



**MILWAUKEE  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

# MPS Quick Reference Guide to Tanzania and Tanzanian Culture for Educators and Staff

## Where is Tanzania?

Tanzania, officially the United Republic of Tanzania, is a country in East Africa within the African Great Lakes region. It lies south of the equator. It is the largest country in the region, bordering the Indian Ocean to the east. Tanzania shares borders with Kenya and Uganda to the north, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west, and Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique to the south. The country includes the island of Zanzibar.



*Ngorongoro Crater, Northern Tanzania*

## Geography

Tanzania is roughly twice the size of California. The terrain includes coastal plains, a central plateau, and highlands. It is home to three of the continent's largest lakes: Victoria, Tanganyika, and Nyasa. The country is known for its vast wilderness areas, including the plains of Serengeti National Park and Kilimanjaro National Park, home to Africa's highest mountain, Mt. Kilimanjaro. Zanzibar Archipelago and the mainland coast are popular vacation destinations.

**Capital:** Dodoma, located in the center of the country.

**Population:** 68.56 million (according to the World Bank 2024). For comparison, the United States has a population of 334.9 million.

## Climate

Tanzania generally has a tropical climate. The coast is hot and humid, while the central plateau is cooler and drier. Two main rainy seasons are from March to May and November to mid-January. The dry season, with cooler temperatures, lasts from May to October and is considered the best time to visit.

## Government

Tanzania is a unitary presidential democratic republic. President Samia Suluhu Hassan became the sixth president in March 2021. She is head of state and head of government, and of a multi-party system.

## Culture

**People and Languages:** Tanzania is a linguistically diverse country. Swahili (Kiswahili) is the national language spoken by approximately 90% of Tanzanians. Swahili and Kiswahili refer to the same language, with Kiswahili being used by native speakers and Swahili being the English term. Other languages spoken include Sukuma (~16%), English (~10%), Maasai (~5%), and Chaga (~2%). Many Tanzanians are multi-lingual.



**Religion:** Christian: 55.3%, Muslim: 31.6%, traditional African ethnic religions: 1.1%, other: 1%

**Cuisine:** Tanzanian cuisine includes staple foods like ugali (maize porridge) and rice, commonly served with beans, spinach, okra, and cassava leaves. The cuisine features goat, beef, and fish, often grilled (nyama choma) or stewed.



Ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and coconut milk are widely used, reflecting Middle Eastern and Indian influences. Plantains are frequently used in soups and stews or are fried into chips.

**Education:** Education consists of two years of pre-primary education, seven years of primary education, four years of secondary education, two years of advanced secondary education, and three or more years of tertiary education. Students learn in both English and Kiswahili. Private schools mainly use English from primary school onward. Public schools use Kiswahili in primary education and English from secondary education onward. Education is free up to age 15; however, many families struggle to pay for school uniforms, materials, and exam fees.

**Clothing:** Traditional Tanzanian clothing includes the kanzu for men (a long white robe) and the kanga for women (a colorful cloth wrapped around the body). Along with kitenge fabrics, these styles are central to Tanzanian culture, reflecting both traditional and modern fashion. The Maasai are known for their iconic red shúkà, representing courage and strength. Islamic clothing, including buibui and hijab, is also prevalent in regions with strong Muslim populations.

## Why Are Refugees from Tanzania Coming to the U.S.?

Refugees from Tanzania seek refuge in the U.S. primarily due to persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. Other reasons are strict refugee policies including limitations on movement within camps, restricted access to asylum procedures, and insufficient funding for refugee assistance, according to the United Nations. Individuals also seek better employment and education in the United States.



## How Are Tanzanians Coming to Wisconsin?

Tanzanians come to Wisconsin for family reunification, education, and employment opportunities. The sister city relationship between Milwaukee and the Tarime District in Tanzania facilitates cultural exchanges and potential business investments. Immigration involves adhering to U.S. government visa requirements and regulations. Some students in MPS whose home country is listed as Tanzania in Infinite Campus are, in fact, secondary migrants. Their countries of origin may be DR Congo, Zambia, Kenya, or other countries.

## How Should Educators Prepare?

MPS educators should use their training and skills in welcoming newcomers.

- ▶ Approach students with a lens of empathy and trauma-informed care.
- ▶ Create a core group of support involving school psychologists, social workers, nurses, and counselors.
- ▶ Be attentive to students' clothing needs for Wisconsin weather.
- ▶ Learn how to say a few phrases in your students' language.
- ▶ Be aware that students are in a major transition. Issues such as housing, clothing, medical care, or immigration requirements may cause students to be absent from school from time to time.
- ▶ Newcomer students come with a variety of academic and language backgrounds ranging from students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) to students who have strong academic skills in their home language.
- ▶ Use LanguageLine ([mpsmke.com/language](https://mpsmke.com/language)) to access an interpreter over the phone.
- ▶ Google Translate may be helpful but only in limited circumstances. Google has an app available for download.
- ▶ Use the following links to request translation (for written materials) or interpretation (oral) at [mpsmke.com/translation](https://mpsmke.com/translation) or [mpsmke.com/interpreter](https://mpsmke.com/interpreter).
- ▶ For resources to combat bullying/harassment, visit [stopbullying.gov](https://stopbullying.gov).



## Language Considerations

Become familiar with your students' English proficiency levels. Use the Infinite Campus pathway for English language proficiency (ELP) verification: **Main Menu > Student Information > English Learners (ELs)**. For information about the significance of ELP levels in learning English, contact your school's ESL teacher.



## Whom Can Educators Contact Within MPS?

Instructional Coach/Family Engagement (ELs)  
 Kourosh Hassani, EdD:  
[hassanka@milwaukee.k12.wi.us](mailto:hassanka@milwaukee.k12.wi.us)



## What Agencies Can Provide Information and Support?

<b>General Information</b>	<p><b>Zetho Foundation Inc.</b> focuses on education, health care, and community development.          Website: <a href="https://risccmke.org/en/edumakono-zetho-professional-bio/">https://risccmke.org/en/edumakono-zetho-professional-bio/</a>          Phone: (414) 323-4740</p> <p><b>Brighter Tanzania Foundation</b> focuses on economic empowerment, education, and helping to uplift communities in Tanzania. <a href="https://www.brightertanzania.org/">https://www.brightertanzania.org/</a></p>
<b>Cultural Orientation</b>	<p><b>Catholic Charities:</b> <a href="https://www.ccmke.org/RIS">https://www.ccmke.org/RIS</a>  <b>Wisconsin Department of Children and Families:</b> <a href="https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/refugee">https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/refugee</a>  <b>UN Refugee Agency:</b> <a href="https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/">https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/</a></p>
<b>Resettlement Information</b>	<p><b>International Institute of Wisconsin:</b> <a href="https://iiwisconsin.org/">https://iiwisconsin.org/</a>  <b>Lutheran Social Services:</b> <a href="https://www.lsswis.org/">https://www.lsswis.org/</a>  <b>Hanan Refugees Relief Group:</b> <a href="https://hananrrg.org/">https://hananrrg.org/</a></p>

*This list is for information only.*

## Helpful Phrases

English	Written in Swahili	Pronunciation
Hello	Habari!	Ha-baree
How are you?	Habari yako?	Ha-baree Ya-ko
Goodbye	Kwaheri!	Kwa-heri
Thank you	Asante.	Asante

## Classroom Resources & Recommended Readings

Books set in Tanzania

<https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/16431>

International Children’s and Young Adult Literature Collection at UWM

Initiated in 2021, the collection highlights experiences from outside the United States, both in original languages and in translation. Learn more about the ICTAL here: <https://uwm.edu/libraries/icyal>