Ana: Being an immigrant in England always has an implication that it’s just harder to get jobs. It’s harder to show your strengths.

Andrew: We worked for the National Coal Board as apprentice coal-miners. But a piece of luck came along and my life changed.

Presenter: Voices of immigrants talking about their experiences of working in Britain. Our first speaker, Ana Silvia Rodriguez, came to England in 1979 from Mexico to join her English husband. In Mexico, Ana worked in Education. When she moved to England, she tried to find similar work. But this wasn’t so easy.

Insert 1

One of things that I’ve felt a little bit sad in living in England is that job opportunities don’t come as good as if I was in Mexico. In Mexico I had a job. A full time job. I co-ordinated five schools where they taught French. In England I could only get work part-time as a
teacher. And I think there has been some discrimination. Maybe also, my confidence doesn’t show who I am being in England. Perhaps, because I will always speak with a foreign accent. Maybe people make assumptions about the kind of person that I am. But the only thing that I know people recognise me for is when they see that my children have done really well at school and they get very good marks. And, I know if I had stayed in Mexico my professional possibilities would be greater. Being an immigrant in England always has an implication that it’s just harder to get jobs. It’s harder to show your strengths.

**Presenter:** Ana feels sad that, as an immigrant, her ‘professional possibilities’ – her career – was limited. She didn’t always get the jobs she wanted. Ana believes that this was partly because of ‘discrimination’ – she wasn’t always treated fairly in the job market because she’s an immigrant. She also said that, perhaps her accent stopped her from feeling confident when talking about her ‘strengths’ – her abilities and work experience. However, Ana does feel happy that she is recognised for her abilities because of her childrens’ good marks at school.

Our next speaker is from Somalia and went to live in Wales in 1987. Although his background was in banking, like Ana, he found it very difficult to get work in his own field. So, he made use of other skills and experience and now helps refugees through his work at the Welsh Refugee Council.
My name is Eid Ali Ahmed. I came from Somalia in 1987 and since, I have been living in Cardiff. Now, my current job is a Strategy Development Officer at the Welsh Refugee Council. I know very well what it means to become a refugee and to lose your cultural roots, your country, your friends and your soil and your history.

**Presenter:** Eid Ali Ahmed’s personal experiences as a refugee are important in his job as Strategy Development Officer in Cardiff - the capital city of Wales. He understands the issues faced by refugees who have come to live in Britain from all over the world. Eid Ali helps refugees in Cardiff by working with his local ‘council’ – which organises local services such as housing. He feels that the work he now does is very important, but it’s not what he expected to be doing. And even today, Eid Ali still feels quite emotional about his experiences of trying to find a job when he first arrived in Wales.

**Presenter:** ‘Getting through the network’ - actually getting a job in banking in Wales, wasn’t as easy as Eid Ali thought it would be. He said that despite his relevant

Getting a job. Getting through the network… Earning my living in this competitive society was so emotional you know…and all the doors were shut to me because I am having an overseas qualification and overseas experience and that was really a shock to me.

**Presenter:**

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qualifications and work experience from Somalia, ‘all the doors were shut’ to him.

Eventually, Eid Ali decided that he wanted to lecture in Business Administration, so he began to study for more qualifications. In fact, he went for his Masters Degree in Business Administration, usually shortened to an ‘MBA’. So why isn’t Eid Ali a lecturer now?

Insert 4

I tried 50 colleges all across the country. And also, since last year, I have MBA. But with that even, it’s very, very difficult to get the right job. And this is another dimension of the difficulties that refugees are facing in this country. First, refugee issues……. problems. Then once they settle down and they get the qualification and try to make a living in this society. Then, they get a lot of other barriers which faces the black and ethnic minority communities here, who born here. And that’s discrimination and racism.

**Presenter:** Eid believes that discrimination and racism stopped him from getting a job in what he calls, ‘mainstream’ colleges – the well-recognised colleges. But now, he realises that black and ethnic minority people who were born in Britain, face similar barriers or obstacles.
Our next speaker, Andrew Zsigmond, came to England in 1956 from Hungary and like Eid Ali, he was a refugee. Andrew arrived in England not long after the Second World War, and although he was a third year medical student, he didn’t expect to become a doctor. While in a refugee camp in Austria, he signed a contract to work as an ‘apprentice’ – a trainee coal miner for the British National Coal Board. In the Spring of 1957, Andrew travelled by bus to Barnsley, a town in the North of England. What was his working life like?

The reception was varied to say the least because we had tremendous good will from the populous as a whole but very little goodwill from the coal-miners because they regarded us as possible cheap labour. With some justification, I suppose. So, whilst on the one hand socially we were very much welcome, as coal miners the National Union of Mineworkers at the time even organised strikes against us being involved working with them.

Presenter: As he said, the ‘reception’ – the welcome - they got in Britain was generally good, but the British miners didn’t have as much ‘good will’ – they weren’t as kind. However, Andrew said he understood their feelings. The Hungarian miners were prepared to accept lower wages than the British men for doing the same job, so they were thought of as ‘cheap labour’. The unions organised ‘strikes’ against the Hungarian miners – they arranged to stop working in protest and eventually, the National Coal Board decided to release Andrew and
the others from their contracts. Around this time, Andrew had an appointment with a doctor and this appointment changed his luck.

The doctor didn’t like the idea of medical students working as coal miners, so he decided to help Andrew (and another Hungarian), to find a place in medical school. As a result, Andrew was introduced to the new local Member of Parliament, who decided to try and help.

Insert 6

He went to the house as a new MP and asked questions in the house that what were two ex-Hungarian medical students doing coal-mining in Barnsley? Well, of course the poor Minister of Education didn’t even know of our existence. But what did happen as a result of this question in the house that we were sent application forms to apply to various university medical schools, and after many tries, eventually I got accepted to Liverpool University and the Faculty of Medicine.

Presenter: The MP raised the issue in the House of Commons, and Andrew was given permission to apply to medical schools. Six months after becoming an apprentice coal miner, Andrew was accepted at a medical school in Liverpool.

He describes himself as ‘an eternal optimist’ - he was always hopeful that something better would turn up.

Insert 7

I had no expectations other than getting on with my life. And, I was hoping that something will turn up. Hoping against hope in many ways. Because I was, as I say, an apprentice
coal-miner at the time. But, being an eternal optimist I always knew that something better will eventually turn up…and turn up it did.

Insert 8

My first job was in Bournemouth which is in South England. It was work in a Thai restaurant. Just a friend of mine introduced me and I said: “OK, why not? Just give it a try.” Because, when I was in China, I never had any experience of working in a restaurant. So, I think it was good experience and also I got rice to eat and that’s the main thing I missed at that time!

Presenter: Yun enjoyed her first job as a waitress in a restaurant, because she learned new skills. And, importantly, she was allowed to eat lots of rice in the restaurant, which was something she missed! But Yun’s next job was completely different. She became a radio announcer, which was her profession in China.

So does Yun have any plans to change her job again?

Insert 9

My colleagues come from all over China, from different ages, some from overseas Chinese like from Malaysia, or Taiwan, Singapore and there’s a big kind of Chinese community. I enjoy working with these people. I’ve been doing this job since 1996 but I don’t know how long I will stay here. It depends on different situations. As long as I enjoy working here, as long as I can work here….I will stay.

Presenter: Join me, David Thorpe, next time when we’ll be hearing more insights into life in Britain as seen through the eyes of her immigrant population.