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### Refugee Resettlement: Assessing the Quality of Reception in the Southeast U.S.

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Refugee Resettlement:  
Assessing the Quality of Reception in the Southeast U.S.

Adrian Laudani

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Department of International Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

University of San Francisco  
May 2023  
Master of Arts in International Studies

Advised by Dr. Ilaria Giglioli

Refugee Resettlement:  
Assessing the Quality of Reception in the Southeast U.S.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Adrian Laudani  
April 28, 2023

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval of all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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5/24/2023  
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Date

## **Abstract**

When faced with dire situations, refugees are forced to migrate without choice. As a new reality is forced upon them, many don't have much say in what their futures hold. One option that only the fortunate bunch are presented with is resettlement in a third country. Addressing complexities within the refugee resettlement system consists of various dynamics including integration processes, cultural transitions, multilingualism, among much more. The purpose of this thesis is to address the quality of the current reception services in the United States in order to more effectively assist refugees throughout this general transition period. My main thesis question asks how refugee resettlement agencies can better prepare newly arrived refugees to integrate into a new society through their programming efforts. To that aim, it examines the realities refugees face when resettled in Clarkston, Georgia, a diverse community located in the southeastern U.S. known as the most diverse square-mile in America. Placing this local community at the core of this research, we learn of the importance that community-based services have and the need for resettlement agencies to center refugees' voices in this work.

This research relies on two months of ethnographic observation and 16 interviews with resettled refugees, resettlement agency staff, and community partners. Findings shed light on three particular aspects of resettlement, including cultural orientation, employment services, and translation services, and the impact these three elements have on overall refugee integration. While cultural orientation is intended to provide consistent information across resettlement agencies, there are many inconsistencies resulting in refugees' inability to retain much of the information provided. When it comes to employment, resettlement agencies assist with finding initial employment, but do not help refugees with finding sustainable, long-term employment options. Lastly, I found that the translation services provided are insufficient in regard to

refugees having a full understanding of the resources available to them. With these things in mind, this research takes a deep dive into the local resettlement world in Clarkston and offers recommendations for best practice.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my family, friends, professors, and most importantly, the community of Clarkston, Georgia. Little did I know what was going to come as a result of the one year I spent working in Clarkston. Four years later, this has been a full circle moment for me, now dedicating my master level research to the people that played an immense role in helping me figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I give thanks to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps for providing me with the perfect placement location, whether they knew it or not.

To my adviser Dr. Giglioli, it has been a privilege to work with you these last two years. From being your Research Assistant, to now having you review my research, I have thoroughly enjoyed our time together and everything I have learned as a result. To my professors in the MAIS program, thank you for the constant encouragement and willingness to share insights when I felt I needed it most. To my classmates, thank you for the conversations, motivation, and the support, both in and out of the classroom. To Jesús, you constantly inspire me. I will forever cherish the time we've shared in school together, because it probably won't happen again. To my family, I know it's been hard that I've been away from home. I can't thank you enough for the sacrifices you've made and the support you've provided to allow me to pursue my passions.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to my team in Atlanta. You are the reason for this research. I can't express enough all the love and support that I've felt over the years. Thank you for welcoming me back into the office three years after leaving in order to conduct this research. Thank you for always being curious about where I am in life, and for letting me know that I'm always welcome back, no matter how much time passes by. Clarkston has a very special place in my heart, and I'll be forever grateful to each and every person I've met along the way.

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## **Introduction**

The refugee resettlement program in the United States is a longstanding program that has been in place since the passing of the Refugee Act of 1980 (Fix, 2017). As there have been, and continue to be, people displaced from their homes globally, the need persists for third countries to receive and resettle refugees. In order for the United States Resettlement Program to be successful, the quality of its work must be measured to ensure the services provided are meeting the needs of the refugees it is serving. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to provide insight as to what is working well, and not so well, in this program, specifically looking at one part of the country.

Clarkston, Georgia, located northeast of the city of Atlanta, is known as the most diverse square-mile in America, made up almost entirely of refugees (Irani et al., 2018). Utilizing Clarkston as my case study, the aim of this project will demonstrate both the successes of this national program and where improvements can be made, specific to what members have to share about their community. This feedback will help in determining the ways that resettlement agencies can better serve its refugee clients through the incorporation of refugee voices and what they determine is truly needed.

My thesis will proceed to look at the resettlement program in the U.S. through three specific lenses: cultural orientation/integration, employment, and translation/interpretation. Of the many vital pieces that play a role in determining the success of refugees, I argue why these three are most important. By examining the foundations of the resettlement program and where it stands today, I will provide a thorough understanding of the ways in which resettlement needs to shift with the changing times and contexts from which refugees are fleeing. Additionally, I discuss why resettlement agencies need to take a holistic approach into account when providing services, and how this will improve the quality of the services already being provided.

Prior to actually being resettled, there are many steps that refugees must go through. It is a long and tiresome journey, with many individuals and organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, involved in the process. The first step entails the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) determining if said individual or family qualifies for refugee status. If approved, the refugee is then referred to the U.S. government. Following this, a Resettlement Support Center (RSC), contracted by the U.S. government, is involved by gathering the refugee's personal data and information. They do this in advance of the security clearance process, to then be presented to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for an in-person interview. Then the security clearance takes place, which entails fingerprinting and photo taking for additional review. Once complete, the refugee goes through the in-person interview conducted by DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). At this interview, the refugee is able to explain why they are seeking resettlement. The USCIS representative will determine whether or not they qualify as a refugee based on the interview and the previously collected information. This process, still prior to resettlement itself, can take an average of two years.

If approved for resettlement, the long process continues. Refugees then undergo a medical screening, often conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Next the refugee is matched with one of the nine voluntary agencies who will be their sponsor agency in the U.S. Once matched, the refugee is offered cultural orientation to help prepare them for where they are going. There is one final security clearance conducted, and then, the refugee is on their way to the United States. Upon arrival to the U.S., there are five designated airports in major cities that are the international ports of entry for refugees. These include New York City, Washington DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston. Here, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will review the documentation in order to allow the refugee to continue on their journey. Often,

the refugee must take multiple flights in order to arrive at their final resettlement destination (USCRI, 2018).

As described above, the resettlement journey is quite prolonged prior to refugees even arriving in the U.S. This gives some insight as to how many people are involved, and how much refugees endure while in search of safety and protection from the situation they are fleeing from. Once resettled, the long journey continues. Refugees are served by their sponsor agency for the initial three months through the Reception and Placement (R&P) program. During these first 90 days, in-depth core services are provided. Following the completion of R&P, clients have the opportunity to continue receiving services through the Matching Grant (MG) program, which is the employment program. This program is seen through to the 240-day mark, when all services end and, ideally, self-sufficiency is achieved. I will describe further the details of these programs in subsequent sections.

Georgia is a state that has been resettling refugees for more than 40 years (Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies, 2020). Of the nine voluntary resettlement agencies in the U.S., Georgia is home to four of them. These include Catholic Charities Atlanta, the International Rescue Committee, World Relief, and Inspiritus.<sup>1</sup> While the aforementioned resettlement agencies assist with general transitional support, they are also limited in the assistance they are able to provide. These agencies are funded by the government, but I argue that their funding is not sufficient to do what is asked of them. The goal of resettlement agencies is to help refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency within their service period, but is it realistic that refugees are self-sufficient after only eight months following their arrival in a new country? This is an extremely high demand on both the refugees themselves and the voluntary agencies that are serving them.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Catholic Charities is an affiliate of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and Inspiritus is an affiliate of Lutheran Refugee and Immigration Services (LIRS).

Looking at the phrase ‘refugee resettlement’, it was coined to describe the process through which refugees arrive in the United States and begin their new lives after fleeing violence and having sought asylum in a new country. According to the UNHCR, “resettlement is a life-saving solution for the most vulnerable refugees in the world, and is also an important way to share responsibility and support the developing countries that host the majority of the world’s refugees” (UNHCR, n.d.). I argue that resettlement is only a life-saving solution if the countries who are resettling the refugees have the means to assist refugees in properly integrating into their new communities, providing them with the resources and tools they need to thrive. Resettlement agencies have a checklist of services they need to provide within certain time frames, but are these services adapted with each situation and context refugees are coming from? For this reason, it is the *quality* of these services that needs to be evaluated.

Here, it is important for us to remember that refugees are fleeing not by choice, but by force. For this reason, among many others, refugees must be met with the care and quality they are deserving of when their lives have been uprooted. To be received with these intentions demonstrates a respect for the hardships and trauma that has been endured. As Warsan Shire put it, “No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. You only leave home when home won’t let you stay” (Shire, 2011, p. 24).

## Literature Review

### Perception and Policy affecting Refugees

As previously outlined, the resettlement process is by no means a simple one. Refugees arrive in their host country and are told from the beginning all that is expected of them, without having any time to adjust to where they are. There is the pressure of having a 240-day time limit on the help they are eligible to receive, all while working towards the goal of achieving economic self-sufficiency, which is an extremely ambitious goal. One of the most challenging parts of this process is that refugees are told what they need to do without being asked what it is that they might actually need. By this, I am referring to the policies in place that outline the resettlement system, determined by those who are unaffected by said policies. The decisions made by those in positions of power have a direct impact on these new arrivals, and it often leaves them with no immediate control of their lives.

Each fiscal year, there is a presidential determination set which establishes the ceiling number of refugees to be admitted into the country through the resettlement program (Darrow, 2015). As imagined, with each presidency has come drastically different ceilings set, some for the better and some for the worse.

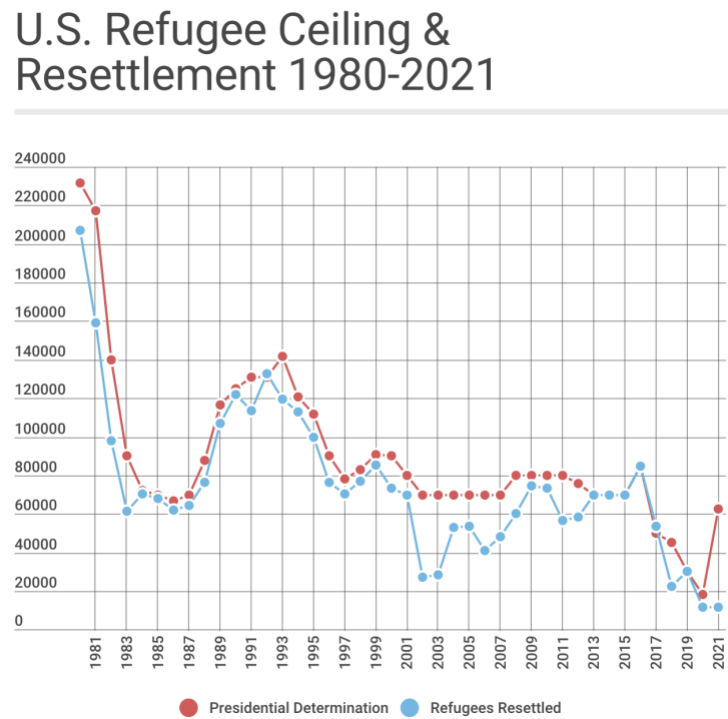
The United States operates the world's largest refugee resettlement program, admitting nearly 85,000 refugees in fiscal year (FY) 2016, or approximately two-thirds of refugees resettled worldwide. Since the passage of the *Refugee Act of 1980*, which established the U.S. resettlement program, the United States has admitted approximately 3 million refugees. (Fix et al., 2017, p. 1)

Looking at more recent years, we can see how the influx of refugees has varied. "The Obama administration proposed to significantly increase quota for the number of refugees the United

States accepts each year—from 70,000 in FY 2015 to 85,000 in FY 2016 and 100,000 in FY 2017” (Steimel, 2017, p. 91). Fast forwarding to the next administration, we can see how drastic of a shift occurs during the fiscal year that the administration changes. From suspending the refugee program for a 120-day period, to reducing the FY 2017 admission from 110,000 to 50,000, former president Trump’s time in office played a main role in why fewer refugees were received in the U.S. during his presidency (Fix et al., 2017).

While the presidential determination sets the maximum number of refugees that can be admitted into the U.S. that fiscal year, this does not necessarily mean that many refugees are actually resettled. The below graph, published by the National Immigration Forum, shows the comparison between the presidential determination, and the number of refugees resettled in the United States that year.

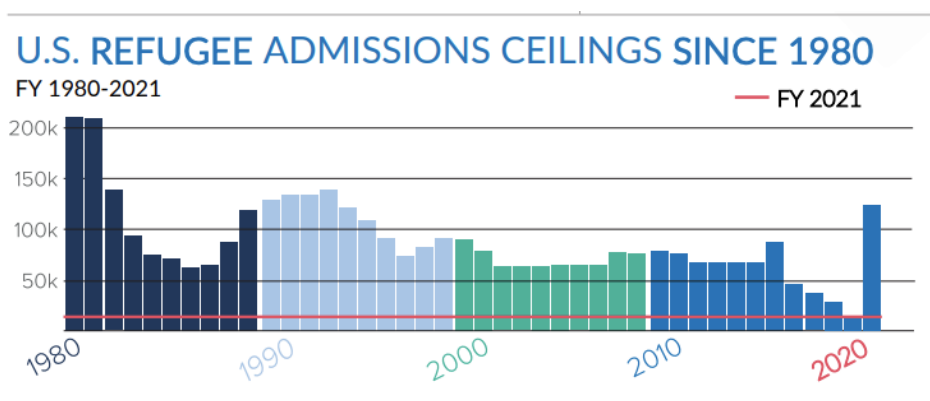
**Graph 1.0 - U.S. Refugee Ceiling & Resettlement 1980-2021**



*Source: National Immigration Forum (2020).*

You can see the trends during certain presidencies that though the ceiling was set, that number might not have been reached. During the 2002 to 2003 period, it is evident how the terrorist attacks of September 11th played a larger part in welcoming less refugees during that time. Now turning to today, “In fiscal year (FY) 2021, no more than 15,000 refugees may be admitted to the U.S., representing the lowest ceiling since 1980” (Shaw et al., 2022, p. 4035). These numbers represent the drastic change that can occur year to year, based on each administration in office. Graph two, courtesy of the UNHCR refugee resettlement facts as of July 2022, shows the shifts I describe from the beginning of the program in 1980, through the last fiscal year 2021. Compared to the graph above, this graph shows only the ceiling set by each president, without indicating how those numbers might, or might not have, been met. Paying attention to FY 2021, this was historically the lowest determination set since the beginning of the resettlement program. Here, it is also important to note that each fiscal year does not coincide with the calendar year. Fiscal year 2021 ran from October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021.

### Graph 2.0 - U.S. Refugee Admissions Ceiling Since 1980



Source: UNHCR (2022).

In the case of the time when Trump was in office, he likely asked himself “How many is too many?”. This question is often raised when it comes to the issue of refugees and immigrants in the United States. As noted in *Presidential Decision Making Adrift*, “Immigration and refugee

policy today are inextricable”. The U.S. allowed unrestricted immigration until the 1920s. Up until this point, there was no distinction between refugees and immigrants, as the U.S. welcomed all immigrants. For this reason, it is stated that in order to understand refugee policy as is, one must look at how it compares with general immigration policy as well (Engstrom, 1997).

Though immigration and refugee policy may sometimes be thought of as separate entities, “refugee policy is a subcategory of overall immigration policy”, and therefore must be conceptualized in this regard (Engstrom, 1997, p. 3). In "Paper integration: The structural constraints and consequences of the U.S. refugee resettlement program", Molly Fee notes that “While all migrants pass through varying degrees of immigrant selection, refugees are the sole group in the U.S. that also passes through a program of state-facilitated incorporation, which stands out as an anomaly of U.S. immigration policy” (Fee, 2019, p. 477). Here, we can see how refugees are categorized separately and don’t share the same experiences within the immigration system, though they fall under the general umbrella of immigrants.

In the 1936 ceremony celebrating the 50th anniversary of the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty, former President Franklin Roosevelt speaks of the men, women, and children who have immigrated in search of a better life in America. He states that freedom was not the only thing discovered, but how they contributed to making the new world both richer and more capable of growth (Cafaro, 2015). Here, President Roosevelt applauds how immigrants have added value to this country, and this continues to stand true today. In an article published in the *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, Donald Kerwin does the same, but pertaining to refugees. “Refugees embody the ideals of freedom, endurance, and self-sacrifice, and their presence closes the gap between U.S. ideals and its practices” (Kerwin, 2018, p. 205). This notion of “closing the gap” is critical when reflecting on the stance that the United States either chooses, or chooses not,



to take regarding refugee admittance. Kerwin continues by describing the ways that the refugees in the Center for Migration Studies' sample achieved success at high rates. He explains how this large group, arriving between 1987 to 2016, became U.S. citizens, homeowners, college graduates, English speakers, and business owners, among others. The impressive piece here is that this group was representative of many nationalities, and not simply highly achieving groups.

Kerwin speaks of these individuals as a "highly achieving group", but is this title appropriate? The reality of refugees' lived experiences is more often than not traumatic. To look at such a group and define it as "highly achieving" also suggests that you are looking for an outcome, and not at the individuals themselves. This becomes difficult when reflecting on where the importance lies within the successes of the resettlement system. Are we centering the refugees themselves for the sake of their well-being, or does the success matter more to applaud the systems put in place that are doing the work to help them?

Section 207 of the Refugee Act of 1980 breaks down the resettlement benefits made available to refugees, among many other things. This is important to refer to when discussing the policies associated with resettlement due to the fact that the Refugee Resettlement program came as a result of the wave of Cuban and Haitian refugees in the late 1970s to 1980. Looking at how the program has developed over the course of history is also imperative in terms of gaining a complete understanding of this issue. According to Section 207,

In the process of determining eligibility for status, a case-by-case review will take place, but it is likely that Cubans and not Haitians are covered under the act. Regarding benefits and services, refugees qualify for federal cash assistance programs such as AFDC and SSI; in-kind assistance such as Medicaid, food stamps, English-as-second language, job training, and other resettlement services. The federal responsibility for resettlement cost is

100% for the first 3 years after arrival. Within one year of arrival, refugees can adjust their immigration status to permanent resident alien status. (Engstrom, 1997, pp. 150-151)

Since 1980, much of this has changed. The federal responsibility is no longer the first three years after arrival, as refugees are expected to begin repaying their travel loan after six months in the U.S. However, it is still the case that after refugees have been in the U.S. for one year, they should receive their green card in order to later apply for citizenship at the five-year mark. “Though formalized by the Refugee Act of 1980, the history of the USRP (U.S. Resettlement Program) dates back to several earlier unintended resettlement efforts, laying the groundwork for the program that operates today” (Fee, 2019, p. 479).

To understand present day resettlement, we must look at the history of where this program started. We must examine the changes in policy, including removal of certain acts and the implementation of others. Refugee resettlement is a necessary and life-saving program, and it will only continue to be as strong as we allow it. We must ensure that while doing so, the voices of the refugees impacted by these policies are lifted, respected, and heard, as to work towards closing the gap between U.S. ideals and its practices, as stated by Donald Kerwin. Furthermore, it is important to zoom in and look specifically at the resettlement organizations themselves to understand how these policies impact them. Let us now turn to the structure of the national resettlement agencies and examine the specific services they provide and goals they set for the refugees that they are welcoming.

## **Resettlement Organizations in the U.S.: A Broad Context**

It's difficult to measure just how resettlement impacts refugees on a larger scale when the program is in place across 50 states with 312 offices in 185 locations (Kallick & Mathema, 2019). Resettlement agencies follow the same model, with the goal being to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency in 240 days after arrival. Noted in "Understanding successful refugee resettlement in the U.S.", we learn that "Economic self-sufficiency has long been the focus of the U.S. resettlement programme. ORR (the Office of Refugee Resettlement) describes, 'The first step...is helping refugees and other populations served by the program achieve economic self-sufficiency'" (Shaw et al., 2022, p. 4035). In order to help refugees properly integrate into their new lives, they must be given the proper tools and resources to thrive. One of the most important of these is employment so that refugees may begin to make and save money and start contributing to the society where they now find themselves. This can, however, become a problem.

"Not surprisingly, there is a tension between this push for rapid self-sufficiency and the goal of finding employment commensurate with the professional qualifications and experience of mid-to-high-skilled refugees" (Fix et al., 2017, p. 7). *How are Refugees Faring?* is not the only piece of literature that makes this point. Referring again to Shaw et al. 's piece, "Some scholars critique the U.S. resettlement policy emphasis on economic self-sufficiency as simplistic and unrealistic. Others question the bureaucratic structures of resettlement programmes that prioritize paperwork and compliance above client well-being" (Shaw et al., 2022, p. 4036).

As previously noted, refugees arrive with already acquired skills that they want to share and continue to develop. What good does it do to place a refugee in a chicken factory working on an assembly line when they were previously a seamstress? The challenge lies with the resources provided to the resettlement agencies who are in turn helping the refugees. "One critique of the

U.S. resettlement program is that its focus on early employment may come at the cost of forgoing other interventions that could improve longer-term labor market outcome and mobility, such as skills training, credential recognition or recertification, and intensive English language training” (Fix et al., 2017, p. 16). Thinking about this, how can resettlement agencies better serve their clients to promote well-being not just for the initial period after arrival, but also for the long-term?

It’s important to look at the process which refugees go through to be resettled in the United States. By no means is it a simple feat to be selected when there are innumerable refugees across the world seeking resettlement. As outlined in the introduction, refugees go through an extensive process prior to being resettled. The UNHCR outlines what elements are considered when it comes to deciding if resettlement is the right choice. “Resettlement decisions are based on a variety of factors, including the needs of the refugee, housing costs, whether the refugee has relatives in a community, and whether local communities have resources available to take in refugees” (Kallick & Mathema, 2019, p. 12). I believe the most important piece stated here notes that the local communities must first identify the resources available, otherwise the resettlement cannot be successful. While refugees endure rigorous steps to prove their absolute need for resettlement, it isn’t up to them. As a result, extended wait periods in refugee camps are the unfortunate realities many are faced with.

One primary motivator for resettlement was the strong desire in search of safety (Shaw et al., 2022). This comes as no surprise. Now, what happens once refugees are granted resettlement? Upon arrival to the U.S., refugees are met by a resettlement agency and are enrolled in the initial Reception and Placement (R&P) program that provides services for the first 90 days. In the initial 30 days, certain immediate services must be provided, including, assistance purchasing food and clothing, finding affordable housing, school enrollment, English as a Second Language (ESL)

enrollment, employment assistance, social security application, public benefits applications, and attending a medical appointment (Fix et al., 2017, p. 7). These initial services are required by all resettlement agencies as per ORR guidelines. Those who assist with these services are the case managers assigned to work with said individual or family. What is imperative for the agencies working with the refugees to do is ask them what *they* truly need. While this program is structured to provide a wide array of necessary services, it cannot cover everything when seeking to provide holistic care.

The concept of empowerment is something that resettlement agencies need to consider when serving refugees. How are they able to provide said service while simultaneously allowing refugees to take authority of their own lives? The importance of empowerment in relation to serving refugees is discussed at great length by Sarah Steimel:

Under the traditional resettlement model, refugee resettlement organizations ‘focus[ed] on refugees as their object of knowledge, assistance, and management’. Under this model, resettlement organizations were assumed to be “expert” on resettlement and developed top-down models for “successful” refugee integration. This problematically assumed a monolithic refugee experience rather than recognizing the broad diversity in refugees’ experiences and meanings. (Steimel, 2017, p. 92)

When working in a multicultural field, people of various backgrounds are encountered, many with overlapping experiences and many without. In this sense, it is a detriment for resettlement agencies to group together the refugees they serve as though all of their experiences are shared experiences. “Recognizing refugees as authors of their own stories requires acknowledging that these stories are being experienced, sought, and narrated in a particular social context; narratives are ‘produced in relation to socially available and hegemonic discourses and practices’” (Steimel, 2017, p. 93).

In defining empowerment, it is addressed as an individual's perception that they have both the opportunity and the ability to act effectively and control their surrounding environment. Refugees must be given the means to control their environment, when so much of their life has been out of their control. One means through which refugees are empowered is education. In addition to safety, education was identified as a key motivator when seeking resettlement (Shaw et al., 2022). Over the course of time, refugees integrate into American society, and "When people in these refugee groups are given a more stable environment and the opportunity to go to school in the United States, however, the picture changes dramatically" (Kallick & Mathema, 2019, p. 23). This picture that is mentioned is that of educational attainment. Many refugees in search of a better life seek educational opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them in their home countries. While access to education varies, it is often the case that refugees arrive with minimal education due to the need to start working from a young age. When resettled at young ages, it is shown that "refugees who arrive as children—and who grow up in this country, at least in part—show even further success" (Kallick & Mathema, 2019, p. 22).

If we look past the initial 90-day Reception and Placement service program, we arrive at the Matching Grant (MG) program, which provides employment services for the following 90-day period. This leads to the 240-day mark, which is the point at which self-sufficiency is ideally achieved. The Matching Grant program has certain requirements that must be met, due to the monetary checks received as part of successful participation in the program. At 120 days, those in Matching Grant must have entered full or part-time employment, be receiving an average hourly wage, must have been offered health benefits through their current job, have reached the 120-day self-sufficiency mark (which means they are able to support their family without cash assistance), continue forward to retain self-sufficiency and achieve overall (not just economic) self-sufficiency

at 240 days. Those who were unable to meet these requirements must drop out of the MG program, and similarly, if a family or individual out-migrated from the initial state where they were resettled, they also would have to drop out. What this means is that they lose access to the monetary benefits that come from being an active participant in the MG program (Halpern, 2008, p. 42).

Looking at the goals of the initial Reception and Placement program and Matching Grant program provides tangible information relating to the extent of services provided to refugees who are resettled in the United States. Breaking down what is and isn't considered "successful resettlement" is important to look at because this may vary from agency to agency, depending on location and resources available. Resettlement agencies face limitations themselves in terms of funding given to help their clients. Certain things are out of their hands, as they are following the direction put in place by the U.S. government.

Understanding the resettlement system in the U.S. helps us to better comprehend how this system affects people in certain communities. While resettlement is one unified program, the way these services are run might vary depending on the needs of the community and the context specific to that area. For this reason, let us now take a closer look at refugees in Clarkston, Georgia, and how these general resettlement guidelines have a direct impact on them.

## Refugees in the Context of Clarkston, GA

To gain a clear understanding of why Clarkston, Georgia serves as a unique location for refugees to be situated, we must engage both with those being resettled and those doing the resettlement work. We must look at refugees specifically in the context of Clarkston and examine the various factors that impact those who are being resettled. How are the struggles faced by those located east of the city of Atlanta unique to their resettlement experience and those who are working with them throughout their journey? These pieces give us insight as to what is so special about “the most diverse square mile in America” (Irani et al., 2018, p. 1) and how it came to be.

To begin, I include a table that shows where resettled refugees in Georgia are coming from in the 2022 Fiscal Year. While these figures are not specific to the city of Clarkston itself, this provides context as to where refugees are arriving from in the state of Georgia, and how this might impact foreign-born communities such as Clarkston.

**Graph 3.0 - Refugee Arrivals by State and Nationality Fiscal Year 2022 October 1, 2021 through May 31, 2022**

| PA Nationality    | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Grand Total |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| Total             | 5   | 73  | 59  | 38  | 36  | 87  | 71  | 69  | 438         |
| Afghanistan       |     | 5   |     | 7   |     | 4   | 1   | 2   | 19          |
| Bhutan            |     |     |     |     | 4   |     |     |     | 4           |
| Burma             |     | 2   | 1   | 14  | 5   | 6   | 23  | 10  | 61          |
| Burundi           |     |     |     |     |     | 5   |     |     | 5           |
| Cambodia          |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     | 1           |
| Central African.. |     |     |     |     |     | 7   |     | 14  | 21          |
| Dem. Rep. Con..   | 1   | 11  | 7   |     | 7   | 20  | 28  | 21  | 95          |
| Egypt             |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     | 1           |
| Ethiopia          |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1           |
| Guatemala         |     | 13  | 14  |     |     |     | 3   | 2   | 32          |
| Honduras          |     |     | 4   |     |     | 4   |     |     | 8           |
| Iran              |     |     | 2   | 5   | 5   | 4   |     |     | 16          |
| Iraq              |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     | 1           |
| Republic of Sou.. |     |     | 6   |     |     |     |     |     | 6           |
| Somalia           |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     | 1           |
| Sudan             |     | 13  |     | 11  |     | 5   | 4   | 2   | 35          |
| Syria             |     | 20  | 25  |     | 6   | 29  | 11  | 18  | 109         |
| Uganda            |     | 5   |     |     |     | 1   |     |     | 6           |
| Ukraine           | 4   | 3   |     |     | 8   |     |     |     | 15          |
| Venezuela         |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     | 1           |

Source: U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (2022).

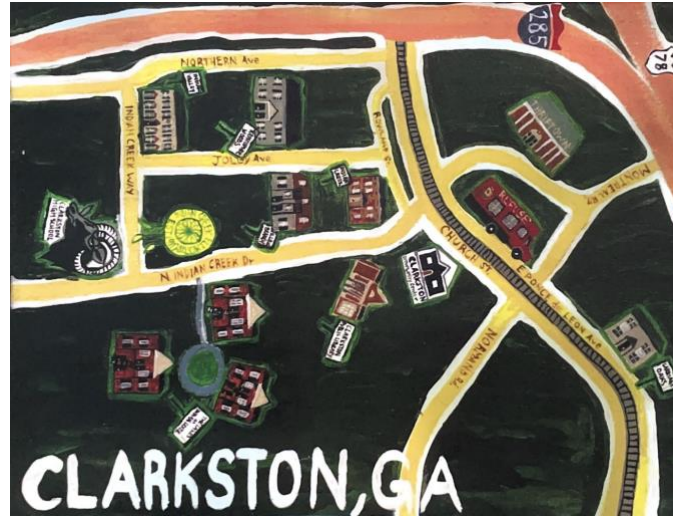


“Clarkston, nine miles east of Atlanta, is the resettlement point for all refugees arriving in the state, earning it the nickname the ‘Ellis Island of the South’” (Sriram, 2020, p. 3). Over time, Clarkston has become an ideal resettlement location for agencies in the area, and has continued to remain so to this day. In the book *Outcasts United*, Warren St. John expands on the previous statement, providing background information as to how Clarkston became the diverse town that it now is.

Clarkston was a typical small southern town...that began to change in the 1970s, when the Atlanta airport expanded to become the Southeast’s first international hub and, eventually, one of the world’s busiest airports. From the perspective of the resettlement agencies, Clarkston, Georgia, was a textbook example of a community ripe for refugee resettlement. (St. John, 2013, pp. 34-35)

The Clarkston that once was ceases to exist, as it has now become this multicultural hub. For this reason, Clarkston became central to the work of resettlement agencies, and answered the big question of where to house the refugees that they were receiving. The below hand drawn map depicts the center of Clarkston, represented by one of its community members. This shows that in a small community like this one, there are only so many places to run into your neighbor, whether it be the grocery store, coffee shop, school, local library, or community center.

**Figure 1.0 - Clarkston, GA Hand Drawn Map**



*Source: Community piece of art. Unknown artist, Clarkston, GA.*

According to the 2020 census, Clarkston is made up of just 12,700 people. Out of that number, a total of 6,690 people were foreign born, making up more than half of the community. These demographics shed light on the realities of those living in this small and incredibly diverse city (Data USA, 2020). “Yet, growing refugee populations in small cities do not come without backlash from local residents and politicians, and in some cases, statewide governments” (Kim & Bozarth, 2021, p. 856). And by no means were these fast-moving changes simply being accepted without question. The confrontation that began to arise was not between the refugees and long-time residents of Clarkston but came from the Police Department. In the eyes of Charlie Nelson, then police chief, the refugees who moved into Clarkston were the root cause of all problems. As though they weren’t faced with enough challenges already that came with the transition to life in a new country, refugees were now being tormented by police who made it very clear that they weren’t welcome here (St. John, 2013).

Along these same lines, one of the biggest challenges that refugees face upon arrival to the United States is that of English language capability, or lack thereof. Looking again to Sriram’s

piece which speaks to Bhutanese community members in the metro Atlanta area, the first concern listed relating to high suicide rates is language. “All of the subjects described the ‘language gap’ as the most pressing and immediate concern for the community” (Sriram, 2020, p. 4). They continue to speak about how the issue of language barriers creates a rift between parents and children, with parents often not knowing about what their children engage in outside of the home. One related issue pertaining to difficulties that may arise within familial relationships is when family members are then expected to be translators.

"Providing Linguistically Competent Care for Refugee Patients in Clarkston, Georgia" touches upon this crucial issue that surfaces due to lack of funding for interpretive services at the clinic. They state, “Because of lack of funding for interpretive services, the clinic’s system has been limited in its capacity to provide appropriate interpretive services for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients, often relying on family members or untrained clinic volunteers” (Engels et al., 2019, p. 414). This becomes very problematic when untrained individuals are now being given the responsibility to translate medical terminology that might not be within their vocabulary or scope of understanding. "Refuge city: Creating places of welcome in the suburban U.S. South" speaks to the many foreign-born adults living in Clarkston, and how they often arrive both with limited English proficiency, but also with little formal education (Kim & Bozarth, 2021). It goes on to explain how this impacts the employment opportunities made available to these refugees. The lack of employment opportunities leads to a greater struggle including financial difficulties, purpose, and so forth. Refugees arrive with many skills that they want to use and share, but if not given the chance to do so, what are the alternatives?

In "Refuge tech: An assets-based approach to refugee resettlement", the method used observes what the community already has from an asset standpoint in order to understand how the

challenges faced above by their participants could be addressed. The stated goal was “to identify available assets and resources so we could devise ways to leverage these using technology” (Irani et al., 2018, p. 5). They speak to the close-knit community within Clarkston, and how the events held both welcome the refugees while simultaneously informing them of local resources available to them. Connecting this with the piece "Refuge city: Creating places of welcome in the suburban U.S. South", their study collects information pertaining to “what respondents considered to be strengths/assets or weaknesses/challenges of Clarkston as related to healthcare, community and/or religious groups, jobs, transportation, proximity to family and friends, housing, safety, food access, education, recreation/leisure opportunities” (Kim & Bozarth, 2021, p. 856). In this sense, these two intersect precisely at gathering information that examines the strengths that exist within the community of Clarkston, and how those strengths are a direct result of the refugees who live there.

Now, while English language proficiency is a real struggle, it isn't unique to Clarkston. Similarly, access to basic needs including employment opportunities, access to health care, technology and so forth are all commonalities shared among resettled refugees in the greater United States. The true difficulty lies within making a place that is so far from home, feel somewhat like home. As this is the case, I strived to get answers to some of these questions by means of the methods that I used for the purpose of this research. Described further in my methodology section, I use a combination of practices that allow me to better understand the context of resettled refugees in Clarkston, Georgia. Expanding on my literature review, I proceed to outline the commonalities that lie in the academic side and now practical side of this work.

## **Methodology**

To begin, I'd like to reiterate what my research question asks. How can refugee resettlement agencies better prepare newly arrived refugees to integrate into a new society, specifically within the southeast U.S., through their programming efforts? Examining the particular areas of cultural orientation, employment and translation services provides a unique lens to answer this question. These three services are only a few of the many resettlement agencies provide. Each one compliments the other, specifically when it comes to the overall integration process of refugees. Through this, we can see how these concepts will answer my research question and address the concerns of true quality reception services.

To do this, I look closely at a handful of resettlement agencies in Atlanta. As a disclaimer, I would like to note that I previously served as a full-time volunteer with one of these agencies from August 2018 until August 2019. While I had connections prior to conducting my summer 2022 research, I would like to state that I am not an expert in the field, and gathered new information that I did not have from my prior experience. For confidentiality purposes, when describing the agencies themselves in my findings, I will refer to them as agency W, agency X, agency Y, and agency Z. I will provide a general description of the work the agencies do, after assessing each of them closely for similar themes and functions. I will, however, keep their names private. Collectively, said resettlement agencies are all Atlanta based not-for-profit organizations who provide resettlement services to refugees and new Americans arriving in the United States. The agencies assist these communities in working towards self-sufficiency and success through their extensive and comprehensive services. These services are designed to assist with the economic, social, and cultural aspects of integration.

When engaging with these agencies, the methods I utilize include mainly ethnography and interviewing, as this combination served as the best means for me to collect information on my three areas. While interviewing allowed me to ask questions specific to the three themes previously described, ethnography allowed me to observe mainly cultural interactions and translations. I engaged in my ethnographic research at varying locations, from a central outdoor hub in Clarkston–Refuge Coffee Shop, a variety of apartment complexes along North Indian Creek Drive, and larger events including the World Refugee Day celebration that takes place every June. Through this method, I was able to observe how refugees navigated the U.S. culture, making use of food pantries as extra sources for food, and so forth. I was able to witness how refugees engaged in conversation, even with the barrier of language.

To further describe one of the central locations I spent my time, I would like to refer to a piece written by the founder of Refuge Coffee Co. She proceeds to describe Refuge Coffee Co. below:

Refuge Coffee sits smack dab in the middle of our 1.4 square mile city. On any given day, you can sit at one of our outdoor tables and see a group of regally-dressed women from Congo or Burma or elsewhere walk by wearing bundles on their heads and babies on their backs, you may hear several different languages spoken all at once (French, Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Swahili, Tigrinya, Amharic, Nepali, and English – there are 60 languages spoken here), and you can walk in any direction from Refuge to one of the restaurants or markets nearby and sample food from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nepal, Syria, Burundi. (Murray, 2022)

This location played a large role in both my ethnographic research as well as where my interviews took place. Building on this, the importance of interviewing proved to be very useful. What do refugees, specific to Clarkston, identify as the key services they've been provided? What, from

their experience, do they identify as shortcomings? Through interviewing, I was able to incorporate the voices of refugees in determining what they identify in the services that are provided to them. Interviews were conducted with refugees who have been resettled in Clarkston, resettlement agency staff, and local community partners including shop owners and advocacy workers.

The interview questions were catered to the varying ways these groups interact with one another and the refugee community in Clarkston. Questions began broadly pertaining to the general resettlement process, then grew more specific targeting positive personal experiences, and finally, questions narrowed in to allow room for critiques and constructive feedback. One common question across all three categories asked the interviewee to begin by sharing a bit about who they are and how they're connected to the refugee community in Clarkston, either through personal or professional experience.<sup>2</sup>

In total, I conducted 16 interviews over the months of June and July 2022. In my findings section, I only refer to 13 of these 16 interviews that I feel best speak to the arguments I am aiming to make. While my interviewees generally fell into the three categories of resettled refugee, resettlement agency staff, and local community partners, there were, however, overlaps among these categories. Some resettlement agency staff were former refugees, as well as (one) community partner staff. Additionally, many resettlement agencies in the Atlanta area host full-time volunteers and part-time interns through faith-based and secular volunteer corps or institutions. Some full-time partnerships include the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, AmeriCorps, and Dominican Volunteers, and part-time internships are through Notre Dame and Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty. Two of my full-time staff interviews were conducted with the aforementioned full-time volunteers.

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1 provides the complete set of questions asked to those in the three categories listed.

The interviews were typically one hour in length and occurred through various platforms. While most interviews occurred in person, some took place over the phone due to limited availability to meet in person. 11 interviews took place in person, and five interviews occurred over the phone. The interviews that were conducted in person occurred at varying locations. The main community meeting place was Refuge Coffee Co, where six of the 11 in-person interviews took place. The remainder of the in-person interviews occurred at the places of work for resettlement agency staff and community partners who took time for their interview during their workday.

As for confidentiality purposes, I am not disclosing precise information that would place my interviewees at risk. As Clarkston is a small community, I must ensure the privacy of those I interviewed. For this reason, pseudonyms will be used in place of real names. Information will be presented in general estimates and broad terms. Rather than stating the exact year when someone was resettled, I will instead indicate a period as a decade or so forth. Similarly, the exact country of origin will not be disclosed, however, I provide the region for context. As it is important to identify the regions in which refugees in Clarkston are coming from, I will provide this general information to make known the areas represented.

That being said, my interviewees consisted of Americans, North Africans, Central Africans, East Africans, South Asian, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern individuals. They span from citizens, refugees, asylees and immigrants, former and presently. I was able to access this particular group of individuals through previous connections made while working with the refugee community in Clarkston in 2018-2019, as well as through my new connections made upon my time in Atlanta in the summer of 2022.

Expanding on the importance of this research, I demonstrate how I conducted my research



in an ethical manner. One important aspect of my methods that each interviewee received was the consent form. Two different consent forms were created for resettlement agency staff and community partners, and separately for former refugees. Each consent form explained the interviewee's rights while voluntarily participating in the interview. It indicated their compensation, which was a beverage and snack of choice, though many interviewees denied this offer. The consent form outlined the purpose of this study, and the goal for conducting the interviews.

Looking at the limitations I was faced with, one of them was the time frame. The data collected was gathered mainly in the summer of 2022, between the months of June and July, when I was physically present in Clarkston conducting the research. I met with a variety of individuals involved in this community, however, I was limited to individuals who were willing to meet with me and those who had the time and/or means to. Another limitation was myself as an individual. As I was the one conducting the research, I prepared questions that I felt would benefit my project. In addition, I was only able to collect information that those I met with were willing to share with me, so as to not have any individual feel forced to share more than they were comfortable with.

Expanding on this, another limitation that I bring is my language ability. I was only able to conduct interviews in English. I felt that bringing in a translator would entail another individual learning the personal answers to the questions asked, and interviewees might not have felt comfortable disclosing information with multiple parties present. Finally, as I have previous experiences working in refugee resettlement in Clarkston, I knew certain places to go and people to talk to. This could serve as a limitation only visiting places and people previously known, though in ways it serves as an asset as well. All in all, I am aware of the limitations I was faced with as I

went about my research. With this knowledge, I am hopeful that I was still able to gather information that reflects what this refugee community wants to share with the world.

## **Findings**

As previously discussed in the literature, there are many layers that play a role in the integration process for newly resettled refugees. It is not simply the case that refugees arriving in the United States proceed to live their lives the way they once did, but now the fact of the matter is that their entire world must adapt to the situation they now find themselves in. While dealing with the potentially traumatic experiences that migration can cause, these refugees are expected to hit the ground running upon arrival. In this aspect, I don't see that the U.S. resettlement system treats the refugees fairly, taking a holistic approach into account when doing this work.

Upon conducting my research in Clarkston, I found that there were many similar themes among resettled refugees and asylum seekers specifically pertaining to the process of integration. Themes of culture, employment, and language all surfaced, which is why I have chosen to further explore these particular aspects of resettlement. While these three themes do not encompass all of the difficulties pertaining to the entire resettlement experience, these are the pieces I found to be most notable to the community I engaged with. I will begin by describing the issue at hand as I see it, then will provide evidence from my interviews to support my claims, and lastly, engage in a thoughtful discussion bridging these concepts together. Following this, I will provide suggested recommendations based on my findings.

Overall, I am optimistic that my findings assist with providing an answer to the research question I initially pose. I am confident that the results discovered can provide valuable insight to the agencies working in Clarkston and offer alternative means to improve the work already being done.

## **I. Cultural Orientation & Integration**

The refugee experience can be defined by an “in-betweenness” that leaves refugees partially in their country of origin, and their new home in which they’ve found themselves. Resettlement agencies and other social services assisting refugees must recognize that “The maintenance of transnational ties to one’s country of origin and the integration or assimilation into a host society are not opposed processes” (Cole, 2014, p. 287). In looking at the United States resettlement program, cultural orientation (CO) is offered to refugees within the first 90 days after arrival as part of the R&P core services (HIAS, n.d.).<sup>3</sup> In the cultural orientation session, topics covered include employment, housing, education, health, money management, travel, hygiene, and the role of the resettlement agency. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, CO had to be conducted within the first 30 days of arrival, allowing refugees to gain access to this pertinent information early on in their resettlement journey. This initial CO session is not the first exposure refugees have, however, as they also receive a cultural orientation overseas prior to leaving for the U.S. Cultural orientation overseas is regarded as to how the program assists with the facilitation of resettlement of refugees here in the U.S. While cultural orientation is put in place to help refugees assimilate into life in the U.S., it was found in a study conducted by Julie Kornfield that refugees already formed prior notions about the U.S. from the media, friends, and family (Kornfeld, 2012).

My findings discover that the way in which cultural orientation is conducted at resettlement agencies is not conducive to what refugees need to receive in order to truly learn the information provided to them. I argue that cultural orientation needs to be restructured so that it can be useful for refugees, and not an overwhelming amount of information where nothing is retained. I propose that rather than resettlement agencies providing a one-time four-hour cultural orientation session,

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<sup>3</sup> HIAS refers to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, one of the nine resettlement agencies in the United States.

they break it up into two separate sessions. Resettlement agencies can very easily continue to provide the necessary information, but in a way that allows the refugees on the receiving end to process and understand the vital information they are being given.

Referring to one of my interviews, a full-time volunteer at Resettlement Agency X describes their opinion of cultural orientation through the lens of being a caseworker. Nancy says, There's something we're doing wrong with cultural orientation, and that's proven by talking with clients who say they learned nothing [in cultural orientation]. I think financial literacy needs to be separate because it's too much in one sitting. There needs to be more ways to make cultural orientation engaging. It's critical information but [the] way it's done now doesn't engage clients enough for them to remember [the information].

As previously indicated, cultural orientation is conducted overseas before the refugee departs for resettlement, and upon arrival in the U.S. The Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange, or CORE, provides objectives and indicators for overseas CO and domestic CO, including what the role of the local resettlement agency is. In the domestic CO learning indicators, CORE outlines the expectation that refugees learn when it comes to budgeting and personal finance. Some of these indicators include participants being able to explain and create their monthly budget, understanding how to build and maintain a good credit history, identifying sources of income when initial assistance ends, and knowing how to access and/or use bank services, among many other things (Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange, 2019).<sup>4</sup>

Nancy speaks further to financial literacy, specifically about some of the objectives stated above, in saying that “it needs to be more in depth. [We] don't talk about building credit, different banks for low income, how to buy a house one day. [We] think it's out of reach, but it is within

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<sup>4</sup> The full list of indicators can be found in Appendix 2.

their reach for long term self-sufficiency and success.” As resettlement agencies are often stretched thin to accomplish all that is asked of them, they must also reevaluate the quality of their work from time to time to ensure that refugees are being set up for long-term success, as Nancy describes here.

Nancy provides a unique point of view as a caseworker. While she isn't the one conducting the cultural orientation session (there is typically a designated employee who oversees CO), she spends the most time with her clients to know if the information provided to them is implemented in their day-to-day life. Roger, a resettled refugee from East Africa, speaks to his experience with international cultural orientation received before arriving in the U.S.:

During the cultural orientation before I came, they told us many things to expect when I came here, [things like] what to avoid...it was helpful. Here in America, the culture is so different from where I come from, so it was helpful to learn how to adjust to the community. They talk about how people live here, [and how] you have to work in order to live, pay bills, and I have to prepare mentally. Back in the camp, it's done for four days and it's so much information.

Roger was resettled by Resettlement Agency Y in the last 5 years. He came as a young adult apart from his family and had to learn how to navigate life in the U.S. on his own. As he expressed, the experience of cultural orientation is overwhelming with the amount of information provided. That being known, how do resettlement agencies run their domestic CO so that it emphasizes previously provided information, but also allows for refugees to return to unknown pieces as time goes on? Another point I would like to state is that while cultural orientation is a one-time session, it should not inhibit refugees from requesting access to the information again as questions might likely arise over time.

Discussed in cultural orientation is the larger concept of integration as a whole. One of the central parts to integration is precisely the balance between maintaining home culture and accepting parts of one's new culture. A study done by Mercer University in Atlanta looked at this and discovered what worked for agencies serving immigrant and refugee populations.

The programs that were successful with immigrant and refugee students really leaned into affirming their cultural identities...Programs that are successful really engage in allowing this transnational identity development rather than an assimilationist identity where they're going to shirk off their home culture and take the United States culture as their identity.

(Falk, 2022)

As noted here, refugees cannot simply rid their home culture once arriving in the United States, as it is deeply ingrained in their identity and who they are. Many former refugees and asylum seekers find themselves later employed at resettlement or refugee serving agencies. As they knew what it was like to live through the resettlement experience, they can better serve clients as a result. "I have experience because I went through this, so I have the feeling for others since I know what it is like," said Ibrahim. While discussing cultural orientation with former refugees in Atlanta, I learned that this process does not look the same for all agencies, though the same format should be followed. A current employee of Resettlement Agency X and former Central Asian refugee resettled by Resettlement Agency Y, Ibrahim said that he and his family never received cultural orientation in the U.S. Ibrahim came to the U.S. in his early adulthood with his spouse and his children. As a current employee at a resettlement agency, Ibrahim can look back at his family's resettlement experience and identify what his agency lacked compared to the way in which he serves his clients now.

The difference with Resettlement Agency Y and Resettlement Agency X is that we feel responsible to call clients and ask them for everything...if they need a doctor, if they're missing documents. I lost my green card when I came through Resettlement Agency Y, but they didn't call me, so I did everything by myself. I reapplied for a green card, went to the immigration office for an interview...all that I did myself and [now I see] Resettlement Agency X does those things for the client.

The main services resettlement agencies provide to families upon arrival are considered core services. As previously noted, the core services are part of the 90-day R&P program, and include a variety of in-depth services, required to be carried out by each agency.<sup>5</sup> In order to deliver said services, R&P provides funding under the Department of State, with the current FY 2023 funds set at \$1,225 overall per refugee.<sup>6</sup> These funds are used by the resettlement agency to pay for rent, groceries, cell phone bill, and further (U.S. Department of State, 2022, p. 5). As this is the funding allotment provided to each individual refugee, it is the caseworker's responsibility to make this stretch as far as possible. When it is a family of seven arriving, there is seven times the funding to go towards the basic needs described above, but when working with a single arrival, this is much more challenging.

Ibrahim once again recalls his resettlement experience stating, "I remember they did not complete the core services with my family". How could that be the case? The aforementioned core services are adapted by each agency while factoring in how far they can stretch the limited R&P funding. A recommendation report published by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) suggests that domestic capacity needs to be increased, starting with the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), as well as the Department of Health

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<sup>5</sup> The extensive list can be found in Appendix 3.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix 4 shows the ways in which these funds have shifted in recent fiscal years.



and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement. They recommend that this increased capacity made across the network of resettlement agencies can incorporate a variety of things, including additional funding for staffing, housing, integration services, and ensuring guaranteed funding for resettlement agencies at the beginning of the fiscal year (IRAP, 2022). I believe that recommendations such as these can provide the foundation for those in governmental positions to truly understand the extent that resettlement agencies are stretched with this work.

Taking all of this into account, the fact that these services are to be carried out should not be a question. If Ibrahim and his family did not receive their core services upon arrival, I cannot imagine that they are the only refugees to have arrived and not have been given all the support that they should have. This leads me to think about the levels of command at each agency, and how at one versus another, there might be more or less supervision taking place. In conversation with Sonam, a resettlement supervisor, he talks about how refugees are able to maintain their home culture and integrate into U.S. culture without compromising one or the other.

It depends on the individual and on the community. One of our goals is to connect clients to their community, so we don't want them to feel that we just drop them in the desert. I see community people are working as a group, [and that] there is a sense of belonging. It depends on the individual; they need to go out and seek out the help if they need it.

Originally from South Asia, Sonam came to the U.S. as an asylee more than a decade ago. Since then, he has worked at both Resettlement Agency Z and Resettlement Agency X in supervisor positions. For this reason, he has a unique perspective as to the resettlement services provided by different agencies as someone who oversees the caseworkers. To Sonam's point, resettlement agencies work to connect refugees with their communities upon arrival. While cultural orientation is meant to help refugees integrate, this cannot be done without the presence of a support system,

often found in one's own community. One thing that can aid this process is through affiliation with a religious group, which is why resettlement agencies also ask clients if they want to be connected with a place of worship upon initial home visits from the case manager. I believe that this is another aspect where resettlement agencies can improve. While this is one small part of the many goals for their clients, how effective are the agencies in their efforts?

Finding community among refugees is something that is irreplaceable. When any individual finds someone who understands their experience as they are simultaneously living through it, it can provide a sense of comfort greater than anything else. Similar to the way that Ibrahim described his feelings regarding the personal experience he went through, Asad felt the same way,

If you know how they [refugees] suffer, it was a better response since I went through the whole process. I know their feelings when they were in the camp, when they come with high expectations and the reality is different, I know they are scared to call 911. Being in this position, I can encourage them to speak up, [and] to navigate the system.

A former refugee from the Middle East, Asad and his family were resettled in the U.S. approximately a decade ago. He works with Resettlement Agency Z in various capacities and assists via partnership with CORE. As someone who has lived through the resettlement experience, Asad is able to apply this knowledge in his work. An additional point I will make is that as we take pride in refugees for being bearers of wisdom and skill, we must employ them to be the ones to facilitate these sessions. As in the case of Asad, he is able to relate in a way that non-refugees couldn't. This is why refugees who are employed at resettlement agencies should be the ones to do this work, as they know best.

To reiterate my key findings, cultural orientation consists of too much information in one given period of time. Refugees become overwhelmed with the amount of information they are expected to learn, while staff members can grow frustrated by missed pieces of information when working together with their clients. While cultural orientation is intended to be thorough and in-depth, it still seems to miss critical aspects of meeting each refugee where they are in their process of resettlement. Though agencies are doing the work that needs to be done for the most part, there are various changes that can be made to improve how these services are carried out. Let us now transition to the employment services refugees receive by said agencies, and how the suggestion I am making may or may not be a realistic and attainable goal for refugees upon initial arrival.

## II. Employment Services

Now I ask, how, if at all, can integration be measured? Employment is one aspect that can say a lot about how a refugee is or isn't integrated into society. As Stephen Castles says in the *Age of Migration*, "In the country of immigration, settlement is closely linked to employment opportunities" (Castles et al., 2014, p. 13). The employment opportunities a refugee is presented with has a large impact on assimilation due to them recognizing their worth and contribution to the new society they're now living in. When it comes to employment services provided by resettlement agencies, these mainly happen through the Matching Grant (MG) Program, or employment program, mentioned earlier. Matching Grant is funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and assists with refugees achieving the goal of economic self-sufficiency. Caseworkers are able to explain the MG program to clients and begin to enroll them starting at the 30-day mark. While R&P does not close until day 90, MG can begin and remains open until day 240 when resettlement assistance stops and cases are closed. Even after cases close at eight months, refugees still have access to social services for their first five years in the United States (Administration for Children and Families, 2020).

While the MG program provides standard services, again, we see the trend that each resettlement agency can carry out these functions in different means. Often, there is an employment team with separate MG case managers. Other times, the R&P case manager can oversee the MG program as well. Whoever it might be, this individual or team helps refugees find and apply for work, and all of the steps in between for their employment experience to be successful. The various services that the MG program provides include case management, interview preparation, job application support, employer outreach, job placement and so forth. Other support includes transportation assistance and the MG cash allowance (HIAS, n.d.). One important thing to note is

that up until October 1, 2021, the period of self-sufficiency was until day 180, which was the six-month mark. It has only been one year and a half since this time frame was extended by two more months, thus extending the period of support available (Personal communication, March 9, 2023).

Even with this recent self-sufficiency extension, it is still difficult to imagine that in only eight months, refugees are completely settled. Because of how quickly everything moves upon arrival, the employment process works the same way. Resettlement agencies, specifically the employment teams, have partnerships with local companies where they often send their clients to interview and thus, work. While these partnerships make sense on one hand, it is also hard when seeing how this system doesn't set refugees up for long term success. This is the unfortunate reality that when resettled, refugees are not often given the chance to return to their field of work, or at least not initially. This often has to do with the fact that their accreditations and professional degrees are not easily transferable to the U.S. market. Castles touches upon another issue associated with refugees entering the workforce in their newfound home. What he proceeds to say is an overwhelmingly common stereotype,

One of the dominant, but empirically unjustified, images in highly developed countries today is that of masses of people flowing in from the poor South and the turbulent East, taking away jobs, pushing up housing prices and overloading social services. (Castles et al., 2014, p. 19)

While in Atlanta, I engaged in conversations such as these with resettlement agency staff members and clients alike. "It's good they help us find a job, but they should help us find a job we can grow in", said Haben, a young adult resettled with her family by Resettlement Agency X in the last five years. She proceeds to describe her work experience upon initial arrival to the United States,

I was mad at Resettlement Agency X for so many things. I wanted to get help, but after 3 months, I couldn't. I was trying to get in contact about so many things—my GED, my work...it was too far, and the money was not good. I was working at A. I passed out twice there because of the chemicals. Then [I was] at B, [and] then found C.<sup>7</sup>

Resettlement agencies have a certain window of time in which they help newly arrived refugees find employment. Though the MG period is through day 240, clients are expected to begin work as soon as possible. Resettlement agencies have partnerships with many local businesses, most often warehouses and factories, where they are able to send large groups of people who can commute and work together.

Employment is important for evident reasons; however, it doesn't come without its challenges. "Moreover, shift work made it difficult to attend English class regularly, so he stopped attending" (Gowayed, 2022, p. 43). This depicts the case of a Syrian refugee described in *Refuge: How the State Shapes Human Potential*. "The factory that I'm working at, even if I worked the rest of my life there, I am not going anywhere" (Gowayed, 2022, p. 53). Returning to Ibrahim, he recalled his employment experience when resettled. "They wanted to send me to work at the chicken farm," he said, "but I asked them, 'Didn't you look at my CV?'" He proceeded, "I said you have to look at my CV to send me somewhere. It's disrespect[ful] for the person because they deserve something better." Ibrahim continued, "We need to help them find jobs in their careers, show we care, [and that] they can have a good life."

Ibrahim's feelings are similar to those of Haben's. This is a result of resettlement agencies not providing employment opportunities that will serve refugees for the long term. If the goal is to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency at day 240, does it matter then what the refugees are doing

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<sup>7</sup> To protect Haben's identity, I have omitted her previous and current places of work.

after that date? I would hope so, but the reality might be that agencies are unable to support refugees to the extent they would like to if they don't have the capacity to do so. That being said, I suggest that resettlement agencies prioritize establishing new partnerships with companies in various fields of work as they see trends for arriving refugees. Agencies have access to this data through the bios received prior to arrival, outlining all relevant information about the incoming refugee, including an outline of the client's job history. In paying closer attention to this, it is one clear way that agencies can help steer clients in the direction so that they can more quickly find a sense of belonging in their new home. Speaking further about clients' feelings surrounding employment, Sonam said,

People must have [an] open mind when they come otherwise, they won't be successful.

Staff must communicate honestly about [the] differences between [their] home country and here, and [the] challenges and/or changes they will face. There must be clear communication.

It is true that clients often do not understand the full extent of requirements when enrolled in the Match Grant program. If they are late to work multiple times and get fired, that is a strike for the MG program, and this is taken seriously by the agency. Resettlement agencies must ensure that when clients sign off on paperwork and documentation, it is not because they feel that they have to, but because they are agreeing to the terms and conditions out of a voluntary participation.

In establishing open and clear communication, resettlement agencies must address these cultural differences in workplaces not to worry clients, but to allow them to enter the workplace with the knowledge needed to succeed. Even so, this doesn't guarantee that refugees won't be surprised when in the workplace itself. "Though refugees acknowledged their potentially limited opportunities regarding higher-level jobs, they nevertheless were surprised by the fast-paced

working environment, the number of hours they would be working, and the manual labor involved, or the difficulties in entering their field of expertise” (Kornfield, 2012, p. 53). For this reason, I would suggest that a client’s employment team or case worker is more intentional about checking in with clients after they begin work. While it is the client’s responsibility to reach out to the agency if a problem arises, I would state that maintaining open dialogue between both parties allows for care and concern to be at the forefront.

Kitti Murray, founder and CEO of Refuge Coffee Company,<sup>8</sup> speaks about how Refuge came to be a mere seven years ago. She explains why she wanted to open a coffee shop, but not just any ordinary coffee shop, and how the care and love that she had for her refugee neighbors were a big part of it. She continues to describe a particular aspect of the work they do at Refuge, which is job training,

As a networker, I wanted to network. In community development, you don't give an opportunity without giving preparedness for the opportunity. There are people who have lived their entire lives in refugee camps and don't have the preparedness [they need]. The job training piece was the thing that made it substantial.

Refuge Coffee Company’s stated mission is “To use a delicious cup of coffee as a platform for job training and personal development of resettled refugees and other immigrants” (Refuge Coffee Co., 2023). This example that I provide is one that serves as a model for how organizations would ideally greet refugees and immigrants in the U.S. upon arrival to a new workforce. Referring to the job training section of their website, Refuge explains the following about their program:

At the core of what we do is our job training program. By providing our barista trainees competitive wage jobs, we offer newly arrived immigrants and refugees a chance to pause,

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<sup>8</sup> Kitti Murray allowed her full name to be used.



breathe, and dream about their lives in America. During the 12-18 months when barista trainees are in the program, they attend unique workforce readiness classes and interact with mentors who provide assistance with English language education, college, trade school preparation, or future career planning. (Refuge Coffee Co., 2023)

How can places of employment provide not simply job training, but also incorporate the personal piece of this to support refugees in a more holistic way? If other companies utilized a framework similar to the one explained above, I believe it would provide a much smoother transition for refugees upon beginning employment. This serves as a model not only for refugees, but agencies working with migrants, asylum seekers, and immigrants alike.

Yolanda, an employee at a community partner agency of the Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies, speaks to the sustainability piece of employment. She discusses the hopes she has for her agency to employ the community members that they are serving. She shares,

I would like to see [my agency] first provide the opportunity to the community that we serve. It would be easy to call the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech, but shouldn't we go back to the community? We should get someone we're serving to work with us.

Yolanda's concern speaks to how refugee serving agencies need to do a better job of providing refugees with employment opportunities. However, she acknowledges the ease that comes with recruiting interns or employees from local universities. Jean, a former asylee from Central Africa, speaks to the struggle of showing up to work on time. Jean's concern directly responds to the difficulties that a new culture brings, possibly relating to why Yolanda's agency, for example, doesn't recruit from their own community often enough,

People lose jobs because they don't keep time, but it's something they aren't used to. [Where I'm from,] if we say we'll meet by 9, it's we'll be there by 11. It's 'elastic time',

there is no rush. [Now] there is no time for socializing...that affects a lot the people who weren't born here.

Jean came to the U.S. as an adult and had to adjust to a new culture and way of life as many others do. While he didn't come to this country through a resettlement agency, the aspects of life that he had to adjust to were the same as those coming as refugees.

In addition to the ways in which employment is linked to integration in the U.S., it is imperative to acknowledge the importance of relationality throughout this process and the impact of connection. "Anthropologists have long pointed to the central importance of peers in migrants' ability to adapt to new contexts" (Cole, 2014, p. 281). As resettlement is a process shared by many, it can't go without saying how community has a positive impact on integration, including in the workforce. The process of assimilation is not linear, and not one that is 'complete' once the resettlement agency service period is done. If resettlement agencies are tasked with the responsibility of assisting refugees achieve self-sufficiency, this should then encompass more than just economic stability.

In talking about how difficult the adjustment process is, Jean said, "It's not easy to adjust and change your habits. I came at 40 years old, struggling to adjust [as] we're already matured. Our children adjust very fast, then we must go to work, come home, and are very tired. The children are faster to learn the new culture and new language." This is the reality refugees are faced with, especially if they arrive with their family. The parents are expected to start working as soon as possible, which then takes away time from them studying English. These pressures of finding work and learning the language go hand in hand, and one cannot be achieved without the other. Let us now turn to the translation and interpretation services offered to see how resettlement agencies fare in this regard.

### III. Translation & Interpretation Services

“How am I supposed to find a job if I cannot even speak the language?” (Gowayed, 2022, p. 43). Language shapes how we see the world. It is the way in which we understand who we are and how we interact with those around us. Conversing in different tongues and varieties allows us to communicate effectively in the ways which we know how, based on how and where we were raised, with certain cultural and religious influence. Regardless of the language itself, all people use this tool as a means of survival. For refugees, this is an especially powerful instrument as they often exercise this ability to speak, read, write, or understand multiple languages. However, this brings about difficulties when crossing into different cultural contexts. As John J. Gumperz says in his book *Crosstalk*, “Communication difficulties often lie at the root of wrong or stereotyped judgements of attitude and ability when communication is across cultures” (Gumperz, 1979, p. 33). How does multilingualism negatively affect refugees in a resettlement context? If a refugee is multilingual but lacks the English language, does that make them inferior or incapable? For refugees, linguistic ability generally influences their ways of interacting with the world. For a refugee with more linguistic capabilities, does that mean they should have more access to services or resources available?

Kathryn works at Resettlement Agency Z, and is a former employee of Resettlement Agency X. She has worked mainly in navigating the school system for newcomers, doing school onboarding, enrollments, and orientation. As a result, she is the communicator between the resettlement agency and the schools that she works with. She speaks about the various refugee communities she has worked with in this capacity, and how the struggles of interpretation and translation have been present, particularly pertaining to the recent influx of Afghan refugees. Speaking to the services offered by the schools, Kathryn states, “There has been an Afghan

community in Clarkston for a while, but [there is] still no Dari or Pashto interpretation.” She continues, “They still don't have forms translated. Afghanistan is the number three top country in terms of statistics, but there's still no proper interpretation”. While Kathryn is speaking about the schools themselves, how is their lack of services related to the role that the resettlement agencies play in this?

Nancy shares a similar experience in her role as a caseworker, specifically pertaining to the recent arrivals from Afghanistan. Nancy says,

The translation services [that are] lacking is that agency documents are not translated into languages clients speak. We have about five, but this year, for example, we have had a lot of Afghan's speaking Dari and haven't translated those documents for them, but granted we also did not have the time [to do so].

Nancy's comments refer to the ways in which written documentation can be improved to encompass all of the clients being served. These translation services have an impact on what clients can later refer back to, as they are always given copies of the provided forms in their native language. Nancy proceeds to describe the ways in which oral interpretation services can be improved, stating,

I think all multilingual staff at this agency need to go through interpretation training. Just because you speak a language doesn't mean you know how to properly translate legal documents and terms. Paraphrasing doesn't allow [a] client to get [the] full picture. [In one instance, a] client would talk for a long time and [the] interpreter would not repeat everything. She felt like she wasn't being heard and filed [a] grievance.

Nancy expresses a valid point, and one that I will expand on in my recommendations section. Like Nancy and Kathryn, Rebeca recounts her experience with Afghan clients at her agency. Rebeca

works at Resettlement Agency Y and has also noticed the impact of refugees arriving from Afghanistan. She describes her agency and how they “work with different communities to provide linguistically and culturally meaningful services.” She continues, “As a result, we see people more recently from Afghanistan with various language abilities.” While it is one thing to notice this change, the question remains with what is being done to accompany those individuals with different needs and abilities?

Though Matthias does not currently work at a resettlement agency, he previously worked for a refugee community center in Clarkston. Much like Kathryn and Nancy, he describes the difficulties faced when it comes to language. He says,

[The] access point is hard...that’s what it’s always about. Different communities aren't always represented, [so there are] language difficulties. [There are] always good intentions and a lot of good programs, but [the] thing that gets lost is that it’s hard to get people to show up.

He describes how refugees are able to feel comfortable and confident seeking out services when a language barrier exists. He continues, “Accessibility has a bunch of different layers. There are usually people that already do these things, so how do we connect everyone and fill the gaps for what already exists and refer people to those places?” Refugees might seek services outside of their resettlement agencies, and the question that remains is how they are receiving access to those additional resources. While resettlement agencies work directly with the families, their job should not end outside of their agency walls. This would help facilitate a truly holistic resettlement experience.

Jose works at a refugee, immigrant, and asylee facing organization in the metro Atlanta area. He serves many Clarkston residents as a result of his work. He talks about these same themes of accessibility and language, and the hardships faced by clients as a result,

We know sometimes the clients live in hard places to reach services. It might be hard for them to get services right away, [and] sometimes a language barrier [exists] as well. We have access to interpreters. It's hard for clients to find the kind of help that they need.

These testimonies speak to the fact that those serving the refugee population acknowledge the difficulties faced when it comes to receiving proper language services. Jose goes on to describe another related issue the agencies themselves face. "The other issue is the sheer capacity [agencies have]. Most agencies have this issue that we want to help, but we can't help everyone. A lot of our partner organizations have the same issue." This issue of capacity has a direct impact on the quality of services agencies are, or are not, able to provide. I believe that as this is an apparent problem, resettlement agencies should work to deliver quality services in order to ease the transition process for refugees. As Jose expresses, this is often difficult when agencies want to help everyone but simply do not have the resources to do so.

In Blommaert et al.'s writings on *Spaces of Multilingualism*, they talk about the impact of the space and environment as understanding cultural context. They state that "Multilingualism should not be understood as full competence in different languages", continuing later that, "Competence is about being positioned, not about general or open-ended potential" (Blommaert et al., 2005, pp. 199 & 211). In line with this, I argue that communication goes beyond language ability, as does competency. Individuals who might not speak the same language are able to communicate via body language and gestures. Blommaert rightly continues by saying, "How people use language is strongly influenced by the situation in which they find themselves"

(Blommaert et al., 2005, p. 205). In the resettlement process, refugees are faced with a new environment, culture, lifestyle, and reality. To be expected to speak a new language while adjusting to a new system of life entirely is an extremely heavy weight to bear. While resettlement agencies provide interpretation services, I would like to see more offered to refugees on top of this base level service. Documentation is often provided in various languages, but is this the language for both a husband and wife?

In my fieldwork, I often saw spouses who didn't have the same level of ability when it came to language. A husband might speak, read, and write, while a wife was only able to speak, though timid and reserved to do so. Refugee resettlement agencies should ensure that all family members, of appropriate age, receive interpretation services that suit their needs. Similarly, a family member should not be expected to translate on behalf of another, as this then puts the burden on the refugee and not the agency who should be facilitating the conversation. In addition, this may also add opportunities for miscommunication that then becomes difficult to reverse. Utilizing this concept of multilingualism provides critical insight as we continue the conversation on integration, and how situation and environment affect refugees' assimilation process.

Returning to Asad, he said that "not having proper interpretation is why they [refugees] don't trust the health system". Similarly, Asad said, "You can't use language to gauge the level of education for the refugee. There are lawyers [and] doctors that speak other languages, but that doesn't mean they are uneducated". This precisely mirrors how many refugees are frustrated when receiving interpretation services outside of the resettlement agency. Haben shares her experience as someone who knew how to speak English at a clinic visit,

All of the responsibilities were on me...we were taking them to the clinic. Lifeline Primary Care didn't have my languages of Amharic or Tigrinya. Why take us to a clinic that didn't

have a translator? [You need to] make sure the person has the opportunity to express how they're feeling in a way that they're understood.

These feelings of frustration are shared by the refugees themselves and by the community agencies working with them. The refugees feel unheard, while the organizations feel stretched thin and unable to provide the services they know their clients are in need of. As a result of my interviews and findings, I will proceed to offer recommendations that I believe will assist with these common hardships faced by refugees and the agencies serving them. While my data was collected in the city of Clarkston, these recommendations can be applied to organizations across the U.S. serving refugees, as these issues are likely shared by communities outside of Clarkston, Georgia.



## **Recommendations**

As I've noted, my findings demonstrate a particular subset of issues within the larger refugee resettlement program. There are a variety of factors that must be taken into account to understand what makes this work effective. One of the challenges is that while suggestions can be made on the smaller, direct service side, the larger policy changes that need to happen are not as quick to achieve. Based on my analysis, inclusive of observation, interviewing, and academic research, I make recommendations that I believe are achievable for resettlement agencies as a whole, not simply the ones working in the city of Atlanta. These recommendations are not ones that need new staff or projects to implement, but ones that will allow the current measures in place to be adjusted and delivered more efficiently.

When it comes to cultural orientation, we see a trend that the information is simply too much at one given time. As resettlement agencies should have designated staff who conduct the CO, I suggest that this task is taken seriously. Oftentimes, at nonprofit organizations in general, it is not uncommon for employees to wear multiple hats. If there is a staff member who should be focusing on CO, among other designated tasks, I suggest that this be a main part of their job. While I understand that CO only happens when there are arrivals coming, I would encourage agencies to see the time in between as a chance to update information as needed. As an example, agency staff and volunteers who might be introduced in one slide of the presentation could often shift. It is imperative that the information provided is entirely accurate and up to date, so as to not confuse refugees when they are in an already overwhelming setting.

By ensuring that the information is accurate, you are already setting refugees up for success. In addition, while it entails more time on the staff member's end, I suggest that cultural orientation be broken up into more sessions. The outcomes of cultural orientation include that the

refugees can report back the information provided to them. If divided into multiple sessions, refugees are able to take in and process smaller amounts of information at a time, thus allowing them to be more retentive at subsequent sessions. While not a guarantee, this should help mitigate the issue of information overload.

Pertaining to employment, Matching Grant (MG) teams at resettlement agencies should expand the types of places they send clients to work, and ideally, find matches that align with the clients' past work history. With clients' employment history readily available, they should be able to begin working in advance to find options that could be feasible for clients to work. The difficult part of this is that clients need to be assessed upon arrival if they are going to work. Though it is ideal that all family members begin work as soon as possible, oftentimes the husband will work, while the wife remains home to provide childcare. Additionally, if there are physical disabilities or other constraints, this might not allow a refugee to begin work right away. Either way, there are ways that allow the resettlement agencies to be prepared in advance if they so choose to.

In addition to this recommendation, I would like to dive deeper into the concept of job training, as outlined by the Refuge Coffee Co. mission statement. Resettlement agencies have job preparedness and training programs built into their MG program, but how can this be further implemented? I believe that the MG program, which is cohesive of these trainings, needs to offer more specific preparation sessions. This might look like providing an overall understanding of employment in the U.S. down to the particular aspects in the workforce the client is about to enter. Are the trainings offered specific to the coffee industry, factory setting, or grocery store environment? I believe that these in-depth discussions might provide further context for refugees who are entering these workspaces for the first time, thus, setting them up for success in that particular industry, regardless of the length of time they find themselves in that space.

Finally, I make recommendations for the translation and interpretation aspect of resettlement work. As previously described, resettlement agencies are often staffed with former refugees who speak multiple languages. I believe that implementing a formal training is necessary, as simply speaking a language should not deem someone a proper interpreter. If a caseworker is from one Arab country and is working with a family from a similar region, is it appropriate to say their interpretation methods are correct? Caseworkers must understand the impact that while they have shared experiences and language ability, they must maintain the professional boundary as to not have any sort of favoritism while working with clients, especially those from shared backgrounds.

In addition, resettlement agencies must prioritize providing proper written translation to all clients they serve. While it is easy to provide a copy of a document in English and interpret it verbally, that is not an effective practice when it comes to empowering clients. Refugees are unable to learn further about the resources available to them at home if they cannot later read the paperwork they have been provided. It also proves to be difficult when, in many situations, a wife does not have the same level of language proficiency as her husband. Therefore, agencies must ensure that if they are only able to find an interpreter who speaks one language, it is the common language between the wife and husband, and not simply one of their languages, expecting the other to fill in missing gaps.

All in all, I believe that by implementing the recommendations provided above, resettlement agencies will be able to offer their clients a more well-rounded, holistic, and welcoming variety of services that cater to their needs. Resettlement agencies are structured in a way that they are able to put forward what their clients are in need of upon resettlement. By making these small adjustments, their work will be more effective and have a more profound impact on

the lives they serve. This is not a matter of resettlement agencies not doing the work already. Rather, I acknowledge the importance of the work already being done and offer these suggestions as a means to continue improving the lives of refugees arriving in the United States.

## Conclusion

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (Malkki, 1992, p. 24). This is directly applicable when discussing the Refugee Resettlement program in the United States. Resettlement agencies work diligently to provide the quality services that refugees are not only in need of but are deserving of. As we know that refugees have lived through traumatic life experiences, it is precisely the role of the resettlement program put in place by the U.S. government to alleviate some of their hardships upon arrival in a new country. How can this be done better to ensure the dignity of refugees’ lives is upheld? One solution is to allow the refugees to be the experts in the situations directly affecting them.

It is imperative that when discussing refugee resettlement, the refugee is centered in the conversation. By focusing on their experience, the agency will better be able to implement their work. Though limited with funding and monetary resources, resettlement agencies do maintain the means to assist refugees in a more substantial and valuable way. Through a more in-depth cultural orientation, a well-rounded employment process, and an expansion of interpretation and translation services, resettlement agencies will be able to provide more effective aid to newly arrived refugees. As these agencies pride themselves in terms of the support they provide to refugees, it is a matter that this support allows refugees not just to survive, but to thrive in their new home.

While this research is just the beginning of what is likely a long-term process, it is one contribution, among many, to help improve the system that welcomes refugees into our country. As a daughter of immigrants, I feel strongly that we must ensure new arrivals to the United States are greeted with respect and care. Though it is difficult to fathom the true extent of hardship experienced, resettlement agencies are tasked with allowing refugees to look towards their future with hope and ambition. It is crucial that in this field, one must strive towards attainable goals that

set refugees up for success. Whether it be returning to school, opening a business, or learning English as a fourth or even fifth language, refugees arrive with dreams and aspirations. For the resettlement system to achieve success, each individual agency, down to its volunteers and employees, must keep this in mind, and work towards each goal as though it was their own.

The U.S. resettlement program was put in place to provide a pathway of success for our refugee brothers and sisters. Self-sufficiency is not achievable by simply providing said resources, but by truly accompanying refugees through every step of the way. I hope that the data that has been collected can offer a small glimpse into the extent of the work resettlement agencies already do, as well as the challenges many refugees have to overcome when arriving to the place that will soon become their new home. The themes of cultural orientation, employment, and translation are three out of the endless dynamics that affect refugee success. We must continue to analyze and scrutinize these programs to make certain that refugees are given the necessary tools to integrate their lives with their current environment. In doing so, this will allow refugees to feel the sense of belonging and welcome that will empower them to pursue their dreams and, little by little, begin to feel embraced by their new life.

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## Appendix 1. Interview Questions

**Table 1.0.** Interview questions

| <b>Questions for resettlement agency staff</b>   | <b>Questions for community partners</b>  | <b>Questions for resettled refugees</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| What is the most common struggle or hardship that you see among the refugees you've resettled?                               | In what ways do you see the refugee community engage with organizations such as your own?  | Can you tell me any limitations or barriers you have faced throughout your resettlement process?                      |
| What is the biggest challenge your agency faces when it comes to providing for/supporting the refugees you serve?            | How do you feel your organization provides additional support or services, if any, to the refugee communities that reside in Clarkston?            | How do you navigate interactions with those outside of your immediate refugee community?                              |
| Do you feel that the length of time you provided services for is appropriate? Why or why not?                                | Are there common trends you have learned of regarding struggles within the resettlement experience/journey?  | What could your resettlement agency do better for you?  |
| Can you tell me something you feel your agency does well?  | What is one short-term and long-term goal you have that you believe will help improve the life of refugees in the Clarkston community?             | How effective are the translation services you receive?   |
| How might your agency lack in providing holistic services to refugees upon initial arrival?                                  | What changes would you like to see implemented on a local and/or state level based on the direct interactions you have with the refugee community? | Do you feel that your case manager checks in on you and your family enough?   |
| Can you analyze the effectiveness of the translation services you provide to clients?  | How do you see refugees contributing to society both in the context of your local community as well as on a larger scale?                          | Do you feel that you receive sufficient answers to questions you may ask about reunification/family members overseas? |
| In what specific ways do you feel your agency goes beyond the expectations of providing basic resettlement services, if any? | What/who do you find provides the most holistic support for refugees here in Clarkston?  | Have you gained a clear sense of life in America as a result of cultural orientations you received?                   |
| Is there a specific story that comes to mind when recalling individuals or families you've                                   | Do you see trends at local community centers, religious congregations, etc?  | How do you feel about the employment assistance you have received?  |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| resettled? Why was this instance memorable for you or your agency?   |   |  |
| What changes would you like to see implemented on a local and/or state level based on the direct interactions you have with the refugee community? | What motivates you/your organization to continue doing this community engaging work?      | What do you value most about this new environment feeling like home? |
| How does your work help foster a greater sense of community for new arrivals to the area?  | How does your work help foster a greater sense of community for new arrivals to the area? | Where do you feel most comfortable in Clarkston?                     |
|  |   | Where or to whom do you turn to for support?                         |

## Appendix 2. Domestic Cultural Orientation Indicators

**Table 2.0.** Budgeting and Personal Finance objectives and indicators for domestic Cultural Orientation

| <b>Content Objective</b>   | <b>Learning Indicators</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Refugees are responsible for managing their personal finances</b>                       | Participants know their total monthly income and expenses, including rent and utilities   |
|  | Participants can explain and create their monthly budget, differentiating between wants and needs   |
|  | Participants can identify sources of income when initial assistance ends  |
|  | Participants understand the importance of paying bills on time  |
|  | Participants can acknowledge that employable members of the family may all have to work in order to meet their financial needs                                      |
|  | Participants can acknowledge that their financial obligations in the U.S. (e.g., rent, travel loan) will affect their ability to remit money to relatives back home |
|  | Participants have an understanding of their likely financial situation over time  |
| <b>In the U.S., financial transactions are mostly conducted through the banking system</b> | Participants can identify the different denominations of U.S. currency  |
|  | Participants know how to open a bank account and use various bank products and services (including checking and savings accounts and ATMs)                          |
|  | Participants understand fees associated with using check cashing or remittance services   |
|  | Participants understand how to build and maintain a good credit history   |
|  | Participants can articulate measures to protect themselves from financial fraud and identity theft  |
|  | Participants understand the benefits of direct deposit of their paychecks to a bank account   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | Participants understand that banking in the U.S. is safe and should be used   |
|   | Participants understand the risks associated with using paycheck cashing stores and keeping large amounts of cash at home                         |
|   | Participants are familiar with financial institutions that can accommodate cultural beliefs (such as avoiding institutions that collect interest) |
| <b>Paying taxes is a legal obligation in the U.S.</b> | Participants can acknowledge that paying taxes is a personal responsibility   |
|   | Participants understand when and how to pay taxes   |
|   | Participants understand the concept of withholding (for taxes, social security, etc.) on paychecks  |

*Source: Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (2019).*

### Appendix 3. Reception and Placement Core Services

**Table 3.0.** Reception and Placement (R&P) core services

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>R&amp;P services must include:</b> | Pick-up at the airport   |
|                                       | Housing (securing housing, furniture, establishing utilities)        |
|                                       | Transportation training (e.g. how to use the bus)                    |
|                                       | Cultural orientation (cultural mores, financial literacy, U.S. laws) |
|                                       | Enrollment in English language courses                               |
|                                       | Benefits registration  |
|                                       | Medical care   |
|                                       | Enrollment in employment services                                    |
|                                       | School enrollment  |

*Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (2023).*



#### Appendix 4. Reception and Placement Funding per Fiscal Year

**Table 4.0.** Reception and Placement (R&P) funding provided by the Department of State per fiscal year

| <b>Fiscal Year (October 1st to September 30th)</b> | <b>Allotted funding per person</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|
| FY 2023  | \$1,075                            |
| FY 2022  | \$1,025                            |
| FY 2021  | \$1,025                            |
| FY 2020  | \$975                              |
| FY 2019  | \$975                              |
| FY 2018  | \$925                              |
| FY 2017  | \$925                              |
| FY 2016  | \$925                              |

*Source: Data based on communications between the U.S. Department of State and refugee resettlement agencies (n.d.)*