

# **Congolese and Sudanese Refugees' Experiences of Resettlement in Idaho**

*An Evaluation Report for CSI Refugee Programs  
Twin Falls, Idaho*

---

2024



# About Idaho AHEC Program Office

---

Established in 2022, the Idaho AHEC Program Office supports three Area Health Education Centers through statewide collaborations, creation of strategic partnerships, program evaluation and reporting.

Our centers join a cadre of 235 AHECs across the nation, whose members work to recruit, train and retain health professionals to work in rural and underserved communities.

Acknowledging the challenges of refugee resettlement, we support research on refugees' experiences that impact on their health. In collaboration of the College of Southern Idaho Refugee Programs, and the Master of Public Health of Idaho State University, this evaluation report will enhance the knowledge about resettlement challenges, and contribute to the development of future prevention interventions.

Report prepared by:

Juanita Triana Melo, MPH student, Idaho State University

Diana Schow, PhD

Kristin Van de Griend, PhD



# Table of contents

List of Figures	4
Executive Summary	5
Background and Significance	6
Participants	8
Thematic analysis	9
Open Coding	9
Axial Coding	9
Emergent Themes	12
Themes and Sub-themes	13
Cultural Confluence	13
Traditions and Family	13
The Local Culture	14
Power Imbalance in an Ocean of Hopes	16
Overwhelming Challenges and Low Self-agency	16
Organizations	18
Resilience and Dreams	19
Twin Falls Life	22
Pros and Cons	22
Rural and Urban	23
Refugees' Needs	24
Final Recommendations	26
References	28
Appendices	30
Appendix A. Humans Subjects Committee Letter	30
Appendix B. Interview Guide	31
Appendix C. Recruitment Poster	35



# List of Figures

Figure 1. Coding Process	9
Table 1. Axial Coding Categories	10
Figure 2. Themes and Sub-themes	12

# Executive Summary

---

This evaluation report, prepared by Idaho AHEC for the CSI Refugee Programs of Twin Falls, identifies and describes Congolese and Sudanese refugees' experiences of resettlement in Twin Falls, Idaho and how rural or urban settings may relate to those experiences. Based on these experiences, recommendations are made that may help promote refugees' physical and mental well-being.

In February 2024, the principal evaluator conducted 12 semi-structured in-person interviews with Congolese and Sudanese refugees served by the CSI Refugee Programs to explore, describe, and explain their experiences of migration and resettlement in the state. Participants were also asked to send an image that represents how they heal and move forward after resettlement.

Participants were recruited purposefully and also through the snowball method (Patton, 2002). Interviews, which varied between 30-50 minutes, were scheduled at a convenient time and location for both participants and interpreters. Interpreters were present and provided services in seven interviews (two in Swahili and five in Arabic). The other interviews were conducted by the evaluator in English. Interview recordings and field notes were stored in a password-protected folder on the principal evaluator's personal computer. Then, the interview recordings were transcribed using the password-protected transcription software Sonix, to which only the evaluator had access. No names were collected for this report, and all transcriptions were de-identified. Interviews not conducted in English were re-verified by the interpreters in cooperation with the evaluator—ensuring that the information was correctly interpreted and translated.

Transcripts were thematically analyzed using HyperResearch. The principal evaluator developed 75 initial codes, and eight subsequent axial code categories. From the analysis of these axial code categories four major themes emerged: Cultural confluence, power imbalance in an ocean of hopes, Twin Falls life, and recommendations.

This evaluation was deemed exempt from Institutional Review Board approval, as it was “determined that is an assessment and does not fall under the definition of research as defined in the Title Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46[45CFR 46]” by the Human Subjects Committee of Idaho State University (Appendix A).

# Background and Significance

---

In 2022, 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes. Of those, 35.3 million were refugees, and only 114,300 of those refugees were resettled around the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). Refugee resettlement is the process by which refugees from an asylum country go to a third country for permanent residence. The objective of the resettlement process is to assist refugees in achieving self-sufficiency and successfully integrating them into new host communities (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2003; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).

During resettlement, which is done with positive intentions, refugees can also be exposed to physical, psychological, and economic challenges that negatively impact their capacity to be independent and create meaningful connections with host communities (Garcia & Birman, 2022; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). For instance, some refugees resettled in urban and rural settings are exposed to substandard or overcrowded housing conditions, violence, and high-risk community behaviors, such as no physical activity, detrimental nutritional habits, and substance and alcohol abuse (Gilhooly and Gilhooly, 2023). In addition, refugees are exposed to language barriers, unemployment, discrimination, and a lack of professional and sociocultural opportunities. Some also face barriers to healthcare and sufficient resettlement services (Kumar-Agrawal, 2019; Bose, 2020; Ziersch, Due & Walsh, 2023; Haugen, 2019; Nunn et al., 2022).

Moreover, Bose (2020) reported that the design of some refugee programs hinders resettlement because they prioritize self-sufficiency over integration, and they conceptualize refugees as one homogenous group (Bose, 2020). This approach forefronts the need to respect the confluence of multiple cultures within refugee populations, as well as the role that diverse cultural backgrounds and previous experiences play in the resettlement process.

The state of Idaho has been receiving refugees since 1975. The Idaho Office of Refugees is the agency responsible for refugee services. Nowadays, this agency receives individuals from all over the world, and it supervises four resettlement offices. During the two last decades, 14,743 refugees have been resettled in the state (Idaho Office for Refugees, 2024a).

## Background and Significance

---

A review of grey and peer-reviewed literature revealed a gap in knowledge about how refugees experience resettlement in Idaho, especially when considering the different experiences they may have in rural, small city, and urban settings. Most of the literature about refugees' challenges of resettlement in the state focuses on Boise (Fee, 2022). Very little is known about this subject for the refugees in the Twin Falls area and those served by the CSI Refugee Programs. This could be related to the fact that 81 percent of refugees in the state are resettled in Boise, and approximately 19 percent are resettled in Twin Falls (Idaho Office for Refugees, 2024b).

Following is a description of what was learned from interviews conducted with refugees served by the CSI Refugee Program. This is presented in gratitude to the CSI Refugee Program and its service recipients, in acknowledgment of their willingness to share - even in what could be considered one of the most vulnerable of human conditions.

# Participants and Recruitment

---

Interview participants included Congolese and Sudanese individuals who self-identified as refugees or asylum seekers. They were between 18 and 80 years old and were receiving or had received services from the CSI Refugee Programs. They spoke English, Swahili, or Arabic.

For participant recruitment, the principal evaluator placed posters in English, Arabic, and Swahili at the CSI Refugee Program office. The posters requested participation in interviews and explained their purpose. They also indicated that participants would receive a \$20 gift card in appreciation of their time. The frequent presence of the principal evaluator at the CSI Refugee Programs office facilitated a highly successful and speedy recruitment of participants. This is mentioned to emphasize the importance of taking the time to build a sense of safety and rapport with participants in vulnerable circumstances.

Eligible participants were also recruited by the evaluator and two CSI Refugee Program interpreters through regular contact with individuals at the center, in one-on-one meetings, at communal events such as classes and lunch breaks, and through referrals made during the interviews. Without the strong teamwork between the evaluator and interpreters, who are trusted individuals in the refugee community and experts in ensuring the primacy of safety, these interviews would not have been as successful.

Participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in the evaluation were interviewed at locations and times that were convenient for them and the interpreters. No names were collected, and other identifiers were eliminated from this report to ensure anonymity.

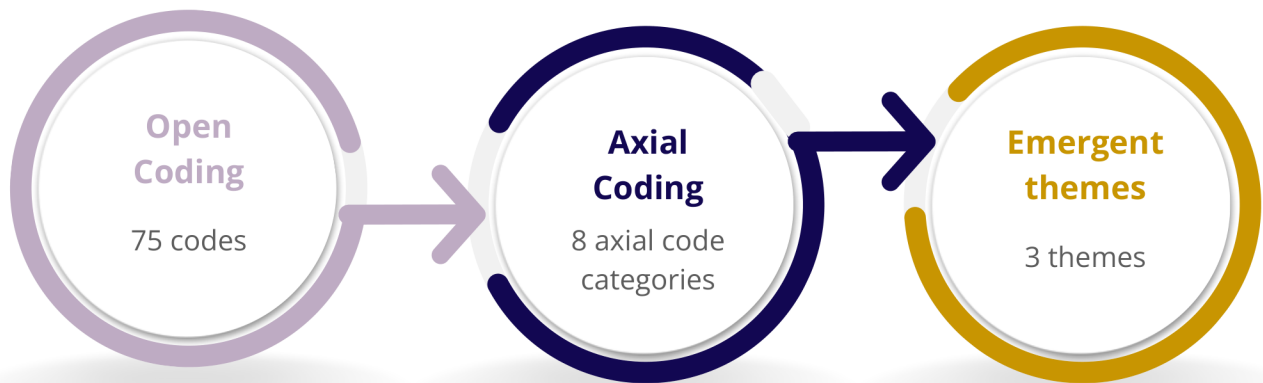


# Thematic Analysis

---

Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed to develop 75 initial open codes. Following open coding, the evaluator re-analyzed the codes and organized them under eight distinct axial code categories. These categories were re-analyzed one more time, which led to the emergence of three major themes. Based on this analysis a list of final recommendations was produced. Figure 1 represents the coding process.

Figure 1. Coding process



## Open Coding

During the open coding process, each interview and picture sent by the participants was analyzed. Analysis of interview data revealed 69 codes. Findings from field notes revealed six codes and are separately indicated and described throughout this report. Some topics that were repeatedly mentioned across participants' responses were loneliness, American culture being busy and individualistic, the cold weather in Idaho, and the lack of opportunities to make meaningful connections.

## Axial Coding

Axial code categories were created based on open codes that represented similar topics. Only open codes from the interviews (n=69) were analyzed during this stage. Some codes were included in more than one category. Table 1 is a representation of the eight code categories along with their definitions and examples that help clarify their meaning.

Table 1. Axial Coding Categories

Axial category	Definition and examples
Adaptation	<p>Changes or adjustments made to fit into the new environment, and considerations that affect or promote these adjustments (e.g. feeling welcomed in Idaho, a welcoming local community, family support).</p> <p><i>"Coming here was, it was difficult. But I know coming to a different place means new goals, new hobbies, new challenges, and new experiences"</i> int 12.</p>
Integration	<p>Aspects related to positive and negative interactions with the host community and other refugees (e.g. language barriers, lack of opportunities to interact with locals).</p> <p><i>"They don't respect people... how can I say it? They don't respect the color"</i> int 8.</p> <p><i>They've never treated me different; they treated me equally and nice"</i> int 7.</p>
Agency	<p>Feelings, opinions, and actions that reflect lack of control over their lives, and adaptive responses to that lack of control (e.g difficulties in making their own choices regarding life in Twin Falls, fears of suggesting improvements to the multiple organizations they are being served by).</p> <p><i>"Maybe...I'll be subjected to what will be given to me"</i> int 1.</p>
Organizations	<p>Positive and challenging interactions at the workplace, with healthcare providers, and CSI Refugee Programs (e.g going to medical appointments).</p> <p><i>"They help me, and they are giving me good care. They give me medication for my [disease]"</i> int 3.</p>

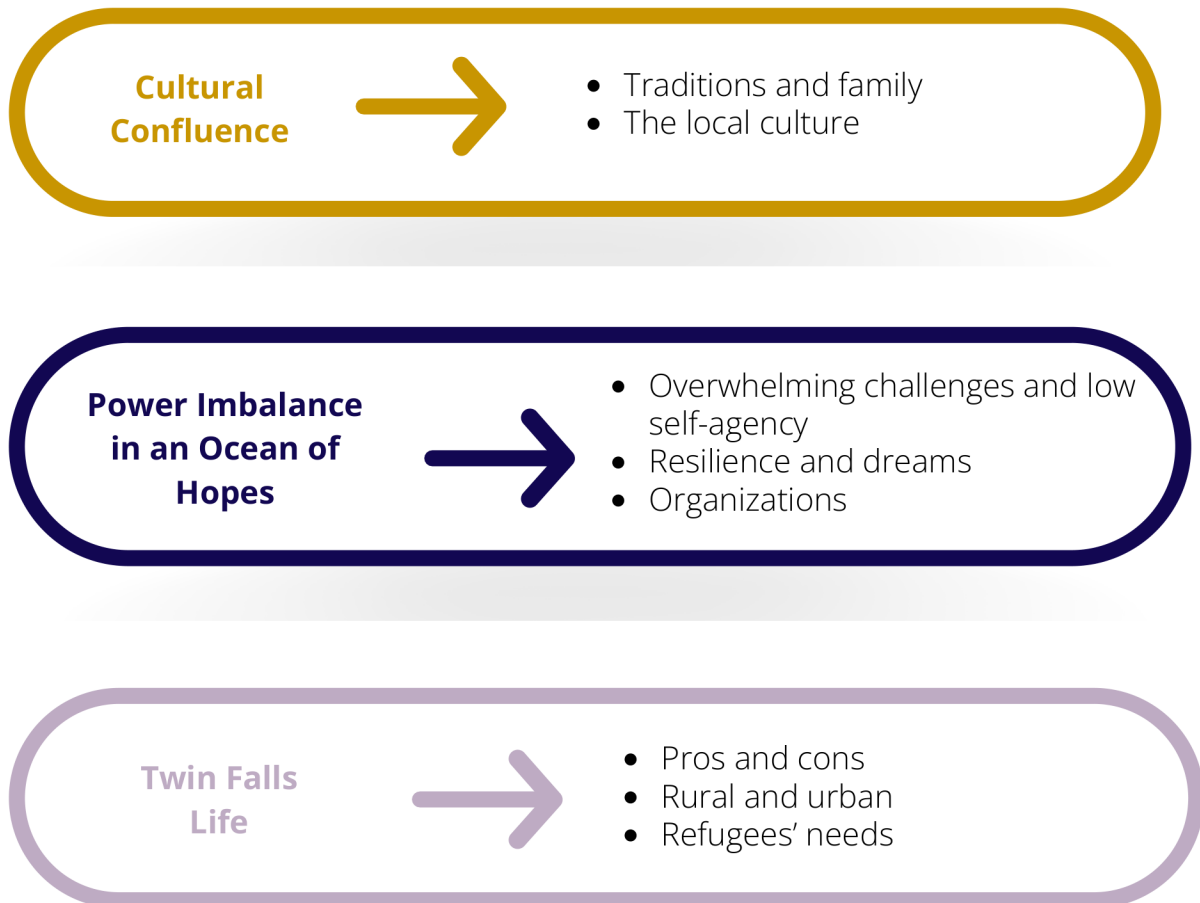
Table 1. Continued

Axial category	Definition and examples
Needs	<p>Essential needs for mental and physical well-being, whether these features are met or not (e.g basic needs such as access to food, income, housing conditions, utilities, work, and religion).</p> <p><i>"...the hardest thing was the money...it was hard for us because... the food stamps does not help to buy soap, detergent, shampoo, body cream" int 9.</i></p>
Attitudes	<p>Refugees' attitudes, which can be seen as boosters to thriving and improving (e.g positive outlooks, tools for supporting successful resettlement).</p> <p><i>"I was very happy... I was really proud of myself to see that I could wait all those years [in the refugee camp]...to be here where I am right now" int 6.</i></p>
Past	<p>Refugees' past experiences and challenges related to their country of origin (e.g refugees' life in their countries of origin, difficulties they faced, and descriptions of their journey of migration).</p> <p><i>"Over there, it was just like waking up to war or waking up to fights to hear gunshots" int 10.</i></p>
Twin Falls pros and cons	<p>Cultural, structural, and climatic aspects of Twin Falls (e.g positive and negative aspects of Twin Falls).</p> <p><i>"Twin Falls is peaceful. There is no violence, [it] is quiet, and I am loving it" int 2.</i></p>

## Emergent Themes

Following the identification of axial code categories, they were re-analyzed and three major themes were identified that represent participants' experiences and challenges of resettlement in Twin Falls. Once the analysis was complete, a list of potential recommendations for consideration by CSI Refugee Programs was developed. Figure 2 shows the themes and sub-themes that emerged from this process.

Figure 2. Themes and sub-themes



# Themes and Sub-themes

---

## Cultural Confluence

### *Traditions and Family*

Crucial aspects of refugees' adaptation in Idaho were identified. These included strong family relationships and the preservation of culinary and religious traditions:

*...even in here [the U.S.] we still go to African market. We buy food in there. So, we come and cook here int 6.*

From the field notes it was possible to identify how many of the participants' houses have traditional decorations, the scent of the origin countries, and traditional food. Even though some of the houses were more "Americanized" they preserved the scent of traditional food. Because the evaluator is from a different culture from the participants' culture, it was easy to identify new scents and aromas at the participants' houses. This exemplified the confluence of cultures existing in Idaho that were balancing newness with keeping their traditions alive.

Ninety-one percent of the participants talked about how the process of resettlement strengthened their relationship with family that either came with them or already resided in the U.S. This was mostly mentioned in reference to the initial months after arriving in the country when participants spend considerable time at home and have the opportunity to share time with family. Participants discussed how their family is a source of unconditional support:

*I love my family and my friends because they love and ...care about me int 5.*

*Back there [country of origin] we...don't sit as a family. So, this is good for us. We're just at home together int 11.*

However, there were a few descriptions of a lack of quality time with family members after they obtained a job:

*It's not like how it used to be in [origin country]. I know it's a big responsibility for my*

*kids. And it's not how it was in [origin country], because everyone is busy in their jobs, and they leave us here alone int 10.*

### *The Local Culture*

In relation to refugees' interactions with the host community, most of the participants had positive experiences with locals and other refugees. They shared how people in Idaho are nice, welcoming, and smiling. It is important to note that most interactions with locals were short and occurred at grocery stores or on the street. There were no descriptions of other public or private interactions with the host community.

*...they're nice. [I] haven't encountered any challenges with people in the community int 4.*

*...Even if they [Americans] are fighting they smile at you. Even if there is someone riding a bike or at a store, they all are smiling. They all treated us very kindly. I really want to know what they are eating because they are always happy, even if they are fighting [said in jest] int 9.*

Importantly, some refugees understood “interaction with the community” as “interaction with people at the refugee center” and not “interaction with the host community at large”. Some refugees indicated that a lack of interaction with the host community at large was a result of language barriers and lack of opportunities to do so:

*...Everything here seems [to be] very well. If I go grocery shopping there is people that has been helping me... If I don't understand, they are there explaining it [to me]. If I go through troubles or through anything, there [are] people around me that could help me out. Even if I'm sick or really needed help, there [are] people around me int 7.*

*... I really want to learn English...sometimes I know what they're saying, but I cannot reply back or know the [words] of what I want to say back to them. So, it's still challenging me a lot. I really want to communicate with others int 12.*

Despite most of the descriptions being associated with a welcoming local culture, it was possible to ascertain that there might be a lack of trust when it comes to sharing nega-

tive events. Two of the participants mentioned instances of discrimination. One participant mentioned instances of discrimination against refugee children at schools.

*They don't respect people... how can I say it? They don't respect the color int 8.*

*[In a refugee community] they said that Americans do discriminate [against] people. Black people... because they don't like black people. That's what I heard [that happens] in schools...I heard that they bully people [at] school, especially kids int 6.*

One participant perceived the value of freedom as a challenge when it is related to discriminatory behaviors:

*...Well, it's good to be free.. But not so free that you can't respect other people's cultures. ...Too much freedom...when something is too much, it becomes too bad int 4.*

In addition, isolation and loneliness were frequently mentioned by refugees who were recently resettled and also refugees who resettled years ago. Most of them identified a lack of opportunities to make meaningful social connections, even when they were English proficient.

*...And if there's a wedding or anything that we can get to know each other. Only if there is a group gathering ... I could talk to people...everyone is busy with their own life. People don't get a chance to get to know more int 7.*

*I feel like I am closer [to the family]. You know when I am with them, that feeling of looking for friend[s] it is not that much. Though I still need friends. Those who [have] already been here. So [they] teach me the modes of here, how to express in English, and the accent...That is what I want int 2.*

*...the people here... [do] not socialize enough... It is maybe because they're busy with stuff, maybe jobs, their personal stuff. So, I haven't actually made a lot of connections with people here...what I know [about] people here is that they're free...they're focused in their own thoughts. In other ways, they mind their own businesses int 4.*

### Power Imbalance in an Ocean of Hopes

#### *Overwhelming Challenges and Low Self-agency*

There were descriptions of how the change of culture and environment is overwhelming for refugees. Most of them mentioned how following new rules and understanding new systems and procedures is difficult. Participants mentioned how their family is so important during the resettlement process. However, some the participants acknowledged that once they start working they will not be able to share the same amount and quality of time with their family.

*The change is that we are very much closer [than in the country of origin]...We are close. But I hate [that] when I [will] start working it will be the same...Because when we [will] start working It will be like busy for everyone... So, I am sure the change is coming int 2.*

*But here [in the U.S.] sometimes you can't even share dinner because you[r]...schedule[s] are different. One works at night and the other at morning int 5.*

The occurrence of these overwhelming changes might be said to decrease refugees' perceptions of control over their own lives and contribute to a lack of confidence in their capabilities:

*... when I came to America, I felt a little less confident [about] myself... I had so many questions...maybe because I changed the environment, maybe because I don't know a lot of people here, maybe because it's a new culture, a whole new culture for me to learn from scratch. So that lowered my confidence... int 4.*

*...That is the only job I can do... int 3.*

This low self-agency was also related to a power imbalance that starts when the refugees begin their migration journeys. Refugees discussed a history of rejection and suffering through multiple checkpoints to determine if they were eligible to be resettled in the U.S. For some of the participants, this process took decades, for other years. Many leave families behind in refugee camps or war, and many grow up and grow old in precarious housing and living conditions. The experiences of these challenges came across as a dehumanization of refugees and a relegation of their personhood to mere numbers. Three participants shared details about their journey of migration:



## Themes and Sub-themes

---

*[the process of migration] it was too long because you need to pass, to be accepted and to pass all procedures. They have steps, steps, steps. And [we are here] by grace, let me say just by grace, because we [were] interviewed many times... You can fail, and your application can be not approved. But by the grace of God, our application was approved by the government of the US...int 1.*

*...after being [at the refugee camp] for [many] years. It was a very long process... we [were] provided with a lot of things like food, just how they treat refugees...And so we lived there. Then... we were called and they told us that we are in process of coming here [to] America. So of course, it was still a long process because we had to go through checkups... they interview you, they want to know about your life ... then they get a picture of you. Fingerprints...after that...we went to a hospital...they just did exams on us, like to see if we have any kind of sicknesses... int 6.*

*...[I have a child in the refugee camp], as much as we try, we found no way to bring her here...the process has been not easy. Each time I go, there's something missing int 10.*

Furthermore, there is a power imbalance created by the organizations and policies that help refugees at all points along the continuum of the resettlement process. This imbalance comes into existence because refugees are reliant upon helping organizations for their basic needs. They are not in a position to meet their basic needs any other way. By the time refugees reach their resettlement communities, there is already a sense of low efficacy and agency. This dynamic affects refugees' perceptions of having control over themselves, as well as their confidence to pursue education and better work opportunities.

This power imbalance was exemplified by a participant who spent an inordinate amount of time describing his reasons for not providing feedback about the services he received from organizations in Idaho.

*... When you reach some place and you find new... people, you have different levels [of] thinking, [and]even in doing things. There are some things which maybe I can [say]... " What [are] they are doing?" ...Maybe if [it] was me, maybe I would do this [or that]. But for now, I can't say anything because I'm just watching. As time...goes. If I can maybe be given the opportunity to have something to say, I can maybe correct some people. For example, "Why are you allowing this thing?" But right now, I can't say anything. I'm still under their condition, looking at what they do int 1.*

### *Organizations*

Participants described their main interactions with organizations, such as the CSI Refugee Programs, healthcare facilities, and religious institutions. Most of the participants described healthcare in the U.S. as good. Some of them explained that they had access to medical technology and good health professionals in Idaho. Some participants described language barriers when communicating with providers. None of the participants reported negative experiences related to payment of medical bills or prescriptions. Only one of the participants mentioned the high price of healthcare outside Medicaid support.

*...Even if I go to a doctor and I have something, they would help me. They have a sense of care. The doctor would ask me what [I] have and what [I] don't have int 10.*

*The...doctors are doing their jobs. It is really good. If I have a headache or if I have a problem with my body they will examine [me]. If I'm sick, even if I'm not sick... the[y] are going to make a lot of appointments to test, and make sure I'm all right. If [I am] not sick, they will still check on [me] and make sure [I am] doing okay int 7.*

There were some mentions of differences in cultural perceptions of health, disease, and treatment between participants and providers. However, the interviews were not developed to delve deeper into this matter:

*[The doctors], they treat me really well... They prescribe a medicine, but that medicine does not work ...There is this specific medicine that [I] want, I have it in [country of origin], and it is not in here... So, it is very hard for me to explain the doctor what I really want because of my English int 9.*

*...because of these diseases, they told me to don't eat some food. But I still eat them. Whatever I like, I eat... int 3.*

Regarding the CSI Refugee Programs, all participants considered them helpful and important for resettlement and integration with the community. Participants expressed gratitude for the center services, English classes, and general support. Three participants suggested it might help to work on improving communication between personnel of the center and those they serve, especially when those they serve are not English proficient.

*...it is nice for them [the refugee center] to be doing this for those who are coming in. Teaching them the rules, the causes of here, most the language, how to get jobs, how to settle... int 2.*

*I just really thank them because they welcomed us here, and they really helped us. And if there is a thing that we didn't understand, they would tell us in a way that we understand. If there's a question that we needed clarification on, they would clarify it. And if there is something that I needed and they don't have it, they would assist us on where to find it, how to get it or where to ask for it int 7.*

*I don't [know] If can say that they change anything because what they did to me was awesome...I hope they can continue doing that for other people as well int 5.*

*...I have something in my heart that I want to say and explain to them, but I don't have English to explain it to them. I wanted to talk to a [staff of the center]...and because I don't know English, sometimes I ask someone else, "Can you go talk to this [person], help me with my problem?" and sometimes that person does not word it how I wanted, or forgets to tell the [staff] about my problem int 9.*

### *Resilience and Dreams*

Despite perceived low self-agency, most of the participants shared optimism, examples of resilience, and dreams for the future. For both cultures, Sudanese and Congolese, there were many descriptions of positive feelings. These included being thankful for the opportunities they have, readiness to work, readiness to talk with people, and dreams of success and study in the U.S.

Regarding hopes, and with the express intention of supporting the raising of hopeful consciousness, participants were asked to take a picture of something that represents hope or moving forward. Following is what was shared:

## Themes and Sub-themes

---



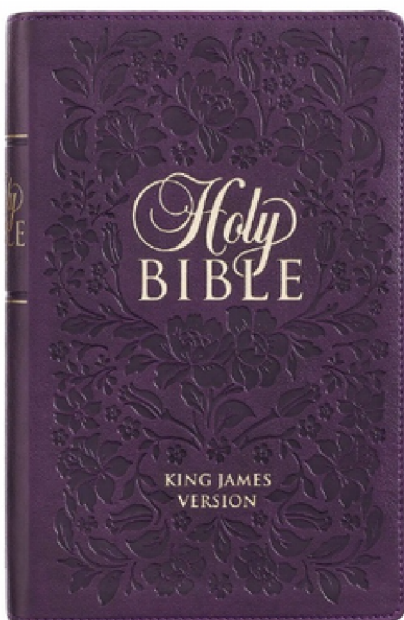
## Themes and Sub-themes

---



*"The sky means freedom and vastness to me. It means no limitations put on me and countless possibilities".*

Participants also sent images that were retrieved from Google hope:



*I am hoping, if God help me, to have my own job, I don't want to work for anybody. Just for myself... int 5.*

*...We don't have a problem. We're going to get over it and get used to it int 7.*

*...[the] human being always has hopes and dreams. If there is no hope there is no life. And this is our life. So that's how we live it int 10.*

*The journey was a little difficult but thank God that we made it here int 11.*

*I want to become independent. I want to work and then build who I am...rent a house and buy furniture in it, and then bring my [family] here...work to build a future for my [family] int 12.*

*So now I'm here. Of course, I am still planning a lot of things because I want to succeed in life. It's just one door that has opened in my life, and it's a very big opportunity for me to come here, and I don't want to take this opportunity for granted. I'll work hard and harder for me to be someone int 6.*

## Twin Falls Life

### *Pros and Cons*

Overall, participants had a good perception of life in Twin Falls. Most of the participants found Twin Falls to be a peaceful, quiet, safe, and beautiful place to live:

*I don't see anything to change here int 5.*

*...we like [it] here. People are good here int 11.*

*I like that [here] it's a very quiet place, and it's a safe place. There's not a lot of crime, and everyone is minding their own business int 12.*

Ten of 12 participants talked about life in the U.S. being “busy [translated term].” Busyness stood as an obstacle to making meaningful social connections and sharing family time together. There were also descriptions of a wish to be busy, especially in the initial months after resettlement.

*It looks like people are busy. Like everybody is busy* int 6.

*I haven't made that many friends here, but the ones I have, sometimes they're working or they're busy with things, with life...* int 12.

*It [is] not difficult to find friends, [it] is that everyone is busy...I am not busy; the other people is busy. They are 90% busy, so [it] is difficult to be in their life* int 7.

Even though many spoke highly of Idaho and the refugee center, there were some negative aspects that were frequently mentioned. These included the cold weather, not seeing people walking in the communities (only using their cars), and a lack of opportunities for social interactions:

*It is just too cold here. If I could, I would change the weather here* int 3.

*Yeah, there is only cars, [it is] like abandoned. You know, [there is] no people around. That is why I think they are scared to walk. So, I spend most of my time in the house...* int 2.

### *Rural and Urban*

Half of the participants came from a self-described urban background. The other participants reported coming from a small-town or rural areas. Regardless of their background (rural/urban), participants did not describe challenges related to living in a micropolitan area (Twin Falls). There were descriptions of differences between living in Twin Falls and origin countries, but none were framed as challenges. In addition, participants discussed happiness with the resettlement setting because of the availability of resources.

*...where I came from, [at] 5 am people already starting moving, maybe hearing voices, people will be going to work...we don't use cars mostly, we don't have car[s]; like not everyone has a car, so at 5 am you start hearing people passing, talking... [The quietness is] what I was not expecting [when I came] here ...* int 2.

*In [country of origin] the place is loud. When we came here, it was very quiet, no noises, nothing. You're just in a quiet place* int 11.

## Themes and Sub-themes

---

*...we have access to adequate food in the family, access to clean and safe water. Also, the kids have access to better education than what they had... int 4.*

*...In Idaho I feel like we are a little bit different [compared] to where I come from. In Idaho you can find everything and go to work and earn your money, you can eat well... int 5.*

Though rurality was not expressly discussed, it was possible to identify how the individualist mindset of rural Idaho was perceived as a challenge when it came to socializing and interacting with people. It is important to consider how Idaho's culture of rugged individualism interfaces with more collectivist-oriented cultures:

*...Everyone is living their life, and everyone is in their own business. They are living their life the way they want to, so why [couldn't] you just live it how you wanted to live it?! int 7.*

*Back at home, when I rented a house or bought a house everyone, neighbors. A lot of them. They just come and say, "Welcome back!" [They] bring gifts and everything. And it's very surprising in here. Even if you're moving a couch, nobody looks at you. It's very surprising for me int 10.*

### *Refugees' Needs*

Participants described living in good conditions and mostly getting their needs met. Most of the refugees who were recently resettled had organizational support to pay utilities, food, and health insurance. The ones that were already working did not have the same support and had to assume most of their own expenses. Some mentioned economic difficulties as they transitioned into being self-supporting:

*So, it was very difficult for us, and money was a big difficult part before I worked. So, I am trying my best. I work and support my family int 9.*

*Even if the money is [there, it is] not enough...I can pay my rent and electricity. I have food stamps int 3.*

In relation to transportation, participants described transportation issues when grocery shopping, going to church, and engaging in leisure activities. Regarding obtaining employment, very few participants reported problems finding a job because of a lack of



## Themes and Sub-themes

---

documentation, academic background, and health problems. Some of the participants who were currently working reported being used to working hard and wishing for better shifts. But they also reported not having any issues with their jobs:

*All jobs in America [are] hard, but I was just trying my best int 5.*

*Since I started there [at a job] I haven't seen anything bad or, there's nothing that I don't like in there. Ever since I started working there, they have been treating me right. They have been teaching me the way to do the job right. Every time, if I found a difficulty, they would show me the way to [do] it. If you get in trouble they would get a translator to show you what you did wrong int 7.*

*Because I don't have a car it is very difficult for me to go. Whenever there is a neighbor here that lives close, he takes us. Sometimes he comes, and sometimes not int 9.*

Finally, there were some discussions about the need for an African church with worship services in the participants' language. Despite this, most of the participants continue attending religious events without regard for language, cultural, or transportation barriers.

*I was expecting maybe to find a Congolese church here, but since I did not find one, for now I am going to [church]. I am mostly with the Christians, which is good int 2.*

*Yeah, I wish we have a Swahili church, because I don't understand English int 5.*

# Final Recommendations

---

The purpose of this report is to identify and describe refugees' experiences of resettlement in Twin Falls, Idaho and to develop recommendations to promote their physical and mental well-being.

From the thematic analysis, the following suggestions may be helpful:

**1.** Continue developing opportunities for refugees to interact with the community, such as the refugee day celebration, among others. In addition, create opportunities where refugees can regularly interact with the local community. Participants reported few interactions with the local community and were excited about meeting people from other cultures and different backgrounds.

**2.** Involve refugees in activities where they can help the local community. Participants that are recently resettled can volunteer in many ways. Some described a lack of activity. Engaging in volunteerism may build good will and trust with the community while simultaneously allowing refugees to explore interests and work opportunities.

**3.** Promote and share positive representations of individuals with refugee backgrounds who have contributed to the community and have helped its individuals thrive. This may help reduce bias.

**4.** Develop more activities to help refugees further their education, whether that be finishing high school or pursuing advanced degrees. Young participants repeatedly mentioned their interest in connecting with, learning more about, and preparing for educational opportunities.

**5.** Encourage and promote the creation of groups of refugees who want to develop small businesses or increase their income through informal jobs (e.g. cottage industries). Many participants mentioned having skills in diverse fields that they would like to explore more, such as cooking, sewing, construction, decoration, landscaping, among others. Allowing the formation of groups where they can still practice or learn these skills and network, could contribute to increasing their income.

**6.** Create safe spaces for refugees to provide feedback about CSI's services and personnel without being identified or judged. Participants were cautious about how they provided feedback.

## Final Recommendations

---

**7.** Promote and provide a space for non-English proficient refugees to express their concerns while they interact with program staff. Develop an organized protocol, that always includes translators, which ensures refugees are able to accurately share their needs or concerns.

**8.** Continue providing the classes offered by the center. All participants mentioned and recognized the good job of the CSI Refugee Programs to teach them English and the culture of Idaho. Participants found the classes very helpful and did not suggest any changes.

**9.** Include in formal communications empathic statements that acknowledge and give validation to the overwhelming challenges and changes that refugees face during the resettlement process. For example, during intake CSI might consider sharing that the resettlement process will involve shifts in life and lifestyles. These shifts may include changes in family dynamics once refugees start working. It is important to provide spaces where refugees are told about those changes and feel free to share their feelings when these things come up.

**10.** Partner with continuing education institutions and schools to teach school personnel about how to work with refugee students and their families. One of the participants described discrimination at schools.

**11.** Increase and promote research about how Idaho's culture of rugged individualism may support or impede successful resettlement. Words such as "being busy" and "minding their own business" were frequently mentioned among the interviews. Considering that Congolese culture can be described as "collectivist", it is important to explore how the self-reliant perspective impacts refugees' experiences of resettlement.

**12.** When conducting further evaluations about discrimination against refugees, family relationships and job environment consider the need of developing more trust with participants to ensure there is not reticence to talk about these topics.

**13.** Offer transportation options to attend to religious meetings. Part of refugees' adaptation and integration with the host community occurs at religious settings. Facilitating participants attendance to these events may contribute to fulfilling their spiritual needs and promoting positive integration.

# References

---

- Bose, P. (2020). *Refugees in New Destinations and Small Cities*. Springer Nature.
- Colic-Peisker, V. and Tilbury, F. (2003). "Active" and "passive" resettlement: The influence of support services and refugees' own resources on resettlement style. *International Migration*, 4. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/18870824.pdf> (Accessed: 26 July 2023).
- Fee, M. (2022). *Resettled but displaced: Refugee incorporation in San Diego, California and Boise, Idaho* [University of California]. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4n91w8vj>
- Garcia, M. F., & Birman, D. (2022). Understanding the migration experience of unaccompanied youth: A review of the literature. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 92(1), 79–102. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000588>
- Gilhooly, D. and Gilhooly, M. (2023) 'Finding the familiar in rural America: How a rural lifestyle helps older Karen adapt to life in the United States', *Anthropology & Aging*, 44(1), pp. 1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5195/aa.2023.399>.
- Haugen, S. (2019). "We feel like we're home": The resettlement and integration of Syrian refugees in smaller and rural Canadian communities. *Refuge*, 35(2), pp. 53–63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064819ar>.
- Idaho Office for Refugees. (2024a). *About refugees in Idaho*. Idaho Office for Refugees. <https://www.idahorefugees.org/resettlement-in-idaho.html>
- Idaho Office for Refugees. (2024b). *Creating welcoming communities that thrive together*. Idaho Office for Refugees. <https://www.idahorefugees.org/>
- Kumar Agrawal, S. (2019). Canadian refugee sponsorship programs: Experience of Syrian refugees in Alberta, Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(4), pp. 941–962. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0640-7>.
- Nunn, C., Wilding, R., McKinnon, K., Ku, H.G., Myint, G.P.S. La, Taveesupmai, P., O'Keefe, M. and Graves, K. (2022). Promoting healthy futures in a rural refugee resettlement location: A community-based participatory research intervention, *Journal of Sociology*, 58(2), pp. 178–195. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833211003204>.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Designing qualitative Studies*. In M. Patton (3rd ed), *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (pp. 209-257). Sage Publications
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2022). *Mid-Year Trends 2022*. Copenhagen. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/635a578f4/mid-year-trends-2022> (Accessed: 7 April 2023).

## References

---

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023). *Global Trends Report 2022*.

Copenhagen. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

Ziersch, A., Due, C. and Walsh, M. (2023). Housing in place: Housing, neighborhood and resettlement for people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds in Australia.

*Journal of international migration and integration*, pp. 1–24. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-023-01008-w>.

# Appendices

## Appendix A. Human Subjects Committee Letter



November 27, 2023

Ms. Juanita Pilar Triana Melo  
Community & Public Health  
921 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Stop 8109  
Pocatello, ID 83209

Dear Ms. Pilar Triana Melo,

After speaking with you about your study, Congolese and Sudanese refugees' experiences of resettlement in Idaho: A phenomenological study, I have determined that is an assessment and does not fall under the definition of research as defined in Title Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46[45CFR 46].

*Research* is defined as:

Federal research regulations and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA) define research as "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge." The first of these two elements—the use of a systematic investigation—may be a characteristic of both research and non-research projects. Public health practice, quality assessment (QA) and quality improvement (QI) programs, resource utilization reviews, and outcome analyses are examples of non-research activities that frequently use statistical and other scientific methods to collect and analyze data in a manner that is identical to research studies... The primary goal of the activity must be to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge to be called research.

A list of activities that are not research is: Quality Assessment, Quality Assurance, Case Report or Case Series, Needs Assessment, Medical Practice and Innovative Therapy, Medical Practice for the Benefit of Others, Public Health Practice, Outcome Analysis, Resource Utilization Review, and Education.

Your proposed study is not subject to review by the Human Subjects Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ralph Baergen'.

Ralph Baergen, PhD, CIP, MPH  
Chair, Human Subjects Committee

## Appendix B. Interview Guide

Hello, my name is [principal evaluator's name], I am a student of Public Health at Idaho State University. I am here with [interpreter's name]. She works as an interpreter at the CSI Refugee Programs, and she is also working on this project. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The objective of this interview is to understand your experiences and relationships in the United States and in Idaho. The interview will take about 60 minutes. There is no wrong or right answers. Feel free to let me know if you don't understand a question. I can clarify it.

Remember that you don't have to answer anything you don't want to answer, and that you can stop the interview at any time. Also, remember that if you tell us you tell us about immediate harm to yourself or others, or if the interviewer has a reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 years or a vulnerable adult or is being abused, abandoned, exploited, or neglected, the interviewer must report it to the child/adult protection services and the CSI Refugee Programs Director.

Examples of things that the interviewer will report are:

- A suicide plan.
- If you say that you are withholding food from your kids.
- A situation in which an elder person or a person with a mental concern is being abused or taken advantage of.
- If you say you are intentionally harming your children in any way.

Examples of things that the interviewer will not report:

- If you are consuming illicit substances or drugs.
- If you are experiencing financial difficulties.
- If someone is treating you or your family badly.
- If you tell me that you are feeling sad, stressed, anxious, angry.
- If you are worried about your health, your mental health, or your situation in the U.S.
- If something with the CSI Refugee Programs is not working well.
- If someone at the CSI Refugee Programs is treating you badly.

Before we start the interview, I would like to remind you that:

- Your participation on this evaluation is voluntary.
- Your participation in the evaluation will not affect the services that you receive from the CSI Refugee Programs
- Your confidentiality as a participant in this evaluation will remain secure to the best of our abilities.

## Appendix B. Interview Guide

---

May I start recording?

Demographic variables:

Participant number:

Sex: Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_

Age:

Country of origin:

- Rural (<10,000) \_\_\_ Micropolitan (10,000-49,999) \_\_\_. Metropolitan (>50,000) \_\_\_

Time living in Idaho:

Job:

Level of education:

Current studying?

Where do you live: (in twin falls, outside):

House: Rent \_\_\_ Owner \_\_\_

How many people live in the house?

At your house in Idaho, do you have: Gas \_\_\_ Energy \_\_\_ Water \_\_\_ Heating \_\_\_ A/C \_\_\_

Do you have a car:

Status: Refugee \_\_\_ Asylum seeker \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Civil status: Married \_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_ In a relationship \_\_\_ Single \_\_\_

Do you have kids?

How many kids do you have?

Let's chat about your experience of coming to the United States –

- How has been your experience of migration to the United States?

- What are some things that you like about living here?

- What are some things that you would change?

PROMPTS:

- How are you doing in the United States?

- If you could describe a place you would like to live in the United States, how would it be? How does this place look like?

Now let's talk about relationships. I'd like to learn more about your relationships with people in this community, people at work, people in organizations that you work with (e.g. doctors, nurses), people in your home and friends. In particular, I would like to know about things that go well and things that are hard.



## Appendix B. Interview Guide

---

Let's start with organizations (healthcare professionals, refugee agencies, teachers, churches).

- What are some organizations that you work or interact with? What works well? What is challenging or difficult?

PROMPTS:

- Can you give me an example?
- Tell me about your experiences when obtaining care from those organizations.
- What would you like to change about those organizations?
- What makes you feel comfortable to seek for care from those organizations?

Now we'll move to your job.

- Tell me about the people at work. What works well? What is challenging or difficult?

PROMPTS

- Can you give me an example?
- How was the experience of getting a job in Idaho?
- Are there any specific reasons why you are not currently working?

Now we'll move to the community.

- Tell me about the people in the community. What works well? What is challenging or difficult?

PROMPTS

- Can you give me an example?
- How do you feel when interacting with the new community?
- What have surprised you about the culture in Idaho?

Finally, let's talk about something a bit more private, family and friends.

- Can you tell me more about your family and friends here in Idaho? What works well? What is challenging or difficult?

PROMPTS

- Can you give me an example?
- How is your relationship with your family/friends/couple?
- In what ways do you think that your relationship with your family or friends has changed since living in Idaho?

Now we are going to talk about your dreams and hobbies.

- What would you like to do now? What are your dreams?

## Appendix B. Interview Guide

---

- What do you like about living in Idaho? What activities you like to do in Idaho?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you feel we've missed/not covered, or do you have any questions for me?

Finally, I would like to ask you to please take a picture with your phone that shows things that make you feel better, and happy in Idaho. This picture can't have faces, addresses, names, or information that people can use to identify you, or someone else. Once you have the picture, please send it to me.

Thank you!

## Appendix C. Recruitment Poster



**Are you from Sudan or the Congo ?**  
**Are you 18 years of age or older?**

***Please help the CSI Refugee Center improve its services!  
Share what your relationships are like as a refugee in Idaho!***

- If eligible, take part in a 45-60 minute interview
- The interview will be confidential and is voluntary.
- Your participation will not affect any services that you receive from the CSI Refugee Center
- Interested? Send a text message to [REDACTED] or an email to [REDACTED] for more information.
- Receive a \$20 gift card for participating

Remember: text and email are not secure forms of communication



