



TENT

# Canada Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees



In collaboration with:



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[TENT.ORG](https://tent.org)



TENT

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## About the Tent Partnership for Refugees

With more and more refugees displaced around the world, businesses have a critical role to play in helping refugees to integrate economically in their new communities. Tent was launched in 2016 by Hamdi Ulukaya, the CEO and founder of Chobani – a multibillion dollar food company in the U.S. – to mobilise global businesses to fill this gap. Today, Tent is a **network of over 400 major companies**<sup>1</sup> committed to helping hundreds of thousands of refugees access local labour markets by helping them to become job-ready and connecting them to work. Find out more at [www.tent.org](http://www.tent.org).<sup>2</sup>

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## About ACCES

ACCES Employment is a charitable non-profit organization that assists job seekers from diverse backgrounds to integrate into Canada's job market. The employment service provider connects companies to skilled people while building strong collaborative networks with community partners across the Greater Toronto Area and nationally. Every year, the organization works with 42,000 clients, 87% of whom are refugees and newcomers. ACCES Employment's vision is a fully inclusive labour force that reflects the diversity, skills, and experience of Canada's population. Find out more at [www.accesemployment.ca](http://www.accesemployment.ca).<sup>3</sup>



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# I.

# Introduction



Throughout its history, Canada has been a haven for refugees. Not only has the country provided safety; it has allowed refugees to build new lives, and become key contributors to Canada's economy and society. Refugees have made Canada stronger, wealthier, and more dynamic.

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This guide is a manual to assist companies that are interested in hiring refugees, and have questions about the logistics and practicality of employing them in Canada. It contains essential information about a variety of topics related to hiring refugees in Canada, including:

- Who refugees in Canada are, common countries of origin, and how they arrive.
- The benefits of hiring refugees.
- Where to find refugee talent.
- The logistics around hiring refugees.
- The barriers refugees face in finding and securing employment, and the steps companies can take to mitigate them.
- Information about hiring refugees, including in-depth reads on hiring refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Leading companies throughout Canada have already committed to hiring refugees, playing a vital role in helping them to restart their lives, while at the same time benefiting from their talent, resilience and ingenuity. Refugees are highly motivated and resilient workers, and are known to have lower turnover rates.<sup>4</sup> In addition, consumers indicate not only that they are more likely to buy from companies hiring refugees, but also that they are more likely to work for them.<sup>5</sup>

Immigrants, including refugees, have been essential to Canada's post-pandemic economic recovery, which has been among the strongest in the world. However, as of August 2023, more than 710,000 unfilled positions remain across all sectors.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore vital for companies in Canada to create long-term, sustainable solutions to recruiting talent.

The guide is intended to help companies in Canada develop refugee hiring programs that will set up both employers and refugees for success.



*Tent works closely with companies to build and implement effective refugee hiring programs. For more information, get in touch – email [info@tent.org](mailto:info@tent.org).*



### ***Tent Coalition for Refugees in Canada***

*Tent Canada is a coalition of more than 30 major companies from across the country stepping up to help refugees enter the labor market through job preparation and employment. By joining Tent Canada, companies will have access to:*

- *Tailored advice on how to set up successful refugee hiring programs.*
- *Resources, trainings, and best practices, distilled from Tent's global network of companies, and tailored to the Canada context.*
- *Peer-to-peer learning and regular convenings with member companies.*
- *Recommendations on best-in-class partners that can connect companies to refugee talent.*
- *Opportunities to coordinate with other companies to overcome structural challenges to hiring and integrating refugees.*
- *Tent's professional mentorship programs, which pair employees with refugees.*
- *Communications guidance and opportunities to amplify companies' efforts.*

*Visit the [Tent Canada website](#)<sup>7</sup> to learn more, and express your interest by getting in touch – email [info@tent.org](mailto:info@tent.org).*







## II.

# Refugees in Canada, and why companies should hire them



Before developing a refugee hiring program, it is important to understand who refugees in Canada are, how they are resettled, what the largest refugee populations in Canada are, as well as the business benefits hiring refugees brings.

### Who is a refugee?

A refugee is protected by international law and defined under the 1951 Refugee Convention as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”. By the end of 2022, there were approximately 39.2 million refugees globally, according to UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) data.<sup>8</sup>

Canada has long been a global leader in welcoming refugees. Since 1980, the country has resettled more than 1.1 million refugees from around the world.<sup>9</sup> Immigration, which includes refugee resettlement, accounts for almost 100% of the country’s labour force growth.<sup>10</sup> By 2036, immigrants will represent up to 30% of Canada’s population, compared with 21% in 2011.<sup>11</sup> During the 2021 Census, nearly one in four people counted were or had been a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada.<sup>12</sup> These trends indicate more than ever why companies should position themselves to welcome refugee talent.



*While there is no precise definition of a “newcomer”, the term is used broadly in Canada to include immigrants, refugees, temporary residents such as students, and more. All refugees are considered newcomers, but not all newcomers are refugees.*

### Refugees and refugees claimants in Canada

Refugees in Canada are categorized into two main groups depending on how they arrived in the country: **resettled refugees** and **refugee claimants** (also referred to as asylum seekers).

#### Resettled refugees

Resettled refugees arrive in Canada after being referred by either UNHCR, a designated referral organization, or a private sponsorship group. (Individuals cannot apply directly to the Canadian government as refugees).<sup>13</sup> Refugees resettled to Canada must pass medical, criminal, and security screenings abroad before being issued a visa to travel.

Resettled refugees may be granted permanent resident status upon arrival in Canada, meaning they can work legally in the country immediately after arrival.<sup>14</sup>

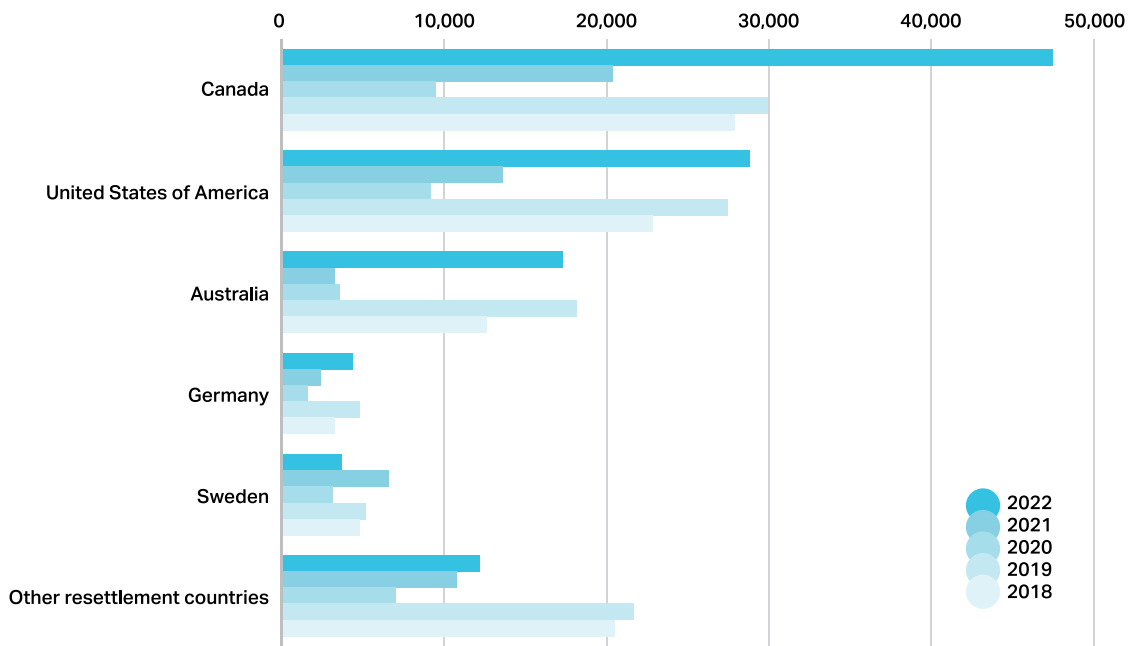
There are three main refugee resettlement programs in Canada:

- The **Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program**,<sup>15</sup> through which Canadians can resettle individuals or families who qualify as refugees under Canada’s refugee and humanitarian program.
- The **Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program**,<sup>16</sup> through which refugees are referred for resettlement to Canada by UNHCR and other partners with which Canada has an agreement.
- The **Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program**,<sup>17</sup> which matches refugees identified for resettlement by referral organizations, such as UNHCR, with private sponsors in Canada.

Canada has historically been a leader on refugee resettlement. During the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw record low numbers of resettlement around the world, Canada was the largest receiver of resettled refugees, welcoming more than 20,000 people in 2021

– more than double the resettlement arrivals recorded in 2020, according to UNHCR.<sup>18</sup> In 2022, Canada received the largest number of resettlement arrivals, at approximately 47,500 – a 133% increase on the year before:<sup>19</sup>

### Refugee resettlement arrivals | 2018 - 2022



Between January 2015 and September 2023, around 260,000 resettled refugees have arrived in Canada.<sup>20</sup> Most resettled refugees arrived from Syria (36%), followed by Afghanistan (18%), Eritrea (14%), and Iraq (9%). Nearly all (97%) resettled refugees arrived under the PSR and GAR programs, with slightly more PSR (53%) than GAR (44%) arrivals. Syrians top the table for admissions under each of the three resettlement programs over the time period, with 44% arriving under the PSR program, and 50% under the GAR program.<sup>21</sup> Government data indicates that Syrian refugees have tended to resettle in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia.<sup>22</sup> Among Afghans, 48% arrived via the PSR program, and 52% were GAR arrivals. The majority of Eritreans and Iraqis arrived via the PSR program, at 88% and 70%, respectively.<sup>23</sup>



*In addition, approximately 200,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Canada between March 2022 and October 2023.<sup>24</sup> Despite their need to find safety, the vast majority do not arrive in Canada as resettled refugees and are not officially referred to as "refugees". Instead, they arrive under the "Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel" (CUAET) temporary residence program.<sup>25</sup> Please note that this guide will use the term "Ukrainian refugees" to refer to all people who have been displaced from Ukraine and arrive in Canada under CUAET.*

The table below shows the largest resettled refugee populations by country of origin and immigration category between January 2015 and September 2023:<sup>26</sup>

Country of origin	Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR)	Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR)	Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)	Total
Syria	41,470	47,175	5,650	94,295
Afghanistan	22,200	23,980	70	46,250
Eritrea	32,795	3,795	575	37,165
Iraq	15,955	6,430	435	22,815
Somalia, Democratic Republic of	7,410	5,235	170	12,815
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	1,715	9,115	555	11,385
Ethiopia	6,025	1,270	145	7,435
Pakistan	2,775	765	25	3,565
Sudan, Democratic Republic of	595	2,650	220	3,465
Iran	1,485	1,360	115	2,960
Burundi	870	1,740	85	2,695
Central African Republic	30	2,505	20	2,555
Stateless	1,020	705	85	1,810
Myanmar (Burma)	260	880	250	1,390
South Sudan, Republic of	680	515	75	1,270
Colombia	25	1,055	90	1,170
<b>Total</b>	<b>138,425</b>	<b>114,525</b>	<b>8,950</b>	<b>261,900</b>

Refugees have resettled across all of Canada. The table below shows the Provinces/Territories that have welcomed the most resettled refugees between January 2015 and September 2023:<sup>27</sup>

Province/Territory	Total
Ontario	109,180
Alberta	47,965
Quebec	37,625
British Columbia	24,250
Manitoba	15,255
Saskatchewan	10,070
Nova Scotia	6,890
New Brunswick	5,910
Newfoundland and Labrador	3,600

According to Canada's 2024-2026 Immigration Levels Plan,<sup>28</sup> the country aims to welcome around 90,000 refugees, protected persons, and people selected on humanitarian and compassionate grounds in 2024, and approximately 80,000 in 2025 and 2026.<sup>29</sup>



*The Province of Quebec is responsible for selecting refugees to the province. Every year, the governments of Canada and Quebec agree on the number and origin of refugees who, once selected, will be welcomed to the province.<sup>30</sup> According to its immigration plan, the province plans to admit 7,200 refugees per year in 2024 and 2025.<sup>31</sup>*

### Refugee claimants

People with a "well-founded fear of persecution" or who "are at risk of torture or cruel or unusual punishment in their home countries" can also make a refugee claim from inside Canada, either at a port of entry upon arrival or online.<sup>32</sup> Individuals are referred to as a "refugee claimant" until their application is approved by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), after which they are referred to as a "protected person".



*While the term "refugee claimant" accurately describes a person who is seeking Canada's protection at its borders, the government also uses the terms "asylum seeker" and "asylum claimant".*

Refugee claimants can apply for a work permit while waiting for a decision on their asylum application to be made. They can do this either as part of their refugee claim (e.g., at a port of entry), or separate to it. Once refugee claimants receive a work permit document, they can work legally in the country immediately.

Between the beginning of 2015 and the end of June 2023, approximately 160,000 claims for refugee protection have been approved by the IRB, with around 28,000 in 2022, and more than 17,000 in 2023 so far.<sup>33</sup> Mexico, Haiti, Turkey, India, Colombia, Iran, Pakistan, and Nigeria make up the top countries of origin among refugee claimants in Canada between the beginning of 2020 and September 2023.<sup>34</sup>

### Other ways refugees can resettle in Canada

- The **Health Care Workers Permanent Residence Pathway**,<sup>35</sup> which is available to refugee claimants who worked a minimum number of hours in Canada's health care sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The **Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot**,<sup>36</sup> which helps skilled refugees to immigrate to Canada through existing economic programs.



### The business benefits of hiring refugees

Refugees are highly motivated and resilient workers. Many refugees who arrive in Canada have spent time in refugee camps or environments where they often cannot work formally. When they arrive in their country of resettlement, they typically look for opportunities that will allow them to provide for themselves and their families, and reinsert themselves into the labour market quickly. They embrace the opportunity to build a new life, and become key contributors to the country's economy and society.

Refugees in Canada are also more likely to be working age than people born in the country; they are, on average, approximately 11 years younger, according to UNHCR.<sup>37</sup> An aging population means that Canada's worker-to-retiree ratio is expected to shift from seven-to-one 50 years ago to two-to-one by 2035.<sup>38</sup> This means that refugee workers are currently – and will continue to be for decades to come – strong candidates to help fill labour shortages in several sectors and regions in Canada.

There are several business benefits companies can realize by hiring refugees:

#### **Refugees are known to have lower turnover rates**

Reducing staff turnover is valuable to companies, and hiring refugees is an effective way for employers to increase employee retention rates. According to one study, employee turnover costs companies in Canada an average of \$41,000 each year (including the cost to rehire and lost productivity), with 16% of hiring managers reporting \$100,000 or more in turnover expenses.<sup>39</sup> Once refugees find a welcoming work environment, they tend to stay longer.



*According to research conducted by the Fiscal Policy Institute and commissioned by Tent, staff turnover rates among U.S. manufacturing companies are almost three times higher among all workers (11%) compared with refugees (4%). Turnover rates are particularly low among refugees in sectors such as meatpacking and hospitality.<sup>40</sup>*

#### **Hiring refugees can strengthen a company's brand**

Hiring refugees can also strengthen a company's brand by demonstrating to consumers and the company's employees that it lives its values. Increasingly, consumers demand that companies make a positive impact in their communities, and they are more loyal to brands that do. A survey commissioned by Tent of 6,000 American consumers indicated they are more likely to purchase from companies hiring refugees. Younger consumers, in particular, were more likely to do so, with one in two respondents (49%) aged 18 to 25 more likely to buy from brands hiring refugees.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Companies are more likely to attract talent by hiring refugees**

Companies are better positioned to attract employees when hiring refugees. A Tent survey of more than 5,600 adults in Europe found that nearly 50% are more likely to work at companies hiring refugees, while only 11% are less likely.<sup>42</sup>

#### **Having diverse staff improves financial performance**

Research by McKinsey covering 15 countries has shown a positive, statistically significant correlation between company financial outperformance, and gender and ethnic diversity – particularly among executive teams.<sup>43</sup>







### III.

## How to connect with refugee job seekers



This chapter explains how Canada's refugee resettlement programs operate, which organizations provide refugees with resettlement services and employment assistance, and how companies can work with these organizations to connect with refugee talent.

To facilitate refugees' integration when they arrive in Canada, the government works with a host of organizations to deliver much-needed resettlement and settlement services. These services are delivered via two programs:

- The Resettlement Assistance Program
- The Settlement Program

#### ***The Resettlement Assistance Program***

Under the Resettlement Assistance Program,<sup>44</sup> the Canadian government provides GAR program refugees with immediate essential services for the first four to six weeks after they arrive. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds 39 organizations across Canada to deliver these services to help refugees integrate more quickly. These services, which cover a refugee's most basic needs, include providing temporary housing, helping to find permanent housing, delivering Canadian life skills training, and more. Organizations do not charge refugees a fee for these services.

The government also provides GAR program refugees who cannot pay for their own basic needs with income support for up to one year from when they arrive in Canada, or until they can support themselves – whichever comes first. It is important to note that the Resettlement Assistance Program does not provide refugees with employment-related support.



*Find a full list of Resettlement Assistance Program service provider organizations, including location and contact information, via the [Government of Canada website](#).<sup>45</sup>*

Resettled refugees who have been sponsored to come to Canada are not eligible to receive Resettlement Assistance Program services. Immediate essential services and income support are instead provided by sponsors. Under the PSR program, refugees are assisted by their private sponsors, who provide direct financial support, as well as help with housing, clothing and food, for the length of the sponsorship period, or until the refugee becomes self-sufficient – whichever comes first. Sponsorships typically last for one year, but some PSR program refugees may be able to get help from their sponsors for up to three years. Under the BVOR program, refugees receive six months of government-provided income support. Sponsors provide a further six months of financial support, and up to a year of social and emotional support.

### *The Settlement Program*

Under the Settlement Program,<sup>46</sup> the government provides all newcomers, including refugees – and their eligible dependents (i.e., spouses and children) – with a much wider range of services to help them settle and adapt to life in Canada. The government funds 550 organizations across Canada to deliver these services, which include:

- Support with daily life needs.
- Employment-related services, including help with finding a job, mentoring and networking, job-specific language training, skills development and training, and credential recognition.
- Language training in English and French.
- Services for specific groups (e.g., women, 2SLGBTQ+ people, the elderly).
- Support with enrolling children in school or daycare.
- Support with using transportation.
- Short-term/crisis counselling.

Organizations do not charge refugees a fee for these services, as they are often funded by the Government of Canada or other private donors.

It is important to note that each Settlement Program service provider organization is different; some will provide certain services but not others, and some will specialise in specific services (e.g., employment).

Refugees can access Settlement Program services until they become a Canadian citizen, processing time for which takes an average of 21 months. Most newcomers can only apply for citizenship if they have lived in Canada for at least three out of the five years before the date they sign their application. Settlement Program services are also available to all Ukrainian refugees under CUAET temporary residence, as well as their dependents.



*Find a full list of Settlement Program service provider organizations, including location and contact information, via the [Government of Canada website](#).<sup>47</sup>*

## Who to contact

Connecting with Settlement Program service provider organizations that specialise in employment-related services (as listed above) is a productive place to start for companies looking to hire refugee talent. These employment service providers – of which there are more than 400 in Canada – prepare refugees for work, help them to search for jobs, and connect them with employers.

Because of the many services they provide, employment service providers have access to a vast pool of refugees looking for work. This makes them ideal partners for companies looking to hire refugees, as they can help to identify potential candidates. Employment service providers typically help employers by:

- Identifying refugee candidates whose skills match the needs of the job.
- Completing new hire paperwork.
- Providing additional support for refugees post-hire (e.g., regular check-ins, training supports, etc.).

Government-funded employment service providers and community agencies do not charge employers a fee for these services.

It is worth noting that employment service providers are not staffing agencies; they cannot guarantee to be able to match companies with refugee talent all of the time.



*Find a full list of Settlement Program service provider organizations, including location and contact information, via the [Government of Canada website](#).<sup>48</sup>*



*For more information about working with organizations to identify and hire refugee talent, see Tent's "Working with Refugee-Focused Service Providers in Canada" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>49</sup>*



# IV.

## Evaluating refugee talent



This chapter explains what documentation refugee candidates are likely to possess and provide during the hiring process, and shares steps companies can take to make their application and interview processes more accessible for refugee talent.

Hiring a refugee in Canada is similar to hiring any other foreign employee in that companies must first ensure that candidates are authorised to work in the country.

It is common practice for employers to ask candidates to confirm orally, or in writing, that they are eligible to work in Canada during the application and interview processes. Many companies include this as a question (e.g., “Are you legally eligible to work in Canada?”) on their resume submission form, or as an opening question during the first interview. Candidates then share proof of work eligibility when an offer of employment is made.

Refugee claimant candidates will possess an **open work permit**, and Ukrainian refugee candidates will possess a **CUAET open work permit**. Open work permits allow the recipient to work for any employer in Canada, except for one that has been found to be non-compliant,<sup>50</sup> or one that regularly offers striptease, erotic dance, escort services, or erotic massages.<sup>51</sup> Open work permits are not job-specific, so employers do not require a labour market impact assessment from Employment and Social Development Canada, or proof that they have submitted an offer of employment through the Employer Portal and paid the employer compliance fee.<sup>52</sup> However, employers should be aware that some work permits may have certain conditions – for example, the type of job that can be held, or the location the recipient can work. These restrictions will be listed on the work permit.<sup>53</sup>



*Resettled refugees may be granted permanent resident status upon arrival in Canada, meaning they can work legally in the country immediately after arrival and do not require an open work permit.*

Open work permits are valid for up to three years. The expiration date on the work permit is the last day the recipient is permitted to be legally employed in Canada – in most cases, it is also the date a refugee’s temporary resident status expires in Canada.<sup>54</sup> A “Must leave Canada by” date on a refugee’s work permit applies even if it is different to the permit’s expiry date. Refugees can apply to extend or change the conditions of their work permit before it expires. They must stop working if they are still in Canada and either their work permit expires before they apply for a new one, or they did not respect the conditions of the permit. In such an event, the individual may still be able to apply to restore their status as a worker.<sup>55</sup> If the recipient has applied to extend or change their open work permit before it expires, they have so-called “implied” or “maintained” status and may continue to work under the same conditions as the original work permit until a decision on their application has been made.<sup>56</sup>



*Do not assume that refugee candidates will know which documents they need to share to prove work eligibility. They may also be reluctant to share information or documentation they deem to be personal.*

Refugees require a 9-digit number known as a Social Insurance Number (SIN) to work in Canada. Refugees cannot work without a SIN. Open work permit holders usually have a temporary SIN starting with a "9", the expiry date for which should match that of the open work permit (it is the responsibility of refugees to keep their SIN record up to date).<sup>57</sup> Once they have applied for a SIN, a refugee will be emailed their number. It is important to note that while a refugee must present their SIN to an employer for income tax and benefit purposes, they are not legally required to present it to an employer before receiving a job offer.<sup>58</sup>



*Find examples of what different types of immigration status documents, including work permits, look like via the [Government of Canada website](#).<sup>59</sup>*





## The hiring process

Even when a refugee candidate is a perfect fit for a particular role, they may struggle to stand out in a conventional hiring process. Refugees often face structural barriers when trying to find and secure work, which can make them appear less competitive to employers – for example, they may lack the relevant credentials from Canadian institutions or be subject to negative stereotyping. They may also have gaps in employment on their resume due to displacement, or seem overqualified.



*Tent works closely with **more than 400 companies** around the world to build and implement effective refugee hiring programs. Tent helps its member companies to set a strategy for their refugee hiring efforts and connect to local organizations to recruit refugee talent. It also trains companies on best practices for refugee hiring and integration. To find out more about becoming a Tent member, reach out – email [info@tent.org](mailto:info@tent.org).*

Companies can adapt their processes for assessing a candidate's suitability for a job and make the recruitment process more accessible for refugee talent.

### **Lack of credentials and documents, including references**

Refugees often arrive in their new country with their educational documents in a foreign language or, due to the urgency with which they left their homes, without any identification documents at all. Other

times, the university or educational establishment from which a refugee received their qualification may be unresponsive or cease to exist – for example, due to war or civil conflict. This can make requests for certification difficult or impossible.

### **Potential solutions:**

- Assess refugee candidates' foreign credentials using a verified online resource or agency (e.g., World Education Services).<sup>60</sup>
- Consider different options for referrals – for example, volunteer work, which can provide a professional contact for a conversation about a candidate's work ethic and other attributes, such as their ability to work well as part of a team.

### **Out-of-date or lack of skills**

Living outside of their home country, refugees may have a skills deficit due to changing job fields and/or gaps in employment due to displacement.

### **Potential solutions:**

- Evaluate skills through profiling tools. The National Occupational Classification (NOC) system<sup>61</sup> provides a standardized framework for understanding the category of work in which refugee candidates can be classified, as well as a benchmark for assessing the level of skill required for a particular job.
- Test for any technical skills that are a prerequisite for doing the job (e.g., numeracy, computer literacy, experience operating heavy machinery, business-level written English/French).
- Provide opportunities during interviews for refugee candidates to show their hands-on skills.

- Determine if and how gaps in experience can be managed, and whether required skills are absolutely necessary for the role.
- Consider bridging any gaps in skills through additional training.

### Language proficiency

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

#### Potential solutions:

- Assist refugee candidates with translating documents into English and/or French.
- Challenge your team to assess the level of local language proficiency that is actually required for the role, then tailor the application and interview process accordingly.
- Ensure clear communication during interviews by pronouncing words carefully; breaking down sentences into short, clear phrases; and giving the listener time to digest the speaker's words as they go. Avoid idiomatic language (e.g., phrases such as "give it a shot" or "it's a piece of cake").
- Partner with local organizations that can assist with interpretation and paperwork for initial screening and interviews.



*For more information about hiring and supporting local language learners, see Tent's "How to Overcome Language Barriers and Invest in Refugee Talent" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>62</sup>*

### The interview

- Consider diversity when composing interview panels to mitigate unconscious biases further.
- Encourage strong two-way communication between interviewers and candidates to ensure that they fully understand each other. Do not assume that a candidate's silence is confirmation of their understanding.
- Explain to interviewers that refugee candidates may not always adhere to certain norms, and that this is a sign of cultural difference, not disrespect – for example, some cultures do not practice eye contact or shake hands between men and women.

### Other adaptations

- Ensure that your standard recruitment process is focused as much as possible on assessing refugee candidates' behaviour, attributes, and potential to do the job.
- Enlist hiring managers and HR staff to undergo "unconscious bias" training to reflect, understand, and challenge common biases and judgements during the recruitment process.
- Assess the needs to successfully perform the job, with a focus on core functions – this can be done by evaluating the language and terminology of job postings to remove jargon, and valuing international education and experience.
- Consider removing names, ages, and genders from resumes across the recruitment process (from hiring fairs to interviews to onboarding), and scoring them with a standardized rubric to deter unconscious bias.

- Do not reject a refugee applicant for an entry-level job solely because they appear “overqualified”. Many highly-skilled refugees cannot practice their profession when they resettle, so they seek out lower-skilled roles. These candidates may decide to leave eventually to resume a career in their former fields, or they may be great candidates for fast-tracked responsibilities.



*Tent can educate your colleagues on the refugee hiring process, including best practices for interviewing refugee talent, and provide information to better understand the legal statuses of refugees, as well as the relevant work authorisation documentation – reach out at [info@tent.org](mailto:info@tent.org).*



## V.

# Onboarding refugee employees



While hiring refugees has many advantages, there are some challenges that both refugees and their employers might face once refugees are hired. Employers can address these barriers and reap the full benefits of a dynamic and diverse workforce by making some upfront investments in how they recruit talent, and considering changes to the onboarding processes.

Most of the investments and changes covered in this chapter are relatively short-term; past approximately six months, refugee employees are likely to require far less tailored support.



*While some refugee employees seek to maintain their refugee identity, others may choose to shed it over time. All staff members should respect their refugee colleagues' wishes in this regard.*



*For more information about building an inclusive workplace for refugee employees, see Tent's "How to Integrate Refugee Employees into the Workforce" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>63</sup>*



*To maximize the contributions of refugee employees, companies should have a system to identify, support, and retain them. For more information about how to collect and track refugee status information in a sensitive, safe, and legal manner, see Tent's "Tracking refugee status in the workforce" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>64</sup>*

### *Preparing managers and colleagues to work with refugees*

- Broaden managers' knowledge of cultural, religious, and community activities that may be important to refugee employees – for example, sharing an annual calendar of cultural holidays can help managers to anticipate when their refugee reports may prefer to take time off.
- Double down on positive reinforcement, which can be critical in helping refugee employees to build confidence within their first few weeks on the job.
- Make time to connect one-on-one – for example, arrange for managers to have a welcome lunch or coffee with their refugee reports (ideally within their first week).
- Encourage lunches or coffee chats between refugee and non-refugee colleagues, and consider giving gift cards to cover the cost of the meal or coffee, or allowing employees to expense it.
- Assign buddies or mentors to new refugee employees so they have a partner who can help to acclimate to your workplace culture, practice the local language, and develop a meaningful and reliable connection from day one.



*For guidance on how to launch a buddy program in support of refugee hires, see Tent's "Implementing a Buddy Program for Refugee Employees" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>65</sup>*

### **Adapting your onboarding program for refugee workers**

- Consider diversity when composing interview questions. Give new refugee hires an on-site introduction to managers and colleagues, and a short tour of the workplace to encourage familiarity, build new connections, and get them more familiar with the space.
- Offer additional support for key procedures such as enrolling in benefits. If needed, provide translation or an interpreter to assist.
- Distribute hard copies of onboarding materials in case accessing digital materials at home is a challenge.
- Provide uniforms and badges early to help refugee employees feel an immediate sense of connection, belonging, and pride.



*For more information about building an inclusive workplace for refugee employees, see Tent's "How to Integrate Refugee Employees into the Workforce" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>66</sup>*

### **Other types of support**

#### **Limited language proficiency**

Many refugees arrive in Canada without the skills to communicate fluently in English or French. This language barrier can create difficulties for refugees and employers at first.

#### **Potential solutions:**

- Avoid asking yes/no questions and instead check for understanding through clarifying questions (e.g., "what time will your shift start tomorrow?", instead of "do you know what time you start tomorrow?").
- Incorporate more visuals into onboarding documents and presentations.
- Translate important documents, such as safety signs and holiday schedules, into refugee employees' native languages.
- Host on-site language development classes during work hours (e.g., as a "lunch and learn").



*For more information about hiring and supporting local language learners, see Tent's "How to Overcome Language Barriers and Invest in Refugee Talent" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>67</sup>*

#### **Cultural differences**

Refugees may have different cultural and social norms to those of workplaces in Canada. Employers should be aware of notable cultural differences, and how to address them.

#### **Potential solutions:**

- Review your company's time off policy to ensure that refugee employees will be able to take adequate time off to celebrate religious holidays – for example, allowing Muslim employees who request time off in advance to do so for Eid.

- Reconfigure break times to align with religious needs, such as daily prayers.
- Be open with employees about Canadian business culture – for example, emphasize the importance of arriving on time for shifts and professional appointments.
- Avoid over-generalizing about a country or culture.
- Adjust your uniform policy to accommodate cultural norms around appropriate clothing.

### Skills gaps

Once hired, refugee employees may need specialized training to perform their job correctly and effectively – for example, they may need additional training in Canadian email etiquette or how to use a specific software.

#### Potential solutions:

- Provide job shadowing opportunities before and during employment.
- Offer on-the-job training.
- Take advantage of free professional development training offered by employment service providers, private companies (e.g., IBM SkillsBuild,<sup>68</sup> HP Life,<sup>69</sup> and LinkedIn Learning),<sup>70</sup> and the Canada Job Grant.<sup>71</sup>

### Transportation

Recently-arrived refugees are likely to rely on public transportation, as they are less likely to own their own vehicle to get to and from work. They may also not know how to drive or have a Canadian driving license.



*For guidance on how to help refugee employees commute to and from work, see Tent's "Addressing Transportation Barriers" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>72</sup>*

#### Potential solutions:

- Arrange car sharing programmes so that participants split relevant costs (e.g., fuel, parking) and/or driving duties.
- Subsidise third-party driving lessons for refugee employees or arrange them during work hours.
- Contract third-party providers to arrange shuttles that pick up and drop off groups of refugee employees working the same shifts.

### Childcare

A lack of childcare can be a major challenge for refugees, especially refugee women, who might have limited family or social networks to rely on.

#### Potential solutions:

- Allow parents or caregivers to work different or staggered shifts.
- Direct employees to childcare facilities in the province and/or the Canada Child Benefit,<sup>73</sup> where tax-free monthly payments are made to eligible families to help with the cost of raising children under 18.
- Encourage informal childcare arrangements with family and/or friends.
- Offer childcare on-site.

### Accommodation

Refugees may face prolonged displacement when they arrive in Canada, living in hotels or other temporary accommodation while their paperwork is processed or before securing permanent housing.

#### Potential solutions:

- Offer "work from home" options and/or a hybrid work environment.
- Provide financial support to relocate, if necessary.
- Direct employees to legislation that protects against housing discrimination on the grounds of race, culture, or ethnicity.
- Support BVOR program refugees' housing costs by becoming a Workplace Sponsor.<sup>74</sup>



*For more information about building an inclusive workplace for refugee employees, see Tent's "How to Integrate Refugee Employees into the Workforce" resource, available via the [Members' Hub](#).<sup>75</sup>*







# VI.

## Hiring Afghan refugees



This chapter provides an in-depth read on hiring refugees from Afghanistan – one of the largest refugee populations to have arrived in Canada over the past two years.

On 15 August 2021, Afghanistan’s capital city, Kabul, was captured by the Taliban, marking the end of the War in Afghanistan, which began 20 years prior following the U.S.-led invasion of the country. The fall of Kabul forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans and other foreign nationals.

To support Afghan citizens who assisted Canada during the war,<sup>76</sup> such as interpreters who worked with the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as family members of former interpreters,<sup>77</sup> and vulnerable Afghan nationals outside of Afghanistan, Canada’s government has introduced several programs to resettle Afghans (under both the GAR and PSR programs).<sup>78</sup> Since August 2021, approximately 40,000 Afghans have arrived in Canada.<sup>79</sup>

This chapter offers important information for companies that are interested in hiring Afghan refugees.

### **How does the government support Afghan refugees?**

Resettlement Assistance Program and Settlement Program service provider organizations across the country are supporting most Afghan refugees who arrive in Canada. These organizations provide immediate essential services, as well as a wider range of services, including employment support, to help them settle and adapt to life in Canada.

### **Where are Afghan refugees resettling in Canada?**

Since Afghan refugees first started arriving in Canada in August 2021, IRCC has been helping to connect them with communities where settlement support is already in place. Nearly all provinces are expected to welcome Afghan refugees, with the top 10 landing cities being (in descending order): Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, Ottawa, Mississauga, Edmonton, Surrey, St. John’s, Kitchener, and Hamilton.<sup>80</sup>

Afghan refugees are settling in these cities for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to:

- Proximity to local employment and settlement support.
- Availability of schools, housing, language training, and job opportunities.
- Settling in the same community as their sponsor or family if they are under the PSR program.

The map and table below show the number of Afghan refugees resettling in Canada through one of the country's special programs:<sup>81</sup>



### Key languages

Afghanistan is a multilingual country where many different languages are spoken. Dari, Farsi, and Pashto are the three most widely spoken. These are followed by Uzbeki, English, Turkmeni, and Urdu.<sup>82</sup>

### What kinds of educational and professional backgrounds do Afghan refugees have?

Afghan refugees come to Canada with a wide variety of professional experiences, educational backgrounds, and skills. They can provide tremendous value to businesses.

Given the varied ways Afghans have arrived in Canada, it is difficult to have a complete picture of educational and professional backgrounds. Based on informal data from refugee-focused non-profits in the U.S., approximately 20% of Afghans are high-skilled with English proficiency, 20% are mid-skilled with some English proficiency, and 60% are best suited

for vocational roles with limited English language proficiency.

Data also indicates that Afghans who worked alongside the military often have high levels of education and strong English language skills.

### What are some of Afghanistan's cultural or working culture norms that employers should be aware of?

Employers should be culturally sensitive when introducing Afghan refugees into their workforce. That said, while it is important to understand Afghan culture, it is also just as important to recognize that all Afghans are unique individuals and will bring their own opinions and lived experiences. With this caveat, there are certain things in Afghan culture that will be important to understand. Some Afghan women, for example, choose to wear head coverings (i.e., a hijab). In addition, many Afghans are practicing Muslims and observe the tenet of prayer five times a day.

Many Afghan Muslims do not consume alcohol and pork products, as well as avoiding meat that is not “halal”, which is a way of preparing food according to Islamic dietary guidelines.

In addition, gender norms between Afghanistan and Canada are different. In Canada, it is common for people of all genders to shake hands, hug, or kiss cheeks upon greeting. In Afghanistan, it is more common for people of the opposite gender not to touch unless they are very close family or friends. It is polite for men to wait until a woman extends her hand before extending their own. While this may feel strange, it is respectful. Instead, they can place their hand over their heart during the greeting.

In Canada, it is also common and respectful to maintain eye contact with people with whom you are speaking. In Afghanistan, eye contact is often kept to a minimum out of respect. Know that employees who do not make much eye contact are not trying to act disrespectfully.

***Potential solutions:***

- Be open about the local business culture and ensure that candidates are comfortable with behavioral expectations.
- Have an open and honest dialogue about gender roles in the context of employment and identify jobs Afghan candidates feel comfortable doing. During the interview process, explain whether a role will require the candidate to spend a significant amount of time interacting with members of the opposite sex.<sup>83</sup>
- Ask Afghan refugee employees if they celebrate Ramadan and/or other relevant Muslim holidays. If they do, recognize this as an opportunity to increase awareness among other employees by hosting an educational or celebratory staff event.
- Have a designated, clean prayer room that includes a compass (Muslims pray towards the Kaaba, located near the centre of the Great Mosque in Mecca), a prayer rug, and has no statues of people and animals (Islam has a strong stance against idol worship). Consider incorporating an organizer or container for individuals to store their rugs and/or clothes after they have finished prayer.

**Hiring Afghan refugees**

Connecting with employment service providers is a productive place to start for companies looking to hire Afghan refugee talent – see “Who to contact” in the **How to connect with refugee job seekers** chapter.



# VII.

## Hiring Ukrainian refugees



This chapter provides an in-depth read on hiring refugees from Ukraine – one of the largest refugee populations to have arrived in Canada over the past two years.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have fled their home country. This mass exodus of people is one of the fastest forced displacement crises in history and the largest since the Second World War.<sup>84</sup>

To support those affected by the conflict, Canada's government has introduced the "Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel" (CUAET), under which Ukrainian refugees and their family members can apply for a three-year Temporary Resident Visa to travel to, stay, and work in Canada.<sup>85</sup> CUAET also allows people who are already in the country to extend their visitor status, work permit, or study permit temporarily. Approximately 200,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Canada under CUAET scheme between March 2022 and October 2023.<sup>86</sup>

It is worth noting that Ukrainian refugees can still apply for permanent residence in Canada at the end of their temporary stay, should they decide to.

This chapter offers important information for companies interested in hiring Ukrainian refugees.

### **How does the government support Ukrainian refugees?**

Resettlement Assistance Program and Settlement Program service provider organizations across the country are supporting most Ukrainian refugees who arrive in Canada. These organizations provide immediate essential services, as well as a wider range of services, including employment support, to help them settle and adapt to life in Canada.

### **Where are Ukrainian refugees resettling in Canada?**

Existing Ukrainian-Canadian communities are playing an important role in helping Ukrainian refugees to resettle in Canada. According to Census data, as of 2016, most Ukrainian-Canadians live in Ontario (28%).<sup>87</sup> A larger proportion live in Alberta (27%), British Columbia (17%), Manitoba (13%), and Saskatchewan (11%) compared with the national population. Approximately 3% of Ukrainian-Canadians live in Quebec, while 1.1% live in the Atlantic provinces, and 0.3% in the Territories.<sup>88</sup>

The table below shows the geographic distribution of Ukrainian-Canadians and the national population in Canada in 2016:<sup>89</sup>

Province/region	Ukrainian-Canadians	National population
Atlantic provinces	1.1%	6.7%
Quebec	3.1%	23.1%
Ontario	27.7%	38.4%
Manitoba	13.2%	3.6%
Saskatchewan	10.6%	3.1%
Alberta	27.2%	11.5%
British Columbia	16.9%	13.2%
Territories	0.3%	0.3%
Census metropolitan area	Ukrainian-Canadians	National population
Toronto	10.6%	17%
Montréal	2.6%	11.6%
Vancouver	6.9%	7%
Calgary	6.7%	4%
Ottawa–Gatineau	2.1%	3.8%
Edmonton	11.8%	3.8%
Quebec	0.1%	2.3%
Winnipeg	8.6%	2.2%
Hamilton	2.1%	2.1%
Small census metropolitan areas	18.9%	17.3%
Census agglomeration	12.6%	12.1%
Rural areas	17.1%	16.7%



## Key languages

Around 20 languages are spoken in Ukraine. The two most widely spoken are Ukrainian and Russian. According to the country's 2001 Census, 67% of the population speak Ukrainian as their first language, and 30% speak Russian. Other languages spoken by the population as a first or second language include Romanian, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, and Hungarian.<sup>90</sup>

Although not an official language in Ukraine, English has become more important. EF Education First's English Proficiency Index 2022 found Ukraine to have "moderate" English proficiency, ranking 35 out of 111 surveyed countries.<sup>91</sup>

## What kinds of educational and professional backgrounds do Ukrainian refugees have?

A 2023 survey by the EU Agency For Asylum (EUAA) of more than 4,250 Ukrainian refugees in Europe found most respondents to be "highly educated". More than two in five had a master's degree or equivalent, one in five had a bachelor's degree, and 4% had a PhD. Around one in three respondents had lower levels of education, including secondary (10%), vocational (18%), and primary (1%).<sup>92</sup>

According to UNHCR, 63% of Ukrainian refugees were employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine, with "diverse professional and occupational backgrounds".<sup>93</sup>

The table below shows the top 10 skills backgrounds of Ukrainian refugees as of September 2022:<sup>94</sup>

Skills background*	%
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
Agriculture	3

\* Multiple responses were possible

### What are some of the cultural or working culture norms in Ukraine that employers should be aware of?

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 Canada.

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

The communication styles of Ukrainians – writing in particular – can be different to that of Canadians. Ukrainians tend to use fewer expressions, go straight to the point, and/or jump into conversations without greetings or introducing themselves. They may appear more formal, direct, and distant compared to their Canadian counterparts.



*With Ukraine's general mobilization order requiring men aged 18 to 60 to stay within the country, 90% of Ukrainian refugees are estimated to be women and children.<sup>95</sup> Companies should note that employees who are Ukrainian refugees may be single mothers who take care of more than one child.*

### Potential solutions:

- Be open about the local business culture and ensure that candidates are comfortable with behavioral expectations of the workplace.
- Accommodate sick days and flexible hours, which may be required by refugee employees who have children.
- Offer family counselling to refugee employees (and their children) who may have experienced trauma due to the conflict in Ukraine.
- Avoid talking about family or the situation in Ukraine, which may be triggering. Mental health awareness and safe workplace culture are relatively new concepts in Ukraine – many refugee employees may not be trained to recognize and communicate their needs.
- If possible, accommodate requests for over-time and allow employees to have multiple jobs, which may be requested by single parents or employees who are financially supporting family members in Ukraine.

### Hiring Ukrainian refugees

Connecting with employment service providers is a productive place to start for companies looking to hire Ukrainian refugee talent – see “Who to contact” in the **How to connect with refugee job seekers** chapter.





# Conclusion



*“The minute a refugee has a job, that’s the minute they stop being a refugee.”*  
**– Hamdi Ulukaya, founder, the Tent Partnership for Refugees**

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Gainful employment is a vital part of refugees becoming self-reliant, rebuilding their lives, and providing for themselves and their families. Along with economic security, a job creates feelings of belonging, and of being valued and recognised as an individual. While welcoming refugees into the workforce requires modest initial investments of time and resources, there is plenty of evidence to show that the dividends far outweigh the costs.

Refugees are too often depicted in the media as helpless individuals needing charity and benefits. Most are far from this perpetuated image and instead want to be given the chance to utilise their talent, skills, and experience to become key contributors to their new country’s economy and society.

Employment should be seen as more than just a job; it is an important means of strengthening communities throughout Canada. Companies involved in hiring refugees can help to make this happen.

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