

Topic: Employment

Activity: An Employment Difficulties Case Study

Objectives	<p>To consider some of the difficulties refugees may face in their employment.</p> <p>To consider ways in which refugees can try to improve their employment situation.</p>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case study (see sample included), one copy per participant• Prepared flipchart with reflection questions listed (see samples included)• Markers• Tape
Lesson Time	30 minutes
Introduction	<p>Incoming refugees are instructed to take the first job offer they receive, whether it is in their field or not. This is critical in order for refugees to be able to pay their expenses after resettlement support ends. However, finding that first job may not be the only difficulty a refugee faces in employment. Refugees may encounter other challenges, and will need to consider ways in which to address their situation.</p> <p>This case study has been based on the real-life experience of an Iraqi woman resettled in 2009, although her name has been changed to protect her privacy.</p>
Practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Put participants into small groups of 2 to 4 and distribute case studies. Have participants read the case study, answering the questions presented in the case study along the way. When finished, have the small groups answer the final reflection questions on prepared flipchart.2. Bring the large group together and ask for a spokesperson to share the highlights and important elements from the small group discussions. Discuss further as necessary.3. When working with less literate participants, the facilitator can read the case study aloud to the group, and then lead a large group discussion about the reflection questions.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the main issues presented in this case study? How did Amira handle these issues? How would you handle these issues?• Can you think of any way to avoid the issues Amira encountered?• What are some of the resources or supports Amira used? How did she use them? What other resources or supports might be available?

An Employment Difficulties Case Study

Now resettled for one year, Amira* has had a very difficult transition from life in Iraq to that in the United States. A single mother of two teenagers, she struggles every day to make a living for her family. Amira's children have both been placed in high school, and are learning English quickly. Amira herself has strong English skills, a high level of education, and many years of professional experience as an engineer in Iraq. Yet she is having difficulty finding and maintaining secure employment, despite her active efforts and positive approach.

Amira came to the U.S. directly from Baghdad, without having received Cultural Orientation beforehand. Despite knowing little about the U.S. refugee resettlement program, she immediately set about finding work for herself. With pre-existing computer skills, Amira found employment openings on the Internet. In one year, she has been employed in five different positions, including her two current jobs. One of these is at a supermarket, where she started out stocking shelves. She was told she did this task too slowly, and was moved to the bakery, where she washes dishes. Her other job is at an auto center. She had applied for a supervisor/manager position, but instead was offered a position discussing and processing auto repair orders.

Working at the auto center for one month, Amira has had difficulties with her manager, a young man in his early 20's. Amira has requested training from her manager, but has not received it, and the manager has criticized her performance. He was also negative about her wearing a headscarf to work on a Muslim holy day. Another male colleague has been helpful to Amira, but told her that this work environment is not well suited to a woman. Amira feels discouraged and upset, but is attempting to make the best of her job and to prove her skills. She hopes to eventually find a better position and has enlisted the help of employment services at her resettlement agency.

Amira has maintained a warm and positive relationship with her resettlement agency. Amira's case worker helped her to complete driver's training, and now she has her driver's license. In response to Amira's need, her driver's license, and her commitment to helping others, Amira received a donated used car from the resettlement agency. Having fixed this car herself, Amira now uses it to help other refugees when they need transportation.

Amira's rent is expensive for her low income, but by working at both jobs she manages to support herself and her children in their two-bedroom apartment. She has hope, but is very conscious of the hardships she faces to give herself and her children a future in the United States. In the face of these challenges, she considers her family her "team"; her children support her decision to move to the United States, and appreciate the sacrifices she has made for their future.