Creating a Culturally Inclusive Workplace for Ukrainian Refugees
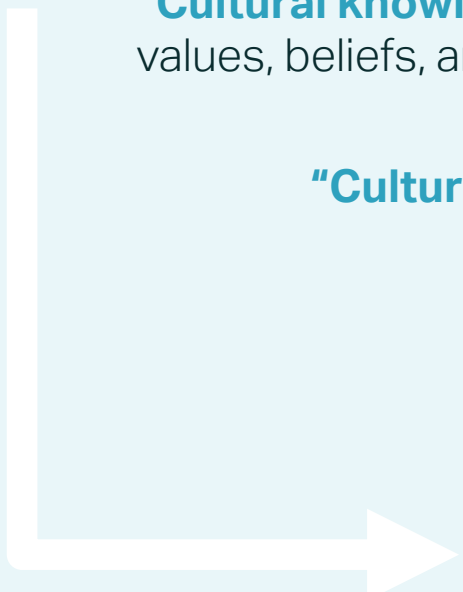
A Resource for HR/People Teams and Managers

Contents

Companies should prioritize cultural inclusion to ensure the success of Ukrainian refugees

▲ Cultural inclusion of refugees and displaced persons can bring social and economic benefits to your company.

▲ You may be familiar with the news on Ukraine, but there is more to learn about the country and its people.

▲ It is important to educate your workforce on cultural inclusion, and the steps your company is taking to support the integration of Ukrainian employees. This has wide positive social effects.

▲ TENT.ORG

Going beyond 'cultural knowledge': building 'cultural competence'

Companies should aim to build cultural competence. This happens in stages:

"Cultural knowledge" — knowing about some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group.

"Cultural awareness" — being open to the idea of changing cultural attitudes.

"Cultural sensitivity" — knowing that there are differences between cultures, but not assigning values to these. Cultural sensitivity also encompasses cultural humility – admitting that one does not know, but is willing to learn, about other cultures.

"Cultural competence" — brings together the previous stages.

An informed approach to hiring and onboarding

Employers do not need to be experts in Ukrainian culture to make their new employees feel welcome; we simply encourage you to have a learning mindset!

Learning about the culture and customs of Ukrainians, and the challenges they are facing, can help employers to have an informed approach to hiring and onboarding.

Ukrainians are highly receptive to others wishing to learn more about their culture and country. They will value working in an environment where there is already a basis of understanding about their background.

▲ TENT.ORG

Terminology

A refugee is **an individual who has been forced to flee their home country** because of a well-founded fear of persecution or violence.

Colloquially, a Ukrainian fleeing the war in Ukraine is often referred to as a refugee. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, **millions of Ukrainians have fled their home country.** This mass exodus of people is one the fastest forced displacement crises in history and the largest since the Second World War.

Legal statuses of displaced Ukrainians in the U.S.

However, most displaced Ukrainians in the U.S. are not legally considered refugees, as they are in the U.S. under different legal immigration statuses.

Since February 24, 2022, most Ukrainians have entered the U.S. in the following ways:

1.
Humanitarian Parole: individuals who are granted temporary admission to the U.S. based on urgent humanitarian need. This is a temporary status, and individuals will need to adjust their status within two years. The U.S. government created a parole program for Ukrainians called "Uniting for Ukraine", which has helped more than 125,000 Ukrainians to resettle in the U.S. since February 2022.

2.
Temporary Protected Status (TPS): individuals already in the U.S. who are from a foreign country that has been designated for TPS due to conditions that make it impossible for nationals to return. This is a temporary status, and individuals will need to adjust their status to stay in the U.S. permanently. The U.S. government granted Ukrainians TPS in April 2022. Approximately 60,000 Ukrainians are in the U.S. under TPS.

Some Ukrainians have also arrived as refugees and asylum seekers.

Ukrainians under all of these immigration statuses can legally work in the U.S.

Contents

A quick overview of recent Ukrainian history

1917 | Land on the eastern border of Ukraine becomes part of the Soviet Union after WWI, while western territory is divided among Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. A remaining bastion of territory in western Ukraine claims independence shortly before succumbing to surrounding powers.

1932-33 | A forced famine-genocide called "Holodomor" is executed against Ukrainians by order of Josef Stalin and Soviet authorities seeking to squash Ukrainian identity and nationalism. Millions of Ukrainians die as a result.

1991 | Ukraine declares independence from the Soviet Union. The country experiences years of political and economic reforms throughout the 1990s. The process of adopting a new Ukrainian constitution causes massive social and political turmoil, and high inflation.

2004 | There are mass protests across Ukraine due to contested presidential election results. This uprising is called the "Orange Revolution".

Timeline of the war in Ukraine

November, 2013

President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych refuses to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union, causing mass protests across Ukraine.

January and February, 2014

Protests turn into a socio-political movement in favor of European integration called "Euromaidan". The Ukrainian government, backed by Russia, uses violence and force against protestors.

March, 2014

Russian forces occupy government buildings in Crimea, effectively illegally occupying the Ukrainian peninsula, and announce an illegal referendum to have Crimea become a part of Russia.

March and April, 2014

Russian forces begin to move into the region of eastern Ukraine known as "Donbas", which is defended by protestors from Euromaidan and volunteer battalions. This is the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Heavy fighting ensues, causing severe civilian casualties, as well as the displacement of millions of people from eastern Ukraine.

February 24, 2022

Russia begins its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with missiles and rockets launched at almost every city in Ukraine simultaneously. The war, which is still ongoing, has displaced millions of Ukrainians.

Understanding the U.S.'s relationship with Ukraine

For decades, and especially through the tumultuous 1990s, the U.S. favored its relationship with Russia over developing one with Ukraine. However, student and academic exchanges, as well as large investments into the Ukrainian economy, have developed strong cultural and social exchanges between the American and Ukrainian people.

Fearing escalation in its relationship with Russia, the U.S. did not intervene substantially when the war in Ukraine started in 2014. Instead, the U.S. put more investment into the development of Ukrainian civil society and democracy.

Since the 2022 Russian invasion, the U.S. government has provided significant military and economic aid to Ukraine, and mobilized its allies to do the same.

The Ukrainian economy

▲ Ukraine's economy is considered emerging and lower-middle income. Agriculture and industry are the two biggest professional sectors.

▲ According to a 2022 UNHCR report, 63% of Ukrainian refugees were employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine, with diverse professional and occupational backgrounds.

▲ According to UNHCR, the top 10 sectors where Ukrainian refugees have professional expertise are: education (16%); trading (12%); professional services (10%); health and social services (7%); other services (6%); accommodation and food (5%); financial services (5%); personal services (5%); construction (3%); and agriculture (3%).

Ukrainians in the U.S.

▲ **Large-scale Ukrainian immigration to the U.S. began in the 1880s** and has gone through several waves in response to socio-economic factors in Ukraine throughout the last century.

▲ According to U.S. Census estimates, there were approximately 1 million Americans of Ukrainian descent in 2021, **representing 0.3% of the American population.**

▲ Cities such as New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Los Angeles, Cleveland, and Seattle have large Ukrainian-American communities. Recently arrived Ukrainian refugees can also be found in these cities.
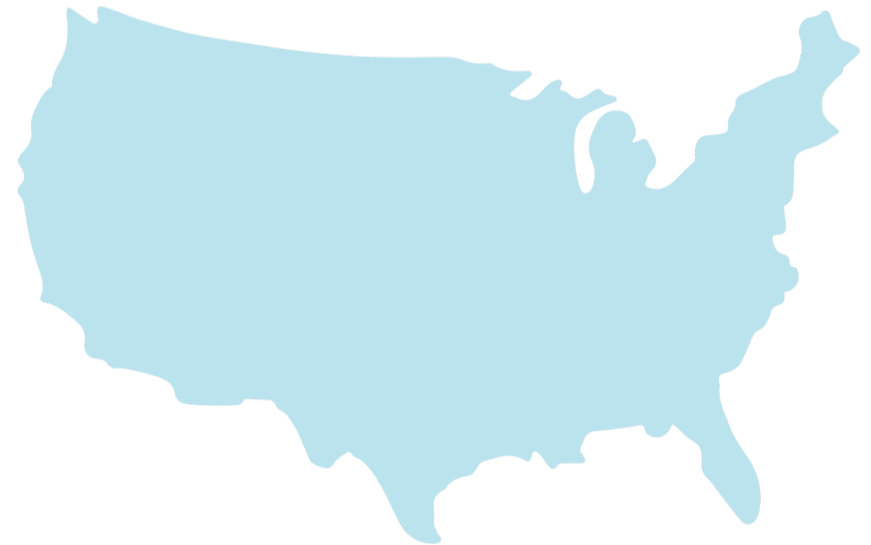
Educational and professional backgrounds of Ukrainians

Ukrainians are highly-educated and seek opportunities abroad to better their own and their families' lives. Among Ukrainians, labor migration is relatively popular. However, Ukrainians have deep ties to Ukraine and largely prefer to return to the country for retirement and/or regularly return throughout their time abroad.

Higher education is seen as key to securing a fruitful career, which is regarded as one of the highest markers of status. According to UNESCO, **Ukraine is among the most educated societies in the world,** with 83% of Ukrainians enrolled in a university, trade school, or college degree.

According to UNHCR, **seven in 10 Ukrainian refugees have completed higher levels of education** (i.e., have a bachelor's degree or higher).

Ukrainians and Ukrainian-Americans are most likely to work in IT, engineering, medicine, and the creative industries, including marketing and design.

Who are Ukrainian refugees?

▲ **Ukrainian refugees are highly educated, ambitious, cosmopolitan,** identify as European, and have a diverse profile of interests.

▲ Because military-age men are not allowed to leave Ukraine, women and children make up around 90% of all Ukrainian refugees, according to UNHCR.

▲ Because of large-scale internal displacement at the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2014, **it is possible that a Ukrainian refugee is experiencing displacement – and thus starting from scratch – for the second or even third time.**

▲ **TENT** | BACKGROUND ON UKRAINIAN CULTURE AND THE EXPERIENCES OF UKRAINIANS IN THE U.S.

16

Characteristics of Ukrainian refugees

While complete data is not yet available, Ukrainian refugees of working age are known to have the following characteristics:

▲ **Language knowledge:** typically, an intermediate level of English.

▲ **Industry expertise and skills:** Ukrainian refugees will have worked in a variety of sectors, including as IT professionals, accountants, administrative professionals, culinary professionals, project managers, healthcare professionals, engineers, blue collar workers, marketing professionals, etc., as well as being students and entrepreneurs.

▲ **Familiarity with American culture and business culture:** Ukrainians are highly exposed to and respect American culture and business culture. Many young Ukrainians, especially those who work in IT, regularly interact with American companies and are comfortable in American professional contexts.

Cultural norms of Ukrainian refugees

Ukrainians are largely modern Europeans with liberal values. Ukrainians are proud of their diverse and innovative country, and this translates into their identity. Older generations of Ukrainians do tend to be more conservative and traditional.

Ukraine has made great strides towards gender equality over the past decade. Because of the lower-middle-class status of most Ukrainians, **it is common for both men and women to work and provide for their families.**

▲ TENT.ORG

Ukrainian religious norms

Most Ukrainians are Christian, and many identify as either Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. For the latter, although the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is currently undergoing reforms, it is important to keep in mind that a **Ukrainian refugee may follow the Julian calendar,** meaning they celebrate major holidays such as Easter and Christmas at different times than when conventionally celebrated in the U.S.

Ukraine is also home to people of other religious backgrounds, including Crimean Tatars, who are typically Muslim, as well as Ukrainian Jews.

Ukrainian workplace norms

Ukrainians have high respect for authority, hold their supervisors in high regard, and will work to please them by any means necessary to prove their worth. They will rarely express discontent or disagreement with those in higher positions in the workplace.

A clear, articulated path towards promotion and development would be highly valuable for a Ukrainian refugee in a new workplace. Concrete deliverables and timelines with goalposts would aid with adaptability and integration.

Important considerations for employers hiring Ukrainian refugees (1/2)

Ukrainians generally prefer quiet praise over high praise. In Ukraine, managers do not typically praise their employees, especially in public. Ukrainians also perceive being humble and hardworking as a virtue. Like anyone, however, they appreciate knowing when they are doing well and being recognized for their work.

It is important to keep in mind the multiple levels of trauma Ukrainians deal with on a daily basis – from generational trauma because of their family suffering under the Soviet Union to the latest escalation in war that has caused serious damage to their mental well-being.

▲ TENT.ORG

Important considerations for employers hiring Ukrainian refugees (2/2)

Many Ukrainian refugees have gone through harrowing experiences of war and may have suffered personally. Do not assume that a Ukrainian refugee speaks Russian, and do not try to show off your Russian language skills to them. If a Ukrainian refugee had any contact with Russian soldiers or lived under Russian occupation, they will be easily triggered by hearing the Russian language.

Ukrainians are often described as being resilient, despite everything. They are sensitive to relying on others and asking for help, and prefer to rely on themselves and take the long way towards their goals if needed.

Contents

Trauma-informed HR practices

Ukrainian employees would benefit from the following trauma-informed practices:

▲ **Pre-employment:** establish an environment that makes the candidate comfortable, such as limiting the number of interviewers and avoiding questions on their recent evacuation or family left behind. Make sure that you assess their potential and hard skills, not their interviewing skills.

▲ **During employment:** create an inclusive atmosphere to ease a Ukrainian employee into their new job, including an **onboarding buddy** to help acquaint them with the new work culture and environment. Note that it is normal practice in Ukraine to skip onboarding, so a Ukrainian employee will benefit from understanding the onboarding timeline and expectations.

▲ **During potential off-boarding:** off-boarding is not part of Ukrainian employment culture, so it is likely that the concept may be stressful to a Ukrainian employee. Ensure that the experience is private and respectful, and provide constructive communication as to why off-boarding is mutually beneficial, as well as the steps involved.

Best practices for recruiting Ukrainian talent (1/2)

▲ **Securing a job as a Ukrainian refugee is extremely important, and it may be their highest priority as they adapt to life in the U.S.** During the recruitment process, a Ukrainian refugee may be unusually nervous, attempt to hide their stress and emotions, and/or appear to be cold. This is normal.

▲ **Explain the recruitment process,** including timelines and expectations, for every stage of the application process, as a Ukrainian refugee might not be familiar with American workplace norms.

▲ TENT.ORG

Best practices for recruiting Ukrainian talent (2/2)

▲ **Be transparent about your company's workplace dynamics** (e.g., the gender of managers, where employees sit in the corporate hierarchy, how colleagues and teams interact with each other, etc.) and communicate them early in the recruitment process. This will ensure that Ukrainian interviewees have an accurate understanding of whom they will be working with/for.

▲ **Be direct about salary expectations, as this will allow Ukrainian interviewees to plan ahead.** It is likely that they are one of/the only person in their family who is eligible to apply for jobs, so they may feel a lot of weight on their shoulders.

Best practices for integrating Ukrainian talent

▲ **Support Ukrainian employees with accessing your company's benefits** – this includes providing financial literacy training, including: explaining direct deposit, pay periods, taxes, and retirement accounts; and explaining benefits, particularly health care and insurance. Consider translating these materials into Ukrainian. (In most workplaces in Ukraine, benefits, health care, insurance, and different salary payment options do not exist).

▲ **Establish a schedule and mutual understanding of feedback and performance reviews,** and be explicitly clear about potential consequences for performance issues.

▲ **Establish expectations around salary progression and career growth,** and offer opportunities for professional development and growth at the company.

▲ **Explain channels for providing feedback and raising concerns about HR issues.** Things like non-retaliation policies, for example, are not common in Ukraine. Ukrainian employees are generally more familiar with these HR procedures if they previously worked for an international company.

Creating safe/accommodating physical environments

▲ **Working in an office is often a formal affair for Ukrainians, especially those who are older,** so they may be more accustomed to attending work in formal business attire. Speak briefly with new Ukrainian employees about dress code and/or acceptable work attire.

▲ Ukrainian workplaces prioritize hard work over taking breaks. **Work/life balance is not a normal consideration.** Be explicit to Ukrainian employees about lunch breaks, vacation, and how acceptable it is to leave work early or come to work late (especially if the Ukrainian employee has family or childcare responsibilities).

▲ TENT.ORG

Creating safe/accommodating physical environments

▲ Communicate how acceptable it is to spend time with coworkers outside of work, including post-work socializing and "Happy Hours". **If this is an important part of workplace culture, communicate this early on.**

▲ **Consuming food and alcoholic beverages with colleagues is regarded as normal and acceptable in Ukrainian workplaces,** especially for older Ukrainians. While it is an insulting stereotype that all Ukrainians are alcoholics, alcohol plays an important role in most personal or professional celebrations for Ukrainians. Sharing food is also an important part of bonding with coworkers in Ukrainian workplaces. If there is a shared lunch room, a Ukrainian employee may often bring food to share with colleagues.

▲ TENT.ORG

Educating managers on Ukrainian refugees' needs

▲ Leaders and managers are at the front lines of creating a culturally inclusive environment.

▲ Share this training with managers directly working with their new Ukrainian employees!

▲ TENT.ORG

Cultural inclusion is good for companies AND Ukrainian refugees

✓ When refugees better understand their new community's culture, they can better adapt to the workplace, increasing their prospects of success.

✓ **Respect and appreciation of all cultures** helps refugees to feel engaged in their workplace.

✓ **Cultural inclusion** deepens workplace relationships, enabling refugees to build a professional network, which they so desperately need.

✓ **Reducing cultural barriers** can enhance productivity by preventing slowdowns caused by misunderstandings or conflict.

✓ Companies can benefit from new ideas, collaboration, and productivity as a result of **a diverse AND inclusive workforce.**

Ensuring that the whole company 'walks the talk' on cultural inclusion

Seeking feedback from Ukrainian refugee employees will be a critical part of this process. Asking more than once will help to break through any hesitancy around engaging or raising issues of concern, or areas of discomfort.

🔗 **You can find this presentation on Tent's Members' Hub at www.tent.org/member-resources.**

▲

Thank you!