

CULTURAL awareness

Handbook

"Workforce diversity is
not just good policy; it's
our region's future".

Centacare FNQ



**Queensland
Government**

The Cairns Regional Jobs Committee is proudly supported and funded by the Queensland Government



The Cairns Regional Jobs Committee acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land where we work and live, the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji and Yirrganydji people. We pay our respects to elders past and present. We celebrate the stories, culture and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders of all communities who also work and live on this land.

Disclaimer: This document provides a general summary of its subject matter only. It does not purport to be comprehensive, specific to your needs or to render legal advice. No one should act on the information contained in this document without first obtaining independent professional advice.

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By increasing participation and leveraging the existing skills, experience and qualifications of all Queenslanders, we can build a stronger, more capable local workforce and improve our community.



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Introduction

This handbook was created using insights from the lived experiences of migrants and those of a refugee background, along with input from Cairns businesses who employ them.

It serves as a general tool to **build cultural awareness and enhance workplace culture**, raise awareness of cultural differences and offer a practical guide for the effective recruitment and onboarding of workers from diverse backgrounds.

- Businesses are not expected to abandon traditional Australian workplace practices, though **minor adjustments in procedures or mindset** may help foster a more inclusive and diverse workforce.
- Embracing cultural diversity, demonstrates that **your business values different backgrounds** and respects the various ways people live and work.
- A **diverse workforce can lead to increased productivity**, by bringing a wider range of skills, experiences, and perspectives. Hiring migrants and refugees gives businesses access to a pool of resilient, motivated, dependable, and hard-working individuals who are eager to learn and contribute.





A USEFUL RESOURCE

Cairns is home to a valuable pool of both skilled and unskilled labour within its migrant communities and those of a refugee background. The Cairns Regional Jobs Committee has developed this handbook to help more employers recognise **the benefits of building a diverse and inclusive workforce** and to boost their confidence in hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds.

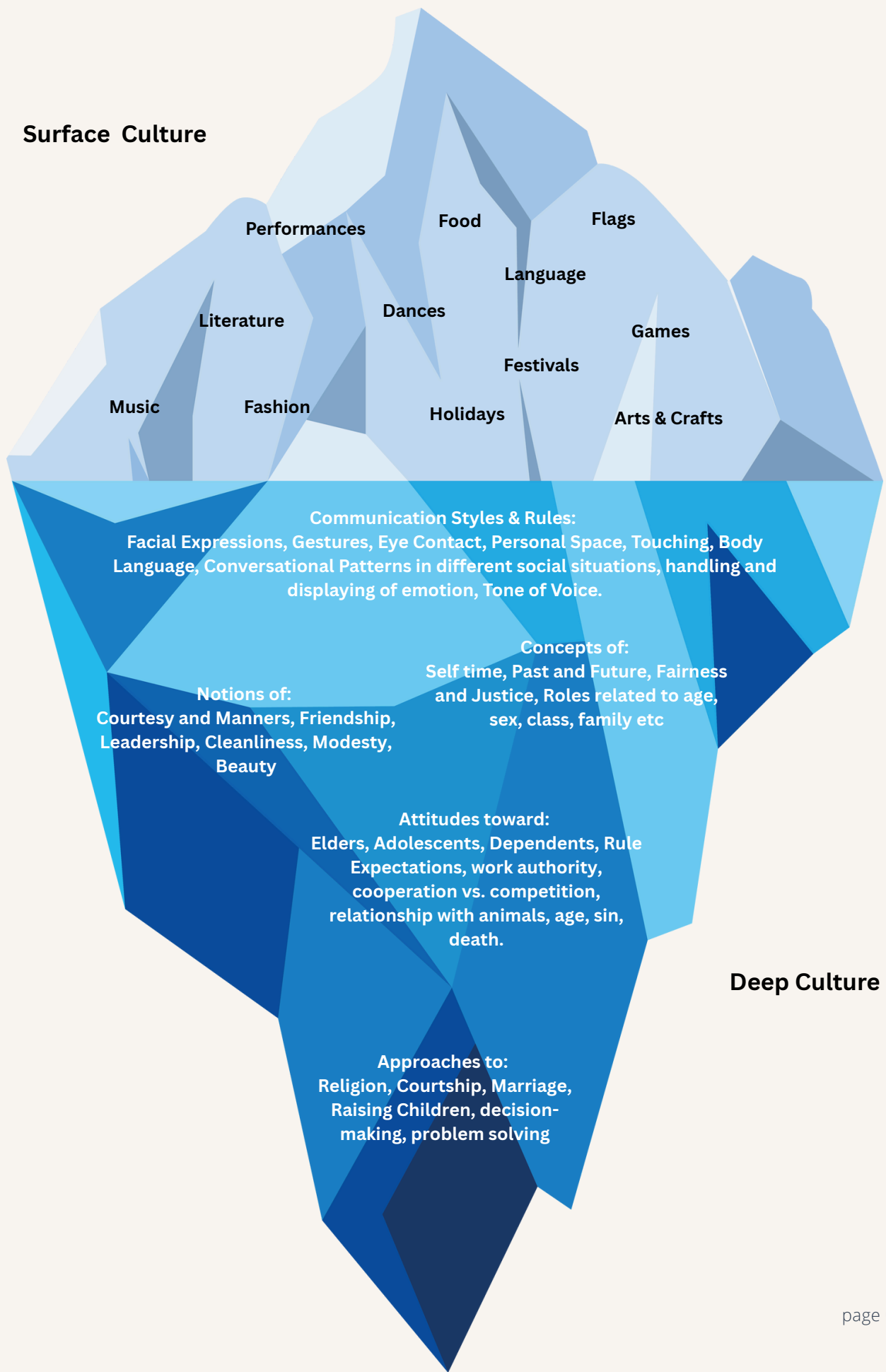
Our research shows that many businesses are seeking support in successfully integrating culturally diverse employees, particularly in overcoming language barriers. This handbook is the result of consultation with businesses, community leaders and key organisations that have experience recruiting migrants and refugees and have successfully navigated the associated challenges.

While the handbook focuses on supporting our local migrant and refugee population, the strategies and insights provided are equally relevant for employers hiring through the Skilled Visa Program.

“Diversity makes business sense; you get employees who speak other languages which could open doors to more business. Depending on the country they have come from, they might bring a whole pool of new clients to you.”

Tanja Miljevic, Employment Manager – South East QLD - Multicultural Australia.

THE CULTURAL ICEBERG



CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

culture plays a key role in shaping our beliefs, behaviours and perspectives

We all want to feel respected. How respect is received and given is different across cultures. While cultures may share commonalities, they also differ in many ways. Cultural differences are not barriers—they can be effectively managed simply by **acknowledging and respecting them**.

Australian workplace culture is generally relaxed and adaptable. The 'Aussie' culture is known for being easy-going. Australians can be direct in their communication, with a strong focus on getting the job done efficiently and yet indirect if they don't want to come across as being rude or superior. Flexibility and openness to change are also common traits.

Let's explore some of the cultural differences that may surface in Australian workplaces, along with practical tips for helping culturally diverse employees better understand and navigate Australian workplace norms.



CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Communication styles can vary significantly across cultures. **Being clearly understood by others is a vital part of effective cross-cultural interaction.** In Australia, communication can often be direct. In contrast, many other cultures place a stronger emphasis on being tactful and avoiding offense, often steering clear of direct conflict. Of course, as with all things - there are always exceptions.

Most people value politeness in conversation, commonly expecting phrases like "please" and "thank you" to be used. However, some cultures focus just as much on how something is said (the tone of voice) as on the actual words being spoken. While appreciation and respect may not always be verbalised or as you expect, gestures such as a smile with real warmth, a head bow or a touch of the arm will show that they value you.

It can come across as disrespectful to not answer a question with sincerity and clarity. It may be perceived that you are not answering on purpose. E.G:

Q. How far is it to the train station?

A: Not far.



Remember, even employees who speak English as a first language might not always understand local slang or jokes —clear communication benefits everyone!

Sharing of personal information may not be forthcoming e.g.: why they didn't come into work.

Being unwell can be shameful. Communicate what should be shared.

Avoid using slang in written communication with employees who may not be fluent in English.

Be mindful of how quickly you speak and the slang or idioms you use. Explain unfamiliar phrases to help those learning English feel more included and confident.

Keep communication clear and straightforward. Speak slowly and give clear, concise instructions. Always confirm that the message has been understood, as some employees may be hesitant to admit they are confused.

OVERCOMING THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER

An employee's English skills will improve over time as they settle into the work environment.

Language barriers can be managed by simply considering the employee's level of English proficiency. What level of English does the employee have?



Advanced:

Employees at this level can communicate effectively in English, actively participate in meetings, express ideas clearly, and understand complex information without difficulty.



Intermediate:

These individuals may have some limitations in vocabulary, expression, and understanding, particularly in more complex scenarios. They might struggle to fully follow discussions or express themselves clearly in certain situations.



Basic:

Employees with basic English skills may find it challenging to communicate effectively. They might have difficulty understanding conversations and expressing themselves clearly in most situations. Additional support, such as language training or an interpreter, may be needed.

"We have an English-only policy at work, and team members are encouraged to help each other with translations when needed. To stay connected, we use chat groups to communicate since we're working at different sites. During lunch, we eat together, share food, and converse in English. This not only helps team members practice conversational English but also boosts their confidence in speaking it".

Mark Fletcher Solid Plaster & Texture Coatings Pty Ltd

GREETINGS

Cultural norms around greetings can vary significantly. In some cultures, physical contact such as handshakes or hugs, especially between men and women -may be considered inappropriate.

For example, if a woman offers her hand to a man from such a culture, he may politely decline. This is not a sign of disrespect, but rather **a gesture of cultural courtesy**.

Similarly, the use of first names may be seen as too informal in certain cultures, while in others, terms of endearment like “darling” may be commonly used in everyday conversation.

In Australian culture, it typically doesn't matter who initiates the conversation, whereas in some cultures, speaking first to someone older or of higher status may be viewed as disrespectful. In some parts of the world, it's customary to engage in personal conversation about family or background before discussing business.

Culture and religion are not the same. While a particular religion might discourage handshaking, cultural norms within the same community may allow it. People greet one another in many different ways—through a nod, an elbow touch, handshake, hug, bow, or even an 'Eskimo kiss.' Take the initiative to learn about the cultural backgrounds of the people you work with or employ. Cultural understanding is a shared responsibility, and fostering cross-cultural awareness should be embedded as a core HR practice in every workplace.

Heads-up: People in Australia tend to be more direct and prefer to move quickly into work-related matters. In conservative or hierarchical cultures, trust takes time to build. Don't overcompensate by being too 'matey', too soon.

EYE CONTACT

Eye contact carries different meanings across cultures. In some cultures, avoiding eye contact is actually a sign of respect.

Heads-up: Keep in mind that if someone doesn't make eye contact while speaking, it may be a cultural expression of respect, rather than rudeness or disinterest.

UNDERSTANDING AND FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

As mentioned earlier, in some cultures it is considered disrespectful to question authority. As a result, some employees may nod or say they understand instructions out of politeness, even if they are unsure of what is required.

In some cultures, not following or questioning the rules can result in severe consequences, while in others, rules are only followed to get what you want. Actions or behaviours may be acceptable if they are done to improve the circumstances of your family, culture or country even if it is against the law.

Heads-Up: Provide clear, straightforward instructions. Use simple language and give practical examples to support understanding. Take the time to explain why a task should be done a certain way and why it needs to be completed by a specific deadline.

Heads-Up: To ensure understanding, ask the employee to repeat the instructions back in their own words, ask open ended questions pertaining to the instruction or ask them to demonstrate. This avoids asking 'Do you understand' and helps confirm they've grasped what's expected.



ARRANGING A MEETING

In some cultures, holding an interview or meeting in a casual setting, such as a coffee shop, may be considered inappropriate—particularly for women. Similarly, in certain cultures, it may not be acceptable for colleagues of the opposite sex to go together to a café / restaurant for coffee or lunch.

Reconsider 1:1 meeting. Employees may think they are in trouble, which can bring shame, they may not feel comfortable with the person of the opposite sex.

Heads up: Offer choices when setting up informal meetings or interviews. For instance, you might ask, "Would you prefer to meet for a coffee, or would you feel more comfortable coming to the office?"



“Meaningful, legal and sustainable employment is one of the most effective ways of ensuring refugees and migrants to Australia are empowered and included in the community. Beyond the obvious financial and economic benefits, employment helps to improve and develop a person’s dignity, self-confidence and social stability and benefits the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals and families.

TIME

Cultural views on time can vary significantly. In some cultures, time is more flexible—arriving 30 minutes late might be perfectly acceptable, and being exactly on time for a meeting could even be seen as impolite.

In Australia, staying late at work is often interpreted as a sign of commitment. But in other cultures, working beyond regular hours may suggest poor time management during the day and be viewed negatively.

Some cultures see time as circular rather than linear—if something isn't finished today, there's always tomorrow. Others treat time as a valuable resource, where punctuality and efficiency are essential. If you operate in a deadline-driven industry, it's important to clearly communicate timelines to ensure everyone is aligned.

Heads-up: Clearly explain that generally, in your workplace punctuality is important and being late can be seen as disrespectful. Make sure your expectations around time—such as start times, meeting punctuality, and any overtime—are clearly communicated in your workplace.

TIME MANAGEMENT

In the workplace, agreeing to take on a task typically means committing to complete it within a set timeframe. However, in some cultures (and generations), time scheduling and prioritising tasks may not be common practices. Understanding these different perspectives on time management can help employers more effectively support migrant and refugee employees.

Heads-up:

- Clearly communicate expectations around deadlines and task priorities. If the work is completed early, communicate to staff that they can present it to you before the deadline.
- Explain why certain tasks need to be prioritised to help build understanding.
- Be prepared to follow up where needed.
- Let employees know that personal appointments should, where possible, be arranged outside of work hours.

HIERARCHY IN THE WORKPLACE

In some cultures, strong respect for hierarchy can lead to a reluctance to question or disagree with employers. Saying "no" may be seen as disrespectful, so employees might say "yes" to avoid conflict—even if they don't actually agree or cannot follow through.

As a result, they may tell you what they think you want to hear and hesitate to share feedback or suggestions for improvement. Employees who hold a deep respect for authority may also avoid raising concerns or discussing problems.

Heads-up: Emphasise that in Australia, employees are encouraged to share concerns, ask questions and contribute to discussion in a respectful manner, especially when it comes to workplace issues or health and safety concerns.

Heads-up: Speaking up in some cultures could result in losing their job. Create safe and accessible ways for employees to share their thoughts. E.G: use an anonymous whiteboard for questions or feedback, a suggestion box, a survey or designate a trusted team member to speak on behalf of others.





HIERARCHY OF ROLES

In some cultures, manual labour is viewed as a low-status job, and individuals from these backgrounds may be reluctant to pursue such roles. Cultural norms around gender may also influence job choices, with certain positions traditionally seen as suitable only for men or women.

In contrast, Australian workplace culture is generally more individualistic, with a stronger focus on personal skills and interests rather than social or gender-based expectations.

The role of the 'boss' may be viewed very differently. In some cultures, the boss is seen as an authority figure who should not be approached casually or during personal time. As a result, informal interactions—such as joking with the boss or patting them on the back over a beer—might be seen as disrespectful.

Heads-up: Highlight that in Australia, manual labour roles are valued and often well-paid. Emphasise that everyone has equal access to job opportunities, and employment is based on skills and capability, not gender or social status.

Heads-up: Curiosity about cultural differences is natural. When misunderstandings arise, take the time to explain the intent behind the interaction to avoid misinterpretation.

AUSSIE HUMOUR

Humour (and sarcasm) has always played a big role in the Australian workplace, but this 'banter' is not always easily understood by people from different cultures. It's important to clarify when something is meant as a joke. Likewise, Australian slang and informal expressions can often be confusing or misunderstood.



Heads-up

Take time to explain some of the unique workplace behaviours employees may encounter. For example, Australians often make jokes or tease people they like—this can be misinterpreted if not explained properly.

Let employees know that humour is a key part of Australian culture and is commonly used to ease tension or lighten difficult situations.

Understand that in some cultures, people avoid using sarcasm and dark humour, as these can be seen as disrespectful. Joking with your manager or superior may also be considered inappropriate.

Notice how the team uses humour and check in to see if the joke was understood / how it was received.

Create a safe space where employees feel free to raise any issues or concerns that they wish to share and try to understand their point of view.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

In some cultures, clearly defined workplace rules and policies may not be common. New employees might not be familiar with **Australian workplace regulations** related to discrimination, bullying, harassment, smoking, stress, safety, and psychosocial hazards (mental health risks at work).

For example, restrictions on smoking or vaping at work may be surprising to those from countries where such rules are more relaxed. The same may apply to the use of mobile phones during work hours or physical contact. Touching someone while speaking with them might be perfectly acceptable in another culture, but in Australia, it could be interpreted as harassment and could lead to complaints or even charges, regardless of intent.

Australian workplace health and safety practices can sometimes be viewed as excessive by those from different cultural backgrounds due to differing views on risk.

Heads-up: Provide employees with clear information and training on key workplace policies, especially around health, safety, and conduct.

Heads-up: Explain the reasons behind rules—such as the importance of wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)—to help build understanding and compliance.

Heads-up: Clearly point out designated smoking areas and explain that smoking and vaping are only permitted during break times.

Heads-up: If language is a barrier, Centacare FNQ or Multicultural Affairs Queensland and Queensland Interpreting and Translation Service are able to assist with language support. Please don't hesitate to reach out for help.





“There are hundreds of languages around the world, but a smile speaks them all”

Nelson Mandela

CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT DAYS

Recognising culturally significant days can be a great way to foster inclusion, promote cultural understanding, and strengthen team connections - especially through shared experiences like food.

Heads-Up: Take the time to learn about important cultural or religious days celebrated by your employees.

Heads-up: Encourage staff to share the meaning behind these occasions, along with stories, traditional foods, or customs. This helps create a more inclusive workplace environment and fosters a culture of respect.

Heads-up: Allow employees to swap traditional public holidays for cultural days, providing equity rather than equality.

"We employ 8 different nationalities including Bhutan, Myanmar, Japan, Ireland, England, Australia, Philippines and Vietnam. We actively support all cultures and make sure our team members have time off to celebrate their respective festivals and days of celebration. We schedule our work accordingly to support these culturally significant events to ensure all team members feel valued and included."

Mark Fletcher Solid Plaster & Texture Coatings



DIVERSE BY NATURE

Beyond its Indigenous heritage, Cairns is home to a vibrant multicultural population. This rich tapestry of cultures contributes to Cairns' dynamic community life, celebrated through various festivals, events, and community initiatives throughout the year.

Language

Over 70 languages are spoken in the region, reflecting its diverse linguistic landscape.

The top 10 non-English languages spoken in Cairns are:

Japanese
Tagalog
Australian Indigenous
Mandarin
Italian
German
Korean
Punjabi
Nepali
Hmong

Culture

More than 21% of our population were born overseas, representing communities from over 102 different countries.

Each year, over 900 residents in the Cairns region proudly become Australian citizens. Cairns Regional Council hosts multiple citizenship ceremonies annually, conducted in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs.

Source: qgsop.qld.gov.au
cairns.qld.gov.au
abs.gov.au



MANY CULTURES, ONE COMMUNITY

Cairns is home to approximately 38 active multicultural groups, reflecting its rich cultural diversity. These groups represent a wide array of cultural backgrounds and contribute to the vibrant community life in the region.

Here are just some of the active cultural groups in Cairns:

- Alliance Française de Cairns
- Australia Japan Society in FNQ INC
- Australian Arakanese Association
- Cairns & District Chinese Association Inc (CADCAI)
- Cairns & Region Multicultural Association Inc. (CARMA)
- Cairns Indonesian-Australian Association
- Cairns Multicultural Islamic Ladies Association (CaMILA)
- Cairns Thai Association FNQ Inc
- Columbians in Cairns
- Dante Alighieri - The Italian Society of Cairns
- Dutch-Indonesian Association
- Far North Buddhist Association
- German Club Cairns
- Gopio (Indian community organisation)
- Greek Orthodox Parish Cairns
- Khacho Yulo Ling Buddhist Centre
- Papua New Guinea & Wantoks Association
- Russian Speakers Association Cairns
- Serbian Cultural Centre Cairns
- The Cairns African Association
- The Cairns Congolese Community

These groups vary in size and activities, ranging from small community gatherings to large cultural festivals. They play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, providing support networks, and promoting intercultural understanding within the Cairns community. You might like to approach active community groups for insights about their culture, invite them a Teams meeting or seek their cultural advice.

August is Multicultural Month – a time to celebrate our diversity, strengthen community connections, and highlight the rich cultural contributions that shape our region.



ASSIMILATION VS. INTEGRATION

Assimilation and integration are two distinct approaches to how individuals and groups adapt to a new culture. **Assimilation** involves the minority group gradually adopting the dominant culture's norms, values, and practices - often **at the expense of their original cultural identity**.

In contrast, **integration** allows individuals to **maintain their cultural heritage while also participating fully in the broader society**. While assimilation can lead to cultural loss and a sense of disconnection, integration promotes mutual respect, cultural diversity, and social cohesion by valuing both the individual's original culture and their contribution to the wider community.



WHAT EMPLOYERS SAY



... about hiring from diverse cultures

Local employers say that stepping outside your comfort zone could lead you to the ideal candidate for your business. Discover more insights from employers about the benefits of hiring migrants , refugees and our first nations people.

“At Accor, we are proud of our global diversity and the rich mix of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives our people bring. Our teams reflect the world we live in—skilled, passionate individuals united by a shared commitment to excellence. Many of our team members, including students on international visas, contribute immensely while completing their studies—and often beyond. We see them thrive, grow into their potential, and in many cases, make Cairns their long-term home. They bring fresh ideas, a growth mindset, and a genuine desire to be part of our workplace. Their loyalty, work ethic, and enthusiasm enrich our culture and strengthen the future of hospitality.”

Bernadette Reynolds, Portfolio HR Manager - Accor

SHOWING RESPECT

It's crucial to approach others with sensitivity and respect for their cultural background, recognising that their thoughts, communication styles, and actions may differ from your own. Stay open-minded and eager to learn about different cultures. Most people will appreciate your willingness to understand their perspective.



THE IMPACT ON THE WORKPLACE

-  Diversity has led to a happier workplace.
-  Migrant employment has helped break down barriers within teams.
-  Onboarding migrants and refugees has fostered a stronger, more connected team where everyone learns from each other.
-  Gaining the trust of migrant or refugee communities makes it easier to recruit more workers.
-  Once settled into their roles, migrant and refugee employees become more confident, taking initiative and engaging more with the team.
-  Unique life experiences foster creativity, resourcefulness and innovative thinking
-  Business who reflect the diversity of their community, build stronger client relationships and credibility.

At Centacare FNQ, workforce diversity isn't just a goal - it's our greatest strength. By embracing lived experience and cultural richness, we're building a team that reflects the community we serve and leads with empathy, insight, and impact."

Anita Veivers, Executive Director, Centacare FNQ



"Painters from different cultural backgrounds often bring unique craftsmanship, traditional techniques, and work styles. They are mostly hard working and turn up without disappointment. A diverse team can bridge language and cultural gaps with a wide range of customers. This can build trust and makes clients feel more understood and respected".

Daniel Vella - Vellacorp Painting

CONSIDERATIONS FOR STAFF



Speak slowly, give clear instructions and pause to ensure your message is understood.



If needed, physically point to the tasks you're assigning.



Consider delivering content in a variety of ways. There are seven different types of learners - visual, auditory, verbal, kinaesthetic, logical, social and solitary - each with unique preferences for processing information.



Listen attentively and be mindful of accents.



Understand that migrants and refugees may take longer to respond to questions. Non-English speakers often need to translate the question into their own language, process it, and then translate their response back into English. It can be hard work!



Encourage employees to continue practicing and improving their English skills by engaging in conversation. Weave cultural curiosity into conversation starters.



If required, consider creating picture books, signs with visual cues or footage to help clarify key rules and instructions.



Be respectful. If there is an issue, rather than embarrassing an employee by singling them out, take the employee aside and discuss the matter privately to build trust and respect.



Be patient. Oftentimes migrants and refugees can read and write English, but may be scared to speak it, especially in groups. Build a safe workplace.



Reactions maybe unfamiliar. Some people laugh or giggle when nervous, others nod and smile, but do not understand.



Seek support from external provider to better understand culture and recruitment



Migrant employees may not do things the way you do them, but it's normal for them! Assist them to understand workplace practices, ethics and values.

EMPLOYER INSIGHTS

from employing migrants or those from a refugee background

The insights below have supported local employers in successfully interviewing, recruiting, and onboarding migrant and refugee employees. These key learnings may also be helpful for other employers looking to do the same.

JOB ADS



Ensure job ads are inclusive and accessible to people from a range of cultural backgrounds.



Use clear, simple language and include positive images of your workplace to make the role more welcoming.

REVIEWING RESUMES



Avoid making assumptions based on a candidate's cultural background or name.



Don't dismiss applications solely because of unfamiliar qualifications—many overseas training programs are highly regulated and rigorous.



Consider the transferable skills a candidate brings, even if their experience doesn't exactly match local standards.



Don't overlook applicants who seem overqualified; many are eager to contribute, even in entry-level roles.



Migrant and refugee workers often show high levels of appreciation for employment opportunities, which can translate into strong loyalty and low absenteeism.

INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

With some patience and support, you could develop one of your business's most valuable team members.

- >> Business owners and managers should actively participate in the recruitment process to lead by example and promote a culture of inclusion.
- >> Include candidates from diverse cultural backgrounds in your shortlist—it's worth taking the time to meet them.
- >> Set aside assumptions and enjoy learning about each candidate's background and journey.
- >> Behaviours that seem unfamiliar may actually bring fresh perspectives and strengths.
- >> Every candidate offers unique skills—look for common ground and be open to different approaches.
- >> Start the conversation with a friendly question, such as what their culture is known for, to help ease nerves.
- >> A candidate's education or abilities should not be judged by their level of English—many are highly educated and multilingual.
- >> Think creatively: how might their skills be used in a related role while they build confidence and gain local experience?
- >> Be patient—given time and support, these individuals can become invaluable team members.
- >> Clearly explain your expectations around workplace standards and ask how the candidate feels about them.

Start

the conversation: Talk about what inclusion means in your context. Be open to change and to hearing what's working—and what's not.

Ensure

everyone has a voice: Make space for different communication styles and actively seek input from all team members.

Show

care and kindness: Recognise that everyone brings different lived experiences to the workplace and that small gestures of understanding will go a long way.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

We often hear about the importance of building inclusive workplaces, but what does inclusion actually look like? At its core, an inclusive workplace values everyone's differences and sees diversity as a strength. It's a place where people **feel safe to contribute, be heard, and show up** as their authentic selves. Inclusion is not passive - it requires action. As the saying goes, "If you're not actively including, you're probably excluding."

Challenge

your bias: Be conscious of your own assumptions and deliberately 'park your bias' to create space for different perspectives.

Call Out

lack of diversity: If you find yourself in a non-diverse setting, speak up. Use your influence to advocate for broader representation.

Lead

with authenticity: When leaders are genuine and open, they pave the way for others to be the same.

Embracing diversity of background and experience, enriches workplace culture and leads to stronger, more impactful work.

RIGHT TO WORK IN AUSTRALIA

Before hiring, always check that the applicant has the legal right to work in Australia. You can do this through the Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) service, which is free to use. To access VEVO, you'll need the candidate's passport or Immicard. VEVO will confirm their current visa status and any work-related conditions. If no conditions are listed, the individual can work in Australia for as long as their visa remains valid.

Workplace Considerations When Hiring Migrants or Refugees

-  Promote a culture (both internally and externally) of inclusion and diversity within your team.
-  Encourage acceptance and respect for differing beliefs and backgrounds among staff.
-  Ensure buy-in from all key areas of the business—HR, training, management, and team leaders must work together toward shared diversity goals.
-  Empower staff to actively contribute to creating an inclusive workplace.
-  Develop clear policies for addressing race-based discrimination.
-  Communicate to your existing team that the new hire is filling a genuine vacancy and is the right fit for the role.
-  Pair new employees with leaders or mentors who are aligned with their support needs and strengths.
-  Be patient and flexible—everyone learns at their own pace, and that's okay.
-  Understand that refugees may feel displaced or uncertain about their identity. Focus on helping them feel valued and welcome.
-  Avoid asking about their past—if they feel comfortable, they'll share their story in their own time.
-  Think of innovative and different ways to communicate and comprehend HR and health and safety policies



CULTURAL FIT

When evaluating candidates, cultural fit is often an important consideration. It refers to how well an individual aligns with the values, behaviours, and working style of an organisation—and vice versa. It's important to note that cultural fit is not about someone's country of origin, religion, age, gender, or ethnicity.

Instead, it relates to the **shared values, attitudes, and behaviours** that influence how people work and interact within the organisation. A strong cultural fit means both the employee and the organisation operate with a similar mindset and approach to work.

To help define your organisation's culture, consider:

- The way your team interacts with customers
- General work ethic and expectations
- Attitudes toward teamwork and collaboration
- Support for professional growth and development
- Commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion policies

ONBOARDING

It's essential that new employees understand all safety aspects of their role and the workplace. Be sure to explain not just what the rules are, but why they exist. This is especially important for migrant workers and those from a refugee background. When it comes to safety, no detail is too small.

Be clear and specific about workplace expectations, including basics like:

Arriving on time
Attending every rostered shift

Speaking English at work
Showing respect to everyone

Reporting issues to a supervisor

Taking breaks as scheduled
Expected workplace behaviour

PPE requirements
First aid and emergency
procedures

How and when to notify of
sick leave
How to apply for annual leave

Maintaining good personal
hygiene

Timesheets and pay day
procedures

Keep in mind, this may be their first job in an Australian workplace. To support understanding, consider translating Workplace Health & Safety instructions and key employment policies. If translation isn't possible, using an interpreter during induction can be very helpful.

Get creative! Some businesses use visuals, videos or pictorial guides for safety and induction materials.

WELCOMING WORKPLACES

HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO SUPPORT NEW EMPLOYEES, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM MIGRANT OR REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS:

- ☐ Consider workplace adjustments: As a supervisor, think about what support and changes might be needed. Start with simple tasks and a clear training plan tailored to the employee's experience and skill level.

- ☐ Use clear, written communication. Follow up conversations with a short email or text.

- ☐ Display a sign or poster that highlights key cultural considerations, relevant to your team

- ☐ Plan for learning: New team members won't arrive knowing everything. It's the employer's role to guide them and build their knowledge step by step.

- ☐ Assign a mentor or buddy: choose a patient and supportive staff member who can mentor or train the new employee, helping them gain confidence in their role and environment.

- ☐ Lead by example: Greet new employees each time you see them and acknowledge their presence. This sets a welcoming tone and encourages the rest of the team to do the same.

- ☐ Avoid isolation: Ensure the new employee takes breaks with at least one other team member so they feel included and supported.

- ☐ Check in regularly: Schedule a weekly catch-up to see how they're settling in, and let them know you're available if they ever need to talk or raise concerns.

- ☐ Encourage two-way learning: Make it clear that you value what they bring to the workplace. It's not just about teaching—it's about sharing ideas and learning from each other.

- ☐ Be patient in admin roles: For administrative positions, give new employees time to learn the systems and feel comfortable before expecting them to answer phones or handle complex tasks.

By taking these steps, you create a more inclusive, respectful, and productive workplace for everyone.

Cultural Awareness Training

centacarefnq.org

multiculturalaustralia.org.au/cultural_training

<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/resourcehub/australian-human-rights-commission-anti-racism-elearning-course>

[Supporting Diverse Workforces - QCOSS](#)

Training / Upskilling

tafeqld.edu.au/courses/course-types/tells/see

skillsexplorer.com.au

culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/

Translation Services

qits.com.au/

forgov.qld.gov.au/service-design-and-delivery/deliver-public-services/interpreter-and-translator-services/find-a-translator-or-interpreter

centacarefnq.org

2m.com.au

tisnational.gov.au/en

Employment assistance

cairnsrjc.com.au

tent.org/resources/australian-employers-guide-hiring-refugees/

qld.gov.au/jobs/finding/specific/migrant

cairns.qld.gov.au/community-environment/community-support/multicultural

business.qld.gov.au/running-business/support-services/programs-networks/languages

workforceaustralia.gov.au/businesses/help/diversity/cultural-diversity

fairwork.gov.au/

qhrc.qld.gov.au/

REFERENCES

This guide was created using some information and insights from:

The Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce

Centacare FNQ

The Queensland Government website

Heath & Zhang

Cairns Regional Council website

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Iryna Kushnir - *Representative of the Cairns Ukranian community*

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