

# Barriers to Refugees Achieving Self-Sufficiency in Dallas, Texas

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## Introduction and Research Setting

Dallas, Texas is one of the largest resettlement locations in the United States with multiple refugee resettlement agencies and refugee serving organizations. 11814 refugees resettled between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020.<sup>1</sup> Refugees are provided short-term support once arriving to the United States and are expected to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Twenty-one remote semi-structured interviews with staff at a resettlement agency and a non-profit in Dallas, Texas elicited perceptions around barriers and challenges to refugees achieving self-sufficiency and refugee needs and concerns. Interviewees also discussed issues around accessing appropriate healthcare and what changes would improve resettlement.

## Interviewee Demographics

Interviewees came from various backgrounds and work experiences before starting their work with refugees. 15 women and 6 men aged 19 to 56 were interviewed. 11 self-identified as white, 5 as Asian, 3 as Black, and 2 as Latinx. Two interviewees resettled in Dallas before beginning their refugee serving work.

## Self-Sufficiency

Defined as “earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant”.<sup>2</sup>

This does not fully consider cost of living in different locations and added costs when resettling in the United States.

## US Resettlement

2016	84995
2017	53716
2018	22491
2019	30000
2020	11814

Figure 1: Resettlement numbers per US Refugee Processing Center.<sup>3</sup>

## Issues of Concern

Organization staff identified the below as barriers to staff work, resettlement, and needs and concerns.

- Lack of childcare
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of financial literacy and larger amounts of money
- Lack of appropriately sized housing for large families
- Lack of continued and expansive insurance and healthcare access
- Language barrier and lack of interpreters
- Lack of accessible transportation
- Learning to adjust to the workplace
- Lack of understanding USian concepts of hygiene and timeliness
- Lack of a mental health framework making it difficult to address trauma

## Suggested Solutions

Respondents suggested that creating stronger community partnerships, increasing housing options, teaching and making English more accessible to working refugees, increasing amount of aid provided to refugees, and increasing transportation access would decrease most barriers to both staff work and resettlement.

## Discussion

The impetus to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency as quickly as possible pushes them into low-paying jobs and creates more barriers to resettling successfully especially due to lack of adequate access to resources. More resources would mitigate most concerns.

## References

1. N. (2020, October 07). Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Resettlement. Retrieved October 22, 2020, from <https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>
2. Tota, K. (2018, September 06). Programs to Support Refugee Self-Sufficiency. Retrieved October 22, 2020, from <https://www.hhs.gov/blog/2018/09/06/programs-to-support-refugee-self-sufficiency.html>
3. N. (2020, October 07). Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Resettlement. Retrieved October 22, 2020, from <https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>