



TENT



AFGHAN-AMERICAN FOUNDATION

How U.S. companies can foster cultural inclusion for Afghan refugees

*A resource for HR/People
teams and leaders on hiring
newly arrived Afghans*



By the end of this presentation, you understand:

- ▲ Why cultural inclusion is key for employers hiring Afghans
- ▲ Background on Afghan culture and the experience of Afghans in the U.S.
- ▲ Best practices to ensure success of Afghan employees



Contents

1

**WHY CULTURAL
INCLUSION IS KEY
FOR EMPLOYERS
HIRING AFGHANS**

2

**BACKGROUND ON
AFGHAN CULTURE
& THE EXPERIENCE
OF AFGHANS IN
THE U.S.**

3

**BEST PRACTICES
TO ENSURE
SUCCESS OF
AFGHAN
EMPLOYEES**

Companies should prioritize cultural inclusion to ensure success of newly arrived Afghans

- ▲ Cultural inclusion of refugees can bring social and economic benefits to your business.
- ▲ You may be familiar with the news on Afghanistan, but there's more to learn about the country and its people.
- ▲ It's important to educate your workforce on cultural inclusion and the steps your business is taking to support the integration of Afghan employees.



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.

Employers don't need to be experts

Employers don't need to be experts in Afghan culture to make their new employees feel welcome - we simply encourage you to have a learning mindset!

Learning about the culture and customs of Afghans and their relationship to the current crisis can help employers have an informed approach to hiring and onboarding.



Contents

1

**WHY CULTURAL
INCLUSION IS KEY
FOR EMPLOYERS
HIRING AFGHANS**

2

**BACKGROUND ON
AFGHAN CULTURE
& THE EXPERIENCE
OF AFGHANS IN
THE U.S.**

3

**BEST PRACTICES
TO ENSURE
SUCCESS OF
AFGHAN
EMPLOYEES**

A quick rundown of Afghan history

1950s - 60s

New constitution brings free elections, civil rights, women's rights and universal suffrage.

1970s

USSR's influence in Afghanistan leads to USSR invasion and resistance by guerillas called Mujahideen.

1980s

Mujahideen begin to receive assistance from the U.S. & others, millions of Afghans flee to Pakistan and Iran. USSR withdraw from Afghanistan.

A quick rundown of Afghan history

1990s

Decade-long civil war begins, Taliban emerges in 1994 as a hardline religious group. Osama Bin Laden arrives in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban.

Taliban take over most of the country and impose strict rules on society, especially on women and minorities.

Post 2001

After al-Qaida's 9/11 attacks, a U.S.-led coalition launches Operation Enduring Freedom, targeting the Taliban and al-Qaida with military strikes. Hamid Karzai is named interim President of new Afghan government.

The U.S. and the international community become heavily involved in state-building. Taliban reemerges as an insurgent group challenging the Afghan government, leading to widespread conflict.

A quick rundown of Afghan history

2021

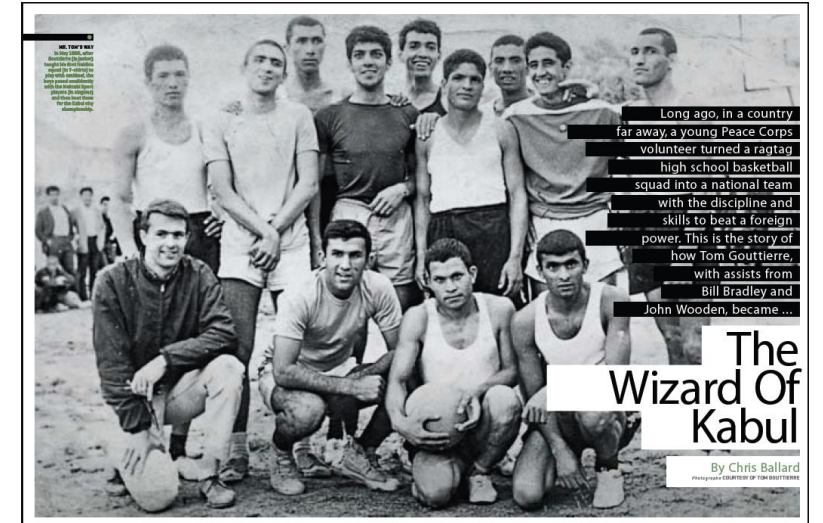
U.S troops withdraw on August 15, 2021 and Taliban seizes presidential palace and Afghan provinces.

Thousands of Afghans, including those who worked for the U.S. military and government, attempt to flee Afghanistan.

The U.S. government pledges to resettle 95,000 Afghans by December 2022.

Beyond history: Understanding the U.S.'s relationship with Afghanistan

- Between the 1960s and 1980s, dozens of young Americans served as members of the Peace Corps across Afghanistan.
- Internews Network helped establish the largest independent Afghan radio network.
- The Sister City International Program established direct city-to-city relationships between U.S. and Afghan cities.
- The YES International Student Exchange Program brought hundreds of Afghan high school students to small communities in the U.S.



The Afghan economy

- The Afghan economy has been reliant on agriculture and livestock. In the 1950s, after several social and economic reforms were introduced, more Afghans moved to urban centers and started to work in health, education, transport and commerce.
- Post-2001, the Afghan economy grew after billions in aid and development. Many Afghans worked for the U.S. government, military and U.S.-led NGOs.
- A new generation of Afghans found careers in new industries including media, government, civil society, non-profit etc.

The Afghan diaspora in the U.S.

- There have been **multiple waves of Afghan migration to the U.S.** dating back to the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and post-2001
- Prior to this current wave, there were **~500,000 Afghans** in the US, with higher concentrations in California (Bay Area, Sacramento, Los Angeles & San Diego), Maryland-Virginia (Baltimore, Silver Spring, Springfield, Fairfax, Woodbridge), New York (Queens, Long Island, Albany), and Texas



The Afghan diaspora in the U.S.

- ▲ A highly educated second-generation Afghan population has emerged in the U.S. The Afghan diaspora is employed in a variety of industries. The highest employment rates are in:
- Education, health care, and social assistance services (20%)
 - Retail trade (18%)
 - Transportation and warehousing (12%)
 - Arts, entertainment, and food services (11%)
 - Professional, scientific, and management (11%).



Who are the recently arrived Afghan evacuees?

There isn't a typical profile – Afghans are arriving with a wide variety of professional backgrounds, from limited to no education, to those who are well-educated, speak English proficiently, traveled the world extensively, etc. The more highly educated Afghans are those who served as interpreters or translators for the US government.

While complete data is not yet available, we know that:

- **Language:** Majority have elementary or no English proficiency.
- **Skillsets:** Farmers, drivers, tailors, cooks, administrative assistants & project managers, students, healthcare professionals, teachers, entrepreneurs, interpreters, engineers, IT professionals, accountants, and aircraft pilots.
- **Familiarity with American culture and business culture:** Afghans who were employed by the U.S. military/government/NGOs have had some exposure to American culture. There are many newly arrived Afghans who have not had this exposure.

Cultural norms of newly arrived Afghans

1. Afghanistan has traditionally had a more patriarchal culture and family structure, although that has shifted over the past 20 years. In most cases, but not all:
 - The husband/father in an Afghan family is the main decision-maker and in some cases the only member of the family to become the breadwinner.
 - Afghans have had limited exposure to work environments that are inclusive towards women and other minorities. For example, having a female supervisor or LGBTQ co-workers may be new to Afghan employees.



Employers need to help Afghan employees ease into a more **gender-equal and diverse workforce** by providing a safe space to discuss and introduce the diversity of the American workforce.

Cultural norms of newly arrived Afghans

2. “Peshani baaz vs. peshani basta” - In Dari, this means open forehead vs. closed forehead; Afghans prefer working with a “peshani baaz” mindset, that favors a more open way of interacting.

This means that Afghans are used to personable interaction, encouragement, occasional greetings, interest to know people’s professional backgrounds to create a positive, welcoming and productive work environment.

3. Indirect communication is used in personal and professional contexts – Saying “No” to supervisors is considered unprofessional in Afghan culture.

This can affect employee communication with co-workers and supervisors whether it is assessing employee needs, mastery of skills, or taking on more responsibility.

Cultural norms of newly arrived Afghans

4. Pride is a critical part of Afghan culture.

There is sensitivity about being displaced, losing one's career, and needing to rely on the generosity of others.



Employers should support the professional development of their Afghan employees. Some Afghan employees may be overqualified for the first job they take; other job opportunities may be more suitable for them in time as they improve language skills.

Important considerations for employers hiring newly arrived Afghans:

- ▲ Keep in mind that they have recently experienced displacement, and many are in the midst of an intense resettlement process.
- ▲ Key challenges that have emerged in the resettlement process:
 1. Affordable housing
 2. Access to basic necessities
 3. Ensuring that families are kept together / in close proximity



Contents

1

**WHY CULTURAL
INCLUSION IS KEY
FOR EMPLOYERS
HIRING AFGHANS**

2

**BACKGROUND ON
AFGHAN CULTURE
& THE EXPERIENCE
OF AFGHANS IN
THE U.S.**

3

**BEST PRACTICES
TO ENSURE
SUCCESS OF
AFGHAN
EMPLOYEES**

Trauma-informed human resources practices



Trauma-informed practices that Afghans would benefit from:

- **Pre-employment:** establish an environment that makes the prospective employee comfortable, such as limiting the number of interviewers and avoiding questions on their recent evacuation or family left behind. Make sure you assess their potential, not their interviewing skills.
- **During employment:** create an inclusive atmosphere to ease the Afghan employee into their new job, including an onboarding buddy to help acquaint the new employee with the new work culture and environment.
- **During potential off-boarding:** off-boarding is not part of the Afghan employment culture, and it is likely that the concept may be stressful to an Afghan employee. Ensure that the experience is private and respectful and provide constructive communication as to why off-boarding is mutually beneficial as well as steps involved.

Best practices and issues to be mindful of during recruitment

1. Explain the **recruitment process**, such as the timelines and expectations of each stage of the interview process.
2. Be mindful of **gender and age** dynamics to ensure that Afghan interviewees have an accurate understanding of who they would be working with/for.
3. Be direct about **salary expectations** early given that equity is important in Afghan culture



Best practices and issues to be mindful of during recruitment

4. Help support their **workplace financial literacy**, including through – explaining direct deposit, pay periods, and taxes, background on withholdings and retirement accounts and explaining benefits, particularly health care and insurance. Consider translating these materials into e.g., Dari and Pashto.
5. Establish a **schedule and mutual understanding of feedback** and performance reviews and be clear about potential consequences for performance issues explicitly.
6. Establish expectations around **salary progression and career growth**
7. Explain **channels for providing feedback and raising concerns** about HR issues – for example, things like non-retaliation policies are not common in Afghanistan.

Creating safe/accommodating physical environments



- Many Afghans are practicing Muslims and observe the tenet of prayer 5 times daily.
Employers should create dedicated meditation/prayer spaces and ensure they are identified for use.
- As part of the preparation for prayer, Muslims also engage in ritual cleansing/washing.
Identify accessible facilities that could be used.
- Some Afghan women choose to wear head coverings (i.e., hijab).
Provide flexibility in the dress code or different uniform options for employees.
- Many Afghan Muslims don't consume alcohol and pork products.
Team building activities should accommodate Afghan employees by providing non-alcoholic drinks as well as halal beef, chicken, or turkey meat.

Educating managers on newly arrived Afghans' unique needs

- ▲ Leaders and managers are at the frontlines of creating a culturally inclusive environment.
- ▲ Share this training with managers directly working with their new Afghan employees!



Cultural inclusion is good for companies **AND** for newly arrived Afghans



- ✓ When refugees better understand their new host communities' culture, they can better adapt to the workplace, increasing their prospects of success
- ✓ **Respect and appreciation of all cultures** help refugees feel engaged in their workplace
- ✓ **Cultural inclusion** deepens workplace relationships, enabling refugees to build a professional network
- ✓ **Reducing cultural barriers** can enhance productivity by preventing slowdowns that are caused by misunderstandings or conflict
- ✓ Businesses can benefit from new ideas, collaboration, and productivity as a result of a **diverse AND inclusive workforce**

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

Seeking feedback from these newly arrived Afghans will also be a critical part of this process. Asking more than once will help break through 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!

