

# Integration Barriers: Perspectives from Refugee Youth





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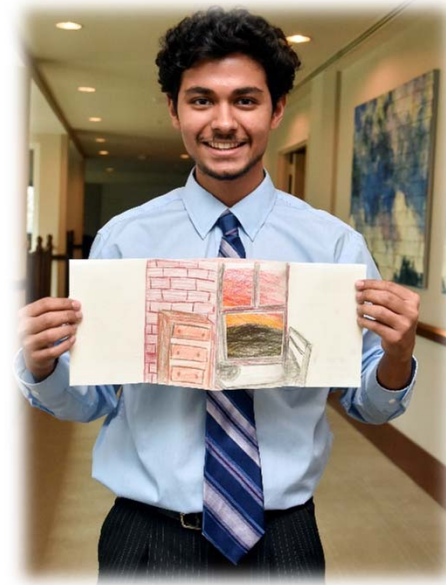
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# U.S. Refugee Youth Consultation

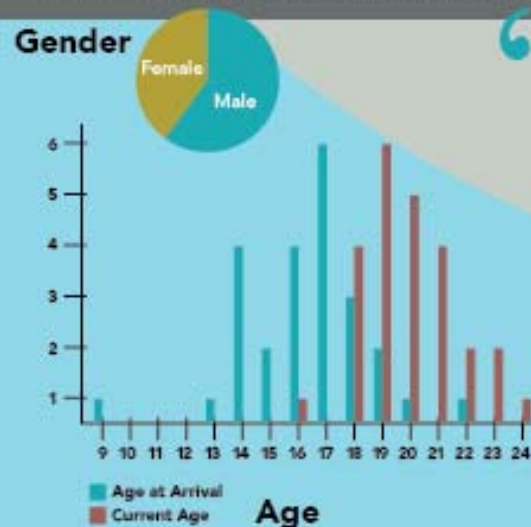
- ❖ This U.S. Consultation was part of the Global Refugee Youth Consultations that were occurring all over the world
- ❖ All of these consultations will feed into UNHCR's Annual NGO Consultation in June 2016
- ❖ The Vulnerable Minors Working Group (VMWG) of Refugee Council USA hosted the U.S. Consultation



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# 25 YOUTH | 14 COUNTRIES | 1 INCREDIBLE CONSULTATION

Information presented in this graphic was collected from 25 refugee youth leaders participating in the 2016 U.S. Refugee Youth Consultations. This event was part of the Global Refugee Youth Consultations which are occurring all over the globe.



“ There was no place for you to grow inside the camp, and you thought you'd have a better place here, but when you got here there was still that struggle, you still felt like you were inside the camp, because you were different, you speak differently, and your hopes, dreams, and advancements... you can't really take advantage of what you have, because you still feel like you're confined.”

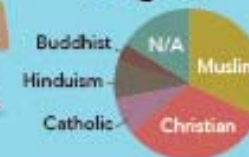
—Dipesh



### Country of Origin

- Burma
- Bhutan
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ethiopia
- Eritrea
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Iraq
- Mexico
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Rwanda
- Somalia
- Sudan

### Religion



“ People tell us that U.S. is heaven, but it's not a heaven for us as an immigrant. I went through a lot of stuff that I will never forget. It makes me strong. I have good intentions, for me, my family and other people. I want to make a difference.”

—Jimmy

### My Experience as a Refugee or Asylee Prior to Arriving in the U.S.

- 49%** were separated from their families for 4 months to 16 years, with one youth still separated
- 40%** lived in a refugee camp
- 42%** were not able to attend school for 3 months to 15 years
- 34%** lived in more than two countries prior to the U.S.
- 23%** were internally displaced
- 20%** fled their homes without their parents/guardians
- 8 years**—average time between fleeing home and resettlement, with some youth living their entire childhood as a refugee

### My Experience After Resettling in the U.S. I currently live with...

- 45%** biological parent(s)
- 24%** foster parent(s) from the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) Program
- 16%** extended relatives/family friends
- 15%** adult siblings

### Top Challenges I Face...

- English Language Skills
- Discrimination & Bullying
- Education
- Cultural Adjustment

\*Additional challenges include financial, housing, employment difficulties



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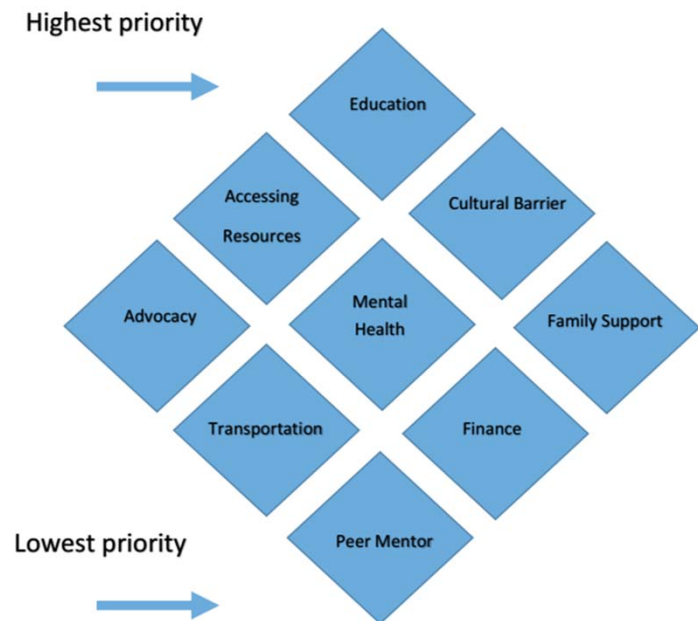


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# Pre-Consultation Activities

DIAMOND RANKING TEMPLATE

- ❖ Prior to the Consultation, the youth completed a Diamond Ranking Exercise
- ❖ The top four issues from all activities completed were: Education; Cultural adjustment; Language barrier; and Discrimination/bullying



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# Methodology: Problem and Solution Tree



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# Cultural Adjustment

Adjusting to a new culture can be a difficult challenge for refugees to accept. If they do accept this new culture and begin to re-establish and find an identity it becomes challenging to keep everyone in both cultures happy. A lack of cultural adjustment limits communication, acceptance, and inclusion.

## Causes

- ❖ Everything is different in the U.S.
- ❖ Confusion and idealistic expectations of American culture
- ❖ Family expectations
- ❖ Some Americans do not want to let refugees into their culture and world

## Impacts

- ❖ Feel isolated, pressured, depressed, fearful, and intimidated
- ❖ Discriminated against and bullied for being different
- ❖ Peer pressure forces them to change their values or beliefs and participate in negative behaviors
- ❖ Family conflict and tension
- ❖ Loss of identity

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# Cultural Adjustment Solutions

## Refugee Resettlement Agencies

- ❖ Give a more in depth cultural orientation
- ❖ Have a cultural orientation that is specifically geared towards youth
- ❖ Can try to help with family generational challenges that arise from adjusting and assimilating to a new culture
- ❖ Encourage refugees to get involved in the community

## Schools

- ❖ Promote biculturalism
- ❖ Offer peer-to-peer cultural exchanges, like an American friend program
- ❖ Encourage participation in afterschool activities

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# Language Barrier

Language barriers create misunderstandings for refugees. They also make refugees feel isolated and are a serious challenge faced by many refugees.

## Causes

- ❖ Limited/lack of English education prior to resettlement
- ❖ Classes in the US have so many students that refugees don't receive enough individual support
- ❖ However, when refugee youth are placed only in ESL classes, they are not able to practice English enough with American youth
- ❖ Few opportunities to practice English in a safe and judgment free zone

## Impacts

- ❖ Isolation, hopelessness, anti-social behavior/feelings, depression
- ❖ Friendship challenges, especially with American kids
- ❖ Difficulties in school and education
- ❖ Bullying and stereotyping
- ❖ Role reversal in homes

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# Language Barrier Solutions

## Refugee Resettlement Agencies

- Organize special events/networking events to promote integration
- Encourage youth to join soccer teams and other activities that would allow youth to practice their English skills in a pressure free setting
- Organize mentoring/language programs for refugee youth



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# Language Barrier Solutions

## Schools

- ❖ Institute a mentoring program for refugees where they partner with an American student to practice English
- ❖ Use summer school as a time to teach English and increase proficiency
- ❖ Make ESL classes more activity-based and offer them more than once a day



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# Education

Education is essential for the success of refugee youth, but when they arrive in a new country they feel like they are starting their education over again. Many refugees struggle with the American education system upon arrival.

## Causes

- ❖ Lack of education of teachers on the unique needs of refugees
- ❖ Differences in the education systems overseas
- ❖ Placement in a grade level that does not correspond to their learning level
- ❖ Language barrier

## Impacts

- ❖ Poor performance
- ❖ Less job opportunities and miss out on other opportunities
- ❖ Feel discouraged, frustrated, depressed, hopeless, and lose interest in their studies
- ❖ Lack of interest can lead them to drop out or become involved in gangs, drugs, and other bad behaviors

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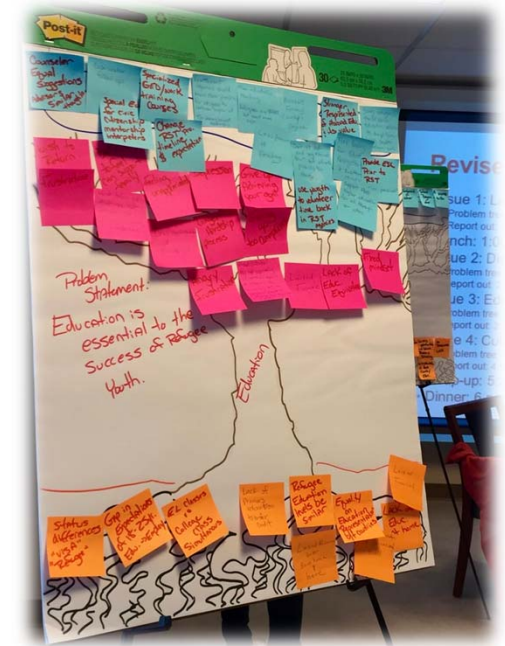


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# Education Solutions

## Refugee Resettlement Agencies

- ❖ Offer a support system for families
- ❖ Educate parents upon arrival about American school systems and the importance of parent teacher conferences for example
- ❖ Educate parents on the financial resources that are available, such as scholarships for private high school and college



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## Education Solutions Continued

### Schools

- ❖ Work to increase communication between schools (i.e. middle school and elementary school) so the new school can be made aware of a student's unique needs
- ❖ Translate school materials
- ❖ Educate teachers on the needs of refugees
- ❖ Offer refugee specific guidance counseling and summer orientation sessions to help with the transition
- ❖ Increase after-school programming and tutoring, as well as parent involvement initiatives

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# Discrimination & Bullying

Refugee youth deal with discrimination and bullying almost every day in all aspects of life. Discrimination dampens the spirit. It affects refugees emotionally and mentally and keeps them from reaching their full potential and achieving the American dream. This is the biggest and most negative issue refugees face.

## Causes

- ❖ American citizens and society
- ❖ Media's misrepresentation of refugees
- ❖ Racism
- ❖ Have different cultures and can struggle with English

## Impacts

- ❖ Can make refugees depressed, suicidal, and prone to self-harming behaviors
- ❖ Feel isolated, fearful, frustrated, lonely, hopeless, insecure, powerless, and reduces their confidence
- ❖ Can give into peer pressure and participate in activities they do not want to
- ❖ Can lose their past and culture by trying to fit into American society to make the bullying stop

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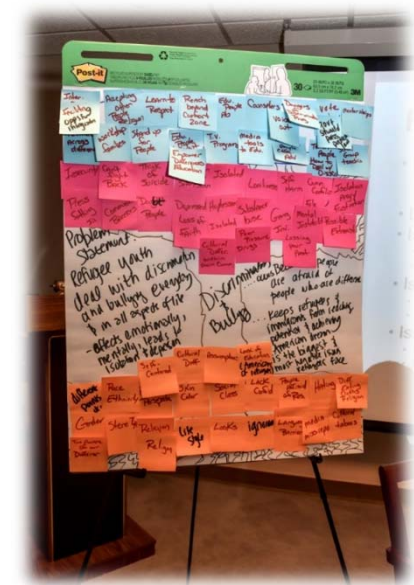


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# Discrimination & Bullying Solutions

## Refugee Resettlement Agencies

- ❖ Incorporate parents in education about bullying
- ❖ Show parents how they can support their children who are affected by bullying and discrimination
- ❖ Encourage civic engagement among refugees and show them programs in the community they can get involved in



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# Discrimination & Bullying Solutions



## Schools

- ❖ Create bullying prevention programs
- ❖ Educate teachers and counselors about bullying directed at refugees
- ❖ Create mentorship programs that partner American and refugee students
- ❖ Have an after-school program that teaches all students to stand up for themselves and others and teaches self-confidence, self-respect and self-love

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## Summary

Education, language barrier, cultural adjustment, and discrimination/bullying were identified by the refugee youth as the biggest issues they face in the US.

There is a lot that can be done to support refugee youth.

- ❖ **Organize** events/programs in the community to help refugees integrate
- ❖ **Connect** youth with programs, teams, and other ways to get involved in the community
- ❖ **Teach** parents how to support their kids with these issues
- ❖ **Provide** a better picture of what American schools are like (during cultural orientation overseas and in the US)
- ❖ **Educate** teachers and counselors about refugees and their unique needs
- ❖ **Create** programs that support refugees and help with their transition

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## Questions?



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