improve!

Addressing cultural differences



Some employers may be concerned about managing cultural differences in the workplace. By taking certain steps, companies can create a culturally inclusive environment from the start:

- ▲ Matching new refugee employees with “buddies” or co-workers that can help address the new hire’s questions relating to the company’s culture.
- ▲ Consider making accommodations for refugee employees, e.g. aligning break times with prayer times or adjusting your uniform policies to accommodate cultural norms around appropriate clothing.

Some refugee employees may need to be told that it is acceptable to speak up and ask clarifying questions. In this case, co-workers should know to check in with their refugee colleagues and encourage this behavior.

Accounting for transportation issues



Some refugee candidates may not have a driver's license or access to a car. If public transportation is not available, and candidates are concerned about transportation, consider the following options:

- ▲ Arrange for carpooling with other employees.
- ▲ Consider arranging employer-sponsored transport for employees who need it.
- ▲ Provide support and/or incentives for obtaining a driver's license.
- ▲ For more best practices, check out Tent's resource on *Addressing Transportation Barriers for Refugee Employees*.

Having a car is essential in many places to get to work, particularly in locations that do not have extensive public transportation systems. Companies can help refugees address this!

Thank you!



Additional Resources*

- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, [*U.S. Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees*](#), 2017.
- Breaking Barriers, [*UK Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees*](#), 2018.
- Action Emploi Réfugiés, [*Info Emploi Réfugiés*](#), 2018.
- Friendly Nations Initiative and Migration Council Australia, [*Australian Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees*](#), 2019.
- Deloitte Insights, [*A New Home at Work: an Employer's Guide to Fostering Inclusion for Refugees in the Workplace*](#), 2019.
- HIAS, ACNUR Colombia, and Ministerio del Trabajo de Colombia, [*Guía para la contratación de refugiados y migrantes venezolanos en Colombia*](#), 2019.
- Casa Refugiados, [*Guía para la contratación de refugiados en México*](#), 2019.