

**Topic:** Employment  
(International Catholic Migration Commission, Overseas Processing Entity,  
Zagreb)

**Activity:** Recognizing Skills/Barriers

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<b>Introduction</b>	<p>In many countries, a person's future is somewhat determined in high school when students are "tracked" or "profiled" (e.g., an academic versus a more vocationally oriented high school. Within an academic school, students also have a major such as math, science, or humanities). These early decisions impact who attends the university and in what faculty (major). This in turn usually determines the career that someone will follow regardless of other factors.</p> <p>In the activity, participants learn strategies for getting ahead.</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Given case studies of two refugees, participants will identify each person's skills, the barriers they faced and the strategies they used to "get ahead" (advance in their career).</p>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Case Study A: Dusan (male; included)</li><li>• Case Study B: Fatima (female; included)</li></ul>
<b>Practice</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Divide the class into 2 or 4 groups. Give each group a case study of an individual in a work situation in the U.S.: Dusan or Fatima. One person from each group reads the study to his/her group.</li><li>2. Ask the groups to come up with a list of skills the individual possesses and a list of barriers the individual must overcome to get a better job.</li></ol>
<b>Discussion</b>	<p>Focus on the fact that everyone brings skills to the workplace and that there are various ways to get ahead. Ask if participants know the story of another refugee, and if so, how that person got ahead. Find out what barriers the participants think are insurmountable. Brainstorm other strategies for getting ahead.</p>

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## Case Study A: Dusan

Dusan (male) Dusan is 25 years old. He has a wife and 3-year old child. He was an apprentice plumber in Krajina before the war. During the 5 years he was a refugee in Serbia, he did not work. He has been in the U.S. for 18 months. When he arrived in the U.S., he spoke no English, but he was –and is–eager to support his family.

Here is Dusan:

“I got a job within the first month of our arrival in Chicago. I worked as a laborer with a small construction company located about 3 miles from my apartment. I walked to work. The pay was \$5.50 an hour, and I worked from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., I attended English classes at a community center near our apartment.

“I did not like my job—it was very hard work for little pay, and I saw no future in it. Also it was very difficult to walk 6 miles every day in the harsh winter weather. I filled out many job applications, told my sponsor that I was looking for more challenging and better-paying work preferably as a plumber’s apprentice, and I mentioned the same to my friends and neighbors.

“Three months later I took a job as a dishwasher for \$5.25 an hour. I decided to take this lower paying job because it was closer to my home and it gave me an opportunity to work overtime. I continued to look for a job as a plumber and took a Saturday, six-week course in plumbing at a community college near our apartment.

“Six months after I took the dishwasher job, my neighbor got me a job interview for a plumber’s apprentice position with a large construction company where he worked. He saw that I was willing to work hard and also willing to try to improve myself by studying English and taking a plumber’s course. I was hired as a plumber’s apprentice at \$7.50 per hour with full benefits.

This job was very difficult for me. I wanted to do a good job, but I had to learn new plumbing techniques and speak English on the job all the time. I worked hard, earned the respect of my supervisor, and six months later I got a raise to \$ 9.00 per hour. Now the company is paying for me to attend plumbing classes to earn my certificate as a regular plumber.”

Discussion Questions:

- What are Dusan’s skills?
- What strategies has Dusan used to “get ahead”?
- What are the barriers that Dusan faces to getting a better job?

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## Case Study B: Fatima

Fatima is 34 years old. She is married and has 3-year old twins. Both Fatima and her husband were doctors in Sarajevo. They have been in the U.S. for 2 years. When they arrived in the U.S., Fatima spoke little English.

Here is Fatima:

“Although we were told in the CO class that our diploma would not be recognized in the U.S., when we arrived in Phoenix 2 years ago I thought I could find a job in the field of medicine. I spoke little English, but I believed that I would quickly improve.

“Our first jobs in America were terrible. Within the first month of our arrival, my husband accepted a part-time nurse’s aide job for \$5 per hour. After 3 months, looking for any night job that would allow me to be with my children during the day, I finally got a job as a cleaning person in a doctor’s office for \$5.50 per hour.

“I did not like my job, and I could not attend English classes because I worked every night except Sundays and I had to be with my children during the day. We did not want to enroll the children in a day-care center because they were only one year old, and we could not afford it either.

“One month later, our resettlement agency offered to pay a babysitter 2 hours a day to enable me to attend an English class at a school near our apartment. After attending the English class for six months, I applied for a nurse’s-aid position at the office where I was cleaning, and I got that job. Since my husband still had a part-time job, he applied for my previous job and got that evening work. My pay was \$7 per hour, and I worked from 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. In spite of the fact that I did not like to take orders from those who knew less and had less experience than I had, I held that job for a year.

“My husband and I took turns caring for the children. On those days when we both worked, we paid a baby-sitter. I continued attending English classes and I studied a lot to improve my English. Having two jobs and taking care of the children left my husband too exhausted to attend any English class at that time.

“Six months ago I applied for a technician’s position at the clinic’s laboratory for \$20 per hour. I got that job, and 3 months ago I began to study for the exams I will have to pass if I want my medical credentials to be recognized in the U.S. To successfully pass the exams, I will have to attend some very expensive courses and improve my English.”

Discussion Questions:

- What are Fatima’s skills?
- What strategies have Fatima and her husband used to “get ahead”?
- What are the barriers that Fatima faces to getting a better job?

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