



Cultural Orientation for Elderly Refugees at the HIAS OPE Vienna



Approximately 25% of the caseload processed at HIAS/OPE Vienna, which works exclusively with Iranian religious minorities, is aged 56 or older.

Most of the students in Vienna CO classes worked in skilled labor professions in Iran, although some were university professors or engineers, while others have received little or no formal education.

Of HIAS/OPE Vienna's caseload, approximately 75% are Christian, and 25% Zoroastrian, Mandaean, Bahá'í or Jewish

Final destination for over 80% of cases = California.



All refugees 15 and over are required to attend Cultural Orientation. Older refugees with debilitating medical issues may be excused.

Typically, older refugees take CO along with younger students. However, the Vienna CO team has experimented with “Seniors Only” CO classes.

Our main message:

Elderly refugees will have many options in the U.S.--perhaps more than they think--and will ultimately be responsible for their own life choices.



"My wish is
for peace
in the US."

"I expect a
stressful but
free life"

"I will change
my eating habits
but I will stay
myself."

Expectations

English will be
difficult & everything is
unknown."

"I know I need
good English for
Trade School."

"My family will
not change in the
USA. But my daughter
has changed some manners
& traditions. No Tarof."

"I want to get
a Green Card but
don't know
how."

"I know LA
is called
Tehrangeles & it's
very big."

"I miss my son,
who's still in Iran."

"I hope that Jesus
Christ will help & bless
me."

"I will see my
family first thing."

"I've heard
America is like
a pun in Farsi. It
means 'All work.'"

"US bosses can
fire you at any time.
No job is stable."

"65 is the
retirement age."

Working in
the US

"Job laws benefit
the Boss."

"I want to be
an auto mechanic
again."

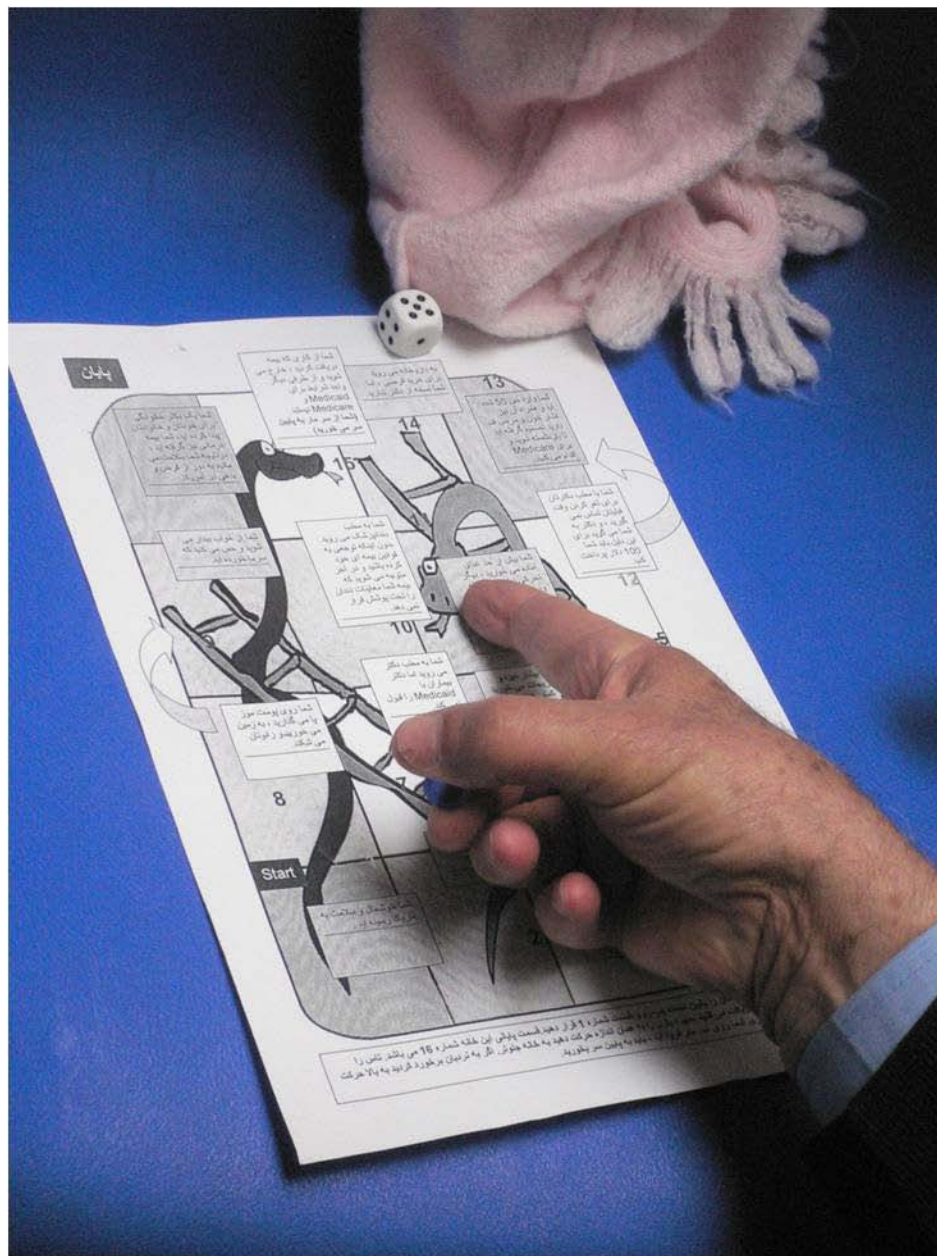
"Maybe I can babysit
for my grand children while
my children work."

"You must
work hard."

"I want to open
a Bedding Store."

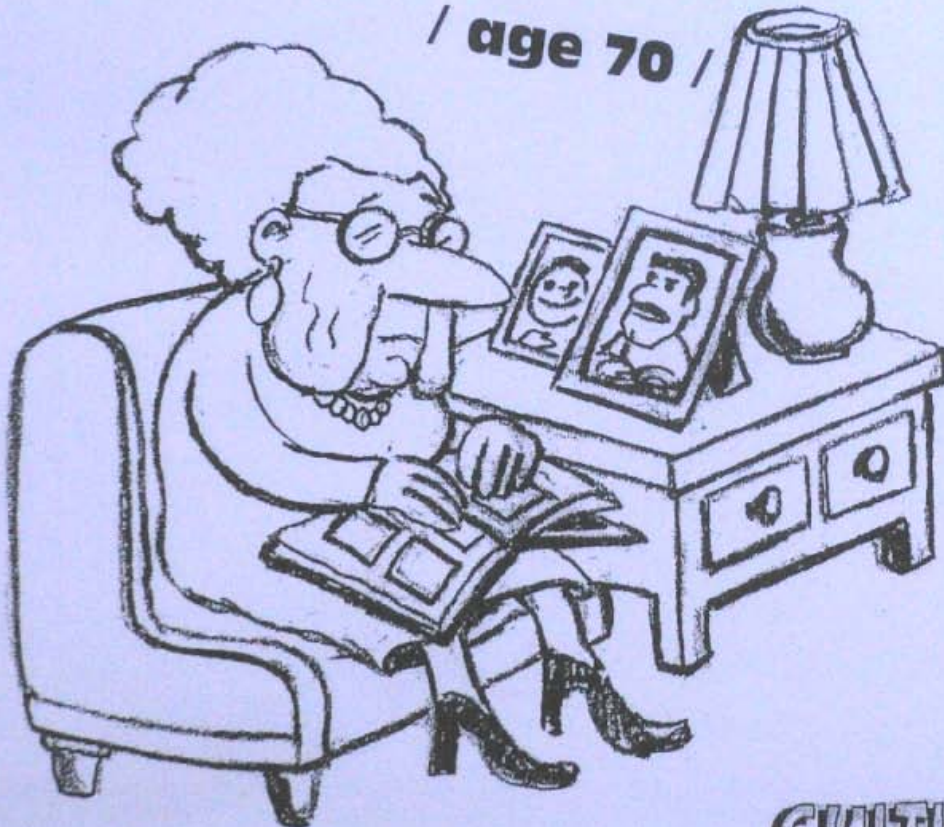
"Without money,
what will we do?
Entry level jobs."

"Pizza delivery,
babysitting &
working at home."



GRANDMOTHER

/ age 70 /



What do you think Grandmother is feeling in the picture to the left? Discuss your observations with the class.

CULTURAL ORIENTATION
PARENTING / TEENS / The ELDERLY



Challenges for Elderly Refugees

depression

isolation

chemical imbalance

homesickness

dependency (on others)

ill health

technological illiteracy

lack of

lack of understanding from others

English

unrealistic expectations

Strategies for Healthy Elderly Refugees

take
a road
trip

go to the
park

Stay
active

music!

play

think
positive &
Use your mind

find
a hobby

be
with
other
people

Watch
Iranian
TV

get
a pet

Knitting
meditate sport
Cooking

don't
depend on
your children
too much

write down
your history &
your memories &
family history



Whenever you catch the fish,
it's fresh.

(Farsi proverb)