

REFUGEES & IMMIGRANTS SETTLEMENT ISSUES IN THE US

-Before going to some issues and problems that the refugee communities and immigrants face once resettled in the U.S

-We want first to thank the US government the generosity it shows to refugees by not only bringing them to the US from different war zones in the world but also by supporting and helping them with different services they provide for refugees and immigrants (Food Stamps, Health insurance (Medicaid), free ESL classes, provide free community transportation) we want also to thank the American people for their hospitality in welcoming and helping refugees in the settlement procedure. When refugees and immigrants come to this country some of them do NOT understand, speak, or write English but Americans do their best to understand them no matter how broken their English may be. They help refugees and immigrants to get any kind of help they may need

-We want also to take this opportunity to thank different Agencies that receive refugees in this country for the hard and complicated work they perform by helping refugees and immigrants to ensure their adaptation process.

-Our thanks go to UNC (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill) for sending its students of the Social studies program to work with refugees in mental Health problems that affect people.

-We want also to thank these students in particular for the incredible work they are doing in their research in mental health.

-We cannot finish this part of thanks without thanking the representatives of North Carolina for sacrificing some of their busy schedule to receive and hear us and we therefore ask you to persevere listening to our frustrations as we express them.

DETAILS:

We will try to peel out some issues that refugees face once they arrive in this country that may at short or long term bring them to have some mental health problems. We would like to mention in advance that this list of issues is NOT exhaustive. This means it may not contain all the issues and problems.

Let us go in detail of some of these issues:

1. When refugees fly from their refugee camps to the US they want to have a place where they can live in peace with their families as well as have peace of mind but unfortunately when they arrive they face some issues that put them in a situation that they find

themselves missing the peace they were looking for and probably traumatize them , things like:

2. **LANGUAGE BARRIER**: Most of refugees come from countries where English is not spoken this means they cannot speak, write, or understand English and once in US they are directly enrolled in English classes where they learn English as second language ESL. But unfortunately after some months of their classes (in most cases no more than 6 Months) the agencies that receive them tell them that the funds that was given for their settlement is finished and therefore they have to work to pay for their bills(rent, electricity, water) and provide for their families by themselves. The hard time comes when refugees try to get a job at this time when they cannot understand or at least speak the basic English words and cannot therefore be hired because employers cannot communicate with them but at the same time they HAVE to pay for their rent, electricity, and water now they are obliged to quit school in order to get a job, this makes refugees to feel mentally destabilized and under pressure.

In short, refugees are not given enough time to learn the language and get ready to take over when the agencies leave them responsibility of their bills and to adapt to their new life style.

3. **UNRECOGNIZED SKILLS**: When refugees come to this country, some of them come with their skills and certifications from their countries of origin or countries of their refuge but once here in this country their skills and certifications or diploma are not taken in consideration or recognized by employers and if they are hired, they are considered unskilled and feel frustrated and neglected. For those who want to continue their studies they are not allowed to continue but some of them have to start over on what they have passed through only because they speak English with accent, or because they don't speak English.

As everybody in America, refugees are required to provide their experience for the job they apply but unfortunately their experiences from their countries of origin or their countries of refuge are not accepted for them to qualify for the job they are applying for. They have to have experience of working here in this country where they have not worked yet.

4. **HAVING LOW PAYING JOBS**: After their period of assistance is finished, refugees have to look for a job that they may be self sufficient but unfortunately the jobs they find are low paying jobs comparing to the expenses that they have to pay for their families and sometimes they are given few hours of work plus a low pay all this combined make refugees feel like alone with no help and this is traumatizing. This includes them to be harassed at work but unable to defend their rights only because they either don't know their rights because they were not taught them or simply because they don't know where to go or who to contact that can help them defending their rights. In this point of low

paying jobs, refugees are always mentally affected when their health insurance (Medicaid) is terminated when they get low paying jobs (\$8/hour) and overwhelmed by medical bills when they go to hospital, Imagine somebody who is making (\$8/hour) having \$7,000.00 that he has to pay for medical treatment and at the same time he/she still paying the IOM (International Organization for Migration) loan for the flight, paying for rent, utility bills etc....

5. **FAMILY REUNIFICATION** : When refugees come to the US they leave their relatives, their family members in their countries of origin or in the refugee camp where they were leaving and whom they would like them to join them so that the family can be reunified but some of them don't know where to go to get help in such cases, some of them know but not only the reunification process is so complicated and difficult , but it also take forever for the family to be reunified In such situation you find parents complaining about their children left in their country of origin or of refuge. In this case you may find a single mom who left her husband behind finds herself in a situation that she has to work to pay for her bills but at the same time she has children with her that she cannot leave themselves in the house and her husband who could have been helping her is still waiting for the long reunification process. You find parent in the same situation waiting for their children, men waiting for their wives left behind but because it takes forever they start doing things they should not be involved in (Like drinking alcoholic beverages, drug use, etc.....)

As we said earlier, this list of issues may be too long but at this time we are going to stop here but it will be irresponsible on our behalf just to enumerate issues without suggesting or proposing some alternatives that may be taken to remedy on such situations, reason why we are going to give some ideas or suggestions according to us what can be done to facilitate things or to try to correct things that can be correctible.

OUR SUGGESTIONS& REQUEST:

In this short paragraph we want to show some suggestions followed by our request we thing may help to improve refugee life and adaptation conditions here in the country. In our proposal we thought it would be helpful if refugees should be assisted in period of 3 (Three) years beginning by the day of their arrival here in the country and this frame time period should be divided in 3 (Three) different steps as follow:

1. The first year when refugees arrive in the country they should be enrolled to ESL class(for adults who have passed the age of going to regular school) and this language period should be of 1 (one) full year while the agency is assisting him/her for paying his/ her bills. This should give refugee time to learn the new language quietly and without fear or interference for good adaptation in their new community.

2. The second year after their arrival should be the year that refugees should start looking for a job because he/she can by then understand or speak basic notion of English. During this year even though he/she may have a job his/ her assistance should NOT be terminated because during this year refugee should be allowed to make sure they have their independent and reliable transportation to go to and from work and this will only happen if he/she is helped by the payment of his/her bills and refugees will be capable of buying their transportation.
3. The Third year will be the year that a refugee will be working while receiving assistance this should allow him/her to save some money and preparing to take over on paying his/her family bills by him/herself after being assisted for those Three years we believe refugees should be able to take full charges of their families without too much thoughts in their minds that is always the source of mental health problems.

SKILLS & CERTIFICATION: We believe that among refugee and immigrants who are resettled in this country some of them that come with different skills and knowledge that may help our communities, improve our work labor in different fields but we believe that most of those skilled refugees are NOT given chance to use their skills once they arrive in this country only because they did not get those skills here in this country. They are therefore considered unskilled and emotionally affected of that act that they think it is unlawful. For this we suggest that skilled refugees should be given time to work in their field of skills and experience and put on essay to see what they have learned and give them time to use their experience from their countries of origin and observe what they are doing and if they need to reinforce their skills they should be helped to do so while working in their fields of skills. For those who come with their certification, those certifications should be considered valuable and those who want to pursue their education should be allowed to do so starting by their last class attended or their most recent certificate.

NOTE: We may stop here but this request does not cover all things that need improvement in the refugee's adaptation process , we think you may have more fields that need improvement that we did not mention in this proposal please feel free to help improving it for the wellness of refugees and immigrants communities, We therefore ask anyone who may be able to help changing things to bring his/her participation /help to make changes because a lot of refugees and immigrants are suffering and traumatized because of the conditions in which their settlement process is conducted.

Thank you.

