

Finding Work Amidst Discrimination

Contributed by [HIAS](#)

Source: www.hias.org/passover2017

The 1951 Refugee Convention clearly states that host countries must permit asylum seekers and refugees to engage in both wage-earning and self-employment. According to asylum experts, “the right [to work] has been recognized to be so essential to the realization of other rights that without the right to work, all other rights are meaningless.” Even with these legal protections, though, outside of the United States, “many of the world’s refugees, both recognized and unrecognized, are effectively barred from accessing safe and lawful employment.” Despite these challenges, refugees are finding innovative ways to sustain themselves. Paola, a 64 year-old refugee from Jurado, Colombia now living in Jaqué, Panama, started a small business selling tamales with a local Panamanian woman. However, she found that it was difficult to survive and support herself and her grandchildren on the income from tamale-making alone. When she heard about HIAS’ livelihood initiatives to help local refugees learn new sustainable jobs, she submitted a proposal to build a chicken coop and received a grant to seed a successful small chicken farm. She says that this new work has helped her regain some of her dignity and gives her a sense of control that was taken away when she had to flee her home.