

TENT

COALITION FOR

Refugees
in Canada

**Inclusion of refugee
employees as a
pathway to success**



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Canada is a major host country for refugees from all over the world

Canada is hosting over

130,000
refugees

from countries such as
Ukraine, Syria, Colombia,
and Haiti



Source: UNHCR

Canada has welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine

- The Canadian government committed to welcoming 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan in the next five years, with more than 30,000 already in Canada
- ~600,000 Ukrainians welcomed, with more expected to arrive



Top trends to keep in mind

- Canada is **fastest growing G7 country** due to immigration
- Record numbers of refugees in 2022 with more than **1 million entries**
- Projected increase of immigrants: 76k in 2023 to 85k in 2025
- Employment rates remain at an all-time high with immigration accounting for almost **100% of labour force growth**



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Building on lessons learned from diversity, equity, & inclusion (DEI)

“Diversity is a fact.
Equity is a choice.
Inclusion is an action.
Belonging is an outcome.”

- Arthur Chan

- We cannot make progress on building opportunities for the most marginalized if we do not change our behaviour, attitudes and dominant cultural or normative beliefs in the workplace.
- Ultimately, this means that the heart of making progress on DEI is targeted at actions aimed at changing workplace culture and inclusion.

Intersectionality and the refugee experience

- There is a **tendency to unintentionally lump all refugee experiences** under one category.
- Refugees experience challenges that are similar to those faced by **marginalized groups** (religious minorities, women, disabled people, LGBTQ+).
- In addition, they have **compounded acute needs** — such as lack of access to basic resources, childcare and professional networks, and health/mental well-being services — which can magnify the intersecting challenges.
- It is crucial to **identify the intersecting needs of refugees** to build out your inclusion strategies.



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Psychological safety and voice

- There are many barriers to inclusion
- When employees are asked in DEI surveys what makes them feel a “lack of belonging” or “exclusion”, the responses often center around being **unheard or unseen/unrecognized** (e.g. in important decision making). This is a fundamental human need.
- This can be especially challenging for **refugees who experience social and cultural exclusion** in an unfamiliar environment with limited psychosocial support systems or resources.
- Harvard Professor Amy Edmondson coined the term ‘psychological safety’ in 1999, and defined it as:

*A context when team members **trust and respect each other** and perceive that **they will not be dismissed, penalised or negatively judged** by their colleagues or managers for speaking up with novel ideas, admitting mistakes or failures, or challenging the status quo. In such contexts, team members are willing to share novel ideas, speak up on sensitive issues and engage in constructive debate.*

Investing in psychological safety creates benefits for your workplace

- Making people feel safe to **show up as their authentic selves** is the clearest and fastest path to inclusion.
- As employees feel more supported, there will be a positive impact on team innovation, creativity), resilience, and desire to learn. Team members feel more engaged and motivated. There is a greater willingness to take risks despite differing opinions.
- **Belonging as an outcome** is directly linked to business growth and retention (Harvard Business Review)
- Inclusion and work on safety flips the dominant paradigm. Hence, we need to go beyond diverse hiring to working hand-in-hand to nurture the voices of those that tend to be most excluded

Google's 2015 study 'Project Aristotle' found that psychological safety was the number one reason for the success of team in terms of creativity, innovation, performance, and creativity.

A safety blueprint: Your role in psychological safety as a leader and ally

1. Safety is about being **seen and heard**
2. Pay attention to **power dynamics**: What blocks people from speaking up? Observe unhealthy dynamics across gender, race, culture, religion and take steps to correct them
3. **Be a role model**: How do you model as a personal leader safe space for mistakes? How do you amplify what's working? How do you model humility and regularly share your imperfections?
4. Have open curiosity for belonging
5. Practice **trauma-informed listening** and how you can play a part
6. **Embrace vulnerability** and **establish trust**: Take full ownership of positive and negative emotions and express effectively
7. **No judgement**: You are no better or worse than your counterparts
8. Create a **safe "speak up" culture**: reward rather than punish candor
9. **Strive for emotionally intelligent** and **inclusive leadership**

Breakout session: 20 minutes

In your group, please assign a volunteer to take notes and bring back insights back to the main group.

Discussion topics:

- a. What are the **key blocks for inclusion of refugees** in your workplace?
- b. In your experience, what are some factors that affect the **sense of safety of refugee employees**? That might impact a healthy “speak up” culture? Consider the supportive leadership environment, power dynamics, dominant behaviour/culture, or other factors that we discussed.
- c. What are some **top solutions** that you feel have worked, or can work, and that can be **amplified**?

Note: If your company has not yet hired refugees, please build on lessons learned from other projects focused on inclusion of marginalized employees.

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Examples of Inclusive actions: What can you do?

1. Take daily actions such as inviting the perspectives of refugees in meetings to encourage wider cultural change
2. Accountability and performance reviews to match values with policies
3. Inclusive policies such as caregiving or transport subsidies, etc.
4. Physical space, rooms for confidentiality? Prayer rooms? Childcare?
5. Celebrating a diversity of cultures
6. Translating work documents to several key languages
7. How do include and then incorporate different perspectives when making strategic changes?
8. Empowering different styles of leadership

Inclusion is so much bigger than the narrow perspective it is today

Inclusion does not work in isolation. Start looking at all your company processes, including policy, sourcing of talent, marketing, client needs, performance reviews, and product design



CALL TO ACTION: Step up as an inclusion ally for refugee employees

**How will you take what you've heard and learned today, and become a role model, an ally, or an inclusive leader for refugees?
What will you be accountable for?**

Some ideas to get started:

- ✓ Can you help set up networking opportunities (e.g. informal, professional, etc.)
- ✓ Speak up when you notice microaggression or alienating comment
- ✓ Be a connector
- ✓ Nurture belonging for newcomer refugees
- ✓ Speak up when you see a disconnect between company values and exclusionary behaviour

Thank you!

