

# We Will Work Hard

A Guide for Employers of Refugee Newcomers



Restoring the dignity  
of the human spirit

The only way out for us is to work hard so that we can improve our living standard.

– **Obwono Ajang, machine operator in Fargo, a refugee from the Sudan and a U.S. citizen**

This publication was written by members of the Minnesota Mainstream Training Project at the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT). The goal of Minnesota Mainstream is to improve the ability of health and social service agencies in the state to provide appropriate services to survivors of torture and war trauma. The work is supported by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation. A special grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation Minnesota launched this booklet.

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Your comments and feedback regarding the contents of this booklet are welcome. What have you found helpful? What other information would assist you? Do you have success stories that you could share with us?

Please contact Evelyn Lennon, MSW, LGSW, at [e.lennon@cvt.org](mailto:e.lennon@cvt.org), or call the number below to share your thoughts and suggestions or to request an in-service training session at your workplace.

Cover and inside photos: Dr. David Parker

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## Introduction

Refugee workers are important assets to the workforce. They bring skills, resourcefulness, a strong desire to work and an appreciation of the opportunities this country offers. This booklet is intended to help ease the transition into work in the United States for refugees and those who hire them. It contains information that is useful to:

- o human resources and training staff
- o occupational nurses
- o workplace managers
- o Employee Advisory Program staff
- o workforce trainers
- o employer liaison staff

At the Center for Victims of Torture we assist refugees who are survivors of torture with rebuilding their lives. We know how important having a job is in the healing process. We know that refugees have had frightening experiences of political violence before arriving in the United States. We provide training and resources to people who work with refugees all over the state of Minnesota in order to develop knowledge of the refugee experience and awareness of how political violence may affect individual refugees, their families and communities.

This educational resource offers information on working with the newest members of Minnesota's workforce. In it you will find information on how best to help newcomers be successful in the workplace as they rebuild their lives in safety.

# Minnesota's New Workforce

Minnesota's newest residents are invigorating rural and urban areas of the state (1). The newcomers have bought homes in neighborhoods in Rochester, Saint Cloud, Saint Paul and Minneapolis. New stores and businesses owned by refugees have helped create a renaissance along Lake Street and Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis and along University Avenue in Saint Paul. Some communities in Minnesota now are seeing reversals in population decline.

A large percentage of the newcomers to Minnesota are refugees, including asylum seekers, who have had to take flight from their home countries (see glossary on p. 15 for definitions). Refugees fleeing war in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, along with economic immigrants from countries such as Mexico, are joining the workforce in the Twin Cities and in small towns such as Owatonna, Pelican Rapids and Marshall.

## Refugee Strengths

work training and experience  
adaptability  
strong survival skills  
resourcefulness  
a strong desire to work  
problem-solving expertise  
community building skills

## Refugee Contributions to the Workforce

Immigration touches not only gateway states such as California and Florida that traditionally have large populations of immigrants and refugees, but the heartland of America as well. This is because this geographic area has been creating more jobs than workers, and immigrants are filling critical niches in the labor market. Many newcomers enter the workforce in lower-paying, lower-skill jobs – in factories, meatpacking plants, restaurants and other blue-collar industries (2).

Refugees and immigrants have historically formed an essential pool of workers in the American workforce. They come to the United States with abilities and talents. Many of today's refugees are highly educated and were professionals in their home countries (2). Others were small business owners, farmers and traders. Many have served in leadership positions. Most arrive in the United States in the prime of their working years, making them a fiscal bargain for our country to the tune of \$1.43 trillion saved in education costs (3).

Refugee and immigrant workers are essential to the U.S. economy. The impact of revenue from refugee businesses and the value of their additional skills are great. And as the present workforce ages the new workers will play a vital role in reducing a projected long-term labor shortage.



**“The American economy absolutely needs immigrants ... Our economy has become more dependent on immigrant labor than at any time in the last 100 years” (3).**

**– Andrew Sum, director of a labor market center**

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**“Q: Overall, how were they as workers? A: Excellent. They were excited by the American dream.”**

**– former director of operations, food processing plant, Lincoln, NE, 2001**

## Refugee Contributions to the Community

**R**efugees strongly value the concept of community and mutual assistance. Before the political upheavals that forced them out of their countries, many families lived in the same village or city for many generations, even centuries. This limited mobility meant that people depended upon extended family members, neighbors and friends for help and support.

In their new country, refugees strive to rebuild relationships and a sense of community (6). They are eager to contribute to their new communities and they value neighborliness and friendliness. Refugees and immigrants sponsor neighborhood celebrations, events and activities providing cultural enrichment and vitality to their adopted neighborhoods.

In addition, the newcomers reinvest in their neighborhoods and contribute to the economic base by building businesses and purchasing homes. They “largely employ neighborhood residents, serve as leaders in their communities and offer locations where groups and associations can meet” (7).



The typical refugee or immigrant and his or her descendants pay an estimated \$80,000 more in taxes than they will receive in local, state and federal benefits over their lifetimes.

– “Immigrants and the Economy” (4)

Immigrants and refugees create more jobs than they fill.

Immigrants and refugees revitalize blighted and depressed areas.

Immigrants and refugees contribute through their needs and demands for goods and services.

The U.S. Department of Labor projects that between 1998 and 2008, the number of jobs will increase by 20 million, but the number of workers will increase by only 17 million.

Production manager Mike Arntson says “Cardinal IG doesn’t recruit refugees for employment. They hire the best-qualified applicants. All they have to do is demonstrate a willingness to work hard, and to give their best effort.”

– “Refugees Boost Dakota’s Population” (5)

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In the most comprehensive study ever conducted on immigration, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences found that immigrants raise the incomes of U.S.-born workers by at least \$10 billion each year.

– Report commissioned by the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, published in 1997 (8)

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# What Do You Need to Know

## Who's Coming to Minnesota and Why?

Immigration has long been a part of Minnesota's history. Immigrants at the turn of the century were economic immigrants – escaping poverty, famine and sometimes persecution – but today's immigrants are more likely to be political refugees. Unlike other immigrants, refugees do not voluntarily choose to leave their homes.

The 1990s saw an unprecedented number of political conflict zones worldwide, which resulted in 12 to 14 million refugees living outside the borders of their home countries at any one time (see glossary for more information). Refugees are forced by circumstances beyond their control to leave the lives they know, often risking death, starvation and tremendous hardship in the course of their flight to a place of refuge. Refugee camps, erected by the United Nations in hosting countries to offer temporary sanctuary to refugees, often hold new dangers – violence and crime, hunger, disease and lack of sanitation, and little opportunity for employment. The length of time that refugee families may spend in a camp before they return home or seek safety elsewhere varies from a few months to more than ten years.



“People forget that this is ... a very new country. ... I know in my case, my grandparents and great-grandparents were new Americans.”

– Mike Arntson (5)

The United States annually resettles less than 1 percent of the world's displaced peoples.

– World Refugee Survey 2002 (11)

A small number of refugees are admitted each year to the United States for permanent resettlement through a partnership of the federal government and nonprofit agencies. The Refugee Assistance Program, officially authorized by the Refugee Act of 1980, provides federal funding from the Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement to assist refugees in making the transition to life in the United States. Local agencies that contract with

the government to resettle political refugees include Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, the Minnesota Council of Churches and World Relief. The refugee resettlement program in the United States is a family reunification and employment-based program, and many refugees are working within six months of arrival. The U.S. Congress determines how many refugees to admit each year and sets the quota by regions of the world.

Minnesota's friendly citizens, low unemployment and good support systems have attracted refugees who have moved here from their first site of resettlement in the United States. Initial resettlement happens in selected cities in the United States. Upon arrival refugees are free to move anywhere in the country. While Minnesota has a high number of refugees per capita, states such as California and Florida are home to more refugees (9).

A count of the numbers of refugees in Minnesota is difficult to obtain; numbers are inaccurate and not up to date. For example, cumulative statistics in 1999 indicated 6,000 Somalis in Minnesota. However, members of the Somali community estimated the number to be more than 25,000 statewide. The

West African population is listed at 2,500 for 1999, but members of the Liberian community estimated that their numbers exceeded 10,000 (10). The Hmong population in Minnesota is estimated currently at 65,000.

A small percentage of families affected by war and violence worldwide find refuge in this country. Although refugees do not resettle in the United States for economic reasons, they are eager to reunite their families, learn the language, get a job and start the process of rebuilding their lives.

## Government Support of Refugees

The laws regulating immigration for refugees are complex. The average U.S. citizen often has much misinformation about what government benefits refugees receive. Inaccurate rumors of free cars, exemption from taxes, etc. abound. It usually surprises people to find out that refugees must pay back the cost of the flight to the United States from the refugee camp. Eligibility for public health insurance only lasts for a few months. For more information on rights, responsibilities and benefits for refugees and asylum seekers, see the *Resources* section in the back of this booklet.

## Effects of War Violence on Refugee Survivors

Most refugees have experienced the traumatic events of war, and some have suffered torture. The consequences may be long lasting, and may affect the individual, her or his family and the refugee community as a whole.

Estimates of torture range from 5-50 percent of refugees in Minnesota based on information from a number of torture prevalence studies. Torture is the deliberate and systematic attempt to destroy a person's identity and humanity and to frighten the entire community into submission. Torture is the most effective tool used against democracy, and its use has been reported in over 150 countries around the world (12). Based on information from a Minnesota-based torture prevalence study in progress, the Center for Victims of Torture estimates that 30,000 survivors of torture reside in Minnesota.

Listed below are some of the common long-term effects of war trauma or torture. Symptoms experienced by individuals and their families vary greatly. Reactions to violence may be immediate, or they may emerge many years after the refugee is in a safe place. New stresses may bring back symptoms that had subsided. Some of these effects may play themselves out in the workplace.

While these are normal reactions to the horror of war, it is common for refugees not to connect distressing symptoms or feelings to war experiences. He or she may not reveal problems out of fear of being labeled "crazy" or of not being employable. It may be surprising to know that even refugees suffering post-traumatic stress can function well in the workplace with adequate support.

### Symptoms of torture or war trauma may include:

- physical pains
- distrust of others
- sleep disturbances and fatigue
- hypersensitivity to environmental triggers (e.g., sounds, smells, small spaces)
- disturbing memories, sadness and grief reactions
- feelings of helplessness and powerlessness
- fears and avoidance

# What Can You Do to Help New Employees?

## Support for Refugee Workers and Their Employers

It is difficult to imagine what it would be like for us to flee from our homes because of war and persecution. Minnesotans have experienced losses through fire, flood, tornadoes or other natural disasters, but few of us have had to suffer the profound losses caused by torture and war.

Refugees are faced with tremendous losses and pressures in their lives. The consequences of torture or war trauma – along with normal cultural adjustment – present new and special challenges for the employee, the employer and co-workers. These issues



Many refugees/immigrants work two or three jobs in order to make enough money to support family members both here and in their native countries. They must pay back the loan of airfare to the United States from overseas and they must pay for physicals and paperwork to adjust legal status after a year of residency here.

“If not for immigrants, we would not have been able to carry on.”

– Scott Lemire, recruitment manager for Marsden Building Maintenance Co. and American Security Corp. (14)

can be addressed in ways that assist job and cultural adjustment and lead to success. Understanding the issues and taking a problem-solving approach can be useful and empowering for everyone.

It will initially take more time to train the newest members of Minnesota’s workforce. But like many of our ancestors who came

to this country as refugees and immigrants they want to make the most of their new lives and offer better opportunities to their children. The long-term benefits to each

company or organization and to the community as a whole will make the extra effort worthwhile.

### Pressures for refugees include:

- Worries about family members back home in danger or in refugee camps waiting for help
- Anxieties about finding jobs that can support family in the United States and family members still abroad
- Insecurities about learning new systems and laws regarding transportation, employment, education, health care and responsibilities, etc.
- Frustration that professional skills are not recognized and marketable in the United States
- Physical and psychological symptoms from war violence that make daily activities challenging

## Guidelines for Mutually Satisfying Employer-Refugee Worker Relationships

Three basic strategies emphasize that initial patience and support for new employees will increase the degree of success in the workplace. According to Joe McKinley, employment counselor at the International Institute of Minnesota: “If employers are willing to learn and to be flexible, they will open themselves up to a whole new world of possibilities ... they’ll find they have a whole pool of labor that is still untapped”(14).

- **Take extra time to orient new refugee employees. This step will minimize problems and misunderstandings later.**

Refugees may lack adequate English-language skills because of the need to start earning money as quickly as possible, or because trauma symptoms and worry have interfered with concentration in ELL classes. An investment in translation or interpretation or in facilitating ELL studies for employees can decrease costly accidents and mistakes. Cultural training for staff and all employees (both refugee and non-refugee) can prevent the compounding of misunderstanding as well.

“Limited English proficiency may contribute directly to workplace fatalities. For example, the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board identified language barriers in worker training as a key factor in a January 7, 1998, explosion at a chemical company in Mustang, Nevada, that killed four immigrant workers and injured another six. In response to these findings, the state of Nevada revised the Nevada Occupational Safety and Health Act to include the following requirement: ‘The written safety program and all training programs required pursuant to this section must be conducted and made available in a language and format that is understandable to each employee.’”

– Testimony of Rosemary Sokas, M.D.,  
M.O.H. associate director for science,  
NIOSH, 2002 (15)

“I learned it was important to clarify English skills. If I gave an assignment and the immigrant worker said ‘OK’ it didn’t necessarily mean they understood what I said. So I decided to encourage people to improve their English. I made a flyer that offered them voluntary testing of their English skills related to our jobs. We promised to set them up with ESL at no cost. We even fronted the \$250 charge. That \$250 was made up easily by reducing mistakes caused by lack of understanding. My operations costs were \$10,000 per hour. Mistakes could easily use up an hour of time, so \$250 was nothing in comparison. Also speaking better English brought them more into the team socially, which also helped with productivity.”

– Interview with former director of  
operations, food-processing plant, Lincoln, NE, 2001

“I think that the American employees were talking about me. I think they didn’t like me. So, I stayed only with people from my country on the breaks and lunches. Also, I am shy because I do not dress or talk like the Americans. I wished that I could speak with them and make new friends. Was I surprised when I heard two American women talking in the hallway! They said that we didn’t like them and wondered why we would not talk to them.”

– Employee of an office cleaning firm in Minnesota

## 2. Avoid unnecessary stresses on the job that might increase symptoms in refugees with trauma histories and might hamper productivity.

The World Health Organization lists stress in the workplace as one of ten “social determinants of health” for which there is broad evidence of its negative impact on the health of all employees. Unhealthy stress is generally thought to be a result of high demand and low control in jobs. Some evidence shows that social support may reduce this effect (16). The chart below gives examples of possible stressors resulting from war violence that may not be obvious to employers and makes suggestions for managing each situation effectively.

### Challenges for Employees

**Fear of Those in Authority:** Uniforms, power and control figures, and excessive rules and paperwork may trigger memories of abuse by those in power.

**Physical Pains:** Refugees may be reluctant to express difficulties because they are afraid of losing their jobs.

**Distrust of Others:** Some employees may be distracted or have difficulty working on jobs where they must work beside others from their home countries.

**Sleep Disturbances and Fatigue:** People may fear going to sleep because they have nightmares, or they may awaken in the night with bad dreams or night sweats.

**Anxiety or Irritability:** An employee may have trouble interacting with co-workers because of the fear that is a normal reaction to trauma.

**Troubling Memories, Sadness and Grief:** Employees come to work looking sad, or they may appear to have no pep or energy. This may be disturbing to coworkers.

**Cultural Considerations:** Refugees have suffered many losses. Perceived or real threats to cultural practices may be difficult.

### Responses for Employers

Provide every employee with the same clear and consistent information, explanations, expectations and rules. Address fears and assist employees in understanding the employee handbook.

Instruct those who stand or sit in the same position for periods of time, perform repetitious tasks or work in a cold environment in healthy strategies to relieve discomfort. Provide sick leave and health insurance.

Accept that distrust of others enabled refugees to survive in the past. Ask if there are people or situations that make them feel uncomfortable.

Encourage employees to see a health provider, as there may be a physical cause for the fatigue. Lack of sleep may impair concentration or memory. Relaxation exercises or medication may help to restore a normal sleeping pattern.

Deal with these situations on a one-to-one basis in private. Acknowledge legitimate causes for anxiety and anger, and help the employee explore techniques to aid in controlling his or her response.

Educate all employees about the general life situation that some new workers may have experienced. An employer is in a good position to express genuine concern and to encourage an employee to seek assistance.

Find ways to accommodate new cultural or religious practices without sacrificing safety or productivity. Try out ideas with employees before implementing.

### 3. Help refugees rebuild social support networks that reinforce natural resiliency. A supportive environment in the workplace fosters problem solving and improves work performance.

Encouraging teamwork across cultural gaps on the job making certain that refugees know whom they can talk to if they are having problems, and networking with other agencies in the community who can help refugees and immigrants with various needs are all good strategies. Encourage use of Employee Advisory Programs. Check that Employee Advisory Programs (EAPs) are knowledgeable about refugees. One former staff psychiatrist at the Center for Victims of Torture recalls that his first referrals of torture survivor clients after moving to Rochester were from EAPs.

## Best Practices

What are the “best practices” for assisting the transition of refugees to work in the United States? Many employers, job counselors and English language instructors have, through experience, discovered tactics that promote healthy and productive work environments. Some of the best practices are:

- Encouraging and assisting refugees in receiving education, language instruction and skills training, particularly when this can be integrated with the work site
- Avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions
- Providing extended orientation sessions with interpreters, if needed
- Using job “shadowing” or mentors who “buddy-up” with new employees
- Problem solving approaches to situations that appear at first unacceptable

The following actual stories illustrate success:

#### “Toilet Trials”

*Rituals involving personal cleanliness are part of religious practice for Muslims. It may be stressful not to be able to participate in daily routines.*

“We had a unisex bathroom that seemed to always be dirty and often the floor was wet. One day a lady slipped and fell. I tried to find out what the cause was. One of the Moslem workers I knew better than I did others. I asked him and he seemed embarrassed and asked me to close the door. He said, ‘First the water, then the paper.’ I thought he meant that, in washing hands, the floor got wet and then they would run out of paper towels to dry it, so I thought I had it solved. He looked relieved. But I checked and there always seemed to be enough paper. Another lady slipped and fell. He again repeated, ‘First the water, then the paper.’ Seeing that I didn’t understand him, he explained further. The custom was to clean oneself with water before using toilet paper. I bought a bidet for \$800. Problem solved.”

*Interview with former director of operations, Lincoln, NE, 2001*

#### “Sometimes He Needed to Sit Down”

*Previous physical injuries, such as those caused by beatings on the bottom of the feet, can cause discomfort when the worker is stationary for long periods of time.*

Wood shop foreman: “This really good guy was working for me. I knew he’d had it rough in his country ... they were having a civil war that was really bad ... but I didn’t know what had happened to him there. I know some family members were killed. We’re out on the floor all day moving around a lot on the job. This guy’s feet would swell right up after a few hours, and I realized he was hiding a lot of pain. We put him at a desk doing orders and phone work and he did just fine. Turned out that he was a banker in his country.”

### “A Black Eye From Fighting With Myself”

*Sometimes the cause of an injury may not be what it seems to be on the surface. ... A survivor of torture recalls a day that his co-workers may have misjudged him.*

“I became very afraid of going to sleep. And then I became very, very insecure. Very, very scared. I was getting very violent nightmares. I would dive, run away from the bed. You know, like, run! I hit myself on the wall many times. I would go to work and I would have a swollen face, a bruised face. People would begin to suspect that I had been in a fight. But it was just my own house ...” *From Terror to Healing, Part Two: The Survivor's Perspective*, © 2001 The Center for Victims of Torture



*A refugee employee may experience significant difficulties beyond the scope of the workplace. He or she may disclose to an employer or co-worker some of the terrible things that happened to him or her before coming to the United States. A sympathetic ear and an acknowledgement of the refugee's suffering and strength in managing to survive and to get to the United States can help bridge the gap in experience. If a recommendation to seek medical help or counseling seems in order, use the EAP, the local First Call for Help or the Information Referral Service of the Center for Victims of Torture (612.436.4800) for ideas on who in your community is trained to handle the issues presented by traumatized refugees.*

*The worker in this story was a client at the Center for Victims of Torture. He teaches high school in Minnesota.*

### “They Came Before the Sun Was Up”

*A workplace schedule adjustment may result in the avoidance of triggers to bad memories that may interfere with sleeping.*

Grace's work shift was from 3 p.m. - 11 p.m. and she was often very tired halfway through the evening. Her employer became concerned about the quality of her work. He consulted Grace's employment counselor who asked her about her sleeping habits. Grace told the counselor that she fell asleep easily in the evening, but she often woke up around 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. and could not return to sleep. She then completed tasks such as cleaning floors or dishes, and several times she baked for her family in the early morning hours. The counselor remembered that Grace had once told her that the military frequently arrived in early morning hours while people were asleep to make arrests. Without inquiring further, she suggested a change to the 11 p.m. - 7 a.m. shift for Grace. The employer granted the request, and Grace managed well in her duties on the new shift.

### “I Do Not Feel Safe Wearing a Name Tag”

*Some refugee workers may be afraid of those in authority or of others from their own countries because of past violence at the hands of police or military or fear of spies and continuing persecution of those still in the home country.*

Employment counselor: The store called to tell me they had to let you go because you did not comply with their rules. We were both so pleased when you got that job. You must be disappointed. What happened?

Lily: They make everybody wear a nametag and I didn't want to do it. They said I had to wear it, or I could not work there.

EC: What was the problem for you in wearing the nametag?

Lily: There is someone else from my country working there, and I don't trust him. I don't want him to know my name.

EC: Did you tell the store why you didn't want to wear the nametag?

Lily: No, they would not understand.



### “She Cries All the Time”

*Expressions of grief are natural, and they can sometimes be accommodated in the workplace.*

An African woman cried at her job on the assembly line so frequently that other workers became concerned. A conversation between the young woman and her supervisor revealed that she had suffered tremendous loss. She cried at home, as well as during the day at work. Her crying did not interfere with the excellent job she performed, and with her permission she was moved to an outside position on the line where she continued to successfully complete the tasks.

EC: You may be right; most of us have not lived under the kinds of circumstances you have. But, you know, sometimes people really can understand and help you find a solution to the problem. You don't lose anything by checking that out.

Do you want me to call the employer to explain and see if we can come to some solution? Perhaps you could use a nickname or a code name that the store could still associate with you but would protect your confidentiality.

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“Our ancestors were also immigrants – refugees from another place coming here to escape injustice and torture of many kinds. ... We will honor them by welcoming newcomers.”

## Notes for Employment Counselors

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**B**esides employers, the people most likely to use the information in this booklet are employment counselors and case managers. Counselors often make the initial contacts with potential employers and they become the chief liaisons between employers and employees. Employers may not have detailed knowledge of the refugee/asylee experience. As an employment counselor, it is important to understand what clients may have experienced and how it is that the effects of those experiences may influence their adjustment now. It is not possible to avoid every misunderstanding between refugee employees and employers, but active listening and knowledge of resources can save a client's job.

We invite you to obtain more information on the refugee experience including the effects that torture, war trauma and oppression may have on work readiness. The Center for Victims of Torture offers training on these subjects and on how you can apply this information to help your refugee clients make the transition to work. Call or e-mail the Center for Victims of Torture to arrange training for your workplace (612.436.4800). In addition, CVT has publications available to download and order through our Web site ([www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org)).

If a client has severe symptoms that interfere with his or her daily functioning a referral for assistance may be appropriate. If you do not know what resources are available in your community, you may call the Center for Victims of Torture for guidelines and information on referring clients for mental health assistance. Financial workers should be aware that clients with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may qualify for Social Security Insurance (SSI), if symptoms are debilitating and properly diagnosed (see glossary for more information).

Helping refugees to be successfully employed in meaningful and satisfying work, but working closely with those who have experienced difficult losses and trauma can result in additional stress for counselors. Many of the effects of stress for those exposed to stories of suffering can be similar to the effects of trauma itself. These effects can be cumulative and they can interfere with work performance and personal lives. It is important, therefore, for counselors to take an active role in reducing job-related stress for themselves.

## Notes for Occupational or Industrial Nurses

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**O**ccupational or industrial nurses may be called upon to handle employee sickness, injury or other health and safety issues for refugee workers. Somatic complaints can be puzzling for health professionals. Refugees with trauma histories may have lingering physical problems as the result of torture or violence. Somatic complaints may also be reflections of psychological distress. The Center for Victims of Torture provides training for nurses and other health professionals that focuses on symptoms, assessment and treatment where torture or war trauma is a factor. For more information, visit the CVT Web site ([www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org)) or contact Carol White ([cwhite@cvt.org](mailto:cwhite@cvt.org)).

### Summary

Most refugees come to the United States having suffered under difficult circumstances. They have been afraid and powerless, but it is with courage, hope, strength and determination that they begin their new lives. They arrive with high expectations of working and achieving the American dream.

Like our ancestors, they bring skills, talents and leadership to their new communities. They are eager to learn and to adjust. But sometimes the knowledge and abilities of refugees are camouflaged as they struggle with language, acculturation and the effects of war. Employers and refugee employment counselors may have to make some adaptations in time and resources initially, but the payoff will enrich America's economy and its people.

# Resources for Employers

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## General Resources for Employers, Employees and Employment Counselors:

RefugeeWorks provides technical assistance and consultation for employers, states and national voluntary groups. Publications include *Refugee Employment Manual*, *Community Service Employment Proven Practices* and others. RefugeeWorks is the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement's training and technical assistance arm for employment and self-sufficiency, and a program of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. RefugeeWorks, 700 Light Street, Baltimore MD 21230; [lirs@lirs.org](mailto:lirs@lirs.org); Phone: 410-230-2700; Fax: 410-230-2890

**<http://www.careeronestop.org>**. CareerOneStop is a Web site where one can find jobs and locate public workforce services by geographic location. CareerOneStop, a federal-state partnership, also contains information on career paths, salary data for various occupations, resume writing tips, and job interview strategies.

**<http://www.ibisconsultinggroup.com/bestpractices.htm>**. The results of a study by Ibis Consulting Group re: the best ways to attract, retain and develop foreign nationals in the workplace.

**[http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/resources\\_rightsstuff.html](http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/resources_rightsstuff.html)**. "Why can't she be a doctor in America? Foreign-trained professionals face long odds in their struggle to restart their careers in the US." *The Rights Stuff*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Rights.

**<http://www.dreamsinusa.com/English/index.htm>**. This resourceful commercial guide has information for immigrants and others on jobs, immigration, education, house ownership and news.

**<http://www.culturalorientation.net>**. Sections cover best practices for refugees seeking jobs.

## For employment eligibility questions, contact:

The Office of Special Counsel, Department of Justice  
1-800-255-8155 / **<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/osc>**

Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) Helpline  
1-800-375-5283

## General Information on Refugees and Asylum Seekers:

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Premier site for information on refugees.  
**<http://www.unhcr.ch>**

U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR). Links to news, updates, worldwide refugee information.  
**<http://www.refugees.org>**

## Cross-cultural resources:

*Finding Common Understanding: An Employer's Guide to a Cross-Cultural Workplace*. Available at the International Institute of Minnesota for a small fee. Telephone: 651-647-0191. **<http://www.iimn.org>**

*An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices*. Available through the Council on American-Islamic Relations, 453 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, DC 2003. Telephone: 202-488-8787 E-mail: [cair1@ix.netcom.com](mailto:cair1@ix.netcom.com).  
**<http://www.cair-net.org>**.

*The Center for Cross-Cultural Health*. A Minneapolis organization with publications, training schedules and locales, online discussion and links. Telephone: 612-379-3573; Fax: 612-623-3002; 1313 SE Fifth Street, Suite 100B, Minneapolis, MN 55414. **<http://www.crosshealth.com>**.

## **These Twin Cities agencies will link employers with qualified employees:**

AccessAbility Inc  
360 Hoover St., NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413  
612-331-5958

Pillsbury Neighborhood Services/ Brian Coyle Community Center  
420 15th Ave. S, Minneapolis, MN 55455  
612-338-5282

Somali Community of Minnesota  
1014 E. Franklin Ave., Suite 102, Minneapolis, MN 55405  
612-871-6786

Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services  
122 W. Franklin Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55406  
612-874-8605

Center for Asians and Pacific Islanders  
3702 E. Lake St., Minneapolis, MN 55406  
612-721-0122

Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio  
220 S. Robert St., St. Paul, MN 55107  
612-871-0200

Summit Academy OIC's Somali Success Program  
935 Olson Memorial Hwy, Minneapolis, MN 55405  
612-377-0150

Southeast Asian Refugee Community Home  
1421 Park Ave. S, Minneapolis, MN 55404  
612-673-9388

International Institute of Minnesota  
1694 Como Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108  
651-647-0191

Lifetrack Resources  
709 Univeristy Ave. W, St. Paul, MN 55104  
651-227-8471

### **The Right to Work Initiative**

This Minnesota program is a collaborative between MN Council of Churches, Lutheran Social Service and World Relief. This program, funded by the Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/osc>, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice, works to educate employers, workers and service providers about immigration-based employment discrimination. For more information contact Lisa Enderson at 612.874.8605, ext. 45.

# Glossary of Terms

**Asylee/Refugee:** An asylee and a refugee is, according to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” Refugees apply and are processed in other countries before entering the United States. (See Asylum below)

**Asylum:** Humanitarian permission to remain in the United States. Asylum is discretionary under United States law. Individuals have the right to seek asylum, but have no right to receive asylum. Asylum is the vehicle through which the United States provides protection to aliens who are physically present in this country and who are in danger of persecution if forced to return to the countries from which they fled. The basic idea of asylum is protection, so a grant of asylum allows the persecuted individuals to remain in the United States in safety regardless of whether she or he has any other legal means for staying in the country.

Asylum seekers apply and are processed in the United States after they have entered the country or are at the border. Once an asylum seeker is granted asylum, he or she becomes an asylee under U.S. law.

**Bureau for Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS, formerly INS):** In March 2003, the old Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) was broken into three parts, all under the new Department of Homeland Security. The BCIS section administers services such as immigrant and nonimmigrant sponsorship; adjustment of status; work authorization and other permits; naturalization of qualified applicants for U.S. citizenship; and asylum or refugee processing. <http://immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm>.

**Employment authorization:** The required permission and documentation to work from the Bureau for Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) and Social Security Administration in the United States (e.g., Employment Authorization Document [EAD] from the BCIS and a Social Security number from the Social Security Administration).

**ELL/ESL:** ELL is an acronym for English language learner. This means that the person is an English language minority student. ESL, or English as a Second Language is an approach to teaching the English language to non-native speakers.

**Immigrant:** An alien admitted to the United States as a lawful permanent resident. Immigrants are those persons lawfully accorded the privilege of residing in the United States. They may be issued immigrant visas by the Department of State overseas or adjusted to permanent resident status by the Bureau for Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). Refugees and asylees are eligible to apply for adjustment of their status after one year of residency in the United States.

**Internally Displaced Person (IDP):** A person who has left home to flee persecution but who stays within the borders of their home country (for example, Colombians or Sudanese fleeing from south to north in their respective countries).

## **Other Categories of Immigration (in addition to “refugee” and “asylee”):**

- Migrants: Persons who leave their country of origin for economic reasons or for reasons not covered under the limited refugee definition.
- TPS (Temporary Protected Status): A designation by the U. S. attorney general that nationals from a particular country (or particular stateless people) need temporary refuge and work permission in the United States.
- DED (Deferred Enforced Deportation): A designation by the U. S. attorney general that nationals from a particular country (or particular stateless people) continue to require temporary refuge and work permission but may be required to return to their home country as soon as conditions are deemed satisfactory by the United States.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** PTSD is a condition of emotional distress following a traumatic experience that is characterized by responses that involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The sufferer “relives” the event through

memories that intrude into daily life and even into dreams. For more information on the symptoms of PTSD, please contact the Center for Victims of Torture.

**Torture:** “Any act inflicted by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed or intimidating or coercing him or a third person for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.” - UN Convention Against Torture, 1984, which the United States has signed and ratified

**Traumatic event:** A traumatic event is one that is outside the realm of normal human experience. It overwhelms the (coping) capacity of the organism to deal with the experience. The disruptive effects of the event on the individual may be profound and long lasting and may affect all aspects of functioning.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established in 1951 in response to the needs of one million, mostly European, refugees. Currently, UNHCR cares for almost 12 million refugees worldwide and is concerned with the safety and well being of an additional 10.4 million internally displaced people.

## Sources

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2. *Speaking for Themselves: A Survey of Hispanic, Hmong, Russian, and Somali immigrants in Minneapolis-St Paul*. St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, November 2000.

The 1990 U.S. Census revealed that 44 percent of newcomers held unskilled or service jobs, compared to 24 percent of the general Twin Cities labor force. The results of a study of 1,119 local immigrants, including significant numbers of Somali, Hmong, Russian, and Hispanic or Latin adults showed that 30 percent had a four-year college degree or higher, while 66 percent held a high school diploma or higher.

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5. "Refugees Boost Dakota's Population." Interview with Bob Reha. Minnesota Public Radio, August 20, 2002.

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Ninety percent of refugee participants in a local study indicated that friends were their most common sources of information for resources.

7. *Immigrants and the Economy*. Minneapolis: Greater Twin Cities United Way Research and Planning Department, June 2002.

8. Smith and Edmonston. *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*. National Research Council. National Academies Press, 1997. <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/5779>.

9. *Annual Report to Congress-1999*. Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1999. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/policy/arc\\_99.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/policy/arc_99.htm)

10. "Primary Refugee Arrivals to Minnesota (Notifications received by MDH) 1979- 1999." Refugee Health Program, Minnesota Department of Health <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/dpc/adps/refugee/refcumm.pdf>.

The refugee arrival figures do not include those who have moved to Minnesota from another state, who were born in Minnesota or who came under other categories of immigration.

11. *World Refugee Survey 2002*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees. <http://www.refugees.org/WRS2002.cfm>.

12. *Amnesty International: Report 2000*. London: Amnesty International Publications.

In more than half of these countries the use of torture was widespread or persistent, not aberrant. In more than 80 countries, torture was reported to be so severe that victims died.

13. Hayes Taylor , Kimberly. "The Language of Work" *Star Tribune*, March 8, 2001.

14. *Finding Common Understanding: An Employer's Guide to a Cross-Cultural Workplace*. Minneapolis: International Institute of Minnesota.

15. Testimony before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee on Employment, Safety, and Training, US Senate, by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, February 27, 2002.

16. *Social Determinants of Health: the Solid Facts*. Copenhagen: World Health Organization, 1998.





