





## CHAPTER 2.9

# Building Bridges to Economic Self- Sufficiency: Employment and Training

## GOALS FOR INTEGRATION (SEE CHAPTER 1.3)

-  **ONE** To restore security, control and social and economic independence by meeting basic needs, facilitating communication and fostering the understanding of the receiving society.
-  **TWO** To promote the capacity to rebuild a positive future in the receiving society.
-  **THREE** To promote family reunification and restore supportive relationships within families.
-  **FOUR** To promote connections with volunteers and professionals able to provide support.
-  **FIVE** To restore confidence in political systems and institutions and to reinforce the concept of human rights and the rule of law.
-  **SIX** To promote cultural and religious integrity and to restore attachments to, and promote participation in, community, social, cultural and economic systems by valuing diversity.
-  **SEVEN** To counter racism, discrimination and xenophobia and build welcoming and hospitable communities.
-  **EIGHT** To support the development of strong, cohesive refugee communities and credible refugee leadership.
-  **NINE** To foster conditions that support the integration potential of all resettled refugees taking into account the impact of age, gender, family status and past experience.

 The focus of this Chapter

 To keep in mind

## Chapter 2.9 Building Bridges to Economic Self-sufficiency: Employment and Training

This Chapter focuses on strategies to support resettled refugees to secure economic self-sufficiency through employment and training. It should be read in conjunction with Part Three which examines particular planning issues of concern to refugee women, elders and young people.




**CHECKLIST**

## Planning for economic self-sufficiency

When establishing a new resettlement program, give priority to:

- ✓ identifying and developing partnerships with key public and private sector partners (e.g. job placement providers, employers, employer associations);
- ✓ making arrangements for individualised assessment and job placement (where possible through an existing provider);
- ✓ incorporating information about employment conditions, services and processes in orientation;
- ✓ resettlement community selection and placement policies which optimise employment opportunities.

In the longer term, aim for:

- ✓ strategies to ensure that job assessment and placement services are responsive to the needs of resettled refugees (e.g. language assistance, professional development and awareness raising among providers);
- ✓ specialised job placement and support programs and services for resettled refugees;
- ✓ programs for providing more intensive job search assistance and support to resettled refugees or strategies to promote their access to specialist programs targeted to nationals experiencing labour force disadvantage;
- ✓ strategies to support resettled refugees to have prior learning, qualifications and experience recognised;
- ✓ strategies to address barriers to work force participation (e.g. child care, transportation);
- ✓ programs to support resettled refugees to establish micro-economic enterprises;
- ✓ strategies to facilitate access to the work force (e.g. mentor programs);
- ✓ measures to promote equal employment opportunity among, and prevent discrimination against, resettled refugees;
- ✓ engaging labour unions, employers, job placement services and the refugee and wider communities in initiatives to promote refugee employment;
- ✓ strategies and programs for job advancement and retraining.

## Economic self-sufficiency and employment as resources for rebuilding

Economic self-sufficiency is one of the most important factors in successful integration, with earning capacity influencing the ability to ‘purchase’ many of the other resources required to rebuild life in a new country, among them, housing, health care and education.

Employment is also important for long term economic stability, especially in times of difficulty or crisis. This is particularly the case in those countries where entitlement to other benefits, such as health care, retirement income, and sickness and unemployment benefits, are tied to participation in paid work.

As well as providing the means for economic stability, employment has a powerful influence on one's capacity to participate equally in the receiving society. Without employment, refugees risk becoming trapped in a cycle of social and economic marginalisation affecting not only them but possibly future generations.

As one of the primary sources of contact between adult new arrivals and their new country, the workplace provides a focus for learning about the culture and practices of the receiving society. Providing day-to-day opportunities for communicating in the language of that society, it also speeds the process of achieving language proficiency, with obvious benefits for reducing social isolation and increasing the overall competence, control and independence of new refugee arrivals. The workplace is also a major site for the development of friendships and social support networks.

Meaningful work is a primary source through which we define ourselves and our role both in the wider society and in the family. This is particularly important for refugee arrivals, many of whom will have struggled to maintain a positive identity in the context of disruption and dependency. Being able to realise their personal potential in the labour force is a significant factor in successful integration. This is particularly the case for men, with studies indicating that being unable to obtain work commensurate with their skills and experience is a significant risk factor for depression in this group<sup>1</sup>.

Promoting opportunities for refugee employment also has benefits for receiving countries. As well as helping to minimise dependency on social support payments, through employment, refugees are able to contribute to the tax base and, through their purchasing power, to the broader economic good.

The workplace is a primary avenue through which refugees can contribute to the economy and broader social fabric of the receiving country.

Measures to ensure that refugees gain access to employment are an integral element of an integration program. Ideally, these should aim to ensure that refugees are able to compete with nationals for jobs which are both commensurate with their skills and experience and through which they are able to optimise their contribution to receiving countries.



**Integration means for me to be part of Canadian society, to learn English and find a job as soon as possible.**

Resettled refugee





## Laying the groundwork in emerging resettlement countries

WHILE steps to promote refugees' economic self-sufficiency are critical to the success of any integration program, they are particularly important in emerging countries, especially those with a limited capacity to fund income support programs. In these countries, resettled refugees need to secure employment at a very early stage in their resettlement.

For this reason, it is important that emerging countries begin at an early

stage to plan measures to support early economic self-sufficiency, including:

- awareness raising among employers, training providers and job placement programs;
- establishing partnerships in both the public and private sectors necessary to create a range of employment and training opportunities;
- developing short term professional and vocational training opportunities;
- micro-economic enterprise initiatives;
- supports to complete formal education and training;
- engaging the co-operation of local networks who might provide links to employment opportunities (e.g. business associations, voluntary organisations, labour unions, faith-based communities).

## Factors affecting economic self-sufficiency

While there is variability in the skills and attributes of refugees, there are a number of factors influencing their capacity to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Among these are:

- proficiency in the language of the receiving country;
- their knowledge of and capacity to access recruitment and job placement services and processes;
- the transferability of, and demand for, their skills in the labour market of the receiving country;
- the extent of disruption to education, training and employment experienced in their countries-of-origin and asylum;
- competing demands associated with resettlement, adjustment to a new society and culture and, for many, the process of dealing with the trauma, grief and guilt associated with forced movement;
- cultural and religious practices and beliefs and the extent to which these are accommodated in the labour force and workplaces of the receiving society;
- their access to the resources required to support work force participation, among them child care, transportation and 'tools-of-trade' (e.g. in some receiving countries, tradespeople may be expected to supply their own tool-box);
- their access to resources for self employment such as loans and knowledge of the business sector in the receiving society;



—their motivation and openness to exploring new employment possibilities, making it essential that resettled refugees are fully involved in and have ownership of the employment search process.

Also influential are conditions in receiving countries, including:

- attitudes toward, and experience of, employing people from other countries;
- economic conditions, with refugees tending to experience particular difficulty competing in the labour market in countries where unemployment rates are high among nationals;
- whether refugees are able to have qualifications and experience gained in countries-of-origin recognised in the receiving country;
- the availability of support to enable participation in language training, and if necessary further education and training in preparation for employment or advancement in the labour market. Some countries have an extensive system for education and training of nationals and access is both free and universal or is promoted through loans, subsidies or scholarships. In others, however, these systems may not be well developed or are available on a ‘user-pays’ basis only;
- existing infrastructure for supporting access to the labour market, such as national job placement networks and programs to support disadvantaged workers;
- expectations of refugee economic self-sufficiency and the availability of income support and safety net services for those





who are outside of the labour market. The issues associated with this are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.4;

- expectations of participation in language training programs;
- the existence of legislative frameworks and programs to prevent discrimination against and exploitation of refugees as a vulnerable group within the labour market.

### **Initiatives to promote and support economic self-sufficiency**

Individualised assessment and job placement assistance

In order to access employment in receiving societies, recent refugee arrivals will need to familiarise themselves with:

- recruitment services and systems in place in the receiving country;
- labour force conditions and the demands for their skills within it. This may involve defining and interpreting their previous work experience and skills in the jargon of the receiving country. For example, job titles are generally specific to a given labour market and may be misleading when transferred to another. Similarly, skills and experience acquired informally through, for example, work in a refugee camp may not be recognised either by employers or refugees themselves;
- education and training options in the event that employment prospects in their former careers are poor or their education has been disrupted;
- processes for re-certification and accreditation.

Those wishing to establish economic self-sufficiency through micro-economic enterprise will require information about programs available to assist them.

Provision for individualised assessment and job placement in the early resettlement period is an integral component of an integration program. Some countries of resettlement have job placement programs in place for nationals. Where this is the case, new arrivals may be linked with these services as part of the reception and orientation process.

However, in most of these countries, it is recognised that additional initiatives are required to ensure that these programs are responsive to the needs of new arrivals. These include:

- providing interpreting and translating services to support refugees to access job placement services and to participate in job search activity;



## INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

**Working for refugees**

IN THE USA, non-	offer employers a free
government agencies are	translation service to
contracted to provide job	assist with an initial
placement services for	training and induction
newly arrived refugees.	period and inform them
Refugees are referred to	about any special
these services where an	subsidies and tax credits
individual assessment is	that may be available to
conducted and assistance	them when hiring the
in preparing a resume	person. They may also be
offered. The service then	available to 'trouble-shoot'
approaches individual	in the event of any
employers looking for	problems (such as safety
workers that 'match' the	issues or cultural
skills of the refugee. Many	misunderstanding).
employment programs	

- offering more intensive support to refugees in the early resettlement period. In some countries this is offered through existing programs established for job seekers with special needs. In others, special programs have been established for refugees;
- providing information and professional development programs to job placement officers to enhance their awareness of the past experiences and current concerns of new arrivals. This may be particularly important in those countries where participation in job search activity through a government job placement service is a condition of receiving social support payment;
- recruiting bilingual and bi-cultural staff to job placement services;
- making provision for regular review of job placements in the early resettlement period with a view to identifying and addressing any problems experienced by refugee arrivals or their employers.

In other countries special job placement services have been established for refugees or assessment and job placement is formally incorporated into the reception and orientation process. For example, in Denmark, where reception and integration occur at the municipal level, individually tailored 'introduction plans' are developed in consultation with new refugee arrivals. These include, among other things, an



**Integration in the labour market is...about appropriate and sustainable employment, not just work full stop.**

European Council for Refugees in Exile Integration Task Force,  
*Good practice guide on the integration of refugees in the European Union: Employment*





## What level of support should refugees be offered to resume former careers or regain a position in the labour force comparable to that held in their countries-of-origin?

SOME refugees will have achieved very high degrees of education and high level professional and vocational qualifications. However, these skills may not necessarily be immediately transferable to the labour market of the receiving country. This may be due to a number of factors:

- There may be limited or no demand for the particular skills held by the new arrival.
- There may be an over-supply of the skills held by new arrivals, creating stringent competition and in some cases, leading to specific bars or barriers to entry of personnel trained in other countries.
- Proof of highly specialised knowledge may be required in order to have prior qualifications recognised and to practise their profession or trade. This may be the case, for example, with the

professions of medicine and law and with trades in the telecommunications industry.

Resettled refugees in these circumstances may require some assistance to assess whether it is possible to reclaim their former careers, or whether indeed their long term interests would be better served by exploring an alternative career path.

In some countries specific steps are taken to support refugees to either resume their former careers or to retrain for work commensurate with their aptitude and aspirations (e.g. through the provision of mentoring programs, training subsidies and social support payments to enable participation in retraining). In others, however, this remains the responsibility of the individual entrant.

There are a number of factors weighing against

refugees regaining the position held in the labour force in their countries-of-origin. In some countries it may be neither economically viable nor politically sustainable, to support refugees to realise this goal. This is particularly the case in those countries in which nationals have limited access to education and training initiatives. In these circumstances, it may be necessary for resettled refugees to adopt a career plan which involves securing employment for immediate economic survival, while at the same time enrolling in language and career training for employment in the longer term.

The extent to which support is offered will be dependent on prevailing labour force and economic conditions in the receiving country and the circumstances of individual refugee entrants.

assessment of the refugee's individual skills and qualifications with a view to facilitating their entry into either the labour market or education and training.

Enhancing job readiness, job-search skills and resources

People from refugee backgrounds may require some additional assistance in participating in job search activity and preparing themselves for employment in the receiving country. Having only recently arrived they are unlikely to have access to

## INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

**Providing intensive tailored job placement support to refugees**

IN HAMBURG, Germany, a non-government agency providing support to refugees (AWO) has entered an agreement with the Public Employment Service (PES) to provide intensive job assessment and placement support to refugees. The program was introduced recognising that officers of the PES had neither the time nor expertise to offer refugees	an appropriate service. Refugees registering for unemployment assistance are referred to AWO rather than the PES. There, they are assisted by an officer experienced in working with refugees and who, in many cases, is able to speak their language. Assessment of their language, training and employment needs is offered followed by referrals	to appropriate services or employment positions. A contrasting approach has been taken in the Australia state of Victoria. There, refugees are assisted through the mainstream employment service. However, settlement agencies provide training courses for employment professionals to sensitise them to the particular needs of refugees.
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resources such as word-processing and Internet facilities. Many will be unfamiliar with job search conventions in the receiving country, such as those relating to the preparation of job applications and resumes and to participation in job interviews.

While refugees are generally very motivated to seek employment in the receiving country, some may have never worked in the paid labour force or may have endured a prolonged period of economic dependency in a refugee camp. Further, workplace culture and values may be very different in the receiving country from those in refugee source countries.

Recognising this, in a number of countries refugees are offered intensive programs designed to orient them to the labour force of the receiving country, prepare them for work and support them with job-search resources. Again, arrangements for providing this support differ between countries, with some establishing programs targeted to refugees and others linking refugees with services provided to nationals with special job-search needs.

Job vacancies in receiving countries are often filled informally through professional and personal networks, based on prospective applicant's established reputation or 'track-record' in their field (as opposed to formalised competitive recruitment processes). With networks and professional identity taking some time to build and nurture, new arrivals may be at a significant disadvantage in this regard.



**I want to continue my education in theatre because I write good stories and I would love to be an actor.**

Resettled refugee



INTEGRATION  
IN PRACTICE**Migrant Information  
Technology Centre,  
London, UK**

A NUMBER of non-government agencies collaborated with refugee communities to establish a 'drop-in' centre for refugees and migrants settling in London. Among other services, the centre provides access to the Internet to support job search activity and to word processing facilities for the preparation of resumes and job applications.

In an attempt to improve the job prospects of new arrivals, a number of countries have developed mentor programs, whereby refugees are linked with peers in their profession (either nationals or established members of refugee communities). Mentors support the new arrival by orienting them to their field in the receiving country, assisting them with the preparation of applications and resumes and linking them with employers and other peers.

In those countries in which faith-based communities have been actively engaged in supporting refugee resettlement (see Chapters 2.3 and 2.11), these have served as an important link between resettled refugees and employment opportunities in the wider society.

Internship programs have also been successfully established in a number of countries. These give new arrivals the opportunity to gain work experience in their field, build networks, and demonstrate their skills and experience.

Promoting recognition of prior learning, qualifications and experience

As indicated above, not all resettled refugees will be in a position to resume their former careers. However, those who wish to do so may need to have professional or trade qualifications (e.g. in nursing, engineering, commercial driving, or hairdressing) gained elsewhere re-certified or re-accredited in the receiving country before commencing practice.

Similarly, those wishing to resume tertiary or other post secondary education or training will need to have prior learning formally evaluated by education or training authorities. There may be a number of barriers to this in receiving countries:

- In most countries, no single body is responsible for certifying credentials gained overseas. Rather, this is the responsibility of individual institutions, professional associations and trades. Accessing these systems may, therefore, be a complex undertaking for new arrivals.
- Formalised processes for certification or accreditation of overseas trained professionals may not have been established for all trades and professions and/or there may be a limited understanding among relevant bodies of how to assess the qualifications and prior experience of overseas trained personnel.
- In some professions, re-certification processes are very

## INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

**Internships for refugee employment**

IN THE Netherlands, an internship program has been developed offering refugees with qualifications and experience a period of paid work experience in a relevant government department. Refugees are employed for a 12-month period, during which time they are offered personal support from a workplace mentor. While ongoing employment is not guaranteed, in practice, a large proportion of those participating in the program have been able to secure this in the internship or other employment settings.

expensive, stringent and protracted, often involving a period of further study. The time, cost and effort involved for refugees may compete with the need for employment for immediate economic survival. In some countries, stringent re-certification, accreditation or registration processes may be imposed by trade and professional associations to restrict the entry of overseas trained personnel who may be viewed as competitors.

- Documentation of qualifications and prior experience may have been lost, stolen or destroyed in the course of the refugee experience, making it difficult to provide proof to employers and accrediting authorities.

As a first step toward enhancing refugees' access to accreditation and re-certification processes, refugee employment services in a number of countries have compiled information for new arrivals and those working with them on requirements and contact details for relevant trades and professionals. Others have developed resources to assist bodies responsible for re-certification and accreditation to better understand and assess the qualifications and prior experience of refugee arrivals. For example, in Denmark, a Handbook was produced for universities to support their assessment of the prior learning of refugees from those main regions represented in the Danish resettlement program.

Consideration may also need to be given to advocating on behalf of or in co-operation with refugees, to secure re-certification processes that are more responsive to the needs of refugees while at the same time maintaining appropriate standards. For example, a refugee employment service in Kentucky, USA

INTEGRATION  
IN PRACTICE**Refugees mentoring refugees**

A PROGRAM was developed to support doctors trained in other countries to prepare for practice in the UK. Through a weekly group program, convened by a re-qualified refugee doctor, refugees with medical qualifications were offered information about the requirements of registration, language coaching, clinical placements and support through the system of re-qualifying exams.



## INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

**Enhancing access to transport in the USA**

ACCESS TO transportation has been identified as a major obstacle to refugee employment in the USA.	provides loans to refugees to purchase a car which is repayable 'in-kind' through the provision of transportation services to other refugee families.	refugees offers low cost transport to refugees for their journey to work.
A number of innovative programs have been developed to address this:	• In Maryland, a large steel company employing significant numbers of	• In Vermont, a refugee support service provides financial assistance and language support to refugees to obtain a driver's licence.
• In Florida, a non-government agency		

worked with the professional engineers' association in that state to establish processes for re-accrediting resettled refugees who had qualified as engineers in their country-of-origin.

Internships and mentoring programs may also be useful, with the former providing the local experience sometimes required as part of a process of re-certification or accreditation, and the latter ensuring that refugees have relevant peer support.

## Addressing practical barriers to employment

While employment yields obvious economic benefits, a number of resources may be required for work force participation, such as a transport and a driver's licence and in some cases 'tools-of-trade'. As they have only recently arrived, refugees are unlikely to have acquired these resources and may need some support in accessing them.

Refugees with child care responsibilities are likely to have limited access to family and informal support, yet may be unaware of the existence of private and government child care agencies. Some families may be reluctant to have their children cared for outside of the family. This may be because they are unfamiliar with child care services, because they or their children are experiencing particular difficulties associated with past trauma, or because existing services are not culturally responsive.

The costs of child care may also serve as a disincentive to employment, particularly for very low wage earners.

For these reasons, refugees with child care responsibilities may need additional information on the role of child care in the



**My English was funny at that time and I took a job as a cleaner in a hairdressers. No-one believed that back home I was an engineer.**  
Resettled refugee



receiving country, child care services and costs, as well as any child care subsidies that may be available to them.

### Promoting economic self-sufficiency through micro-economic enterprise

Micro-economic enterprise can provide an important alternative route to economic self-sufficiency for some new arrivals, in particular:

- those who owned small businesses such as grocers, restaurants or beauty shops or derived income from small home based enterprises, such as dressmaking in their countries-of-origin;
- those whose skills are not readily transferable to the labour market of the receiving country (e.g. doctors, lawyers) or who may not fit well into more traditional jobs (e.g. artists);
- women, since some small or home based businesses may be more compatible with their child care and domestic responsibilities. This is particularly the case for women originating from cultures where it is unacceptable for women to work outside of the home (see Chapter 3.2);
- those resettled in countries with a small formal labour force, but a strong tradition of self employment through business ownership and income generating activity (e.g. Burkina Faso).

If successful, small businesses can assist integration through economic self-sufficiency. Those involving extensive contact with customers or other business networks also provide opportunities for language learning and social connection.

However, in some enterprises (e.g. home based garment construction) these opportunities may be limited, isolating refugee arrivals from the wider community. In a number of resettlement countries, home based producers have also been subject to exploitation by wholesalers and retailers<sup>2</sup>.

There are also some inherent financial risks in establishing small business ventures and some may involve a significant amount of personal investment and organisational effort on behalf of new arrivals, many of whom may already be struggling with other resettlement issues.

Refugees wanting to establish a small business may require some support, including:

- assistance with initial capital outlay or in accessing credit facilities;
- assistance in preparing a business plan;



**I love to make money with my own hands. I always worked hard and helped my family and my children above all.**

Resettled refugee



INTEGRATION  
IN PRACTICE**The Business  
Enterprise Adviser,  
Refugee Council,  
London, UK**

THE ADVISER was established recognising that refugees were having difficulties in accessing existing government enterprise advice agencies. This was due to language difficulties as well as to a lack of appreciation by mainstream services of some of the different business ideas presented by refugee applicants.

The service, staffed by people who are themselves from refugee backgrounds, offers:

- advice on starting a business;
- orientation to the practices and cultures of the market in Britain;
- language assistance to access credit providers. Business plans can be developed in their first language, with translations being provided to enable people to communicate with credit providers.

- information on taxation, accounting and other regulatory frameworks in the receiving country;
- information relating to market conditions in the receiving country;
- an alternative source of income or social support while the business is in its establishment phase.

In some countries, this assistance may be secured through small business enterprise schemes already established for nationals. For example, in Ireland non-refundable allowances are available to people wishing to establish a small business (subject to the viability of the proposal being approved). This allowance, which is gradually reduced, is available for up to three years. In the Netherlands, people starting their own businesses are eligible for a refundable grant for 18 months. Refugees have made extensive use of these programs in both countries.

Some additional assistance may be required to facilitate access to these schemes, given language issues and the fact that in many countries they are often governed by strict and complex eligibility criteria.

In other countries, such as Burkina Faso and Benin, targeted small business enterprise schemes have been established for refugees. Loans with favourable terms are made available to those interested in pursuing this path to economic self-sufficiency.

Marketing the skills and attributes of refugees to employers and promoting cultural accommodation

Engaging employers is a vital strategy in promoting refugee self-sufficiency. As well as exercising control over recruitment, employers have a powerful influence over workplace conditions and culture, and in some industries may be in a position to support refugees with other resources such as child care and transportation. Some employers may be unfamiliar with resettled refugees and this may contribute to a reluctance to hire them. Integration services in existing resettlement countries have sought to foster employer support and overcome potential employer objections by:

- active ‘marketing’ of the skills and attributes of refugees in general or of individual refugees, including, where necessary, information to counter erroneous views about refugees or particular refugee communities or to assist employers in accommodating cultural or religious practices;
- making arrangements to brief key industry and employer bodies about current and projected refugee intakes;



**TAKE  
CARE****Communicating with employers**

WHEN COMMUNICATING with employers and job-placement personnel in the receiving country, refugees should be presented as normal people in extraordinary circumstances. Market research conducted among employers in the United Kingdom in 1998<sup>3</sup> indicates that it is important to avoid:

- inflating the skills and attributes of refugees;
- defining refugee arrivals as 'needy', thereby risking them being perceived as burdens to prospective employers;
- engendering guilt by using shock tactics;
- creating the impression that refugees are the only, or most important, group experiencing labour force disadvantage.

While employers and job placement personnel may require some awareness of the past experiences of refugees, evidence from around the globe suggests that the single most compelling reason for hiring them is the valuable contribution they make to the workplace. Consider communicating some of the following messages:

- Resettled refugees generally have high levels of employer loyalty.
- Owing to their past experiences, resettled refugees are generally highly adaptable and hence are likely to settle readily into a new job.

- While resettled refugees may not have worked in the receiving country before, many have sound work histories in their countries-of-origin and asylum.
- A culturally diverse work force can contribute to a positive company profile.
- Different cultural practices can generally be accommodated in the workplace without compromising safety, hygiene or efficiency.

Also think about providing information about:

- any language or other assistance which may be available to employers hiring resettled refugees;
- particular skills refugees or refugee groups bring with them;
- factors associated with the refugee and resettlement experience that might affect job-search skills and the capacity to retain employment;
- employer obligations under relevant discrimination and equal employment opportunity legislation;
- special incentives available to employers engaging refugees (e.g. language support, subsidies, tax concessions);
- special programs and supports available to employers to assist them in orientating and training new arrivals in the workplace.

- providing language assistance to employers to assist with initial induction and training;
- providing subsidies and tax-relief to employers hiring refugees. In those countries where refugees qualify for programs established for nationals with special employment needs, steps may need to be taken to promote these programs to employers;
- soliciting the co-operation of key corporations to routinely notify refugee support and reception programs of vacancies.



## Accommodating culture

SOME refugees have religious or cultural practices that may compromise their employment prospects or, if not accommodated in the workplace, may exclude them from some employment opportunities. For example, practising Muslims will need flexibility in their work schedule and space to participate in designated prayer times. They may be forbidden to work in positions involving the sale or handling of pork or alcohol.

Some employers may be concerned about employing

Muslim women who wear the veil (or *hajib*) believing that it will compromise safety or hygiene or affect corporate image.

Many companies have been very successful in accommodating these cultural practices. Indeed, a visible commitment to a culturally diverse work force may assist in enhancing a positive company profile. Refugee employment services can take steps to ensure that the cultural practices of refugees do not give rise to difficulties, including:

- the inclusion of relevant

cultural information in professional development programs for job placement personnel;

- awareness raising programs to assist employers to accommodate cultural practices;
- advocacy on behalf of individual refugees who have experienced lack of understanding or active discrimination. In some cases this may involve invoking the authority provided by existing anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunity legislation.



**Fortunately I have a good boss who understands me, who knows about the situation in my country. He was also really kind to me and helped me a lot.**

**Initially I had real difficulties in understanding this new system of work.**

Resettled refugee



### INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

#### Engaging employers

IN FRANCE, a non-government refugee support agency, France Terre d'Asile (FTDA), enters into agreements with major French employers who agree to make FTDA branches aware of job vacancies. Refugees selected for positions are employed on the same basis as other workers. However, FTDA maintains contact with them to monitor the arrangement and to receive feedback from both employer and employee. This arrangement is relatively inexpensive.

## INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE

**Enhancing cultural accommodation**

REFUGEEWORKS, the US Office of Refugee Resettlement's national technical assistance office for employment, was aware that both Muslim workers and their employers harboured misconceptions about whether it was possible for	Muslim women to work while at the same time observing their prayer times and their traditional practice of wearing the headscarf. Working closely with advisers from the Muslim community, Refugeeworks has developed a campaign	aimed at raising awareness of the needs of Muslim workers, the ways these can be accommodated in the workplace and employer's obligations under anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunity legislation.
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## Placement practices as tools for promoting employment

From time-to-time, countries of resettlement have offered resettled refugees placement in communities where unemployment rates are low or there is an unmet demand for labour in specific industries. In others resettled refugees have been offered financial and practical support to relocate from their initial placement site to communities where they have specific employment opportunities or where unemployment rates are lower.

While these are effective strategies for promoting economic self-sufficiency, it is important that they are considered in the context of community capacity to meet other integration goals, such as ethnic community and social support and the costs and benefits of secondary migration in the early resettlement period (see Chapter 2.1).

## Addressing racism, discrimination and exploitation in the workplace

Refugees, in particular those with characteristics (such as accent, racial features or cultural practices) that distinguish them from the dominant culture of the receiving society, may be vulnerable to racism and discrimination. This may affect their prospects of securing employment in the first instance, their opportunities for advancement within the work force and the degree to which they are accepted by fellow workers. Particular hostility may be directed to refugees settling in areas or seeking employment in industries where unemployment is high as they may be viewed as unwelcome competitors for scarce jobs.





## The advantages of special employment programs for resettled refugees

THE NEEDS of people from refugee backgrounds are better served in the long term by ensuring that they have access to the mainstream labour market and to labour force programs provided for nationals. However, in most countries it is recognised that intensive support will be required in the early resettlement period and this is often best provided through a program tailored to the needs of refugees.

Special refugee employment services and programs may also have a role in ensuring that refugees have access to mainstream labour market programs and employment opportunities by:

- advocating on behalf of individual new arrivals to employers and education and training institutions;
- providing language and translation assistance;
- providing information on culture and employment practices;

- raising awareness of the skills and attributes of refugee arrivals to employers;
- working with employers, labour unions, education and training institutions and labour market program providers to enhance employment opportunities for new arrivals and to address barriers to equal employment opportunity.



**I was lucky, I only have good memories but I was always very active. I was willing to work more and I was always looking for more opportunities.**

Resettled refugee



Poor alternative employment prospects, language differences and lack of knowledge of their rights as workers may also make new refugee arrivals particularly vulnerable to exploitation by employers<sup>4</sup>. Mature aged refugees, women and refugees with disabilities may face the compounding effects of discrimination on the grounds of their age, gender and ability (see Part Three).

In countries with a long history of culturally diverse migration there are legislative frameworks in place aimed at preventing discrimination and promoting equal opportunity in the workplace. Services established to support refugee resettlement have used this framework as a basis for both raising awareness among employers of their obligations to refugee applicants and workers and for advocating the rights of individual refugees. Labour unions are also important partners in protecting the industrial rights of refugee workers.

### The role of labour unions

Labour unions have an important role in protecting the rights of refugees; in promoting a hospitable environment in the workplace; and in ensuring that refugees have access to opportunities for employment, retraining and advancement. In many countries wages and conditions are generally better in unionised sections of the labour force.



Some unions may be difficult to engage, seeing refugees as competitors for scarce jobs and as potentially undermining hard won wages and conditions, by offering a cheaper or more compliant labour source. However, in many countries, they have been powerful integration partners, recognising the contribution refugees make not only to the work force and economy of the receiving country, but to the membership base of labour unions themselves.

For those new arrivals originating from countries with a strong union heritage, labour unions can also provide an important avenue for making social connections and developing skills in civic participation.

It is important that resettled refugees are provided information about labour unions and their role in the receiving society. Unions in a number of countries of resettlement have conducted education programs targeted to ethno-cultural communities.

The political leverage of labour unions may make them important partners in garnering broader government and community support for integration programs. For example, in 1999, trade unions in Denmark collaborated with employers and non-government agencies to conduct the *See Difference as an Advantage* campaign. The aim of the campaign was to draw the attention of other workers and prospective employers to the resources ethnic minorities – among them refugees – bring to the labour market and to promote equal opportunity and counter discrimination. The campaign involved a number of strategies including media promotion, a work based stand-up comedy show, resources to assist employers to develop ethnically inclusive workplace policies, lobbying and network formation.



**New arrivals from every continent have contributed their energy, talent and commitment to making the USA richer and stronger. Likewise the American Union Movement has been enriched by the contributions and courage of immigrant workers. Newly arriving workers continue to make indispensable contributions to the strength and growth of our unions. These efforts have created new unions and strengthened and revived others, benefiting all workers, immigrants and native born alike.**

Resolution of the American Federation of Labour,  
July 2001





More recently unions in the USA conducted a series of rallies aimed at securing change in immigration laws applying to immigrants without valid entry documentation. Unions in that country have also played a significant role in placing refugees in jobs and in offering formalised retraining programs.



## ACHIEVING ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

### OVERALL A SOUND INTEGRATION PROGRAM WOULD:

- offer a program for providing individualised assessment and job placement assistance for refugees which is sensitive to the refugee and resettlement experience;
- have strategies to prevent discrimination against and promote equal employment opportunity among refugees, targeted to both employers and refugees themselves;
- offer support for refugees wishing to establish small businesses;
- aim to support refugees to compete on an equal basis with nationals in the labour market and to advance in the labour market commensurate with their skills, experience and aptitude;
- incorporate strategies to promote and support employment opportunities for refugee women, refugee young people and refugee elders (see Part Three).

### SPECIFIC PROGRAMS ESTABLISHED TO SUPPORT REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT WOULD:

- foster a partnership approach with resettled refugees to ensure that they play an active role in and have a sense of ownership of the job search process;
- support resettled refugees to represent themselves to employers by assisting them to accurately assess their abilities and job possibilities;
- provide language assistance;
- provide support which is sensitive to the needs of refugee women, elders and young people (see Part Three);
- engage employers and labour unions;
- engage refugee communities in planning and implementation;
- promote refugees as assets to employers in receiving countries;
- provide or facilitate access to support with practical barriers (child care, transport, tools of trade);
- promote access to meaningful and sustainable employment.