



TENT

Communicating about your refugee efforts

A Resource for
Comms/Corporate
Affairs Teams



By the end of this presentation, you will:

- ▲ Know who a refugee is and understand the scale of the refugee crisis
- ▲ Understand the importance of public communications around refugee issues
- ▲ Familiarize yourself with tried and tested communications narratives that resonate with the general public
- ▲ Be introduced to communications tactics to amplify your work
- ▲ Find out how other companies and organizations have successfully communicated about their refugee efforts



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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.

For example:

- 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.

- 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.
- A **migrant** is someone who voluntarily leaves their country, for example to find work or better living conditions.

The scale of the refugee crisis & the importance of economic integration

- There are currently **30m refugees around the world** - the highest number since the Second World War.
- Refugees are mostly fleeing protracted crises, like civil war in Syria or the crisis in Venezuela.
- When refugees are resettled in high-income countries, they tend to stay there permanently.
- Refugees have the legal right to work in many countries (Tent can help your company to navigate this if there are any questions).
- At the same time, refugees face increased barriers to economically integrate in their new host communities - this is why it's so important for the business community to get involved.

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We're communicating within a challenging public discourse

At Tent, we realize that publicly communicating a company's efforts to support refugees can feel risky:



Across the world - from the U.S., to Europe, as well as in refugee hosting countries like Turkey - refugees have become increasingly politicized. This has been reflected in the way these issues are portrayed in the media

More and more, the lines between refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have become blurred in the public discourse, making it more challenging to make the case for refugees

Negative and often inaccurate language (such as "aliens" or "illegal immigrants") - often on social media - reiterates unhelpful imagery and concepts about refugees in the public consciousness

Consumers respond positively to brands working to integrate refugees

Tent and [New York University's Stern School of Business](#) carried out consumer perceptions [research](#) showing that the U.S., European, and Latin American consumers are more likely to purchase from companies that hire refugees, support refugee enterprises, or tailor products to meet refugees' needs.

While it can feel risky to communicate about an issue that polarizes public opinion, the research tells us that doing it has a **positive impact** on brand trust.



Millennials are especially supportive of brands that include refugees - but so are many other demographics

- Millennials in the U.S. and Europe are more likely to purchase from brands that take action to integrate refugees.
- **In the U.S.**, as well as millennials, female consumers and consumers of color are more likely to buy from brands that include refugees.
- **In Europe**, while political ideology is a strong indicator of whether a consumer will be supportive of a brand that helps refugees, consumers on the right of the political spectrum are surprisingly supportive of certain activities that support refugees, like hiring refugees abroad.

When a company publicly communicates about their refugee efforts, they normalize working with refugees

- According to the [2021 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), business is the most trusted institution in comparison to government, NGO's, and the media.
- Business has a 61% trust level globally and the only institution among the four studied that is seen as both ethical and competent.
- This shift in trust has heightened expectations of business leadership on social issues; 86% of the public expect CEOs to publicly speak out on societal issues. 68% agreed that CEOs should step in when the government does not fix societal problems.
- When businesses embrace sustainable practices, there was a 5.7% increase in trust.

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Connect your refugee-related work to your company's broader social impact efforts

Your company's commitment will be more authentic and credible when framed as part of, or as an extension of, your existing efforts.

In this way, you can connect your refugee efforts to your company's broader values and programs, e.g.:

- Frame a commitment to hire refugees as part of your company's diversity and inclusion program, highlighting your emphasis on a diverse workforce
- Frame a commitment to buy from refugee businesses as part of your efforts to diversify your supplier base

Example: Hilton announced its commitment to impact thousands of refugees to coincide with the launch of its multi-year corporate responsibility strategy under the 'social impact' pillar

Explain that your efforts to support refugees don't come at the expense of creating other jobs (or supporting other vulnerable groups)

- If a commitment to support refugees is communicated in a vacuum - without explaining how it fits into a wider job creation opportunities – it could easily lead to misunderstandings and potential backlash
- It's critical to communicate that jobs for refugees don't come at the expense of jobs for other people. It's always valuable to explain that activities supporting refugees supplement your existing job creation efforts, as well as activities to support other disadvantaged communities.

Example: A few years back, a company faced criticism for committing to hire refugees when it was mistakenly believed that this would come at the expense of its program to hire military veterans. They rectified this error but could have prevented it by clearly articulating its continued support of other vulnerable populations in the original communications.

Frame your work to support refugees around integrating them into their new societies

[More in Common](#), an initiative to address polarization, has done research on the best ways to communicate about refugee issues:

- Instead of using “us vs. them” dichotomies in your communications, frame your narrative around integration - for example, by talking about how you’re trying to make sure that refugees already in the country can become productive, gainfully-employed, tax-paying members of their new society. This framing resonates with conservative as well as progressive audiences, especially in Europe and North America.
- The most powerful counter to the “us vs them” narrative is an inclusive narrative of the “bigger us” - framing hiring policies as being designed to benefit and create opportunity for all.



Consider carefully whether calling for greater refugee resettlement is right for your brand

A very small percentage of refugees are officially resettled in new countries each year - there are many millions more that seek and await resettlement. However, our research shows that consumers respond least positively to companies who publicly communicate or advocate for greater refugee resettlement.

While businesses speaking out to advocate for more refugees can lend a powerful voice to the issue, and we have seen companies undertake these types of campaigns with positive outcomes for their brand, it does come with some reputational risk. As such, companies should tread carefully when it comes to communicating around this.

Example: Ben & Jerry's tweeted at the U.K.'s Home Secretary urging her to show more "humanity" to people arriving by boat to the U.K., saying that "people cannot be illegal". Ben & Jerry's received praise for speaking out on this issue, but also drew some criticism from the Government.

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Announce your refugee program or commitment alongside other companies

- Tent hosts several events each year where ten or more companies announce new commitments to support refugees. Consider making your announcement at one of these events – doing so can take some of the pressure off a standalone announcement.
- There is strength in numbers! If you announce a commitment alongside several other companies, it will strengthen your message and mitigate the small risk of being singled out for criticism.

Example: In December 2020, over 20 companies - working with Tent and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation - announced new commitments to mentor [LGBTQ refugees in North America](#). Read the article in [Fast Company here](#).

Get your key stakeholders and employees on board

- Make sure you've communicated your efforts to key stakeholders internally before you announce commitments to refugees publicly, and they fully understand your efforts.
- Providing relevant stakeholders like department heads, board members, and investors, with information and talking points ahead of a public announcement can align your team and prepare them to speak about your efforts in a unified way.
- You may also want to consider making an internal announcement to all of your staff before or just after announcing a commitment towards refugees publicly. We are happy to share and help you shape creative ideas on the best ways to make impactful internal announcements, including events highlighting refugee voices or inviting other organizations that can speak from experience about hiring refugees.

Example: TD Bank launched an internal refugee task force involving different department heads within the company to flesh out its commitment to support refugees.

Seek out third-party endorsements

- You may consider asking religious leaders, widely-respected humanitarians, or retired politicians to express support for your efforts to help refugees (and Tent can help facilitate this)
- You could include a quote from them in a press release or on your website; ask them to share and endorse your announcement on their social media channels; or connect them to interested reporters who are covering your efforts



Continue to find ways to tell your story

Announcing your commitment to support refugees isn't the end of the journey. Consider other storytelling opportunities over the course of the calendar year, to update your audience on your work or showcase refugees' stories (more on this in the next section). Some examples:

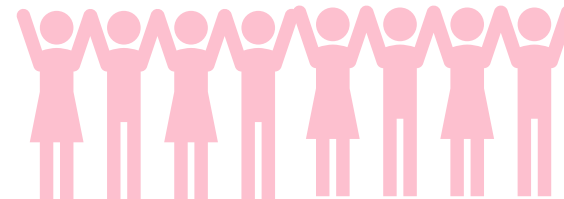
- **World Refugee Day** (20 June)
- **Pride Month** (US, June)
- **International Migrants Day** (December 18)

Get in touch with Tent to find out about communications campaigns we are running over the course of the year!

Example: In June 2020, Ikea issued a press release reiterating its commitment to support refugees, by re-announcing its intention to roll out its skills for employment program in 30 countries

Report back on success

- When businesses see other businesses successfully integrating refugees, they are inspired to take action. Consider periodically reporting back on progress - for example, if you have committed to hiring 100 refugees over the next two years, and by the end of year 1 you have hired 50, you may want to celebrate being on track to achieve your goal and share some of your successes.
- You may want to include some of the refugees in your program as part of these communications. In the next section we'll cover how you can do that successfully and tactfully!



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Put refugees at the heart of your storytelling

In your communications campaigns, think about highlighting the stories of individual refugees you work with, and let refugees tell their stories in their own words.

If you can tell the story of one refugee, one job, or one opportunity at a time, it will help shape a positive refugee narrative over time and serve as a powerful way to showcase your company's impact.

These are some great examples:

- Watch [Hilton's](#), [Starbucks'](#), and [Adecco Group's](#) films featuring refugee employees
- Listen to Tent's [Refugees at Work](#) podcast which features the story of a refugee in their new host community.

Safeguarding refugees' safety must come first

Be aware that some refugees will not be comfortable being portrayed in public communications for a variety of reasons, including for fear of putting their families' lives at risk in their country of origin. You should always be respectful of this.

Some **tips** on how to handle refugees' portrayal in your communications tactfully:

- Be very mindful when you are asking refugees to take part in public communications, and proactively ask about these concerns rather than wait for refugees to raise them themselves. In some cultures, it's not appropriate to say "no" to a request from your employer.
- Be very clear on what the communication ask is - for example, if their name/photo will be used on social media that might reach their home country.
- Only identify the refugee by their first name or consider changing their name if they feel uncomfortable being identified at all.

Be mindful of how you represent refugees in your communications

While many refugees you encounter will have experienced difficult journeys to their host communities, it's critical that in your communications subjects are portrayed positively and not as victims. This will help to shift the narrative from one of refugees as helpless victims to one of refugees as empowered, productive contributors to their new communities.

Create powerful audiovisual content to bring your story -and refugees' own perspectives- to life

Consider investing in powerful images and video content to help bring your audience closer to refugees' realities. Always try to ensure that these stories highlight the positive impact refugees are having on your company and on society.

Audiovisual content can be a really powerful way of doing this.





Thank you!