



Addressing Housing Barriers for Refugee Employees

Refugees – especially those who have recently arrived in an area – often face significant barriers to finding and/or securing housing in their new community, including unfamiliarity with the area and/or local rental process, language barriers, insufficient income or savings, hesitant landlords, and limited social networks. Many of these barriers remain even after refugees have found employment.

Companies can help refugee employees to overcome these barriers by providing housing to them directly, or by helping them to find and/or secure their own housing. Implementing such solutions can address a key obstacle refugee employees face to maintaining their jobs, as well as increasing engagement among them, and positioning the company as especially attractive to refugee talent.

This resource outlines two principal approaches Tent member companies have used to support refugee employees with housing, and highlights some important considerations during the search, placement, and move-in processes.

The following are illustrative examples of approaches used by Tent member companies. Because your country's laws may differ from those where these approaches were enacted, please consult with your company's legal team before implementing any of them.



Providing housing directly to refugee employees

Some companies have existing employee housing-assistance programs, which they can use to provide housing to refugee employees. These companies should invite refugee employees to learn more about the program, and encourage them to take full advantage of it. Consider adjusting the program to make it more accessible to refugee employees – for example, by:

- ▲ Re-structuring any fees – or waiving these fees entirely – so that refugees do not have to pay up front. (This can be particularly helpful for refugee employees who have limited savings).
- ▲ Waiving any requirements that might disqualify refugees from participating (e.g., minimum time spent at the company).
- ▲ Extending the typical length of time for which the benefit is valid (e.g., extending a 30-day emergency housing program to cover a somewhat longer period of time).
- ▲ Expanding the benefit to allow refugee employees' immediate family members to stay with them – at least for a limited amount of time.

Companies that do not already have housing-assistance programs should consider providing housing directly to refugees by:

- ▲ Renting or buying housing units, and then placing refugee employees in the accommodation for a predetermined amount of time. Companies can work with local partners (e.g., real estate agencies, non-profits, or the local government) to identify units that are available and in good condition.
- ▲ Partnering with hotels or short-term rental platforms (e.g., Airbnb, Booking.com) to provide short-term accommodation. Some hotels or rental platforms may waive service fees or offer rooms at a discounted rate for newcomers.



Companies interested in providing housing directly do not need to do so indefinitely. While some companies offer housing for up to a year, others provide a shorter stop-gap solution that gives refugees enough time (and support) to find longer-term housing.



Companies who provide housing directly should conduct routine inspections to ensure that tenants are living in a clean, hygienic, and safe environment. This can help to preemptively flag any issues or necessary repairs, and reduce the company's liability.



Helping refugee employees to find and/or secure their own housing

Refugees may not be familiar with the process of finding and/or securing housing in their new community. Companies can support these refugee employees by offering direct support, guiding them on how to find available housing options, and/or helping them to cover early move-in expenses.

Companies can support refugee employees to find housing by:

- ▲ Identifying available housing options (e.g., via local governments, real estate agencies, online marketplaces, or personal networks) to share with refugee employees.
- ▲ Educating refugee employees about how to navigate the local housing market independently – for example, by sharing information about the most reliable online property marketplaces for the area, or offering guidance about what to expect during the rental process (e.g., explaining rental contracts, deposits, or renters insurance).
- ▲ Offering actionable guidance to help the refugee employee make a decision – for example, by highlighting neighborhoods with more affordable units, or suggesting areas that are accessible to the employee's workplace via public transportation (or other transportation services the company offers).

While housing decisions will be largely determined by local pricing and availability, companies should ask refugee employees for their personal preferences, and try to accommodate them when possible – for example, an employee may ask to live in close proximity to people who speak the same language as them, or to live in a neighborhood with access to a local school.



Household size is a key logistical consideration, so ask refugee employees about the number of people in their household. If HR policy prevents asking this directly, ask “how big of an apartment/house would you need?” as a proxy.

While some refugee employees will be able to secure their own housing independently, many will benefit from additional support. Companies can take the following steps to support refugee employees who are struggling to secure (and pay for) housing:

- ▲ Offer legal and/or interpretation services – either directly or through a partner organization – to review refugees’ rental contracts or agreements.
- ▲ Extend an offer to be a guarantor, or co-sign a refugee employee’s lease, as some landlords may be hesitant to lease their property to a tenant with few references and/or no credit history. Landlords may be willing to switch the lease over to only the refugee employee after one year.
- ▲ Subsidize the costs associated with renting – such as the first and last month of a refugee employee’s rent, or their security deposit – through a one-time grant payment, or a loan.



Encouraging refugees to sign leases that last for at least 12 months will give them time to build a stronger financial foundation.



Moving-in support

Ideally, refugees will move into housing a few days before their first day of work, as this gives them additional time to move in and adjust to their new environment. After a refugee employee moves in, companies can provide additional move-in support, which may include:

- ▲ Covering the bills for utilities (e.g., electric, internet, and/or water) – at least for a limited amount of time.
- ▲ Delivering an introductory gift basket that includes items such as toiletries and food coupons to make the recipient feel welcome and more “at home”.
- ▲ Creating a “move-in checklist” for refugee employees to refer to – this could include setting up a bank account, registering children in school, getting a bus pass, and identifying the nearest doctor, dentist, or grocery store. Walk through this checklist with refugee employees to ensure that all necessary items are completed.

- ▲ Helping refugee employees to create a budget by showing them how much they will earn, and how much they will have to pay for housing, food, utilities, etc.
- ▲ Offering to provide housewares, dishes, pots, pans, linens, furniture, and/or cleaning supplies, as needed.
- ▲ Offering to pay for up to 30 days' worth of groceries.
- ▲ Providing a prepaid Visa gift card (e.g., with a balance of \$150) to help the recipient cover necessary expenses early on, such as clothing, hygiene supplies, and groceries.



Companies can invite other employees – for example, those involved in buddy programs or relevant Employee Resource Groups – to volunteer to help welcome and support refugee employees during the move-in process.



Next Steps:

The Tent Partnership for Refugees can work with companies to help them address specific hiring and integration barriers. To learn more about Tent and its services, reach out at info@tent.org.

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 mobilize global businesses to fill this gap. Today, Tent is a [network of over 400 major companies](#) committed to helping hundreds of thousands of refugees access local labor markets by helping them become job-ready and connecting them to work. Find out more at www.tent.org.

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