

Raising Refugee Voices

Promoting Participatory Refugee Resettlement Evaluation in
Maryland

Report by
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About the Author

Asha Athman is a senior at George Mason University, an Emerging Fellow with the Roosevelt Institute, and Roosevelt @ Mason's Vice President for the 2016-2017 school year. At Mason, she studies Global Affairs, concentrated in International Development and the Middle East and North Africa, and Arabic. This year Asha researched refugee resettlement evaluation in Maryland as an Emerging Fellow and is in the process of building a coalition around the evaluation reform proposal in her white paper. In her past Roosevelt work she has dedicated time to projects in healthcare and foreign policy to raise awareness at Mason campus about health insurance, student representation in health services, and forced migration in the Middle East. She was also published in the 2016 10 Ideas Defense and Diplomacy journal, for her policy memo on national mental healthcare reform in Somalia.



Executive Summary

The inflow of refugees fleeing conflict abroad, as well as the rising profile of immigration as a political issue, requires reevaluation of the current refugee resettlement system in the state of Maryland. With nearly 11,000 refugees and asylees accepted since 2010, Maryland ranks 20th out of 50 states in refugee population size. Centralized in Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's County, resettlement support is delivered through a public-private partnership program where a dozen independent service agencies work to deliver basic needs assistance, language training, and employment services. These refugee assistance agencies operate autonomously and engage with recipients of their services to evaluate their programs with a focus on service quality. State oversight of refugee resettlement policy and programming is traditionally quantitative and lacking qualitative feedback from refugees and asylees. Refugee communities are in need of direct platforms to express their opinions to the state.

The Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA) should reform its current state-level oversight to include a mixed-methods evaluation process that directly engages refugees and asylees. With the technical assistance of local universities, MORA should invest in building a community advisory board of refugees and asylees to assist in designing and administering surveys, focus groups, and caseworker reports with refugees and asylees living in Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties. Introducing a community participatory evaluation requirement in the state resettlement program review process would inject refugee voices into the policy process and enable service providers and state officials to see the full impact of state-funded programs on refugees' economic security.

Introduction

From international to local contexts, refugee resettlement is a process that inherently involves a wide network of people living in communities and working in the government, nonprofit organizations, and private organizations. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) coordinates refugee resettlement nationally through state resettlement offices (Bruno 2011). ORR provides a system for guaranteeing refugees key health and employment services through a diversity of special funding programs. These programs financially support state resettlement operations by providing the funding for state-delivered health, integration, and employment services and grants for public and private agencies that help deliver refugee services. MORA, the state refugee program for Maryland, has resettled an estimated 7,000 refugees and 4,000 asylees since 2010 (Yeheyis 2014:4). Maryland places 20th out of 50 states in refugee population size (Yeheyis 2014:17). This diverse community is predominantly composed of Nepali Bhutanese, Burmese, Iraqi, Ethiopian, and Cameroonian individuals (Yeheyis 2014:54,56). Refugees and asylees are primarily concentrated in Maryland's three largest counties: Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's County (Yeheyis 2014: 57-62; Maryland State Archives 2010).



Maryland meets the economic security needs of its refugee population through a public-private partnership grant program with public and private service agencies. A dozen agencies serve refugee and asylee communities in Maryland, including nonprofits—such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), and Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)—and schools—such as community colleges in Montgomery, Baltimore, and Prince George’s County (Maryland.gov 2016). This is a large network of service agencies working in parallel to economically empower refugee and asylee individuals and families. While Maryland’s refugee resettlement program and service agencies have the relationships and channels readily available to them for communication about refugee resettlement programming, these conversations do not currently include refugees and asylees directly (Appendix: Interviews). Traditional evaluation of refugee and asylee economic security data related to job matriculation, wages, and cash assistance misses parts of these communities’ experiences—namely, the complexities of fast employment and reliance on social networks. Fast employment refers to the priority in refugee resettlement programs to help clients gain employment opportunities as soon as possible. Social networks encompasses resettled kin, other members of a resettled ethnic community, and relationships with formal assistance agency staff and American citizens that volunteer their services to assist refugees and asylees. Evaluating the efficacy of employment services may be better done by asking refugees personally about their economic integration journeys.

Reforming the structure of communication in refugee resettlement is a nationally identified goal, and would particularly benefit states like Maryland. Since the MORA uses a public-private service framework, the state refugee program experiences a degree of relay communication between refugees and asylees, service providers, and the state refugee office. An effort to coordinate discussions concerning refugee services between refugee and asylee communities, refugee assistance agencies, and the MORA would make this system more effective and inclusive. The MORA should invest in a refugee and asylee community advisory board that would bring refugee and asylee community members, caseworkers, and MORA representatives together to conduct an evaluation of state-funded economic empowerment services. With the help of local academics, the advisory board could design a mixed-methods evaluation framework that would allow refugees and asylees to take the lead as both administrators and participants in telling their own stories, speaking on the issues they face related to job mobility, low wages, and household composition.

The MORA could use this data to collectively identify issues to work on in conjunction with service providers and the community advisory board. Ideally, this coordinated action would allow the different stakeholders in the refugee resettlement process to tackle a common problem affecting each of their missions. Refugee resettlement is a continuum by nature, as new refugees arrive and statuses change for those already resettled. As Maryland continues to accommodate its current refugee population, new faces from different backgrounds will join the mix; most recently, an estimated 200 Syrian refugees are expected to resettle in the state (Murillo 2016). Providing sustainable solutions for effective, equitable monitoring and resettlement policy change has clear implications both now and for the future.



This paper is organized into three primary sections. The first section provides an overview of the Maryland refugee resettlement process and the shortcomings at the national and state level that speak to the need for changes to refugee and asylee program evaluation. The second section discusses different methods other refugee programs in the United States have undertaken to include refugee and asylee voices when reviewing assistance programs. The third section contains a policy proposal for improving the refugee and asylee program evaluation in Maryland by forming a community advisory board to help with evaluation research.

Contextualizing the problem: shortcomings in refugee resettlement evaluation

This section provides an overview of the United States federal refugee resettlement policy framework and state-level organization in Maryland. It proceeds to discuss issues and shortcoming facing refugees and asylees in the United States and other resettling countries. The chief aspects of refugee integration discusses are economic assistance and social support networks. These issues are contextualized by relating them to Maryland's refugee and asylee communities, and illustrate the need for evaluation reform at the state-level.

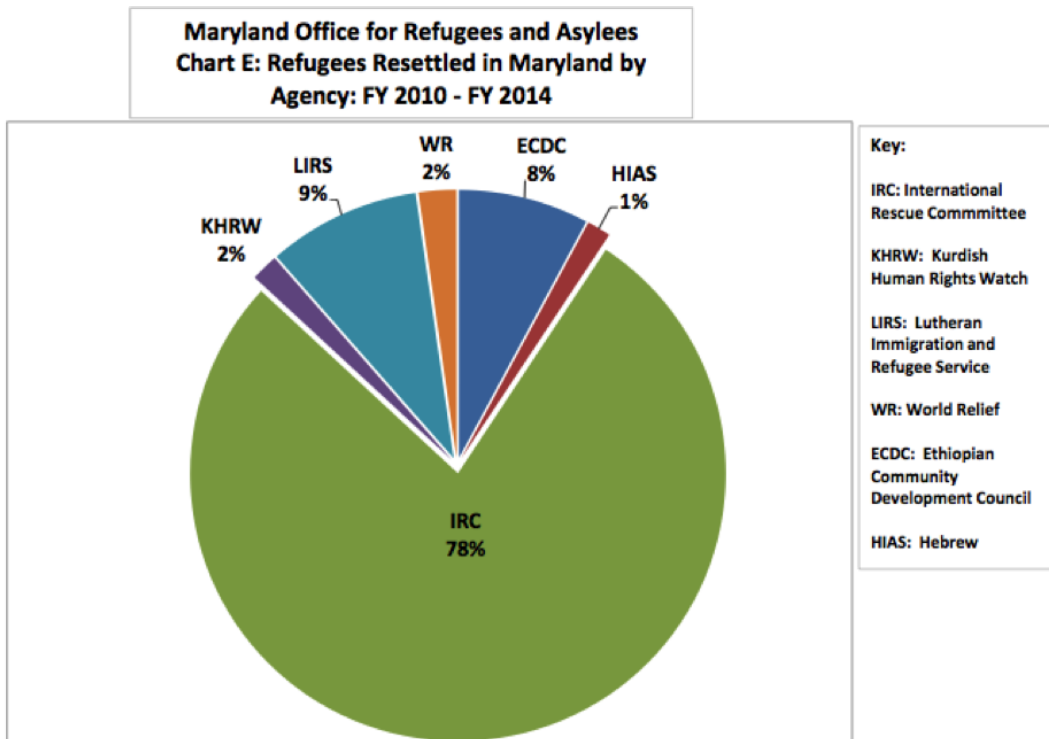
- **MAPPING THE FEDERAL-TO-LOCAL REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS**

Refugee resettlement is a massive national operation orchestrated by the ORR. Through a mix of state-level and federally funded programs, national refugee resettlement policies touch the lives of refugee communities at the local level. ORR's assistance initiatives are primarily focused on integrative initiatives in the form "cash assistance, medical assistance, and employment-related services" (Bruno 2011).

The ORR employs different schemes for delivering its services across the country, including state-administered programs, the Public-Private Partnership program, and others (Bruno 2011:12-15). The key program relevant to this paper is the Public-Private Partnership Program.

- **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM (PPP)**

The Public-Private Partnership program is a refugee assistance framework, which allows participating states to outsource Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) delivery and other social service programs to local private and public refugee agencies (Bruno 2011:13). State refugee programs under the PPP give federal money in the form of grants to local refugee assistance agencies, which are obligated per grant requirements to deliver specific services. Maryland is one of five states that participate in the PPP (Administration for Children and Families 2016b). In Figure I, the cohort of Maryland's agencies and institutions like the IRC, LIRS, and ECDC is detailed. These agencies utilize grant money to deliver public cash assistance and other economic security services on behalf of the MORA.



(Yeheyis 2010:58)

The federal office also employs a number of parallel programs to provide states with financial assistance for particular communities and circumstances. The Targeted Assistance Grant program is one such program that Maryland is eligible for and participates in.

- **TARGET ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)**

The TAP is an additional funding program that is administered to states on the basis of counties showing high influx and density refugee resettlement (Bruno 2011:11). This funding assistance is meant to bolster economic security and integration for refugees who have yet to reach their fifth year of resettlement in the U.S. As shown below, Maryland's most densely refugee- and asylee-populated counties receive grant funding under TAP (Carey, 2015).

Table I. FY 2015 Targeted Assistance Program Allocations by County (Carey 2015)

State	County Name	Refugees	C-H Entrants	Asylees	SIVs	Total	Total Allocation
Maryland	Baltimore	1,177	0	171	63	1,411	293,820
Maryland	Montgomery	845	3	757	341	1,946	405,226
Maryland	Prince George's	138	2	272	55	467	97,246

- **SHORTCOMINGS IN MARYLAND’S REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT EVALUATION SCHEME**

The MORA is responsible for regularly evaluating the social services private agencies provide to refugee and asylee communities on behalf of the state. It collects data on refugee and asylee cases on a monthly, trimester, and annual basis from refugee assistance agencies like the IRC and ECDC (Appendix: Interviews). This data includes numerical indicators and qualitative descriptions related to employment type, employment retention, welfare assistance reliance (i.e. SNAP), income level, and hourly wages (Appendix: Interviews). The MORA reports this data regularly to the Maryland Governor’s office and state legislature on a monthly and annual basis. The MORA also holds monthly, quarterly, and annual meetings for refugee service providers to meet and discuss progress and issues they face operating under the state refugee program (Appendix: Interviews). Refugee and asylee community members do not participate at these meetings yet, and the office does not currently engage refugees and asylees directly through interviews, focus groups, or surveys in its evaluation process (Appendix: Interviews).

Refugee assistance agencies also carry out independent evaluations of their services using refugee and asylee feedback. For example, the Lutheran Social Services National Capital Area (LSSNCA) conducts visit surveys and home visits in an effort to evaluate their services (Appendix: Interviews). These data are focused on visit quality control, and is purposed with determining if refugees and asylees needs were met in their counseling sessions with LSSNCA caseworkers and training/development employees (Appendix: Interviews). The data are collected through direct engagement with refugees and asylees, but the goal is to survey the quality of LSSNCA services, not the integration experiences of refugees and asylees. Other agencies have alternative, independent evaluation processes.

It would benefit both the state and private refugee assistance agencies to ask refugees and asylees about their personal experiences using employment services. An effort to include refugees and asylees in devising and using mixed-method evaluation tools that ask communities about their paths to economic integration would offer additional context to state monitoring indicators and independent agency oversight feedback.

Understanding The Problem: Protracted Challenges in The Refugee Experience

Recognizing the need for coordinated, qualitative refugee resettlement evaluation requires a close look at the refugee experience. Academic research in social work, public health, sociology, and anthropology has revealed many of the problems facing refugee communities. These circumstances include diminished individual agency in resettlement, low socioeconomic mobility, challenges related to family composition, and the complex need for multilevel social support systems. These experiences are presently not a focus in the refugee resettlement evaluation framework built around self-sufficiency and indicators related to employment and welfare participation. A refugee resettlement evaluation framework that engages refugee and asylees on their economic experiences would better reflect the efficacy of employment services.



- **THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE: LOSS, AGENCY, AND RECTIFYING DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

Institutional understandings of refugees’ and asylees’ agency—which refers to individuals’ ability to act and influence change in their surroundings—is related to the losses associated with the refugee experience. The tendency to deem refugees and asylum seekers as vulnerable individuals minimizes public perception of the agency these communities hold (Yarris et al. 2014:114). Recognizing that refugees and asylees actively participate in the refugee resettlement process and integration in Maryland raises the question of why they are not included in designing, monitoring, or reforming the state programs that intimately affect their lives.

Refugees are perceived as vulnerable from the outset because refugee communities are not migrants by choice; they must leave their homes, livelihoods, and loved ones behind due to persecution and conflict (Stein 1980:322). Refugees are categorized as “push migrants,” meaning they were forced to flee their home countries where they had a stable livelihood and support network (Stein 1980:322). Furthermore, structural social and economic losses, like the disruption of social networks and employment, curb personal and communal agency in refugee communities as they resettle abroad (Vesely, Letiecq, & Goodman, 2015: 3).

Diminishing agency is a common struggle for refugees and asylees when they are forced to migrate. As they shift into new environments lacking the physical and social capital afforded to them in their home countries, refugees must rely on public and private agents for their pressing economic and social needs. Furthermore, this problem affects how refugee resettlement agencies view these communities. Refugee resettlement services agencies tend to perpetuate a picture of refugees as “victims in need of assistance rather than persons capable of playing active roles in their own resettlement” (Yarris et. al 2014:114). This pattern of reliance can translate into deep frustration because refugees must grapple with uncertainty and disassociation from the systems, actors, and protocols governing intimate sectors of their lives (i.e., welfare, employment, health care) (Stein 1980:326-328).

Despite these challenges, it is inappropriate to label refugee and asylee communities as agency-less. Applying to resettle in the United States requires extensive preparation including paperwork, screenings, and travel (Davis 2016). Refugees work for months alongside the federal government to legally emigrate so they can work and build new lives in the U.S. Mohammad al-Smadi, a 34-year-old Syrian refugee who recently resettled in Maryland, put it succinctly: “We are hardworking people—we like to work and make our own living, and we don’t like to ask for aid” (Davis 2016). Refugees and asylees like Mohammad are at the forefront of integration in the resettlement experience. Unfortunately, their voices are stifled in the current evaluation process for state refugee programs.

Understanding both the ways in which refugees’ agency is diminished in resettlement and their resolve to better their lives despite trying circumstances makes a case for why refugees and asylees constitute vulnerable yet actively engaged members of American society. Despite having limited political clout as non-citizens, refugees and asylees are the direct subjects of federally funded programs and deserve a democratic space to participate in the political and social channels governing their survival and integration in Maryland and the greater United States.

- **THE “SELF-SUFFICIENCY” FOCUS OF U.S. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS**



The primary goal of refugee resettlement programs is bringing refugees into the mainstream economic fabric of American life. Welfare and employment services are a prime support mechanism used by public and private agents to acclimate refugees and asylees. In the United States, refugee resettlement is traditionally focused on helping refugees achieve “self-sufficiency” (Bach, 1983:175; Bruno 2011:18). Self-sufficiency is a level of economic security at which refugees and asylees no longer require public welfare assistance. The U.S. refugee resettlement model prioritizes employment and weaning families off of cash assistance, and Maryland’s evaluation indicators for its refugee programs (i.e., employment, job retention, refugee cash assistance maintenance, wages) reflect federal self-sufficiency priorities.

Refugee resettlement evaluation that emphasizes data related to employment outcomes, matriculation in trainings, and welfare status misses other key factors that affect refugees’ ability to achieve socioeconomic security in the U.S. Building social support systems critically impacts refugees’ and asylees’ ability to integrate. In order to understand the complexities of how relationships with information, formal institutions, and community actors affect economic integration, refugees and asylees would have to be personally engaged on their resettlement experiences. Employment-focused indicators also fail to cover the long-term challenges refugees and asylees face in state programs. These obstacles include issues like downward socioeconomic mobility, low wages, and family composition.

- **DOWNWARD SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY IN RESETTLED REFUGEE COMMUNITIES**

Structural barriers in the resettlement experience influence downward occupational mobility in refugee communities. Occupational mobility is a term used to describe an individual’s opportunities for advancing their employment position and salary levels. The ideal of self-sufficiency in U.S. refugee resettlement programs has erected federal and state policies that rush refugees and asylees toward economic independence. Stipulations under the matching grant program and federal funding requirements maintain that refugees have between six months and five years to establish baseline self-sufficiency upon settlement. These stipulations usher individuals into low-skill, low-pay work. The mechanisms and qualities necessary to access substantial work opportunities are rooted in investments like language acquisition, host-country integration, and degree evaluation (Ives 2007). A closer look at existing wage data offers a glimpse into how this issue is affecting Maryland.

- **A LOOK AT MARYLAND: WHAT CONSTITUTES A LIVING WAGE?**

One important economic security evaluation metric collected by the Maryland refugee program and local refugee service agencies is refugee and asylee wage levels. Between 2010 and 2014, the average hourly wages for refugees and asylees at their initial job placement was \$9.60 (Yeheyis 2014: 68). This wage calculation represents the start of refugees’ and asylees’ professional careers in Maryland. In reality, this income level falls far below what is required for individuals and families to live independently in Prince George’s County, Montgomery, or Baltimore. The Self-Sufficiency Standard was a project developed at the University of Washington to gauge how much income families in different counties and cities across the United States require to meet their “basic needs” (Pearce 2012). This takes into consideration costs related to housing, child care, food, health care, miscellaneous expenditures, and taxes (Pearce 2012: 4).

In Maryland, the Self-Sufficiency Standard estimates that an individual adult living in Montgomery County requires \$17.07 per hour to meet basic needs (Pearce 2012). This is nearly twice the average wage refugees and asylees received in Montgomery County between 2010 and 2014, which was \$9.83 (Yeheyis 2014: 70). The estimated wage a family requires doubles if an adult is supporting a toddler (Pearce 2012). These burdens are alleviated as children age and if there are two heads of household, but



even under these circumstances refugee and asylee adults are making wages in their initial job placements that are well below the income required to support themselves in the counties in which they reside.

These numbers call into questions how reasonable existing timelines for achieving self-sufficiency are at the state and federal level. Moreover, current oversight indicators alone do not fully speak to refugees' and asylees' personal economic experiences over a considerable period of time. They do not allow us to discern how refugees and asylees are affected by being forced into low-wage work from the outset, or what methods, if any, they use to improve their outcomes. As seen in other parts of the country, low-wage, long-hour employment prospects may be barring refugees and asylees from taking advantage of services that would improve their human capital, such as language classes (Ives 2007:58-60). The plight of single heads of household who struggle economically and socially—in particular women who face unique difficulties living and working as single mothers in displacement—also remains under the radar (Lennette 2013). These uncertainties could be answered by employing mixed-methods evaluation tools like focus groups or surveys that are explicitly designed to investigate refugees' and asylees' economic journeys since arriving in the state.

- **COMPLEXITY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

Refugees' ability to integrate successfully is highly sensitive to their social support networks. Social support systems are informational, instrumental, and interpersonal resources refugees and asylees use to adapt to life in resettlement (Simich, Beiser, Mawani 2003: 886). Firstly, the ability of host providers to relay timely and accessible information is imperative for reducing refugees' and asylees' anxiety and mistrust during the resettlement process (Simich et al. 2003:879-880). Instrumental support like reception and immigration service, housing applications, and health services help refugees meet their immediate needs. Lastly, and importantly, emotional interpersonal support from family or members of refugees' ethnic community is central to “coping with the stresses of migration” (Simich et al. 2003:882).

It is difficult to see how refugees and asylees in Maryland are using (or fail to use) these resources without asking them. Instrumental access is clearer because evaluating the use of these programs is the direct function of the MORA and refugee assistance agencies (Appendix: Interviews). However, refugees' and asylees' access to information and other members of their ethnic community is not a commonly measured metric. Because current program evaluation practices by the MORA and nonprofit refugee agencies do not prioritize collecting data on all aspects of social support systems, a full understanding of the instruments refugees' use to achieve economic security may not be achieved.

- **ADDRESSING LASTING CHALLENGES IN THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE**

A review of the nuanced experience of refugees and asylees in flight and permanent resettlement internationally offers a picture of the complex web of social and economic constraints refugees and asylees face in striving for integration and a high quality of life. Challenges in the refugee resettlement process are also related to a particular policy context wherein federal and state refugee programs and refugee assistance agencies operate under certain constraints. Understanding limitations to refugees' control over their circumstances in displacement, their ability to achieve a suitable lifestyle, and their access to social and communal security allows scholars and policymakers to address issues in refugee resettlement globally. In light of refugees' needs and gaps in service provision, there are a number of potential policy changes to be made.

Modeling The Solution

This section provides an overview of different methods refugee programs in the United States have undertaken to include refugee and asylee voices when reviewing assistance programs. The main examples used are the employment of former refugees as refugee assistance caseworkers and the inclusion of refugee and asylee voices in state refugee resettlement program evaluation processes in Colorado. These initiatives to promote refugee and asylee participation in the resettlement process as oversight and administrative agents indicate the feasibility of equitable, inclusive programs. The suggestions in this white paper would like to build off of existing precedent like this through a participatory evaluation process for state refugee resettlement services in Maryland.

- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: METHODS FOR ACCESSING AND EMPOWERING REFUGEE POPULATIONS**

From universities to public institutions, scholars and practitioners of social work and refugee resettlement have identified social resources that could support refugee resettlement evaluation by incorporating communities. These agents implemented projects that allow refugee communities to provide their input on resettlement programs in a constructive way.

- **CASEWORKERS AND FORMER REFUGEES IN “THE SYSTEM”**

Caseworkers interact daily with refugees and asylees about their experiences in the resettlement system. Mobilizing community members into refugee service provision and oversight enables these individuals to evaluate refugee programs with an intimate understanding of the difficulties communities face accessing and utilizing services. It is common for former refugees to transition into refugee resettlement service positions because “refugees have a unique role as...cultural brokers and advocates within and between” refugee and host communities (Shaw 2015:285). Refugee social workers provide a familiar, supportive environment in consultations through their language skills and cultural knowledge, which helps them to find ways to overcome challenges facing their clients and use shared resettlement experience to advise refugee families (Shaw 2015:289-291).

In Maryland, caseworkers would be prime candidates to lead in surveying economic security challenges facing refugee communities and the role social support systems play in helping those they serve overcome these obstacles. These agents are the link between formal refugee services agencies, the state, and communities. They could play crucial roles in organizing accessible mixed-methods evaluation mechanisms like focus groups and surveys.

- **COLORADO’S REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT NETWORK: A CASE STUDY ON SURVEY EVALUATION AND NETWORKING STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT**

In 2005, the Colorado Trust and ISED Solutions development contractor collectively carried out an evaluation of the Colorado Refugee Services Program. The Colorado state refugee program is federally funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement Wilson-Fish program (The Colorado Trust 2005). Using interviews and focus groups, the study engaged refugee resettlement agency staff, refugee and ethnic



community representatives, and other stakeholders on program efficacy. The study found that the refugee services program in Colorado provides good services in the form of RCA, medical assistance, and English classes, but was lacking because of small staff sizes, strict program eligibility requirements that excluded would-be participants, data management shortcomings, and the absence of assistance from “ethnic community-based organizations” (The Colorado Trust 2005). Directly engaging multilevel stakeholders to evaluate refugee resettlement outcomes delivered an equitable and inclusive reporting mechanism for the state.

The Colorado Trust’s study speaks to the recommendations made in this paper because refugees were key participants in evaluating state refugee resettlement services. This study illuminated both the opinions of refugee community members and those of local service providers. The Colorado Refugee Program also employed a third party with expertise in mixed-methods evaluation to assist in reviewing the efficacy of its services. Maryland would also benefit from adding refugee and asylee voices to its evaluation framework. This could be done in a sustainable and affordable manner by leveraging community representatives, refugee agency caseworkers, and state employees in order to engage refugees and asylees on their experiences in economic empowerment programming. Like the Colorado Refugee Program, the MORA may forge relationships with external actors who have the research expertise to complete mixed methods research with vulnerable communities. For example, academics at local universities could assist in designing and administering evaluation surveys, interviews, focus groups, and reports. Through this reform, the Maryland refugee office and resettlement assistance agencies can adjust resettlement policies based on what relationships and resources are found to contribute to or hinder refugees’ and asylees’ economic success.

Recommendations

This section outlines a proposal for the MORA to adjust its evaluation process to include refugees and asylees through a community advisory board (CAB). The recommendations detail what a CAB is, the logistics behind funding, organizing, and monitoring its research, and how it would provide an avenue for more equitable, inclusive policy change in the future to alleviate refugee resettlement issues in Maryland.

- **USING PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION TO MONITOR MARYLAND’S ECONOMIC INTEGRATION PROGRAMS**

The MORA should mandate participatory mixed-methods evaluation of the economic empowerment programs it supports through public-private partnerships. A CAB made up of refugee and asylee community members, local agency caseworkers, university researchers, and a state resettlement management employee will be responsible for designing and administering surveys, focus groups, and interviews with refugees and designing and organizing qualitative data-gathering mechanisms like focus groups and surveys that directly engage refugees and asylees on their economic experiences under state assistance. The logistical planning of this research can be facilitated by academics at local universities in Maryland or Northern Virginia. The MORA can fund this work through small reallocations of funding from federal programs that support employment service delivery in Maryland, putting those funds toward a research grant for participating universities. The CAB should be staffed from and conduct its research in Montgomery, Baltimore, and Prince William Counties where the state refugee and asylee community is densest and where resettlement programs are centrally managed. This data on refugee and asylee experiences may complement existing monitoring indicators like wage rate, employment status, and welfare dependency in the evaluation literature produced for state and federal review.



Implementing this policy will serve three broad purposes. First and foremost, it will inject refugee and asylee voices into the public and private channels that deeply affect their lives. Secondly, it will give service providers the opportunity to learn more about the economic security successes and challenges facing refugees and asylees in and beyond the populations they serve. Finally, adding refugee and asylee reflections on the resettlement system to evaluation reports will provide more comprehensive monitoring data for policymakers at the state and federal level who review and reform economic integration programs.

- **THE FRAMEWORK: COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**

Creating and reforming policies to address existing shortcomings in the refugee resettlement process should be participatory and involve local stakeholders. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) involves empowering regular individuals to plan and undertake research in the communities to which they belong. In the context of this policy proposal, refugees and asylees in a partnership with academics, caseworkers, and state employees would carry out mixed-method research on resettlement experiences in Maryland within their communities. This research cohort would work as part of a community advisory board.

- **REFUGEE AND ASYLEE COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD AND COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**

Community-based participatory research is an “orientation to research” that enables participants to conduct research and action projects in vulnerable communities they belong to or operate in (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 247). CBPR “aims to change the balance of power and blur the lines between ‘researchers’ and ‘subjects’” by involving members of studied communities to participate in designing and conducting research (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 247). Led by academics at local anchor universities, CBPR intentionally attempts to democratize the study and process of social change through “mutual ownership” of research and its uses (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 247). In this way, CBPR is equity-driven. A community advisory board made up of community representatives and organizers and local service providers is key to helping create and administer research on a commonly shared problem (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 248).

Higher education scholars assist in organizing CABs and designing mixed methods research tools chosen by the CAB-like surveys, focus groups, and interviews. In a CBPR study on Mexican migrants’ experiences in rural destinations conducted by researchers at Montana State University, the CAB consisted of community members, a community organizer, a community health graduate student, an agricultural outreach worker, and the scholars themselves (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 248). Members of CABs decide on the research methods and participate in completing the research by helping with various tasks like translating and adjusting survey and interview questions, designing focus groups, and engaging other community members on the research tools (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 249). Community partners are critical in getting local community members to participate in the research and action projects prepared by CABs. For instance, in the Montana State University study the CAB made connections with a local church, a community health clinic, and migrant farmworker health organizations to make connections with the Mexican migrant community in the local area (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer 2012: 248-249). The primary challenges in the CBPR process are inclusivity, power structures, institutional barriers, and resistance from the community. Yet CBPR, despite its challenges, is a successful model for inclusive research and is well-suited for research on refugee and asylee experiences.

Maryland should invest in participatory mixed-methods research that investigates refugee and asylee



economic integration experiences. A 12-to-15-member refugee and asylee community advisory board made up of randomly selected refugee and asylee community members, local service provider representatives, and state refugee office employees should be responsible for planning and administering the evaluation research methods. A local public university with the academic expertise in appropriate research methods, such as the University of Maryland College Park or George Mason University, could help organize the CAB and design its research methods. Ensuring community participation and trust in the CAB's efforts would require engaging local partners including refugee service agencies, community colleges, religious institutions, shops, and community centers. The CAB and academics should produce literature about their findings from the focus groups, home interviews, assisted surveys, and other methods used to collect data. This synthesized research would be submitted to state and federal bodies along with other evaluation data such as economic security indicators (welfare dependency, employment outcomes, and more). The CAB can proceed to work with local refugee assistance agencies, other community partners, and the MORA to address issues identified through the CBPR studies it produces.

- **EXECUTION: FUNDING AND LOGISTICS**

Executing a CBPR effort would require funding for creating research materials, conducting research activities, and making CAB meetings accessible. A mixed-methods evaluation including surveys, focus groups, and/or home interviews would include costs to subsidize the travel of researchers and participants between counties, printing the research materials, and recording the data. Additionally, in order to make the CAB accessible, participants may need assistance making up for the time and travel required to attend meetings. Funding for the refugee and asylee advisory board and its research could be directed at state level. The MORA would provide oversight and participants in the CAB, and could reallocate \$20,000–\$100,000 of funding for state program social services and discretionary grants to a community advisory board grant managed by the anchor university organizing the CAB and assisting with designing its research methods.

- **SIGNIFICANCE: USING COLLECTIVE IMPACT TO CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS WITH COLLECTED DATA**

Based on community-identified issues, the community advisory board, refugee assistance agencies, and MORA may coordinate their work to address a common problem facing their organizations and constituents. Collective impact Theory offers a foundation for creating social change of this kind. Collective impact is a theory of social change that promotes inclusive, stakeholder-centered coalitions to address problems facing local communities (Collective Impact Forum 2015).

John Kania and Mark Kramer propose that five conditions are required for collective impact to produce change (Collective Impact Forum 2015). First, partners must set a common agenda, agree on a shared reporting measure, uphold a mutually reinforcing agenda, and plan for continuous communication and a backbone support system. Second, the initiative pursued should be local and equity-centered, including the voices of community members and a diversity of other partners (e.g., nonprofits, public institutions, private sector firms). Third, partners must conceptualize the program as collective, coordinated, and system-oriented. Fourth, data should be used to evaluate and revise its trajectory. Finally, successfully maintaining equity and meeting the goals outlined above requires an investment in skilled leadership and a culture of mutual respect between partners. Collective impact provides a solid framework for program reform based on the issues identified by refugees and asylees.

The MORA, a cohort of Maryland's leading refugee service providers (like, the IRC, ECDC, LSSNCA), and the refugee and asylee community advisory board would set a common and mutually



reinforcing agenda based on the problems outlined by refugee and asylee communities as part of the CAB. These stakeholders have independent objectives and needs in their work that are specific to their agencies and communities; however, in executing reforms to address an economic integration issue, the collectively set agenda must be maintained and supported by all participants in their own work.

Together, these stakeholders should decide on a shared reporting measure that is most appropriate for achieving their goal. This effort for change would be localized to Montgomery, Baltimore and Prince George's Counties, which house most of Maryland's refugees and asylees and refugee assistance agencies. This initiative would also be equity-centered because refugee and asylee community representatives on the advisory board would have a seat at the table where refugee assistance agencies and the MORA discuss resettlement policies. Furthermore, all the major actors in the refugee resettlement system would then be present to address shortcomings in refugees' and asylees' economic integration. Communication about the initiative could be kept consistent by allotting time for planning and reporting on outcomes during the refugee service network meetings organized by the MORA throughout the year. The MORA would serve as the backbone of this operation because it is familiar with all the refugee assistance agency partners, and would be able to organize communication between local agencies and have the human and financial resources to support this effort.

Collective impact theory is suited to solving issues in the refugee resettlement arena, and specifically in Maryland, because it involves a host of diverse agents at the state, private, and public institutional level as well as in local communities. These agents have a common interest in creating effective programs that promote efficacy and equity in resettlement outcomes. They are also commonly aware of the issues existing in their communities and workplaces and stand to benefit from increased communication in their lives and work.

Conclusions and Consideration Moving Forward

Establishing participatory, mixed-methods evaluation of refugee resettlement in Maryland would empower actors from multiple positions in the resettlement process. Engaging refugees and asylees directly in designing and administering evaluation tools would offer these communities representation in the resettlement policymaking process. Furthermore, refugees and asylees that answer surveys and participate in focus groups and interviews could share their economic integration experiences. This would move these vulnerable communities out of the periphery of the American political system and utilize their expertise as the most affected parties in Maryland's refugee resettlement process. This would in turn prompt more equitable and inclusive program planning, execution, and monitoring.

This expanded data would also help resettlement agencies understand the attitudes and opinions of their clients. Refugee resettlement service providers would benefit from learning about the shortcomings affecting refugee communities for which they are and are not responsible in their state. This would enable agencies to learn from peer institutions and the broader refugee and asylee community.

Lastly, the evaluative literature produced by the MORA would bolster state and federal-level funding evaluation by providing a greater human dimension and increased nuance in refugee resettlement data. In the long term, under the principles of collective impact, the issues outlined by refugees and asylees could be addressed through the coordinated action of the community advisory board, MORA, and refugee assistance agencies. This would allow the process of refugee resettlement policymaking and monitoring in Maryland to become increasingly democratic, equitable, and effective.





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APPENDIX

I. Relevant Acronyms

CAB – Community advisory board
CBPR – Community based participatory research
ECDC – Ethiopian Community Development Council
ESL – English as a second language
IRC – International Rescue Committee
HIRS – Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
KRHW – Kurdish Human Rights Watch
LSSNCA – Lutheran Social Services—National Capital Area
MORA – Maryland Office of Refugees and Asylees
ORR – Office of Refugee Resettlement
PPP – Public Private Partnership Program
RCA – Refugee Cash Assistance
TAP – Targeted Assistance Program

II. Interviews with Refugee Resettlement Administrators and Service Providers

Augustin Ntabaganyimana, State Refugee Coordinator
Maryland Office of Refugees and Asylees (MORA)
October 13th, 2016

Grant Program Evaluation

1. What type of evaluative data collection are refugee resettlement private and public agencies required to carry out under grant requirements?

→ Which parts of this data are used by MORA for its own reporting purposes, and why?

Economic performance measurement requirements (DATA COLLECTED)

Percentage of clients placed in jobs (full time v.s. part time)

Increase/decrease in SNAP participation

90-day retention

Hourly Wage

Income below and beyond 200% of poverty line

* Case managers collect information client name, when started job, check in later if still in job, wage and income level, whether they stayed at same level of federal services (intake v. check in)

2. Under what timeline does the State or MORA receive reports from the public and private agencies and institutions providing refugee services?

Monthly reports on new clients and updates on existing cases

Trimester basis: more comprehensive reports that evaluate data (what was done and impact) – factors impacting the program positively and negatively

Don't get that deep level of information on individual clients

3. At what level do refugee service agencies communicate with each other?



- Is this mandated under the grant program?
- Has there ever been an effort to hold coordinated meetings of civil employees, refugee and asylee service agency representatives to review the efficacy of resettlement services programs?

Agencies do communicate with each other

Particularly on non-refugee cases (Asylees particularly)

Bimonthly, staffers meet with the directors of agencies working in the state to discuss issues affecting more than one agency

Quarterly consultation meeting (agencies, community colleges, public schools, local public health departments) to discuss issues and provide feedback

Annual meeting for everyone who attends the quarterly, plus the caseworkers, nurses, employment services – Strategic meeting

4. In Maryland, are individual refugee and asylee cases managed by social workers employed at the state or agency level? (Combination of both?)

- Are caseworkers given a forum to express common challenges in their work with state level officials?

Assistance & employment services

Depends on the agency (some have employment specialists, some have caseworkers, differentiate work between them in the process of getting refugees economically secured [transportation, enrollment, organizing workshops, health related needs])

Built into the program

5. Does MORA currently utilize any methods for direct feedback from refugees and asylees on the services they are provided through the Public Private Partnership program?

- Has MORA considered different mechanisms to involve refugees and asylees in monitoring and evaluating the refugee resettlement process?

Incorporate home visits into monitoring

Interviews would add that human touch

Focus groups (Experience in Kansas: grouped by country of origin—common theme was disappointment, lack of understanding) – need to fill informational gaps related to how the system works and create mutual understanding.

State & Federal Reporting

6. What type of information does MORA include in its annual fiscal year reports to the State Congress versus the monthly updates required by the Governor's office?

Office performances

Determined on a place by place basis

Employment empowerment indicators

i.e. Decreases in public support, wages, participation in programming

7. Does MORA oversee the ORR's Target Assistance Program (TAP) for Maryland's 3 eligible counties: Prince George's, Montgomery, and Baltimore City? What type of provisions are made possible by TAP?

TAP not only funding for employment services

Combination of federal and state resources used

TAP is operated through the county level

Leveled through county

Baltimore City would be best for this



****State issues the funding to local municipality or county (for example goes to baltimore city)**

8. Is MORA responsible for supervising the ORR's Voluntary Agencies Matching Grant Program for the participating actors in Maryland (i.e. IRC, LIRS, and ECDC)

Does not monitor the grant

VAMG program member will not access state services if they are in it, and only have 6-month

ORR distributes the funding to national agencies and they distribute to local level

Different for different agencies (LIRS has affiliates at the local level that they distribute money)

**Aerlande Wontamo, Maryland Regional Director
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSS/NCA)
November 2nd, 2016**

1. Does your establishment currently utilize any methods for direct feedback from refugees and asylees on the services you provide?

Utilize both

Visit Surveys (how was the case manager visit [need interpreter, etc.], how was an employment services visits)

Personal home visits

(monthly - 30 day limit) - How clients are doing, check-ups, answer questions

(quarterly) - Was everything done appropriately/satisfaction (quality)

Grievance policy

Direct engagement on specific issues, can rise in level of attention (taken as they come)

2. Is your establishment required to provide an annual or irregular report on your work and outcomes to the Maryland Office of Refugees and Asylees (MORA), Maryland State Congress, or federal Office of Refugee Resettlement?

Tri-mester (space to talk about challenges, and explanation of aggregate)

Monthly (Straight: demographics, employment program outcomes [job intake, etc] - individual basis)

* TANF not reported to MORA, but regardless family composition is taken into account when reports are submitted

3. What is the nature of communication between your establishment and other refugee service agencies in Maryland State?

Don't have regularly scheduled meetings

Have the ability to coordinate if needed, where there is a need for it they communicate

Not collaborating on reviewing services, more on programmatic basis

**Asnake Yeheyis, Data Analyst
Maryland Office of Refugees and Asylees (MORA)
September 22nd, 2016**

1. Does the State and its agencies including the Department of Health and Department of Human Services – MORA currently utilize any methods for direct feedback from refugees and asylees on the services they are provided?

- No direct contact with clients, report through service providers
- Intensive monitoring protocol
 - Review files for all clients



- Visit the providing agencies

2. Is the State or MORA required to receive annual or irregular reports from the public and private agencies and institutions providing refugee services?

- Funding Agency primarily, distribute funding through rigorous grant process (lay out expectations and agencies fill out information)
- Obligated to report
 - Creating online platform
 - Public agencies also apply for contracts like the private agencies

3. Is MORA required to provide the State legislature with a yearly review? If so:

- When (tentatively)?
- Does that report include the work and data of the agencies/institutions it is affiliated with (refugee/asylee service agencies, community colleges, etc.)?

- Reports: Generated for ORR, all of funding from ORR, office governed by the state office
- State review:

1. MFR, managing for results—any state agency or program, whether funding from them or not, budget passes through the state, so office has to provide their plan who they are serving and expected outcomes
 - Annually, file and report on outcomes
 - Because they provide employment
 - Timeline: State fiscal year (Submit planning) at the end of fiscal year submit outcomes

2. State Start

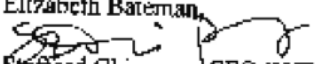
- Monthly report, sent to governors office
- Template-based
 - Number of individuals employed, with health benefits, retained work, wages, etc.

4. Data collection requirement for Agencies

- Collected by agencies
- RCA/RHCA
 - Family size matters





DATE: September 23, 2016
TO: Elizabeth Bateman
FROM: 
Stafford Chipungu, CFO DHR
RE: Refugee Settlement Funding

QUESTION: How is the funding structure set up for deploying federal funds for refugee resettlement to the MD Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA) under DHR?

RESPONSE: MORA receives 100% of its funding for from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/ Administration for Children and Families/ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ACF/HHS/ORR). HHS/ACF/ORR allocates federal refugee assistance based on agency budget appropriations and the number of refugees resettled in a particular state or jurisdiction.

The State of Maryland operates the Refugee Assistance Program as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) resettlement model. Under the PPP, the State funds private non-profit resettlement agencies to administer Refugee Cash Assistance. Funding is allocated based on the number of refugee clients served in a particular jurisdiction or region.

QUESTION: Are appropriations for the county level DHR offices decided and managed at the state or county level?

RESPONSE: As noted above, The State of Maryland operates the Refugee Assistance Program as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) resettlement model. The State funds private non-profit resettlement agencies to administer Refugee Cash Assistance, as opposed to Local Departments of Social Services. MORA also contracts with local community-based and community college providers to provide social services.

QUESTION: Is the aggregate financial data given on welfare support inclusive of Refugee Cash Assistance or is that reported separately?

RESPONSE: The aggregate financial data on welfare support is inclusive of Refugee Cash Assistance.

QUESTION: What is the feasibility of using funding from federal refugee resettlement programs for state or county-introduced ideas? (Ex. Targeted Assistance Program under ORR offers additional funding assistance to high refugee flow and settlement counties nationally).