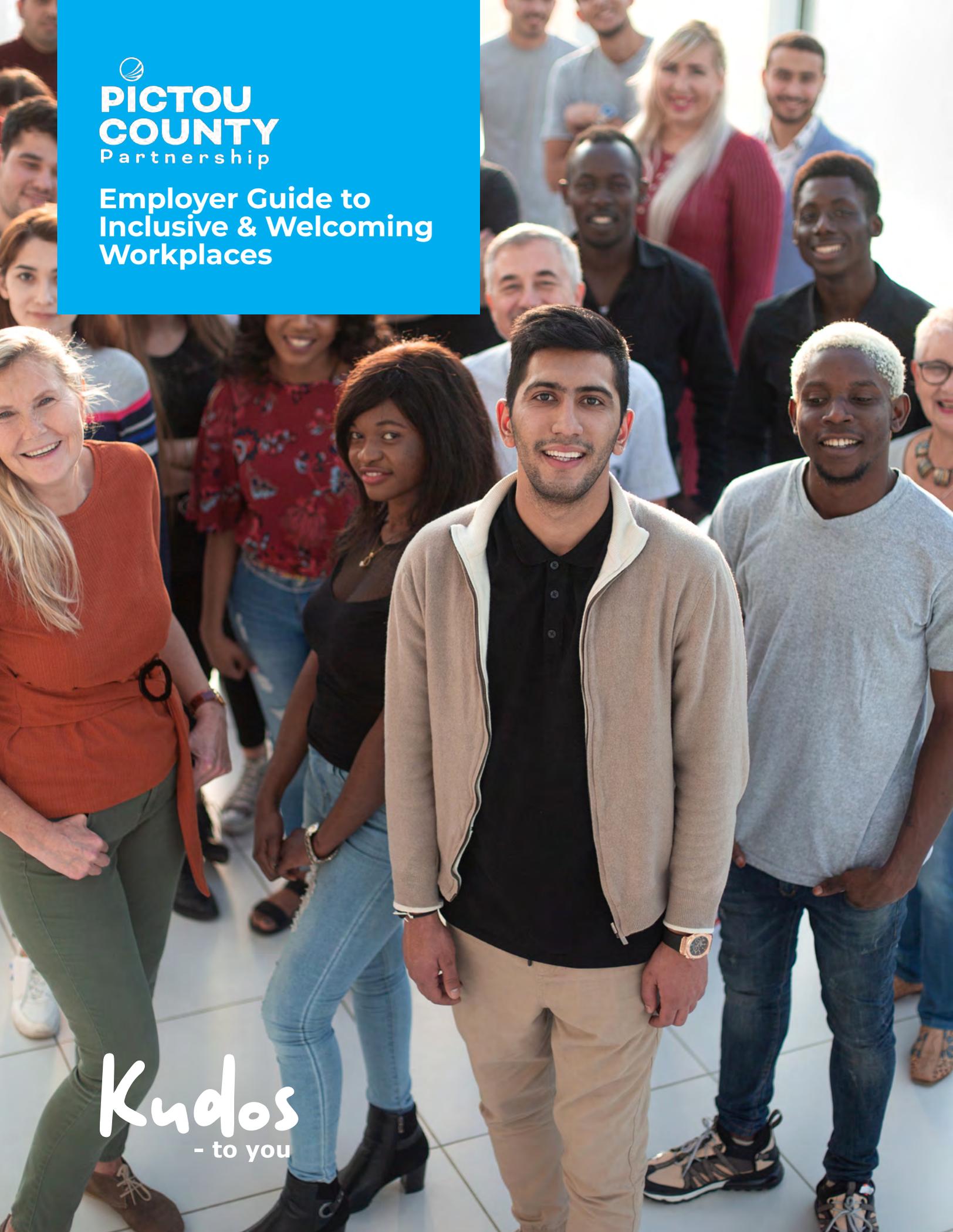




**PICTOU
COUNTY**
Partnership

**Employer Guide to
Inclusive & Welcoming
Workplaces**



Kudos
- to you

Kudos

- to you

Acknowledgement

The Pictou County Partnership would like to acknowledge all those who have been involved in the Pictou County Labour Mobility Pilot that began in 2019. Setting out to establish the proof of concept using a community driven model for labour mobility in the region using the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) has been a rewarding experience and we are proud to share our lessons learned and best practices with employers and other communities looking at their own EMPP initiatives.

Thank you to the EMPP participants, Glen Haven Manor, YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs, Pictou County Safe Harbour, RefugePoint, Talent Beyond Boundaries, The Shapiro Foundation, the Province of Nova Scotia, and Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. A true collaboration of local and global partnerships!



Introduction to the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot

The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) is Canada's model for refugee labour mobility. This innovative immigration pathway supports the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complimentary Pathways** by opening economic immigration to skilled refugees in addition to refugee and humanitarian resettlement.

With 27.1 million refugees worldwide as of June 2022, EMPP addresses the barriers refugees face in using existing economic immigration programs in Canada. As a result, refugees are now able to access more durable resettlement solutions.

EMPP is also an opportunity for Canadian employers to access a new talent pool of skilled candidates who can help businesses in meeting labour needs while benefiting from increased workforce diversity.

Link

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complimentary Pathways

[View Document](#)

To learn more from Pictou County community members who have arrived through EMPP.

Read these stories below:

[Feels Like Home](#)

[Gratitude for a Fresh Start](#)

[Be Open to Fall in Love](#)

Creating more inclusive and Welcoming Workplaces

This guide has been created to support employers in creating more inclusive and welcoming workplaces that promote diversity. In this guide, employers will gain an awareness of cultural sensitivity and the benefits of implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies and initiatives to foster organizational growth.

We are pleased to share insights and best practices learned during the Pictou County Labour Mobility Pilot to support employers on their DEI journeys as they prepare to welcome skilled refugees and other talented individuals into their workplaces.

The business case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

The business case for DEI goes beyond the feel-good factor of increasing fairness, it fosters real organizational growth by attracting wider talent pools, enabling businesses to reach new markets, improving employee engagement, and increasing innovation. These measurable benefits all have the potential to increase business profitability while supporting employers with one of their greatest challenges today – workforce development.

Talent Attraction

As employers find it more and more challenging to fill labour gaps, job seekers are looking for employers who align with their values, making inclusive and welcoming workplaces that value diversity more attractive. Diversity itself is an outcome of creating an inclusive workplace with equitable recruitment and retention policies. As the labour force declines in Canada due to shifts in population demographics, it is more important than ever that employers consider all the ways they can attract previously overlooked talent pools, both local and global, and DEI is an effective tool that can help.

Definition

Diversity refers to all the ways people can be different including race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, language, disability, and age.

Equity is about creating a fair process for all employees to access opportunities. People may experience different barriers in the workplace, and equity works to create balance by identifying those possible barriers and creating purposeful processes to overcoming them.

Inclusion is how employees feel they belong and are valued.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Strategy is an actionable plan outlining how an organization intends to create a more inclusive and welcoming workplace using the DEI values.

Increased Market Share

A workforce with greater diversity enables businesses to connect to new customers and markets. Having international talent and a variety of languages on your team is an asset in the global economy and provides a direct connection to social networks around the world helping businesses of all sizes to increase market share.

Employee Retention

DEI strategies help businesses examine their practices and establish equity that supports greater retention. Initiatives such as implementing stay interviews as informal employee check-ins, and fine-tuning recruitment practices, onboarding, professional development, and promotional opportunities can all be effective in creating feelings of inclusion in the workplace that improves retention. Effective retention strategies lead to greater workforce stability – saving employers time and money.

Innovation

Innovation is often said to be a benefit of diversity in the workplace, but it is important to note that diversity on its own is not effective. It is only when a diverse workforce feels included and are provided equitable access to share their unique perspectives can innovation thrive. When people from different backgrounds are provided the opportunity to collaborate and share ideas, assumptions are challenged which leads to more effective problem solving – fostering innovation.

The business case for DEI is clear. Using DEI as a tool to foster organizational growth will not only help employers create feel-good workplaces, but also be positioned to increase profits. Employers who commit to their DEI journeys can expect to benefit from increasing diversity and the best place to start is by creating an inclusive and welcoming workplace with equitable access.

Definition

Cultural Sensitivity is an acknowledgment that cultural similarities and differences exist between people of different backgrounds without placing a value on those differences. Differences are recognized, but not judged based on one's own cultural norms.

Culture informs how we all experience and interact in the world around us through our knowledge, ideas, values, and belief systems – we all have that in common.

Intercultural Competency

We can develop intercultural competency skills that help us interact and communicate across cultures by acknowledging and respecting cultural contexts. By gaining an understanding that culture impacts our own worldview, empathy allows us to see the world through someone else's cultural context or 'lens'. Intercultural competency enables us to share and learn from one another, enriching our interactions.



Achieving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategies takes commitment and work. DEI is often referred to as a journey and this is because we must work to challenge ourselves from how we interact in the workplace, to how we develop human resource processes and policies.

Our social interactions are impacted by our own culture. Without active awareness, we use cognitive shortcuts such as assigning people to particular social categorization groups and we use culturally learned social role schemas, or ‘ideal’ mental models, that provide us with social rules and expectations. These cognitive shortcuts help us simplify how we experience our interactions, but they also impact the effectiveness of DEI in the workplace.

We need to acknowledge that because we have culturally informed ‘ideal’ mental models, that we also all have unconscious bias towards people who do not fit these models. We must consciously work to overcome these cognitive shortcuts, so that minority members who do not meet our ideal models are not penalized with less access to opportunities.

For instance, in one cultural context there may be informal expectations that employees arrive 15 minutes early for their shift to prepare. A new employee from a different cultural background who shows up at the beginning of their shift may unknowingly be thought of as being late. Employers may be left thinking the employee may have been a poor hiring decision or ‘not a good fit’ because they are not meeting the ‘ideal’ model, while the new employee is unaware of the issue. Clear and explicit communication regarding expectations becomes very important in an inclusive and welcoming workplace, so that everyone can better understand what is really required.

Bias can take many forms and understanding affinity bias is important for unlocking the benefits of diversity. Affinity bias is our unconscious tendency to align ourselves with people who are similar. It can provide comfort and a sense of trust because social interactions are more predictable – with a shared background we have a shared sense of social rules and expectations.

However, this tendency can impact our hiring decisions and employees’ access to promotional opportunities because we are unconsciously preferring candidates similar to ourselves. Increasing our intercultural competency can help in overcoming our affinity bias towards international talent by increasing our comfort levels with different cultural backgrounds.

Recruitment

DEI initiatives can be used to fine tune recruitment processes and policies to enhance equity.

To overcome unconscious bias, it can be useful to review resumes in a blind batch. By removing names, and other hints of an applicant’s diversity characteristics, such as hobbies, and reviewing resumes together in a batch, a hiring manager can better compare candidates to each other instead of comparing them to their ‘ideal’ mental model of a candidate. Increasing the diversity within the recruitment team and having a selection committee will also support equity by including a greater range of perspectives.



Onboarding

The onboarding process is an opportunity for employers to ‘set the stage’ in creating more inclusive and welcoming workplaces. DEI onboarding initiatives can support new employees in becoming effective in their new roles while fostering a welcoming workplace.

Providing a tour of the workplace on the first day is a great welcoming initiative for all new employees. It is an opportunity to make introductions and can provide a platform for new employees to share their professional achievements with their new team. This can be an appreciated acknowledgement for newcomers who may accept positions below their skill level while they begin their new life in Canada.

Appointing a primary contact for new employees for the duration of the onboarding process can be another positive welcoming initiative to consider. There may be different members of a team assisting with onboarding, from HR orientation to more technical training, so it is useful to assign a primary contact that is dedicated to performing regular check-ins with your new employees. Starting a new job can be overwhelming and having regular opportunities to clarify information and to ask questions is helpful. Even if the new employee has experience in the role, there may be differences that you and they have not anticipated.

Consider developing onboarding tools that are clear and explicit with the potential to be translated such as videos. As Canada’s workforce continues to become more culturally diverse, developing tools that enable new employees to learn in their primary or first language can further support more diverse workforces in becoming effective in their new roles.





Mentorship Programs

The onboarding process can also include a formal mentorship or buddy program. A mentor should be available for all new employees to promote equity. Mentors are particularly helpful in supporting new employees from different cultural backgrounds in understanding the more subtle rules and ways of doing things in the workplace. In the beginning, mentors who share diversity characteristics to their mentee's should be considered where possible to promote trust and understanding based on their shared experience.

Mentorship programs can also be considered as a professional development tool beyond onboarding. There are additional benefits of having a second mentor after the initial onboarding period to support exposure to colleagues with different backgrounds which can foster a reduction of bias. Mentorship programs are also an effective way of supporting increased diversity within the management team as individuals can gain exposure to more senior roles than they might not otherwise.

If your workplace setting has multiple departments that have their own dominant

diversity characteristics, employers can also consider mentorship and buddy programs across departments to promote an increase of exposure to more backgrounds, while helping employees gain a wider appreciation for their colleagues' contributions to the goals of the organization.

Social or Community Mentorship Programs

Employers may also want to consider introducing a social mentorship/buddy program to help newcomer employees with community integration outside of the workplace. These social initiatives can be especially helpful in rural communities where access to settlement support programs, and more diverse cultural groups are not so readily available.

One of the challenges of moving to a smaller rural community is having the opportunity to form friendships outside of the workplace to help overcome feelings of isolation. Having a social mentor to make introductions to different community groups and connections to social activities can make a big difference.

DEI Training & Committees

Intercultural competency training is an initiative employers can consider making available for their leadership team. Effective DEI strategies are led by example, so it is important for those in leadership roles to understand the benefits of increasing workforce diversity while developing the skills to support the needs of more diverse employees. Additional training or workshops can be made available to employees who are interested in increasing their intercultural competency skills.

Forming DEI committees is another initiative that can be considered when looking to engage with all employees on the benefits of increasing diversity. Initiatives can include planning intercultural activities to support team building and workplace integration such as lunch and learns, and potlucks.

Accommodating cultural and religious needs

It is important to consider how your organization can make accommodations to support a diverse workforce in meeting their cultural and religion needs. Your business's operational requirements will determine how you are able to accommodate different needs, and often being open-minded and flexible are all that is required.

Understanding your employees' needs will help you, as an employer, better understand how to provide appropriate accommodations. For instance, the Salah prayers are an important part of the Muslim faith and are done five times every day. The time of day prayers are conducted depends on the rising and setting of the sun, therefore prayer times will vary. Discuss how breaktimes can be used to provide time for prayers and develop a plan. The accommodation plan should be communicated with shift supervisors and colleagues ahead of the first day of work to promote awareness among the team and a feeling of inclusiveness.

Prayer locations can be flexible. A dedicated private space that is large enough for the number of those employees who will participate will be

appreciated. Access to running water and spare clean clothes if needed, as part of ritual ablution before prayer, and storage space for prayer rugs is also helpful.

Where flexibility to accommodate culture and religion may not exist because of the particular workplace context, speak to your employee to learn what options exist for them to be able to meet their needs. A supportive and flexible approach will be appreciated.

Settlement

When using immigration to fill labour shortages, businesses should consider how they can support their newcomer employee and their accompanying family members with their settlement experience as a retention initiative. Employers can consider how they may support the following:

- Covering immigration fees, and/or travel cost.
- Finding suitable short-term housing for arrival and long-term housing.
- Providing access to community settlement services for help applying for social insurance numbers, medical cards, and opening bank accounts, etc.
- Providing access to settlement programs such as language training.
- Organizing social events for all employees outside of working hours to promote team building and welcoming your newcomer employee.
- Assisting with navigating the credential and licensure processes where applicable.
- Creating professional development plans and access to new opportunities in the workplace.

Link

To learn more about employers' Duty to Accommodate in Nova Scotia, visit the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.

Visit

Considerations for EMPP candidates

EMPP candidates themselves represent a culturally and geographically diverse skilled talent pool from around the world. Beginning their EMPP journey as skilled refugees with their individual experiences, candidates arrive in Canada as permanent residents ready to begin their new lives as former refugees.

As skilled individuals who likely experienced occupational limitations while living as refugees, EMPP candidates will be looking forward to their future with their newfound sense of agency once they arrive in Canada. EMPP candidates may not have been eligible to work in the country where they had been granted refugee status and often are limited to having to earn funds in an informal economy outside of their professions. As such, professional development may be a priority for EMPP candidates after arriving in Canada.

Employers can consider how to support their new employee's professional development as a retention initiative. Professional credentialing process roadmaps and providing guidance on the requirements will be well received. Sharing an overview of the business' professional development policy and internal advancement opportunities that may exist as part of onboarding information will be beneficial to those who are excited to explore their new career options.

Expectations

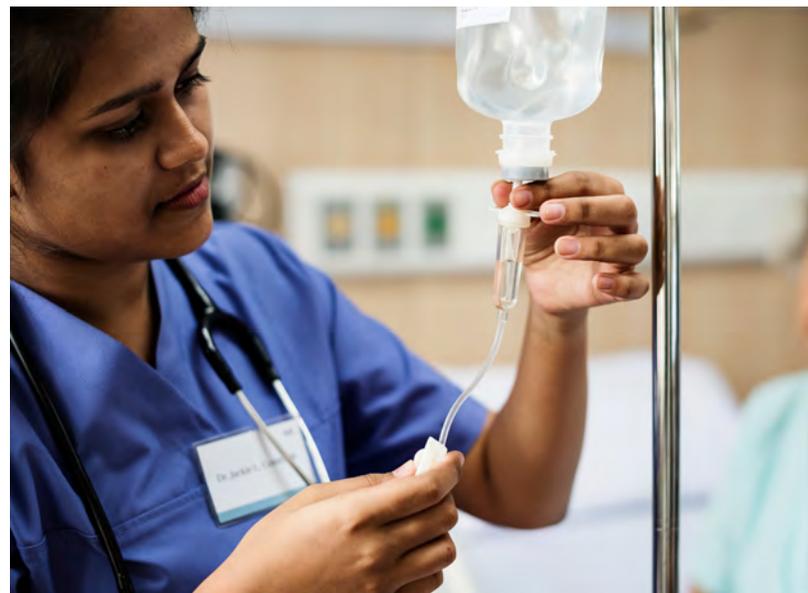
EMPP hiring initiatives can be a satisfying opportunity for employers. The knowledge that you are supporting a refugee with a third country durable solution and an opportunity for a fresh start can be extremely rewarding. However, it can be useful to consider the immigration process can take time and there are no guarantees, so managing expectations is important.

A great time to begin the employer/employee relationship by sharing more detailed onboarding

information about the role and expected work schedule ahead of arrival is when the permanent resident application is approved. The first day of work will be highly anticipated by both the employer and the new employee, so sharing information on what can be expected can help EMPP candidates feel better prepared before departure.

EMPP Settlement

Employers can also allow some time for settlement and adjustment before the first day of work is scheduled after arrival. The newcomer employee will not just be preparing for their first day at a new job, they are also coming to terms with moving to a new country. This is an exciting time, but it can be overwhelming. As former refugees, EMPP newcomers may also be dealing with some complex emotions. They most likely had to leave friends and family behind, as well as past trauma.





Mental Health

A newcomer with refugee experience may begin their journey hopeful, but will likely experience culture shock and have many ups and downs, with possible feelings of isolation, an initial adjustment period, and more feelings of isolation before they are able to fully reach acceptance and adaptation.

Employers should be aware that these ups and downs can include negative mental health and post-traumatic stress. How someone recognizes and deals with mental health will also be influenced by their culture. Negative mental health can manifest itself in many ways including physical symptoms such as fatigue and headaches. Newcomers may not have the vocabulary or the cultural context to express or acknowledge mental health challenges, and newcomers in general are less likely to seek out mental health supports than Canadians.

Employers can support their new employees in accessing mental health programs that may be included in company health benefits packages, and through connection to local settlement supports. Employers can also be mindful that any performance concerns may be an indication that their new employee is going through a challenging time personally, and not be discouraged that a poor hiring decision was made.

All employees benefit from a workplace that is supportive of mental wellness. Employers can consider making resources available to help remove stigma around seeking help.

Kudos

- to you

Conclusion

Creating more inclusive and welcoming workplaces is an effective way employers can actively prepare for and respond to Canada's shifting workforce demographics. Resources (many of them free) exist to support employers with getting started. The business case for DEI is clear with measurable benefits that include greater workforce attraction and retention, innovation, and business profitability. DEI is a journey that benefits all employees, current and prospective, and in turn, your business —a journey worth investing in.

Contact Us



The Pictou County Partnership
Email: office@pictoucountypartnership.com

Funded by:

Financé par :



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

Additional Resource Guide

**Atlantic Immigration Program
Intercultural Competency Training
Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship
Canada AIP Training Registration**

**Canadian Centre for Diversity
and Inclusion**
www.ccdi.ca

**Health Care Human Resource Sector
Council - Onboarding Buddy
Peer System**
<https://hcsc.ca/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

**Immigrant Services of Nova Scotia
ISANS Intercultural Workplace Program**

**The United Nations Refugee Agency
(UNHCR) Figures at a Glance**
<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>