

MORE ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

The ultimate objective is full-time, year-round employment with benefits. In some rural communities, it may be necessary to find employment in the nearest larger town or city. Part-time or seasonal jobs may be short-term options, but they can reduce the opportunity for self-sufficiency. However, it is important to emphasize the difficulty of finding *any* job and the imperative to take the first job that is offered. Even if it is not the job that provides self-sufficiency, it will lead to better or full-time employment with the same, or a different, employer. Getting a good job is easier when you already have a job. A part-time or seasonal job will also help familiarize the employable refugee adults with job demands and expectations in the US.

Keep in mind that public assistance is temporary¹, so refugees need to become economically self-sufficient through employment. Our policy is to set a deadline of **3 to 6 months from arrival**, depending on the family's skills and needs (e.g., English language proficiency, medical issues) for achievement of full-time employment.

Because many refugees arrive from cultures where lifetime employment is the norm and the concept of upward mobility is foreign, it is essential that you explain clearly to the refugees you are helping that their first job might be the *first of many jobs* before they find employment that is suitable to their background or desires.

If further vocational training or academic education are desired, they should be encouraged on a part-time schedule that does not interfere with work. While financial aid is available to refugees because they are legal residents, it is **strongly advised** that your case manager be consulted before enrolling a refugee in any advanced ESOL courses, training courses, certificate programs, or degree-granting academic programs. Your case manager can direct you to resources that will explain the details, challenges and opportunities of pursuing various types of education that will not interfere with employment.

Job Applications

Once employable adults have been assessed and resumes are created, your employment person will need to help them complete job applications. Larger and/or franchised employers in various industries require completion of **online applications**. They can be very simple and completed in less than 30 minutes or, in some cases, can be lengthy and complex and take as much as 90 minutes to complete. Job-seeking refugee(s) will need an active email account in order to register and apply through many employer application systems. Likewise, an email account and address should be set up to provide on **print applications**, which are more common among smaller employers and family businesses.

IRIS does not assist with job applications unless we have a relationship with the prospective employer. We strongly advise you do the same. A 'relationship' might mean simply developing a day-of-application contact who can advocate for and/or track the application of the refugee

¹ Most families will get TFA for up to 21 months as long as they stay under its income limits and fulfill the requirements of doing paperwork review periodically when asked by DSS, and comply with the JobFirst program's requirements to provide ongoing verification of benefit-eligible activities (e.g., ESOL up to 15 hrs/wk, employment-focus English tutoring, and/or job search). Families can receive SNAP as long as they remain below its income limits, although the monthly benefit amount may go down when their income increases from employment.

applicant. You will be provided with a job log where you can enter application and contact information for networking, review and follow up.

Employment Agencies

Many factory-based and other technical jobs are only accessible through employment agencies. They can be good options for those refugees who have limited English proficiency and/or no work experience. While most employment agencies require some English proficiency, they can be persuaded, through dedicated contact, to offer refugees with limited English employment opportunities. The applications that these agencies require are lengthy and full of legal language that is difficult to explain. While awaiting family placement, it would be wise to canvas some employment agencies in your area and collect application forms for reference.

State Licensing and Certification Requirements

Unlike most of the countries represented among refugees, the US has thorough licensing procedures for many professions involving trade, technical, and professional skills. It is important to explain as soon as possible to a refugee who is very experienced lawyer, accountant, teacher, engineer, electrician, plumber, construction worker, or even beautician that a license and/or certification is required in order to practice these professions in Connecticut and other US states. Fulfilling licensing and/or certification processes must be a long-term goal while obtaining employment in the near-term. Of course, emphasizing a refugee's professional/trade skills in a resume or interview can still enhance prospects for obtaining a job of lesser quality. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that an engineer or any of the above occupations with no English cannot expect to be employed in her/his profession and should be encouraged to pursue short-term paths in order to become established and earn money.

Interviewing: Practice! Collaborate with ESOL!

Most job application processes in the US are generally more formal than what most refugees experience in their home countries. Interviews can be daunting for those starting to learn English. As the employment person starts to get a sense of the refugee's/s' skills and capabilities, s/he should supplement their ESOL learning with interview practice. Understanding the scope of the job and being able to describe their work history in short sentences will build confidence. Reviewing industry-specific vocabulary during the search process will prepare the refugee(s) better for discussing the responsibilities for a job during the interview. Ideally, using visuals with descriptors in both English and the refugee's native language is best. Many such materials are available online or through refugees' ESOL.

Federal/State Income Tax Forms (W-4) and Proof of Work Authorization (I-9)

All employers require completion of income tax and work eligibility paperwork soon after the date of hire. Employment agencies require these papers be completed in advance of a job assignment to expedite placement once a job becomes available. It would be helpful for the employment person to have some familiarity with the tax forms before refugee(s) become

On the CT W4 simply follow the income guidelines. On the Federal W4; err on the side of caution. For section 'G - Child Tax Credit' IRIS usually advises **not** entering exemptions on this line for the following reason. Too many exemptions create the possibility that there will be an income tax shortfall at year end that must be paid back to the IRS. Too few exemptions will

mean a tax refund check from the IRS; a far better outcome, which is why we err on the side of caution. On the I-9, use the Employment Authorization Card (EAD or EAC) as a 'List A' document (the only proof needed to complete the I-9. If your client has not yet received the EAC/EAD, two list B or C documents can be used such as the passport from the home country and the I-94.

Now that you have a job ...

Getting a first job is a momentous and very important occasion for every refugee. Most refugees are struck by the formality of getting a job in the US. You can help refugees succeed in their jobs by emphasizing and reinforcing typical expectations employers have before *and after* a refugee is hired.

A refugee entering the US workforce should know the following for her/his first day and beyond:

- **Be on time!**
This cannot be emphasized enough, especially in service industry and factory jobs. Punctuality is expected and must be taken seriously.
- **Sick? Call ahead!**
In IRIS's experience, many refugee employees think they can call in sick after they were supposed to be at work. It is important for refugees to understand that if you are sick, you must call your boss before you're expected to be at work.
- **Be clean and dress neatly.**
To many refugees, Americans seem obsessed with cleanliness. (Although some are disgusted by the practice of allowing dogs into the home and not taking off shoes at the door.) While good hygiene at work is expected in most American workplaces, it might not make sense to some refugees that they have to wear clean clothes or shower before going to work in a factory. Depending on the job, certain appearance standards will be communicated ahead of time, and cleanliness is either presumed or mentioned perfunctorily. If you notice that job-seeking refugees do not seem to be showering regularly, a tactful discussion about personal hygiene may be important before they interview or starting a new job. Introducing deodorant, and guidelines for attire (e.g., when to wash, what to wear, etc.) will be helpful in such situations.
- **Respect lines of communication and authority in the workplace**
To some this is not an issue, but to others who may not be accustomed to formal workplace structures it can cause problems. You have the opportunity to be a refugee's ally, but it should be made clear that employer expectations must be followed so that a refugee does not become dependent on your employment person interceding too often. Onboarding paperwork will often include **codes of conduct**, which oftentimes must be acknowledged via signature. It is important to review any guidelines presented to hired refugee(s) and explain their meaning.
- **"I found another job! See ya!"**
Not so fast. In many countries, it is perfectly acceptable to just not show up to or leave a job abruptly. While Americans are certainly capable of and do engage in this behavior, it is problematic if a refugee does this early in her/his time in the US. Work

history is very important, and explaining it is not only common, but expected. Thus having 10 jobs in one year will not bode well for a refugee. Rather, s/he needs to know that etiquette that requires giving 1 or 2 weeks' notice (depending on the job) is customary and more likely to preserve good rapport between the refugee and her/his boss. Of course, refugees are free to work wherever they want, as long as they can be hired. Nonetheless, they should be aware of common American customs surrounding work so that they can build a successful work history.