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What Do Refugees Need Most

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Thought Paper

What Do Refugees Need Most?

TITLE

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AUTHOR

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TOPICS

Resettlement, needs, barriers, language, transportation, challenges, Reach Out Today



What Do Refugees Need Most?

Micah Stepan and Hayley Gorham

Overview: Refugees often struggle in their new country upon arrival. After fleeing their war-torn homeland and daring to survive an equally perilous journey to freedom through unknown landscapes, refugees often find that adjusting to the new country providing them shelter and safety is just as difficult as the journey it took them to get there. When refugees arrive in their new country, everything is new. Often, they arrive with just what is on their backs, and they begin a new fight for survival at the bottom of the economic food chain. In short, everything is a challenge.

About the Authors: Micah Stepan and Hayley Gorham assist at-risk youth, vulnerable children, and refugee families for *Reach Out Today*, a nonprofit organization in the United States of America in the State of Utah, where they help refugees that are resettling. Micah Stepan is the Head of the Refugee Assistance Committee and works as a real estate agent. Hayley Gorham received a B.S. in Statistics, emphasis in analytics, a minor in Business Management and a minor in Family Life from Brigham Young University. She works now as the associate director for *Reach Out Today*. More info about *Reach Out Today* at <https://www.wikicharities.org/nonprofit/USA/81-3519439>

Introduction

Refugees often struggle in their new country upon arrival. After fleeing their war-torn homeland and daring to survive an equally perilous journey to freedom through unknown landscapes, refugees often find that adjusting to the new country providing them shelter and safety is just as difficult as the journey it took them to get there. When refugees arrive in their new country, everything is new. Often, they arrive with just what is on their backs, and they begin a new fight for survival at the bottom of the economic food chain. In short, everything is a challenge.

Here is an outline of the most difficult challenges and needs refugees face as they arrive in a new land.

Language

Many refugees don't speak the common language of their host country when they arrive. Inability to communicate creates another level of difficulty in trying to navigate the proper steps they need to take to become citizens or obtain a decent job. Though many organizations provide free English classes, it can be very challenging to find the time to attend these classes due to the need to work, care for their children and even finding transportation can be difficult.

Unfortunately, the language barrier limits refugees from forming friendships often further isolating them from their new home. Finding people who are willing to practice with them and continue to teach them outside of community lessons is invaluable.

Housing

Refugees must get an apartment as soon as possible so they can establish residency to change their visa status. This is essential to receiving many of the resources out there. However, most refugees end up in apartments that are too small, in bad parts of town, and honestly are often infested with bugs. On top of that, landlords often scam and exploit refugees since their language skills make them easy prey. Having a mentor to help them navigate contracts and deposits can be essential in the quality of housing refugees and their families end up living in.



Transportation

Imagine trying to get a car when you have no money, no local identification card or driver's license too. That means your jobs are limited to what is around you, your groceries are what you can carry onto the bus, and your access to resources is limited by your ability to travel. Often refugees are intimidated by public transportation because they simply haven't been shown how it works. There is a huge need for individuals living in the same community as the refugees, to walk them through the process. By taking refugee families through the process,

their confidence grows and the world they now live in starts to expand.



Adapting

Adapting to new things can be a challenge for everyone. As was mentioned earlier, for refugees, practically everything is new. For example, refugees resettling from Afghanistan to the United States have a unique challenge with traffic laws. Learning the rules of traffic and laws is a challenging learning curve for refugees from Afghanistan as their home country doesn't abide by traffic rules and laws like the United States. For most refugees, learning the customs of the people can be a surprise as well. Some refugees feel pressure from their new community to assimilate rather than simply adapt to their new surroundings while holding onto their culture and customs. Once they arrive, the list of what they need to learn and how to do something becomes exhaustive. This could include enrolling children into school, how to use gift cards (or even what is a gift card), how to set up a bank account, how to get medical help, how to use the bus, taxi, or train and how to use a microwave. Often, refugees feel like they are floundering, trying to figure everything out, all at once, and on their own.

Of all the needs of the refugee population, the single greatest need when arriving at their new unfamiliar home is to have someone to help them. Someone from the new local community needs to be there, to care for, to teach them, and to learn about them in return. Refugees must learn a new

language, new customs, new laws, new traditions, new cooking methods and skills in order to just make enough money to cover rent for their family.

What do refugees need?

Refugees need someone to be there for them today, tomorrow and six months from now. Refugees need someone to support them and help them in their needs when they cannot do it for themselves. Refugees need a community, just like we all do.



How can you support the refugees in your community? Contact a local nonprofit organization in your community working with refugees and find out.

Note: You can start by searching on www.WikiCharities.org for trusted and validated nonprofits around the world.

