



# HIRING REFUGEES IN AGING SERVICES

*Recommendations for hiring, training, and building inclusive environments for refugees in the workplace*

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# INTRODUCTION

To build the workforce pipeline in the aging services sector, many LeadingAge providers have explored how refugee populations may be a source of qualified candidates to care for the growing older adult population. To support this exploration, LeadingAge partnered with Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) to develop guidance on best practices for hiring refugees.

This resource will provide you with:

- An overview of who refugees are and their status within the United States
- An understanding of how the needs of refugees align with employers and employment opportunities
- Resettlement processes and supports
- How to hire refugees
- Best practices for hiring organizations, with a focus on creating inclusive environments
- Additional contacts and resources
- Provider case studies

As noted in the following information, Global Refuge is one of many resettlement agencies across the United States. To locate resettlement agencies near you, visit the Office of Refugee Resettlement website for local contact information.

## About LeadingAge

LeadingAge is the national association representing nonprofit aging services providers and other mission-minded organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Alongside our members and 38 state partners, we use applied research, advocacy, education, and community-building to make America a better place to grow old. Our membership encompasses the entire aging services continuum, including skilled nursing, assisted living, PACE, affordable housing, retirement communities, adult day programs, community-based services, hospice, and home-based care. We bring together the most inventive minds in the field to lead and innovate solutions that support older adults wherever they call home. Visit us at [LeadingAge.org](https://www.leadingage.org).

## About Global Refuge

Founded in 1939, Global Refuge is the largest faith-based national non-profit dedicated exclusively to serving refugees, asylum-seekers, and other immigrant communities in the U.S. Through more than 80 years of service and advocacy, Global Refuge has helped more than 500,000 migrants and refugees rebuild their lives in the U.S. Find out more at [www.globalrefuge.org](https://www.globalrefuge.org).



# BACKGROUND

Americans are living longer, and many will need to receive care as they age. Yet, the ability to provide necessary care is at risk, as our nation experiences the most significant workforce crisis of our time. Research indicates we will need 8.3 million<sup>1</sup> direct care workers between the years 2021 – 2031, with 71% of providers struggling to recruit new workers, and 73% of providers struggling to cover shifts.<sup>2</sup> As the 65+ population grows, the cohort between the ages of 18 – 64 will remain stagnant,<sup>3</sup> so there simply aren't enough people to provide high-quality help to the growing number of older adults. We need to encourage more people to join our field, and as workforce shortages persist across aging services and nearly every other sector, providers are looking to foreign-born workers as one potential source for filling open positions. Immigrants are already significant contributors to the long-term care workforce: Over 30% of all home care aides, over 20% of all nursing assistants, 20% of RNs in nursing homes, and over 15% of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) in nursing homes are foreign-born.<sup>4</sup> In addition to immigrants, refugees are another population to consider as we build our international workforce pipeline.

The purpose of this resource is to help aging services providers better understand the employment opportunities that exist within the refugee population, including insight into the lived experience of refugees, support systems in place, best practices for hiring and training, and building inclusive environments that are welcoming to all.



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# OVERVIEW OF REFUGEES

## Definition

Refugees are children, men, and women who have been forced to flee their homes and displaced by war, persecution, or natural disasters. Most likely, they are too afraid to return home or simply cannot. At the end of 2022, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated that there were 108.4 million displaced people and 35.3 million refugees globally.<sup>5</sup> Half of all refugees originate from three countries—[Syria](#), [Ukraine](#), and [Afghanistan](#).<sup>6</sup>

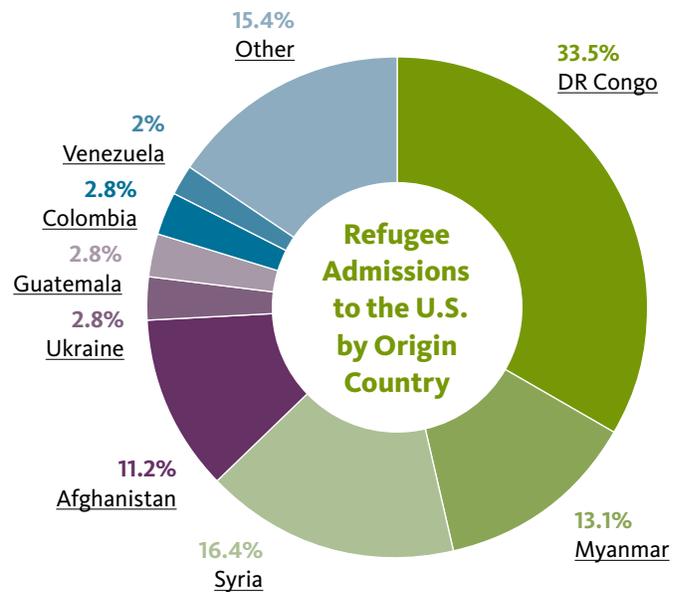
## Why are refugees coming to the United States?

Most refugees live in countries bordering their home country, and only a small percentage will be resettled in a third country like the United States. According to the [Projected Global Resettlement Needs Assessment for 2024](#), there will be over 2.4 million refugees in need of resettlement in 2024, a 20% increase compared to the resettlement needs of 2023.<sup>7</sup> Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from a country in which they have sought protection to a third country that has permitted them to stay with permanent residence.

Throughout its history, the United States has played a significant role in resettling refugees from around the world, offering them safety, opportunity, and a chance to rebuild their lives. Since the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, the United States has admitted more than 3.1 million refugees.<sup>8</sup> The process has evolved, shaped by geopolitical events, domestic considerations, and humanitarian needs.

Before arriving in the United States, refugees undergo a rigorous screening process that includes multiple background checks, biometric data collection, and interviews conducted by DHS and other intelligence agencies. The vetting process typically takes 18 to 24 months and is concluded *before* a refugee is admitted to the United States. This process, designed to ensure that individuals who pose a security risk are not admitted, makes refugees the most thoroughly vetted immigrant population.

The countries of origin for refugees admitted through the U.S. resettlement program have changed considerably over time. In the first eight months of FY 2023, 43% of refugees resettled in the U.S. were from Africa, 28% from the Middle East and South Asia, 13% from East Asia, 11% from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 4% from Europe and Central Asia.<sup>9</sup>



Source: Ward & Batalova, 2023

5 UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, 2023

6 UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, 2023

7 UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, 2023

8 Reception and Placement - United States Department of State, n.d.

9 Ward & Batalova, 2023



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# HIRING REFUGEES

## How do the needs of refugees align with the needs of employers?

Once given the opportunity to rebuild their lives in the United States, refugees often contribute to the country's economy and society. They bring talent, knowledge, and adaptability. Data shows they stimulate investment, increase our workforce, and make businesses more productive. Refugees represent approximately 0.7% of the U.S. population but have made an outsized impact in the communities where they have settled by filling critical workforce gaps in service jobs, health care, manufacturing, and transportation, according to a [recent report](#) by the American Immigration Council.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, refugee employees tend to stay with the same employer for longer than other hires and typically demonstrate outstanding work ethic and adaptability.<sup>11</sup> By resettling refugees, the United States can tap into this potential and enhance its workforce and cultural diversity. Because refugees come with a variety of skills, interests, and experience, they may be a good fit in a variety of careers within aging services, including clinical, culinary, administration, environmental services, activities, or other departments.

## Resettlement process and locations

The U.S. [Refugee Admissions Program](#) prioritizes refugees who are determined to be particularly vulnerable and in need of resettlement. When a refugee is identified for resettlement in the U.S.—and before their flight is arranged—resettlement support agencies determine the best city, partners, and next steps for each case.

During this process, experts take into account the refugee's country of origin, the language they speak, where in the country they might have family members and other important factors such as physical disabilities or mental health needs. Local employment prospects, availability of affordable housing, and community capacity are primary considerations. Based on this information, support is provided for each individual or family. Every effort is made to reunite arriving refugees with family or friends who reside in the U.S. through a network of 300 local affiliates in 202 communities and 46 states throughout the U.S.

Global Refugee and network partners operate 55 resettlement and placement sites and one remote placement site across the United States—making it the second-largest resettlement agency in the United States. When a refugee first arrives at the airport, they are greeted by staff and brought to a home or apartment that has been prepared for them in advance—stocked with modest furniture, culturally familiar foods, and all of the basic amenities of an American home.

For the next few months, case managers support the individual or family in learning to navigate their new community. Adults are enrolled in English language classes, children are enrolled in school, and resettlement partners guide the refugee(s) in using public transportation and accessing community resources. They are introduced to new neighbors and church and community groups that will play an important role in providing each refugee with support and companionship for years to come.

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<sup>10</sup> American Immigration Council, 2023

<sup>11</sup> Kallick & Roldan, 2018





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## Refugees eligible to work in the U.S.

Refugees, [humanitarian parolees](#), [Special Immigrant Visa \(SIV\)](#) holders, [asylum seekers](#), and those with [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\)](#) are all eligible to work in the U.S. Companies do not need to sponsor work authorization as these groups receive that directly from the government. Many forcibly displaced people are work-authorized on arrival (e.g., refugees, Special Immigrant Visa holders, Afghan and Ukrainian parolees), while others may need to wait several months to receive that authorization (e.g., asylum seekers, Temporary Protected Status holders, other humanitarian parolees).

**Asylee:** a person who meets the definition of refugee and is already present in the United States or is seeking admission at a port of entry. It's important to note that "asylees" have been legally adjudicated to merit asylum. Asylees can obtain legal permanent resident status one year after their grant of asylum.

**Asylum seeker:** someone who has fled his or her country and sought safety in another country, and whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Asylum-seekers need to apply for an Employment Authorization Document to work legally.

**Humanitarian parolee:** individuals who are granted temporary admission to the U.S. based on urgent humanitarian needs. Afghan and Ukrainian parolees are eligible to work legally upon receiving their parole status. Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, Haitian, and Cuban parolees need to apply for an Employment Authorization Document to work legally.

**Refugee:** a person outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

**Special Immigrant Visa (SIV):** a person who worked with the U.S. government, U.S. military, or government contractors in Iraq or Afghanistan for at least one year. SIVs are legal permanent residents of the U.S. and are authorized to work upon their admission to the U.S.

**Temporary Protected Status (TPS):** someone living in the U.S. can apply for TPS status when the U.S. government designates their home country as unsafe due to ongoing armed conflict, an environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. TPS holders can apply for an Employment Authorization Document to work legally.



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## WHY HIRE REFUGEES?

With estimates demonstrating we will need an additional 8.3 million direct care workers between 2021 and 2031, aging services providers need to increase innovation to recruit enough staff. In 2020, the U.S. had approximately 3.5 working-age adults for every person 65 and older, and by 2060, that ratio is expected to decline to 2.5 working-age adults for every person 65 and older. That means the workforce crisis will continue to worsen over the next 40 years unless the need for caregivers is reduced, new workers are added, or perhaps a combination of both efforts. U.S. population growth is slowing at a time when we need more workers, particularly in the LTSS field. In fact, at the beginning of 2023, we saw 10.5 million job openings across the country, with only 6 million people unemployed, equaling more than 1.7 open positions for every job seeker.

According to the [Census Bureau](#), “Net international migration is projected to overtake natural increase in 2030 as the primary driver of population growth in the United States.” With that understanding, recruitment and pipeline efforts must include tactics around hiring and training migrant populations, including refugees.

The report, “[Filling the Care Gap](#),” from Natasha Bryant, senior director of workforce research and development in the Washington, DC office of the LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston, found that immigrant workers are beneficial to the aging services workforce. Immigrant populations include the category of refugees, although not all immigrants are refugees. Bryant’s research found that immigrant workers have a positive impact on:<sup>13</sup>

- Quality care, including:
  - > Increase in resident care
  - > Decrease In physical and chemical restraint use
  - > Decrease in urinary tract infections
  - > Decrease in rehospitalizations
  - > Decrease in pressure ulcers
- Employers and care recipients have positive perceptions of immigrant workers
- Staff diversity and enriched relationships
- Enhanced recruitment and retention
- Staff turnover, as some evidence indicated that foreign-born workers demonstrate more loyalty and experience less turnover than native-born workers

Although the study above indicated the quality of care outcomes, overall, there is limited research in this area.

Refugees may also come from cultures with a more innate sense of respect and reverence for the aging population, which can lead to attributes that lend themselves to a culture of caring. One study from the International Organization for Migration notes, “Some elderly clients perceived foreign caregivers to be more attuned to client needs than native workers because of a deep respect and care for elders, which they perceived to be present in the cultural or religious beliefs of the foreign caregiver.”<sup>14</sup> The caregivers interviewed in this research referenced the desire to listen intently, value, and deeply connect with the older adults they served.

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<sup>13</sup> [Filling the Care Gap](#)

<sup>14</sup> [The Role of Migrant Care Workers in Ageing Societies: Report on Research Findings in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and the United States](#)



## Connecting with refugee talent

One of the primary goals of the U.S. Resettlement Program is early economic self-sufficiency. Global Refuge and other resettlement agencies provide in-house programming to support the employment needs of newcomers. Many refugees will get their first job in the U.S. through an early employment program. In these programs, resettlement agencies help refugees create or adapt their resumes, understand the expectations and norms of workplace culture, apply for jobs, accompany them to interviews, and support them through the orientation process. Other programming focuses on helping clients determine and advance on a chosen career pathway. Employment service staff develop partnerships with local employers and provide workforce development training and case management services to clients.

Global Refuge recruits and trains a network of national employer partners. When an organization expresses interest in hiring refugees, Global Refuge offers an [introductory training](#) that provides an overview of refugee employment, best practices of refugee hiring, and the next steps for connecting your business to Global Refuge.

One key advantage of working with refugee resettlement agencies is their strong support infrastructure. Agencies provide wrap-around services to prepare refugees for work. The partnership between employers and the refugee resettlement groups is mutually beneficial. Employers can hire a qualified candidate, and the candidate receives support through the resettlement agency.



Recognizing both the challenges and the advantages that refugees and employers face, Global Refuge launched the [Preferred Refugee Employers](#) (PRE) initiative in 2022 to deepen the partnership between employers who are committed to refugee hiring. For New Americans looking to enter the workforce, PREs offer support and services such as refugee-specific new hire orientation sessions, housing assistance, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and adult education classes, vocational mentorship, free transportation or assistance purchasing a vehicle, and more. PREs receive Global Refuge’s “seal” of approval and are eligible for ongoing training and joint marketing

opportunities. Most importantly, PREs become proven pipelines for hiring and retaining refugee talent, strengthening their companies, and inspiring a culture of welcome. LeadingAge provider members are eligible to become Preferred Refugee Employers with Global Refuge.

*“Refugee outreach and community recruitment efforts are very important to us at Unifi,” said Dr. Archana Arcot, chief people officer at Unifi Aviation. “Hiring candidates from multiple cultures from around the globe makes our company stronger, and inclusive, and helps foster diversity. Investing in a refugee program is an extension of our commitment to supporting and uplifting the communities where we operate, advancing our efforts to build a sustainable workforce for our frontline employees.”*

Higher rates of refugee retention do not come automatically but rather seem to correlate with companies that set policies that offer support to newcomers integrating into the workforce. In a report on [refugee retention rates](#) in 2018, Tent Partnership for Refugees and Fiscal Policy Institute found that the important factor in achieving lower refugee turnover seemed to be that the employer made at least some effort to integrate refugees into the workplace, adaptations that were largely considered by the companies to be small investments.<sup>15</sup>

When hiring refugees for the first time, there is almost always a period of mutual accommodation. The most common challenges are typically related to language barriers, cultural misunderstanding, and transportation

<sup>15</sup> Kallick & Roldan, 2018



challenges. When companies put forth the effort to mitigate or prevent these issues up front, they will often experience an improvement in retention rates as well as new recruitment sources. Once a company has developed expertise in integrating one refugee population, many report becoming more adept at integrating subsequent groups of refugees.

### Best Practices for Refugee Hiring and Retention



As with all new hires, it is important that refugees have a job that is the right fit. Employers may decide to hire the individual first, then identify the role that best suits their skills rather than hiring the refugee into a singular open position. Matching people with the right job can take time and effort, but when it leads to lower turnover, that time spent upfront is well worth it,<sup>16</sup> Although support services are provided by the resettlement agency, employers can add or extend additional support. Best practices may include efforts such as:

- Workplace English classes
- Housing assistance
- Opportunities for career advancement
- Vocational mentorship
- Cohort model of hiring
- Childcare subsidies
- Transportation assistance
- Refugee-specific recruiting pipeline
- Setting an annual goal for refugee hiring
- Supporting cultural inclusion and integration

<sup>16</sup> [Stepping Up to Hire Refugees](#)



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# DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION AND SUPPORT

Establishing a culture of inclusion, belonging, and support is crucial for all organizations, particularly those who welcome diverse populations, such as immigrants and refugees. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) efforts must go beyond a statement and be translated into meaningful action and behaviors with quantifiable outcomes. To accomplish this, leadership and staff must address systemic issues related to DEIB in advance of hiring refugees. Adrienne Ruffin, VP and head of the LTSS Strategic Initiatives and Operations at the LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston, offers the following recommendations:

- 1. Ensure that C-suite leaders and others are paying attention to who is in the room**—and who is not present—when strategic discussions are underway and career-advancing, resume-building work assignments are being decided. Inviting a diverse group of employees into the decision-making process benefits your employees and strengthens your organization’s future leadership bench.
- 2. Reimagine recruitment practices** so your organization can broaden its candidate pool when filling mid-level management and C-suite positions. A larger, more diverse candidate pool gives your organization the best chance of hiring the best employees for high-level positions while also creating a highly diverse workforce.
- 3. Improve communication among all leaders in your organization** so you can create a culture that empowers and elevates all employees, regardless of title or work responsibilities.

As organizations are considering and developing these practices, key parties need to be included in the discussion and design. This includes staff from each department, managers, refugees, partnering organizations, residents, families, and potentially any funding organizations. Including the perspectives of each stakeholder involved is a key practice to ensure that the refugee pipeline is set up for success. These discussions need to include both work-related needs (training, career advancement opportunities) as well as personal needs (housing, transportation, childcare, food access).

Integrating foreign-born workers is key to the success of these staff members. The quality of care and professional relationships developed are dependent upon the training, support, and cultural integration that refugee staff receive when beginning with a new organization. Refugees can experience a social and cultural distance between themselves, the older adults under their care, and their co-workers. The timing of this support is important: It needs to occur immediately upon arrival so that the refugee is supported during the most stressful time of transition.

Although many American cultural norms may be adopted by refugees, it is important to recognize and respect the cultural values and practices they bring with them. Some ideas to consider:

- Understanding and respecting how other cultures and religions approach caregiving, clinical practices, and bereavement
- Making foot washing stations available
- Designing prayer room access, time to pray, and coverage of assigned duties during that time
- Offering floating holidays so that refugees can celebrate holidays from their home country rather than employer-selected holidays



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In LeadingAge’s Quick Cast, “[Filling the Care Gap](#),” Bryant shares key findings from research on hiring and integrating foreign-born workers in our field. This resource offers detailed insight into the importance of training, peer mentoring, career advancement, staff and resident education, and more. The resource covers training, peer mentors, career advancement, staff and older adult education, language and culture education, and racism.

## Training

Ongoing training should provide refugee workers with the skills and knowledge they need to do a quality job. In addition to skills training, refugees may also benefit from cultural competency training that: enhances self-awareness about the workers’ attitudes toward people of different racial and ethnic groups; helps them understand the role of older adults in society; increases knowledge about cultural beliefs and practices and about attitudes toward aging, death, and dying practices; increases knowledge of how to care for older adults and how to interact with older persons who are living with dementia; and helps them build communication and other skills.

Not only is cultural competency training helpful for the refugee, but it will improve team functioning and reduce turnover and stress. Each person learns at their own pace, so the employer may need to provide additional supervision and support to address any cultural and language barriers. [Training materials can be accessed here](#).

## Peer mentors

Peer mentors are a key component to supporting refugees as new employees, particularly if the peer is of the same cultural or language descent. A peer mentor can help prevent a feeling of isolation and can act as a pillar of support for the refugee. Research has shown that peer mentors can help psychosocial resources available to build professional competence.

## Career advancement

Refugees often find themselves in careers that are lower in our labor force hierarchy due to an inability to substantiate or access credentials, education, and experience. Working in a job that is beneath a person’s capacity and skill can lead to reduced well-being and increased use of public assistance, and can limit or create barriers to career advancement. “It is undoubtedly valuable for recently resettled refugees to gain local work experience (Tahiri, 2017), but many refugees remain stuck in entry-level, precarious, and lower-paid jobs (Lee et al., 2020) at the bottom tier of the labor hierarchy, commonly known as survival jobs. Often these types of jobs provide limited opportunity for advancement, afford little time for training and advancement, and are not commensurate to refugee workers’ skills and experience (Delaporte & Piracha, 2018), which can negatively impact refugee’s career development and well-being (Dowling et al., 2020), as well as increased reliance on social support (Lumley-Sapanski, 2019; Mackenzie Davey & Jones, 2019).”<sup>17</sup>

Considering the static demographics of people ages 18–54 and an exponential increase in older adults who need care, it is important for the LTSS sector to not only hire refugees but also to support their career advancement to bolster the growing need for skilled professionals in the field of caregiving. According to [Beyond job placement: careers for refugees](#), “Research estimates that nearly half of refugees are in jobs that do not use their highest

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17 [Beyond job placement: careers for refugees](#)



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skills or qualifications, or struggle to find employment (Deloitte, [2019](#)). Accordingly, refugees would benefit from utilizing existing skills or upgrading to learn new skills and gain local credentials, but also from opportunities to develop new forms of social capital for employability in the local context (Delaporte & Piracha, [2018](#); Kivunja et al., [2014](#)).”<sup>18</sup> Long-term career planning, upskilling, and wraparound support can contribute to the career advancement success of refugee staff, which takes strong employer-led systems.

## Staff and Older Adult Education

Training is also needed for incumbent workers and older adults who are not refugees. Organizations must ensure supervisors, co-workers, and older adults served are well trained in diversity and cultural competence, and exercise patience in supporting their new colleagues and caregivers. This can help build the capacity of supervisors and co-workers to identify, understand, and respect the values and beliefs of others to create a welcoming and safe environment for refugees in the workplace.

Organizations can teach supervisors about the knowledge and skills that foreign workers need, including content related to cultural norms, practices that promote intercultural understanding and integration, and the organization’s culture and norms.

## Language and Culture Education

Written and oral communication can be one of the biggest challenges for refugees working in aging services. Refugees may not be proficient in English and may have difficulties with dialect, variations in accents, intonation, talking speed, and technical jargon. Helping new staff learn to communicate, understand cultural norms, and provide care in a culturally appropriate manner will provide an opportunity for staff to develop a sense of belonging, develop meaningful relationships, and provide quality care. A lack of language proficiency can undermine confidence in a caregiver’s ability to understand service plans, instructions provided, or an older person’s needs and preferences, threatening the quality of care delivered to care recipients.

In addition, care recipients may be less accepting of the care they receive when they struggle to understand caregivers or when cultural preferences regarding care become obstacles. Older adults and colleagues may find it distressing if a caregiver speaks in a native language at work, as it can feel exclusionary. Some staff members and older adults believe they are being “talked about” when staff speak another language in front of them. Employers may consider having policies that require staff to speak English while working, with background to help refugees understand why it is important.

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18 [Beyond job placement: careers for refugees](#)



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Communication barriers and cultural differences can be resolved through training programs whether they are provided by the employer, an external agency, or a partnership. The language and communication competency training should address professional jargon, slang and colloquialisms, and communication skills to help refugee staff overcome potential cultural and language barriers they may face on the job.

- Cultural competency training is related to the organizational culture, person-centered care, the care environment, and sensitivity to the client's needs.
- Employers may need to provide additional supervision or support to address cultural barriers and language proficiency. If the workers are not supported by management, the well-being and stability of the workforce can be impacted.
- Managers may need to address misunderstandings that occur because of cultural differences by encouraging workers' awareness of their attitudes toward people of different ethnic or racial groups, and the central role of culture in people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

## Racism

Support of managers can be an important factor in mediating the outcomes of the worker's experience with racism. Organizational leaders have a role to play in addressing any discriminatory actions of managers, co-workers, and care recipients and to combat discrimination.

There are a variety of strategies to help refugees who encounter racist or discriminatory actions, including encouraging employees to report any form of discrimination. Employers should monitor discrimination, provide access to information and advice on employment rights, and implement formal mechanisms to address and resolve any conflict between care recipients and refugees. Foreign and native staff need assurance that there will be no retaliation for reporting.

One strategy is to integrate the refugees into the organization by personally introducing them to those they will serve in your organization, and providing information about the new staff to older adults before their start date. Employers must implement and uphold a zero-tolerance policy regarding racially abusive behavior from older adults, which may include verbal/written warnings and discharge of services. Some providers may consider implementing a hotline that employees can call if their concerns about discrimination are not being addressed, or if they prefer anonymity.



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# READY TO GET STARTED?

If your organization is ready to begin exploratory efforts in hiring refugees, review the suggested steps below to identify actions that are appropriate for your organization's next steps.

## Step One: Overview of Refugees

If you're considering hiring refugees in your organization, review Global Refuge's information on how to [Become a Preferred Refugee Employer](#) for more details about employing refugees and to determine if your organization has the capacity to become a preferred employer.

## Step Two

Organizations need to have the support of their Board of Directors, leadership, staff, and older adults served as they begin the journey of hiring refugee staff. A series of open discussions is a good way to map out the beliefs, willingness, and needs of your organization as you prepare for this new workforce pipeline. The purpose of these conversations is to garner support, identify barriers and solutions, assess your organization's culture, address needs, set goals, and establish accountability. Discussion questions you may include:

- Is our organizational culture one that is inclusive and welcoming of diverse staff? Consider having your leadership team, Board of Directors, or an interdisciplinary task force complete this [DEI Assessment](#).<sup>19</sup>
- Do we have an organizational culture that can openly and honestly tackle difficult or even controversial topics? Consider practicing DEI-related conversations on your team with this [DEI Conversations Toolkit](#).<sup>20</sup>
- Does our leadership team have the capacity to meet the needs of staff who may need increased support? Are we ready to invest in individuals and support their needs? The Jewish Federation offers [trauma-informed tools](#) that were initially developed to support Holocaust survivors. However, the tools are now being used with many populations who have experienced trauma.
- Can we offer the necessary wrap-around supports to help stabilize the lives of those we hire? Do we have the capacity to support the mental health needs of staff?
- Are we willing to spend the time needed to get to know the individual and match them to a job that best utilizes their skillset?
- Do we have systems in place to mentor and support staff in finding success within our organization and their communities?
- Do we have systems and processes in place to address racism?
- How might the older adults we serve participate in welcoming refugees on our team?
- Do we have mentor or buddy systems in place?

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19 [LeadingAge Minnesota's DEI Assessment](#)

20 [LeadingAge Minnesota's DEI Conversations Toolkit](#)



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## Step Three

If you're interested in moving forward, you can [find refugee resettlement resources or contacts in your state here](#). This toolkit was produced in partnership with Global Refuge, but resettlement agencies in the U.S include many organizations:

- [Church World Service](#)
- [Episcopal Migration Ministries](#)
- [Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.](#)
- [HIAS](#)
- [International Rescue Committee](#)
- [Global Refuge](#) (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service)
- [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services](#) (local offices are typically called Catholic Charities)
- [World Relief](#)

Each resettlement agency will have staff to assist with both the refugee's needs as well as the employer's needs.



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# CONCLUSION

As the workforce crisis worsens in nearly every sector across the country, it is important that employers pursue a variety of workforce pipelines, cultivating strong partnerships with community organizations. For some, this may include hiring qualified refugees into a variety of positions within your organization. It is important that hiring refugees is done with care; a thoughtful approach will increase your ability to both recruit and retain valuable refugee team members.

## Additional Resources

- [TENT Partnership for Refugees](#)
- [U.S. Refugee Resettlement Facts](#)
- [UNHCR Figures at a Glance](#)
- [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#)
- [Workforce Training of Immigrants and Refugees: What Works?](#)
- [USRAP Affiliate Directory](#)





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## CASE STUDIES

### **Bristol Village and Loretto** Case Study from 2019

LeadingAge conducted telephone interviews with two LeadingAge providers, Bristol Village in Buffalo, NY and Loretto, which hire refugees to fill the labor shortage. Both providers report positive experiences and advantages to hiring refugees.

Bristol Village is an assisted living community in Buffalo, NY. Approximately one-quarter of the workforce is refugees who are employed as laundry, housekeeping, and personal care aide staff. Over the past few years, Bristol Village has hired 13 refugees and 10 have remained at the organization. The refugees are from Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia. They have varied backgrounds with previous employment including housekeeping, manufacturing, nurse, babysitter, student, hairdresser, and server.

The organization works with the International Institute of Buffalo, a local refugee resettlement agency, to recruit refugees. Bristol Village staff provide the agency with their requirements and expectations for the needed positions to identify viable candidates. The refugees have already passed intense background and security checks. The International Institute provides the refugees with supportive services similar to those described earlier—helping refugees assimilate into the community and providing educational programs or training and translation services—and assists with the new-hire paperwork. According to Mike Hellinger, president of Bristol Village, since the International Institute acts as an employment agency, the process to hire refugees is not any different than hiring U.S. citizens.

Once a refugee is hired, Bristol Village staff meet with the new employee to explain the organization, how to work with older adults, and their new role and responsibilities. Bristol Village has had positive experiences employing refugees. The refugees have a great work ethic, positive attitudes, and perform high-quality work. One challenge is the language barrier, as some refugees have limited English proficiency. This can create some difficulties for refugees and the employer during the recruitment process and on the job.

Loretto, a nursing home in Syracuse, NY, has a history of hiring “New Americans” who have resettled in Syracuse. Syracuse is a sanctuary city and IOM refugee resettlement city. Loretto’s initial refugees originated from Syria, Somalia, and other African nations and now they employ refugees from a variety of ethnic groups. The refugees work in food services, dining, housekeeping, and as aides, including eight Cuban physicians who work as certified nursing assistants.

Most of the refugees hired at Loretto come from Catholic Charities, a refugee resettlement agency. Catholic Charities works with several community-based agencies, such as Work Train Collaborative and Interfaith Works’ Center for New Americans, to deliver supportive services. Work Train Collaborative, funded by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, offers career pathways to low-income individuals while fulfilling the employment needs of local employers. Interfaith Works’ Center for New Americans is an agency that provides resettlement and post-settlement services to help refugees integrate into the community. Refugees receive assistance with finding an apartment, preparing and finding employment and medical care, understanding the new culture, and English language classes. The support is provided for about 60–90 days for each refugee.



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In addition to the support provided by the community agencies, Loretto assists the refugees with transportation, child care, education, meal programs, free urgent care, a car buying program, and access to any necessary resources. Managers, supervisors, and frontline staff receive trauma-informed care training because refugees often experience stressful events due to exposure to violence, political and religious oppression, war, migration, and resettlement.

The training provided to refugees is the standard training given to all Loretto employees. The training covers soft skills, cultural competency, and poverty issues. Loretto has a cohort model built into the training that creates a support system among the peers at the organization. Kim Townsend, president and CEO, attributes part of the success of the training program to the cohort model.

Loretto reports an overall positive experience with the refugees. They are resilient and have a strong work ethic and commitment to the job. Many seek stability because they have lived in chaos and are likely to take jobs with longer-term employment. Townsend said that if she can retain the employees for one year, then they tend to stay on the job. Hiring refugees also has created an additional pipeline of workers. Children of refugees often want health care jobs and Loretto has created internship opportunities for high school students. Similar to Bristol Village, the top challenge is limited English proficiency. The community-based agencies and Loretto provide support through the English classes and co-workers who assist with translation. Another challenge is the associated barriers with any impoverished person who comes to the country with little or no possessions or money. Loretto addresses this by building in support internally or through partner organizations.

## Case Studies in the News

[How Afghan refugees found stability in Tampa Bay senior communities](#), Tampa Bay Times, July 29, 2022

[Refugees help provider fill workforce gaps while it fulfills mission](#), McKnights Senior Living, April 27, 2022



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# GLOSSARY

**Asylee:** a person who meets the definition of refugee and is already present in the United States or is seeking admission at a port of entry. It is important to note that “asylees” have been legally adjudicated to merit asylum. Asylees can obtain legal permanent resident status one year after their grant of asylum.

**Asylum seeker:** someone who has fled his or her country and sought safety in another country, and whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Asylum-seekers need to apply for an Employment Authorization Document to work legally.

**Humanitarian parolee:** individuals who are granted temporary admission to the U.S. based on urgent humanitarian needs. Afghan and Ukrainian parolees are eligible to work legally upon receiving their parole status. Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, Haitian, and Cuban parolees need to apply for an Employment Authorization Document to work legally.

**Microaggression:** Microaggressions are the everyday slights, insults, putdowns, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned individuals who may be unaware that they have engaged in demeaning ways.<sup>21</sup>

**Refugee:** a person outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

**Racism:** [Prejudice](#), discrimination, or [antagonism](#) by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or [marginalized](#).<sup>22</sup>

**Unconscious bias:** Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one’s tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.<sup>23</sup>

**Special Immigrant Visa (SIV):** a person who worked with the U.S. government, U.S. military, or government contractors in Iraq or Afghanistan for at least one year. SIVs are legal permanent residents of the U.S. and are authorized to work upon their admission to the U.S.

**Temporary Protected Status (TPS):** someone living in the U.S. can apply for TPS status when the U.S. government designates their home country as unsafe due to ongoing armed conflict, an environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. TPS holders can apply for an Employment Authorization Document to work legally.

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21 [UNC School of Medicine](#)

22 [Oxford Languages](#)

23 [UCSF Office of Diversity and Outreach](#)