

# ONBOARDING REFUGEES

A TOOLKIT FOR BC EMPLOYERS

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IMMIGRANT  
EMPLOYMENT  
COUNCIL OF BC **IEC<sub>BC</sub>**

Connecting Employers  
to Immigrant Talent

[iecbc.ca](http://iecbc.ca)



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Immigrant Employment Councils respond to emerging opportunities to support Canadian employers in the labour market attachment of all newcomers. This Toolkit was developed through a partnership of the Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada and made possible with the financial support of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

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### **DID YOU KNOW?**

On average, British Columbia welcomes 37,000 permanent residents every year, 1,600 of whom are refugees.

*- Sources: Government of Canada, ISSofBC*

## Introduction

The purpose of this Toolkit is to assist BC employers to more effectively recruit, hire, onboard and retain a diverse workforce that includes refugees. Employers who use the Toolkit will increase their knowledge of culturally sensitive hiring and retention practices and will boost their ability to create more inclusive workplaces.

Individuals who have lived and worked all, or most, of their lives in varying workplaces in Canada have naturally adopted and generally understand established Canadian workplace practices and norms. However, newcomers to Canada, and, even more so, refugees, do not have that background and need assistance from their employer to integrate into the workplace and become productive members of the workforce and, ultimately, their community.

To effectively create a welcoming and inclusive workplace and successfully integrate new employees who can contribute to productivity, employers need to take a planned approach that follows practical steps.

This Toolkit provides clear information, guidelines, along with the best practices and tips for implementing successful onboarding practices in various workplace environments, including those that have unique needs and practices unlike typical office environments.

The Toolkit offers a snapshot of current efforts aimed to provide co-ordinated cross-sectoral support to the re-settlement of refugees who have made BC their home. At the end of this document, we also offer profiles of refugees to our province from key source countries for 2015-2016 - Syria, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, and Somalia.

Throughout this Toolkit, the terms newcomers and immigrants are used interchangeably and include both immigrants and refugees. It is important to note that the focus of this document is on refugees; however, many of the practices and resources could be applied to any newcomer group.

Since November 2015, the #Startland Initiative has involved angel investors, tech startups and educational institutes to commit donations and in-kind support to teach code and web development to refugees.

According to Kate Armstrong, director of Emily Carr University's Living Labs, who manages the initiative, the program has seen some real success, even though it is still very much a pilot. Within a few weeks of completing the fulltime coding bootcamp training programs, two refugees found great jobs in the tech sector with annual salaries of 75K+. "We're in desperate need of new coders," says Armstrong "It's sort of a win-win because the technology sector needs new people, and there is a skills gap."

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Investing one euro in welcoming refugees can yield nearly two euros in economic benefits within five years. This is a key finding of a recent report from the Tent Foundation in Europe. The return on investing in refugees was calculated using International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates of the economic impact of asylum seekers and refugees on the European Union.

- *Refugees Work. A Humanitarian Investment That Yields Economic Dividends. TENT. May 2016*

## Refugee Talent and the Role of Business

For any newcomer, meaningful employment is often the best way to learn about and integrate into their new homeland. But it is also critical for the social cohesion and economic prosperity of the country that has welcomed them. Canada has given refugees a chance for a new life, and now they are ready to give back – their talents, resilience and unique perspectives.

BC businesses have a stake in refugee employment. In human capital terms, refugee talent is attractive to business. While not all refugees have workplace ready skills, many do, or else have potential and represent a future talent pool.

### WHY HIRE REFUGEE TALENT?

There is a growing body of evidence linking the diversity that results from immigration to gains in innovation, productivity and market opportunity:

- Companies with ethnically diverse employees out-innovate and out-perform others, and they make better decisions.
- According to a recent Deloitte study, there is an 80% improvement in business performance when levels of inclusion and diversity are high.
- Immigrants are able to understand unmet needs in under-leveraged markets, and they have access to unique international networks.





Refugees are like any other newcomers in many ways, and they represent a new talent pool with connections to communities around the world. They can contribute economically as workers of all skill levels, entrepreneurs, innovators, taxpayers, consumers and investors. Their efforts can help create jobs, raise the productivity and wages of local workers, lift capital returns, stimulate international trade and investment, and boost innovation, enterprise and growth. From a global perspective, enabling people to move to more technologically advanced, politically stable and secure countries boosts their economic opportunities and world output. And most of the practices and actions that an employer can take to attract, hire and retain immigrant talent are also just good business practices.



### FEATURED RESOURCE:

BC Refugees JobConnect is a web-based platform that brings together BC employers looking to hire, and job-ready refugees who have made BC their home. This easy-to-use website is designed to help employers fill their workforce needs while offering refugees an effective way to showcase their talents to BC businesses and gain meaningful labour-market attachment. And this is not your average “Job Board.” As it does not involve posting of opportunities by employers and endless sifting through applications. Instead, BC Refugees JobConnect enables employers to identify candidates of interest based on flexible, multi-parameter searches of profile information and supporting documentation uploaded by the refugee job seekers.

Register as an employer today at <https://www.bcrefugeesjobconnect.ca/>

### Other Resources:

Canada-British Columbia Job Grant:  
<https://www.workbc.ca/Employer-Resources/Canada-BC-Job-Grant/What-is-the-Canada-B-C-Job-Grant.aspx>

Employer Guide to Hiring Newcomers:  
[http://www.nimmigration.ca/media/20720/employer\\_guide\\_to\\_hiring\\_newcomers.pdf](http://www.nimmigration.ca/media/20720/employer_guide_to_hiring_newcomers.pdf)

## Preparing Your Workforce to Welcome Refugees

Don't just assume your workforce is ready to accept refugees as workers. Managers and supervisors, who have a responsibility for leading teams, need all kinds of support to be effective in their role. This includes clear expectations and training for managers and peers on how to work effectively with teams from diverse backgrounds.

Before a supervisor is tasked with managing workers who are refugees, they should be provided with information about potential cultural differences. This information also needs to be shared with existing employees. It is recommended that all managers, who will be supervising refugees, be provided with access to this Toolkit.

Give support to everyone in your workplace. To get the maximum return on investment by hiring diverse talent, employers need to ensure that their current employees, as well as the new immigrant hires, achieve a level of comfort that allows them to be productive, supports their professional development, and encourages them to make a long-term commitment to the organization. There are a few simple steps that employers can take to ensure that the new employee will succeed and contribute to the organization's goals.

Employers can develop a more inclusive workplace that embraces refugees as employees in a variety of ways:

- Hosting monthly company luncheons and holiday events, enabling employees to practise their English and build relationships with their peers.
- Training all employees in cultural competency and in ways to communicate in a culturally diverse workplace.
- Implementing team-building activities for new employees and managers that allow them to learn from each other.

Employees across the organization should be encouraged to ask questions and have open lines of communication. This will benefit not only the newcomer but existing employees as well, providing them with important relationships and valuable sources for personal growth.

When Ingram Micro welcomed refugees to its Richmond, BC, location in 2016, the company took important steps to create a welcoming and safe environment. Ingram Micro updated its HR practices and offered training to its current leadership pool on strategies and practices to integrate these new Canadians. As well, the company hired a translator to assist incoming refugees to understand company policies, work procedures and workplaces nuances, as well as safety-related issues. It has aligned work shifts with bus schedules and provided shuttle services during extended shifts.





## WHY ONBOARDING MATTERS TO SMALL BUSINESS?

For small businesses with limited resources, a good onboarding program is a wise investment for three reasons:

- It boosts productivity. Studies show that a strong onboarding program can boost new hire productivity by 70%.
- It helps you retain more employees. Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82%.
- It builds culture. Cultivating a strong culture in your workplace takes time. If you can't retain employees, that process takes even longer. With a structured onboarding program, employees are 58% more likely to be with your company after three years.

- Zenefits Blog, May 5, 2016

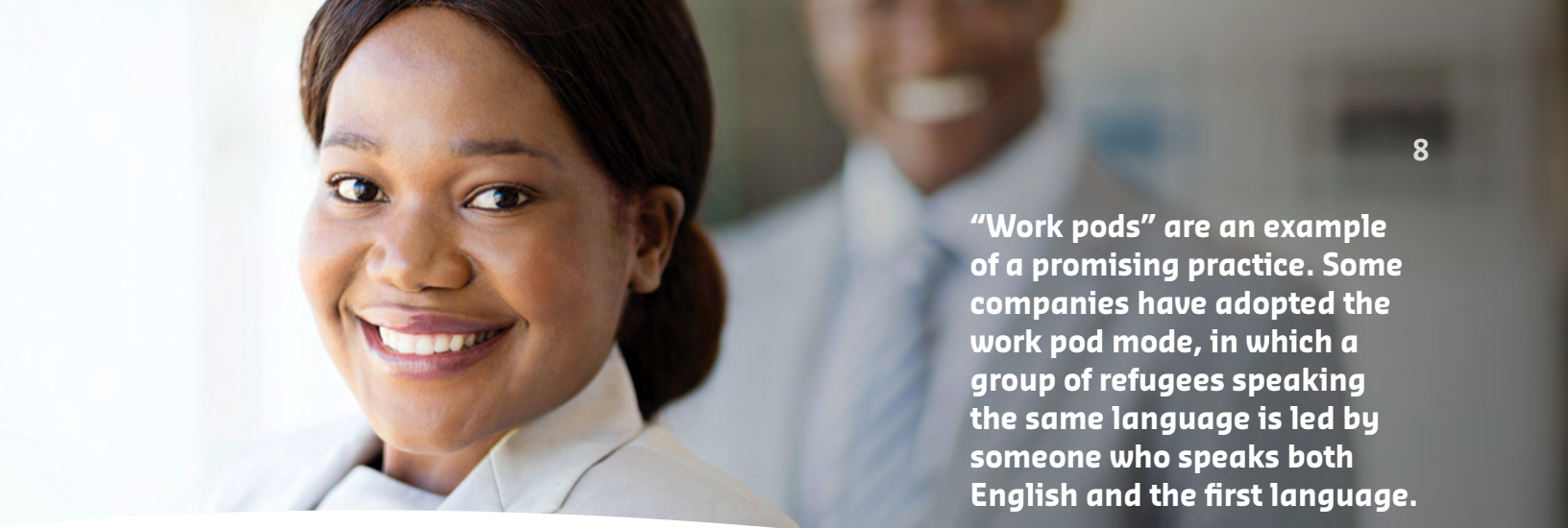
## Effective Onboarding: Creating a Welcoming and Safe Environment

**Effective onboarding leads to retention.** There are a few important components of any new employee's first few weeks or months on the job. These include orientation, training and development, setting expectations, and onsite support. Regardless of skill level, occupation or previous experience, new immigrants will have some differences that require an adjustment for themselves, for their managers and for other employees. These differences can stem from cultural backgrounds, understanding of workplace behaviours and practices, or communication styles. Newcomers can face challenges integrating into the workforce because of cultural differences in workplace interactions.

**Address workplace culture.** It is useful to recognize examples of cultural differences in the workplace to avoid taking things personally and improve relationship with co-workers. Many of your daily misunderstandings at work are nothing more than clear examples of cultural differences in the workplace. What are the norms of behaviour, communication and dress? And what are the breaks, social conversation, or meeting etiquette? These are the critical success factors to cover in orientation. Cultures vary widely in their approaches to verbal and non-verbal communication, personal space, hierarchy, teamwork, initiative, formality, punctuality and privacy.

"To share or not to share?" Many of the examples of cultural differences have to do with how much people share about themselves and their families with their co-workers. How much is too much? It really depends on whom you ask.

In some cultures, people tend not only to share a lot about themselves but also to ask about other people's families. They can often surprise a colleague with a question like, "How's your aunt Margie doing?" when the colleague no longer remembers that her aunt had an operation a month earlier. They ask because they care and they expect others to care about them as well. So when nobody asks people from these cultures about their sick child or their cousin who got married, they tend to feel isolated and disengaged. If you use these cultural differences at work as an opportunity to learn from each other, you can make it a much better workplace.



**“Work pods” are an example of a promising practice. Some companies have adopted the work pod mode, in which a group of refugees speaking the same language is led by someone who speaks both English and the first language.**

**Why introductions make sense.** Many new immigrants come from countries where relationships must be developed before work can get done. Facilitating introductions with peers will help them start on the right foot. Employers often encourage new hires to make themselves comfortable in their new workspace, and to ask questions when needed, but the newcomer may not know whom to ask, or may be hesitant to approach colleagues, who are very busy. Orientation for refugees should also include basic introductions to common workplace norms and practices.

**Make health and safety paramount.** Employers will be recruiting workers who are new to Canada and may have very different understanding of workplace health and safety, and it is very important to provide an extensive health and safety program, including skills training, to minimize safety-related worksite issues.

Employers need to keep in mind that their new hires might have experienced less regulated working conditions in their home country. In order to maintain a high-performance workforce, employers must ensure an in-depth orientation to health and safety training before new workers enter the workplace.

Because English will be a second or, sometimes, third language for refugees, the health and safety orientation needs to be simple but comprehensive. It is useful to provide visual aids and information in relevant languages.

It is important for employers to understand that refugees may end up working in industries that differ from their previous experiences, in a job that they are not accustomed to doing, or may be using tools or machines that they have never used before.

Newcomers need to know that they have the right to know about health and safety hazards on the job. While these may be common-sense for existing workers, they can be a fairly new concept for refugee workers. It is also important for refugee workers to understand that it is completely legal and appropriate to refuse to do work that they think might hurt them or another worker.

**Additional Resources:**

**Onboarding Skilled Immigrants:**  
<http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/2013/01/09/tips-for-onboarding-skilled-immigrants/>

**Retaining Talent:**  
<http://iecbc.ca/employer-tools-and-resources/retain-immigrant-talent/>

**Newcomers to Canada may need to be informed of very basic occupational health and safety standards, including, but not limited, to the following:**

- Using safety equipment—both personal protective equipment and safety equipment on tools and machines—that the employer requires.
- Requirement to tell the employer if they see any broken equipment or spot any safety problems.
- Ensure they understand their right not to use any equipment or machinery that could harm them or another worker.
- Act responsibly in the workplace.
- Report any health and safety violations to the employer.

# Supporting Refugees in the Workplace

It is imperative to create a welcoming environment. Before the new hire arrives, managers and employees of the organization should familiarize themselves with potential cultural differences, to help ease the newcomer's orientation and better prepare the organization for success. Companies that leverage their existing workforce to welcome new employees are more likely to create a welcoming environment.

Assign a buddy. Internal mentor-buddy programs are excellent ways to help a new hire integrate, and to allow the mentor to develop cross-cultural coaching skills. A mentor or a buddy is a colleague who shows the new employee around, makes introductions and informs the new employee about the often unspoken nuances of the workplace culture. He/she also provides feedback. This responsibility should be part of the mentor or buddy's job description, and not a task that is piled on top of an already full workload.

Support beyond the workplace. Look for ways to extend the mentor-buddy relationship beyond the workplace and into the community. Some firms actively engage mentors as cultural informants, helping their mentees overcome settlement challenges outside of the workplace and learn more about life in the community. Over time, many mentoring relationships can grow into personal friendships, and what more powerful way to retain new immigrant talent than through an empowered friendship?

As a less formal program, consider having family-friendly work social events, where all family is welcome. Be mindful not to confine the idea of family to "bring your kids", but extend the invitation to the senior generation as well. This will allow the family members to make connections with their peers so they can be better supported, and alleviate some of the familial pressure the worker may feel, allowing them to be a better worker.

Keep in mind that some refugees may be reluctant to take part in social gatherings that celebrate religious holidays of other faiths, or where alcohol is served, so keep these gatherings simple and available to all.

**Learn more tips on how to retain immigrant talent:**  
<http://iecbc.ca/employer-tools-and-resources/retain-immigrant-talent/>

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** The trauma of violence, homelessness and war is something refugees may carry with them when they arrive in Canada. Many refugees don't suffer one trauma, it is often a cascade of traumas – exposure to war and danger, witnessing violence, being a victim of crime and the conditions of life in a refugee camp.

Therefore, it is worthwhile educating all staff about PTSD and what to look for in the way of possible symptoms. If it is suspected that an employee suffers from PTSD, refer them to healthcare providers.

## Relevant Resources:

PTSD Association of Canada: <http://www.ptsdassociation.com/>  
 PTSD Checklist: [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c017fe4b09474f2e4d227/t/555f690fe4b0577e78910d6c/1432316175529/PCL+test+ptsd\\_self\\_assessment.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c017fe4b09474f2e4d227/t/555f690fe4b0577e78910d6c/1432316175529/PCL+test+ptsd_self_assessment.pdf)





## Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Why it matters. Employers have a positive “duty,” under the law, to accommodate an employee’s religious observances, where doing so would not cause the employer undue hardship.

Religion is a protected ground under BC Human Rights Law, as well as under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Therefore, employers are required to reasonably accommodate religious practices. What is deemed to be reasonable differs from workplace to workplace.

Most workplaces in Canada provide statutory holidays. Employers can include some basic accommodations to make up for this when employing an individual, who is Muslim. For example, in the Muslim faith, Friday is the holy day, as opposed to Sunday. For employees working shifts, possible accommodations could include scheduling the employee for an evening shift on Friday, after the midday prayer, or scheduling the employee on Saturdays or Sundays instead of Fridays.

For an organization with a Monday to Friday workweek, scheduling in such a way would be outside of the bounds of reasonable accommodation. It would not be reasonable for an organization to change its operating hours to accommodate an employee. However, allowing for an extended Friday lunch break for the employee to attend Friday prayer service could be a possible alternative. If it is not possible to alter the working hours, then the employee would not participate in the Friday prayers.

Many of the current refugees to BC are practising Muslims.

### Putting reasonable accommodation into practice in the construction sector.

Situation: you have just hired a new employee, who is a practising Muslim, as a construction labourer. He has asked if it is possible to participate in daily prayers at the work site. He will be responsible for general clean-up of the project site, which is working on the open upper floors of a high-rise tower. Breaks are scheduled for each crew based on the work-flow for the day. Access to and from the work site is by the elevator, which is used during the day by several work crews. There is not

sufficient time for someone to take the elevator to the ground during a break. The site does not have any private space available.

What you need to consider: “Reasonable accommodation” means meeting the employee’s request without causing undue hardship to the employer. In this case, it would not be considered reasonable to provide a private space at the work site. Instead, you should acknowledge the employee’s request and indicate that it will not be possible to provide the private space for prayers at the work location.

**Prayers can be accommodated in any workplace.**

Another important aspect of the Muslim faith is the Salah prayers, which occur five times a day. These are based on the time of day, and so shift accordingly. One prayer occurs before sunrise, a second one in the early afternoon, a third one in the early evening, and then two more occur at night. In a typical work day, there would be one or two Salah prayers. Prayers take approximately 10 minutes to complete, including the pre-prayer washing of the feet. Because the prayer times follow the trajectory of the sun, the daily prayer times shift throughout the calendar year.

In most work environments, Muslim employees will be able to pray during their typical break times. In an organization where breaks are flexible, the Salah prayers can be fairly simple to accommodate by allowing the employee to take their breaks at prayer times, and providing a space for them to pray in, such as a private quiet room.

In companies that are more rigid in their break schedules, such as a factory or a construction setting, it is reasonable for Muslim employees to expect that prayers are to be done only on scheduled break times. It would not be reasonable to require a pause in the assembly line or shift schedules for the entire work group to meet specific prayer times. Instead, the employee would conduct the prayer at a later, more suitable, time and location, even if that means waiting until he or she has gone home after work.

**Location is flexible.** It is ideal for the prayer to take place in a private space, where the employee is able to wash prior to the commencement of the prayer. Sometimes this can be done in a private room on the work site, or even in the First-Aid room on construction sites. If washing is not an option, the prayer can still take place.

**Safety first.** During the prayer, the employee may not respond to verbal discussions. However, prayer can and should be interrupted in the event of an emergency.

**What is the Ramadan holiday?** Muslims also celebrate Ramadan, which requires fasting during daylight hours, as well as the festival of Eid-ul-Adha, also known as the festival of sacrifice. The day is observed at the end of the hajj or yearly pilgrimage to Mecca, approximately two months and ten days after the end of Ramadan. The day is celebrated by all Muslims, not only those performing the ritual of the hajj.

**Find Out More:**

BC Muslim Association:  
<http://www.thebcma.com>

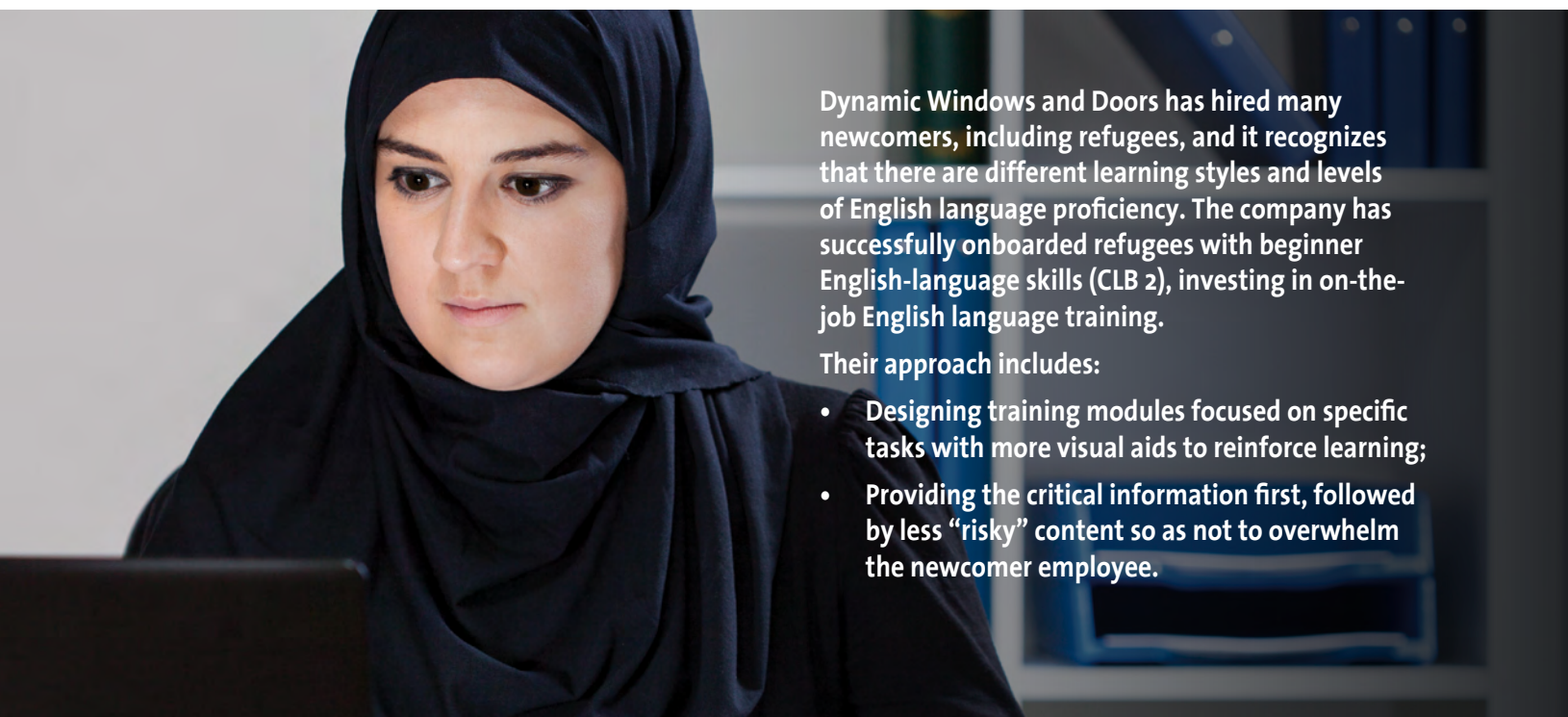
Manager's Guide to Reasonable Accommodation:  
[http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/for-hiring-managers/resources-for-hiring-managers/a\\_managers\\_guide\\_to\\_reasonable\\_accommodation\\_2016.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/for-hiring-managers/resources-for-hiring-managers/a_managers_guide_to_reasonable_accommodation_2016.pdf)

Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices:  
<http://www.nccm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/NCCM-Employer-GUIDE-PF.pdf>

Dynamic Windows and Doors has hired many newcomers, including refugees, and it recognizes that there are different learning styles and levels of English language proficiency. The company has successfully onboarded refugees with beginner English-language skills (CLB 2), investing in on-the-job English language training.

Their approach includes:

- Designing training modules focused on specific tasks with more visual aids to reinforce learning;
- Providing the critical information first, followed by less “risky” content so as not to overwhelm the newcomer employee.



## Credential Recognition and Language Support

A challenge for any employer is the acknowledgement and recognition of qualifications, education and professional certification of credentials received abroad – especially in the case of refugees, who were forced to flee their home countries – often with no supporting documentation – and whose institutions might have no contact with the outside world.

Another aspect to consider is language support, as we operate in an environment where English is for the most part the primary language of communication. As part of their settlement activities, refugees are likely to obtain basic language instruction from the Government of Canada or through various settlement organizations. The Resettlement Assistance Program, sponsored by the Government of Canada, provides language training to refugees. Courses ranging from beginner (no English) to advanced lessons, and workplace specific skills such as resume writing, are being offered to newcomers. However, there are long wait lists, so some of the refugees may not have attended language training classes or have attended informal language classes offered through other community or cultural organizations. Yet, they are eager to enter the workforce.

Some refugees will have obtained a reasonable level of proficiency in written and oral English, suitable for the work environment. However, employers should be prepared to provide ongoing language training and support, as described further in this section.

**Perfect English is not needed to perform every role.**

Employers have a general obligation to provide their employees with adequate training to help employees obtain the required knowledge, skills and abilities to perform their current and future roles. This may include literacy skills such as oral communication, reading and writing.

If stronger business English is required, employers can use several resources to locate the right service or tool to help assess and develop the language skills of their new workers. Employers can provide sector-specific English language training or subsidize the cost of language training outside the workplace. Employers with a large enough employee base may wish to consider providing or subsidizing customized, in-house, workplace-specific language training.

**Use the CLB Benchmark.** The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks offers a free e-learning portal for HR professionals, employers and assessors: <https://www.language.ca/>.

The CLB benchmarks help you understand the level of language proficiency that is required for a particular job. Once you know exactly what you're looking for in a job applicant's language skills, you can refer any applicant for a CLB assessment to evaluate his or her language skills against your requirements.

### Find Out More:

Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada  
<http://canalliance.org/index.en.stm>

International Credential Evaluation Service  
<http://www.bcit.ca/ices/>



### Open your assessment process:

- Where it is difficult to compare foreign credentials, ask for transferable skills rather than screening on education and certifications.
- Focus on competency-based hiring and try a working interview where candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities.
- Use individual interviews alongside expert panels and witness testimony to make up for missing documentation.



## How-To: Conduct a Culturally-Sensitive Interview

Interviewing across cultures requires awareness of cultural differences and norms. Employers, who are conscious of how culture influences body language, values and interests, work ethic, habits, and self-expression, will be better equipped to evaluate an immigrant's job skills and qualifications fairly. As an employer, it is important to recognize that some newcomer job-seekers have never been in a job interview before.

Interviewing may be a language minefield for the interviewee. Consider the difficulties you might have trying to understand questions in such a stressful environment, using a language that is not your mother tongue. Culture can also have a strong influence on the way someone responds to an interview question. Some of the information that interviewees are typically asked to provide may be considered inappropriate in certain cultures. For example, identifying personality traits or promoting oneself may be seen as impolite, or even perceived as bragging by people, who are Muslim. Likewise, identifying a weakness could be seen as losing face.

### INTERVIEW TIPS:

**Do some research.** Since you do not want to make assumptions and generalizations, it is useful to get some understanding of the newcomer's cultural background before the interview.

**Start the interview right.** At the beginning of the interview, take some time to explain the process. Tell the candidate that you are going to ask some questions, take some notes, and mention to the candidate that he/she will also have an opportunity to ask questions. You want to provide thorough information about the scope of the interview.

**Avoid using slang.** As English is not the primary, or in some cases, secondary language of the newcomer, miscommunications are common and should be anticipated. Avoid slang, jargon, acronyms and unnecessarily technical language, and be alert to the pace of the conversation, as well as the body language and expression. If small talk is atypical, don't let this cloud your judgement. This can be particularly important in the early phase of an interview process when engaging in small talk is common.

### Consider this...

Many companies conduct "behavioural-based" job interviews, so that cultural differences and the applicants' lack of Canadian work experience don't undercut their chances of being hired.

How questions are framed is also very important.

"Good interview questions, regardless of whom you are interviewing, should be framed behaviourally," says Ian Cameron, managing director of The McQuaig Institute.

"Ask for stories that will exemplify the skills you require in the role you are filling by starting with 'tell me about a time when, for example you had to collaborate with a number of others on a project or you had to act on a problem with very little direction.' Culturally, their story may be very different than a story you would have experienced. Make the context of the story secondary to the explicit description of the skills you are seeking and listen for good examples of those skills being used and producing results."

-Careers, *Financial Post*,  
May 3, 2013



**Always use language that is immigrant-friendly and allow for differences in communication styles.**

**Respect personal space.** Be aware that definitions of personal space differ between cultures. Different cultures have varying comfort levels regarding personal space. For some refugees, the typical personal space may be larger than what is generally accepted by most Canadians. Some Muslims refrain from all physical contact with unrelated persons of the opposite gender, which could include hand-shaking. If unsure, it is completely appropriate to ask someone if they shake hands before engaging in the practice. What seems rude or forward to you, or reticent and retiring, may have an entirely different meaning to someone else.

**Use practice-based assessment.** If language is a barrier to accurate assessment, use practice-based ways of determining a candidate's ability, which is a very valuable approach for all candidates. Focus on asking for examples and specifics or enable the candidate to demonstrate their skills. This is a common way to evaluate new workers in skilled trades in Canada, and it can be extended to other industries, where appropriate. Ask what experience the candidate has that is relevant and valuable in Canada, instead of asking about their specific Canadian experience.

**Invite questions.** Typically, we end interviews by asking a candidate, "Do you have any questions for me?" Some newcomers are not used to being asked this question, which in their culture may be associated with challenging authority. Assure the candidate they can ask any question about either the job or the process of selection. For example, you can say, "Now that we have discussed your knowledge and skills, you must have some questions about the job or about what it is like to work at our company. You can ask me any question that you have."

#### **Relevant Resources:**

How to Conduct a Culturally-Sensitive Interview?  
<http://iecbc.ca/how-to-conduct-culturally-savvy-interviews/>

Resources for How to Hire Immigrant Talent:  
<http://iecbc.ca/employer-tools-and-resources/hire-immigrant-talent/>

Hiring Immigrant Talent Webinar Series:  
<http://courses.hrma.ca/courses/hiring-immigrant-talent>



**The most impactful element of communication is the non-verbal component, closely followed by the tone of voice. Body language and modulation vary greatly from person to person and often result in miscommunication.**

## How-To: Establish Effective Mutual Expectations

One of the most important steps that employers can take with new employees is to establish mutual, clearly understood expectations. A new country, a new organization, a new work environment - it is a lot for any new employee, regardless of where that person is from. To alleviate misunderstanding, the manager and new employee need to share mutual expectations early in the relationship. The focus is not just on what you expect from the employee, but also what he or she can expect from you as their manager, or from the company.

**Talk about expectations.** Not just what you expect from the employee, but also what they can expect from you. Employers can use a simple process to establish mutual expectations with new employees. Simply take a piece of paper and create two columns. Label one column, "Manager", and the other column, "Employee". Or better yet, label one column with your name and the other column with the new employee's name. Then in the column under the manager's name, begin to list what the new employee can expect from you, their manager.

**Share your management style.** Use statements such as, "you can expect me to provide you with support to do your job," or "you can expect me to provide you with feedback on how you are doing in your new role".

Try to avoid jargon that we may understand but that would be unusual to a newcomer. Instead of saying, "I have an open-door policy," you can state, "please come to see me anytime if you have questions. I will try to make myself available to answer any questions you may have."

**Set clear expectations.** After discussing and listing several items that the new employee can expect from you, begin to create a list in the column under the Employee's name. It is important to explain key requirements of the job, key performance issues, and goals of the work team and/or organization. Expectations need to be clear, concrete and timely. Here is where you will continue to use plain and simple language to indicate the key success factors required in their role. You can include anything that is critical to the job.

Again, instead of saying, "Shifts start at 8 AM", use language, which directly reflects your expectations, such as, "You start your work shift by 8 AM." Also, include behaviour expectations, such as, "I expect you to come talk to me if you have any concerns or questions".



The process of establishing mutual expectations with any new employee is a powerful tool to develop a positive relationship.





# How-To: Establish a Buddy System

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A mentorship or a buddy system is a highly effective way to address or prevent many of the onboarding issues previously described. Many organizations have internal mentorship programs that are excellent ways to help a new hire to integrate, and to allow the mentor or buddy to grow professionally as well.

A buddy arrangement is essentially assigning an existing employee to act as the primary contact person for the newcomer employee for a specific period of time during the orientation and onboarding period. It is preferable to have someone who is a peer at a similar level and job function. It is imperative to identify and assign the function of a peer buddy to individuals, who take the role seriously, and who are encouraged and supported by the company to take on the role. The buddy may or may not be from the same cultural background. It is more important to identify existing employees, who share a positive passion for the company and are excellent ambassadors for new employees.

## DESIGNING A BUDDY PROGRAM:

[http://www.hr.com/en/communities/training\\_and\\_development/designing-a-buddy-program\\_eacwm5gu.html](http://www.hr.com/en/communities/training_and_development/designing-a-buddy-program_eacwm5gu.html)

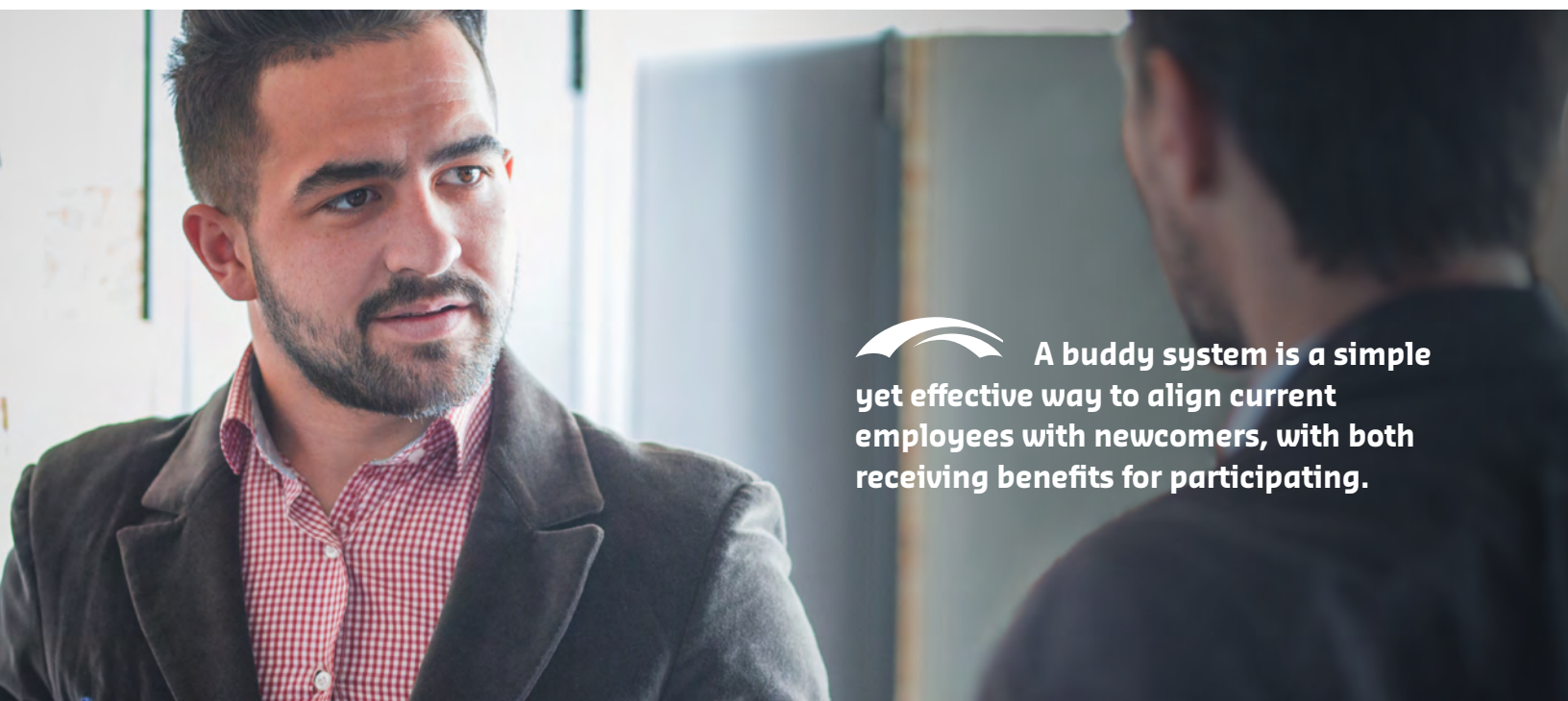
## WHAT CAN A BUDDY DO?

- Welcome the employee on their first day and provide an orientation to the workplace.
- Take breaks together so the employee has someone they know and is not left alone during non-work times and activities.
- Help the newcomer understand the typical language used in the workplace and profession.
- Invite the newcomer to become involved in social activities with co-workers.
- Explain the workplace culture and, in particular, its unspoken aspects.

## EXPAND MENTORING BEYOND YOUR COMPANY

Mentoring and Networking don't just have to be internal. Consider an external mentor, outside of your workforce. You can introduce your employees to IEC-BC's MentorConnect and Connector programs. These programs provide excellent opportunities to learn best practices and industry information and build local professional networks, and they are a great way to advance mentoring beyond the workplace.

Learn more about the MentorConnect and Connector programs at [www.iecbc.ca](http://www.iecbc.ca).



**A buddy system is a simple yet effective way to align current employees with newcomers, with both receiving benefits for participating.**



## How-To: Communicate and Provide Feedback

Managers who set clear, understandable expectations with a new employee will have established a clear means to provide effective direction and feedback. Employers need to create opportunities to provide frank direction as well as constructive feedback in the first weeks and months. Sometimes, we, as Canadians, are too polite, and couch criticism in a way that is not clear.

A newcomer might not hear criticism that is too subtly expressed. He or she wants to perform well, get along with colleagues and contribute to the team, but needs the information to do so. Hence, an ongoing discussion about expectations, from job responsibilities, duties and office culture to performance monitoring and talent development, is the best way to begin the relationship with a new employee. Coaching them to grow in their new position and to reach their goals will benefit the newcomer employee as well as your organization.

**Ask for input and provide feedback.** Many immigrants may be more familiar with hierarchical leadership styles where authority is not questioned, so their input may have to be directly requested. When it is time to provide feedback, managers sometimes “sandwich” negative feedback between pieces of positive feedback. However, some immigrants may appreciate specific direction to focus on key areas of improvement. Speak frankly, give praise as due, and solicit discussion.

Going back to the expectation model discussed earlier, inform the employee that their input is actually welcome and expected.

**Manage conflicts.** Established team members may deal with other team members directly, but some immigrants may be accustomed to asking supervisors to deal with issues with other team members. It is important to facilitate and coach immigrant employees on how to be a team member by raising and discussing issues directly with others.

**Delegate tasks.** Supervisors typically delegate and expect their staff to take initiative on projects. However, immigrants from some cultures may expect firm direction from the boss. Finding the right balance between providing direction and encouraging a newcomer employee to take initiative and make decisions on their own takes time and encouragement.

### Related Resources:

Top 10 Tips for Communicating with Anyone in the World :  
<https://www.dwellworks.com/blog/archive/top-10-tips-for-communicating-with-anyone-in-the-world/>

How to Use Good Communication Skills for Cross-Cultural Diversity:  
<http://work.chron.com/use-good-communication-skills-crosscultural-diversity-8317.html>

# Refugee Response Efforts in BC

From government funding to private donations to volunteer resettlement support, our province's response to the settlement and integration of refugees has been remarkable. Various service-provider organizations and agencies have mobilized resources to help refugees navigate through transition to life in Canada, and many businesses have stepped up to provide innovative solutions to facilitate their employment.

## REFUGEE READINESS HUB

The largest agency of its kind in Western Canada, the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC) offers a variety of support services for immigrants and refugees to help them get settled, find careers and start their new lives in Canada.

In response to Canada's most recent refugee resettlement movement, ISSofBC has created the Refugee Readiness Hub for individuals and refugee-serving organizations. Through this online resource hub, users can learn about Syria, read the latest status of the arrival of refugees and find local resettlement programs and services.

## REFUGEE RESPONSE TEAMS

Five community organizations have been chosen to lead Refugee Response Teams to proactively help refugees settle and integrate into BC communities. Their role is to identify and prioritize short-term community needs to support a co-ordinated approach to helping refugees. For example, the teams may provide links with employers or other labour market opportunities and co-ordinate community supports.

These teams have representatives from organizations spread throughout the province and across a diverse sphere of activities, including ethnic and faith-based groups, immigrant and community organizations, health and education authorities, government, and the business community.

## REFUGEE RESPONSE TEAM/ LEAD ORGANIZATION

- Cariboo - Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society of Prince George
- Vancouver Island - Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) <https://virrt.ca/>
- Thompson-Okanagan - Kelowna Community Resources
- Fraser Valley - DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society <http://fraservalleyrrt.ca/>
- Metro Vancouver - MOSAIC <http://metrovanrrt.ca/>

## Additional Resources:

Immigrant Services Society of BC  
Refugee Readiness Hub  
<https://refugeehub.issbc.org/>

WelcomeBC – For Refugees  
<https://www.welcomebc.ca/Start-Your-Life-in-B-C/Services-and-Support/For-Refugees>

It was one of those perfect opportunities where we could make that connect between the business world and the social services agency. Ingram Micro held a hiring fair at DIVERSEcity, and we had 18 refugees hired in a single day. We also had 25 refugees hired by FedEx in a separate hiring fair held a few weeks after[that]. And we did a third fair with Dynamic Windows and Doors, which was just as successful. We couldn't just sit [by] knowing of employers needing employees, and, on the other hand, clients needing jobs!

-Neelam Sahota, CEO DIVERSEcity



## Current Refugees to BC: Facts and Figures

According to data currently available from the Immigrant Services Society of BC, until late 2015, the top source countries for refugee admissions to BC were Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia. Since November 2015, Syria tops the list, with over 2500 refugees settling in over 50 communities across BC.

Below are some country-specific facts that might be helpful for employers in their onboarding efforts.

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT REFUGEES FROM SYRIA?

**Syrian refugees have fled** from their home country as a result of the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011. Syria has been under the rule of President Bashar al-Assad since 2000, when he was elected in an uncontested election after his father's 30-year rule. Dissent began to build and culminated in the Arab Spring, a wave of revolts in countries across the Middle East. This quickly turned a once peaceful country into a war-torn land, as various rebel groups formed along religious lines to try and overthrow the current government. Because the civil war had broken out along religious lines, this has made the war even more dangerous for Syrians.

**Arabs, including Muslims and Christians,** make up nearly 90% of Syria's population. Kurds, the second largest ethnic group, make up about 10% of the population. There are other, much smaller, ethnic groups, such as the Armenians and the Turkomans. In Syria, ethnic identity and native tongue are closely tied.

**All Syrians speak colloquial Arabic,** and the great majority can also read and write in Modern Standard Arabic. Many resettled Syrians will have a basic knowledge of English, but only a small number will be proficient in the language. Some will also speak some French, German, Russian, or another foreign language, depending on their schooling.

**Families are generally large** and extended in Syria. They include not only parents and children but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Among family members, there are close bonds of love and support as well as responsibility and supervision. Family members feel a duty to take care of each other and make sure no one does anything that will negatively affect other

family members. Family reputation is as important as individual freedom. Improper behavior by women or the failure of men to live up to the code of honesty and generosity can ruin the honour of the family.

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT REFUGEES FROM IRAQ?

**Since the early 1980s, Iraq has faced wars,** political instability, and economic sanctions, resulting in the displacement of over 9 million people—approximately 7 million have fled the country, and 2 million are internally displaced. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than four million Iraqis have been displaced since 2014 by the war in Iraq and its aftermath. Of these, about two million people have found asylum in neighbouring countries, where many eke out a marginal living in poor, inner-city neighbourhoods, often by working illegally for low wages as labourers, drivers, and restaurant workers.

**Iraq includes a number of diverse ethnic groups,** religions, and languages. According to the CIA's online World Factbook, 75% to 80% of Iraqis are Arabs, and 15% to 20% are Kurds, with smaller numbers of Armenians, Assyrians, and Turkomen.

Refugees from nearly every country have come to Canada over the years. And often the countries they came from reflect the history of international crises, like Syria and Iraq today or Chile and Bangladesh in the 1970s and Sri Lanka and Haiti more recently.

*-CBC: Canada's Refugees:  
Where they come from by the numbers.  
October 4, 2015*

Islam is and has always been a very powerful social force in the country. Most Iraqi Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomen are Muslims, making Islam the religion of about 95% of the country's population.

**Arabic, the official language of Iraq**, is spoken by approximately 77% of Iraqis as a first language. Other languages spoken in Iraq include Kurdish, Anatolian Turkish, Syriac, Neo-Aramaic – spoken by the Assyrians; as well as Mandaic and other Neo-Aramaic varieties. Shabaki, Armenian, Roma, and Farsi are each spoken by less than 1% of the population.

**Among Iraqi Arabs, the family is the center of life**, and an individual's social status tends to be determined by his or her family. Personal preferences normally take a secondary place to family loyalty and duty, and individual behaviour is constrained by the desire not to bring shame on one's family. However, with modernization, individual achievement has gradually acquired a more important role.

**Like most Arab societies, Iraqi society is patriarchal**, and men tend to have more decision-making power than women. At the heart of the treatment of women is the belief in a man's honour and the honour of his family. Protection of women is a central tenet of Islamic society, and both men and women believe it to be necessary. That said, women in many Arab countries play a more central role in public life than is immediately apparent. Before the Gulf War and the 2003 invasion and occupation, Iraqi women were generally among the most liberated in the Arab world and were better integrated into the workforce than in most other Arab countries.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT REFUGEES FROM IRAN?

**Many of BC's Iranian refugees are Kurdish**, hence the focus of this profile is on Kurds who fled Iran. Kurds are the third-largest group (after Azerbaijanis) in Iran.

The vast majority of Iranian Kurds are Sunni Muslims and they have found themselves persecuted, discriminated against and marginalised by a largely Shi'a Muslim population in Iran. Although they initially had hope and support for the Iranian Revolution, the Iranian Kurds sought autonomous rule as part of a wider Iran, which led to Ayatollah Khomeini declaring

a Jihad (Holy War) against the Kurdish people. As a result, there has been a sustained military, economic and psychological war waged against the civilian population in the area, which has, according to the Kurdistan Peace and Development Society, led to a 'systematic genocidal campaign'. This campaign has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of innocent people. The Iranian Kurds have long fought for improved governmental representation and protection of their basic human rights through the creation of a federal state.

**The Kurdish culture** is a mix of Islamic tradition and indigenous heritage. The Kurds constitute 7% of Iran's overall population. According to many sources, the Iranian government has systematically made efforts to assimilate the Kurds into mainstream Iranian life, despite Kurdish attempts to maintain regional autonomy. Violent conflict has ensued over decades between Iranian authorities and the Kurdish people. Following the Iranian revolution, brutal conflict ensued between Kurdish rebels and Islamic activists.

**The Kurdish language** is related to Persian (or Farsi), the language spoken in Iran. Kurdish, like Persian, has also borrowed many words from the Arabic language.

**The Kurds are very family oriented.** Family lines are patriarchal—traced along the father's ancestry. Marriage between first cousins is common. A man often marries the daughter of one of his father's brothers. This practice is common among many cultures.

Tribal leadership among the Kurds is inherited. However, local leaders are chosen for their personal qualities, including integrity, generosity, and skill at dealing with government officials.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT REFUGEES FROM SOMALIA?

**Created in 1960 from a former British protectorate and an Italian colony**, this country in the Horn of Africa collapsed into anarchy following the overthrow of the military regime of President Siad Barre in 1991. Since then, conflict and insecurity have displaced thousands, while a four-year long drought led to a humanitarian crisis. Somalia today is a failed state, with 1.7 million of its people internally displaced, and one million living as refugees outside the country.

**The main ethnic group in Somalia** is Somali-approximately 85%. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the minority groups include Bantu, Bravenese, Rerhamar, Bajuni, Eyle, Galgala, Tumul, Yibir and Gaboye. These groups continue to live in conditions of great poverty and suffer numerous forms of discrimination and exclusion.

**The two official languages are Somali and Arabic**, with English and Italian spoken as well. The number of living languages listed in the Ethnologue for Somalia is 13. Of these 9 languages are indigenous, and 4 are non-indigenous.

**Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims**, and less than 1 percent of ethnic Somalis are Christians. Loyalty to Islam reinforces distinctions that set Somalis apart from their immediate African neighbors, most of whom are either Christians or adherents of indigenous African faiths.

**Family is extremely important in the Somali community**; family is more important than the individual in all aspects of life. Men are usually at the head of the household. Women manage the finances and take care of the children. It is considered culturally unacceptable for a man to not be perceived as being in charge of his home. As in many Islamic cultures, adult men and women are separated in most spheres of life. Although some women in the cities hold jobs, the preferred role is for the husband to work and the wife to stay at home with the children. Female and male children participate in the same educational programs and literacy among women is relatively high.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT REFUGEES FROM ERITREA?

**Eritrea is one of Africa's newest states.** It was formed in 1991 after breaking away from Ethiopia following three decades of war. As Eritreans were fighting for their freedom, their country was devastated. The countryside was in ruins and many Eritreans left to escape the intense fighting. Many went first to refugee camps in neighbouring countries such as Sudan and Zaire (now Republic of the Congo). Health conditions in the refugee camps were terrible and many suffered from hunger and disease. From the refugee camps, some Eritreans went to countries such as Germany, Sweden, Italy, the United States, and Canada.

**There are two major religions in Eritrea**, Christianity and Islam. Christianity is the religion of about 50% to 63% of the population of Eritrea.

**The traditional language for more than half the population** of Eritrea, and now the official language of Eritrea, is Tigrinya (also spelled Tigrigna). Eritreans over the age of 50 may also speak Arabic, Amharic, and Italian, because they lived during the Italian and Ethiopian occupations.

**Traditionally, Eritreans care for elder family members** at home and view this as an important duty. This cultural value is embraced by younger Eritrean refugees, though most have not yet needed to care for elders. This younger generation will likely find it challenging to care for elders at home due to the need for both men and women to work.

### Additional Resources:

Country Profile: Iraq. Library of Congress:  
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

Country Profile: Syria. Library of Congress:  
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Syria.pdf>

Somalia Country Profile. Library of Congress:  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2012594293/>

Population Profile: Syrian Refugees:  
<http://lifelinesyria.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EN-Syrian-Population-Profile.pdf>

Cultural Orientation Resource Centre:  
<http://www.culturalorientation.net>

Health Toolkit for Refugees:  
[http://www.swchc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Refugee\\_Health\\_Toolkit\\_2015-2016.pdf](http://www.swchc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Refugee_Health_Toolkit_2015-2016.pdf)

Pathways to Gender Justice. Canadian Council for Refugees:  
<http://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/gender.pdf>



Every year, British Columbia also welcomes refugees from other countries, and your new employee(s) might come from nations not mentioned in this overview. You can find more background information from:

**Country Insights. Global Affairs Canada:**

[https://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country\\_insights-apercus\\_pays/ci-ic\\_er.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-apercus_pays/ci-ic_er.aspx?lang=eng)



The **Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC)**

is a not-for-profit organization that provides BC employers with solutions, tools and resources they need to attract, hire and retain qualified immigrant talent. We believe that the successful integration of skilled newcomers into the BC labour force is critical to both their success and the province's long-term economic performance.

We work with employers, government, and other partner stakeholders to ensure that BC employers can effectively integrate global talent.

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IMMIGRANT  
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Connecting Employers  
to Immigrant Talent