

# Chapter 20

## Educating Refugees: The Role of Non-Profit Organizations

**Pauline M. Wambua**  
Michigan State University, USA

### ABSTRACT

*Unlike other migrants, refugees face unique challenges that prevent them from realizing their full potential in schools. Therefore, integrating refugees in the host country requires strong support mechanisms some of which are provided non-profit organizations. Refugee support initiatives may provide educational reinforcement and valuable support to help refugees foster positive education outcomes. This chapter examined how programs offered by non-profit organizations that support refugees in one of the Midwestern states in the U.S. reduce barriers to refugee students' high education outcomes. The results indicate that, through collaboration, non-profit organizations provide a wide range of refugee support services such as enrolling kids in school, support to students with disabilities, and a variety of after-school and summer programs. These services help refugee students, manage their traumatic experiences, integrate into schools, to be self-sufficient, and provide a safe learning space thereby cushioning them against barriers that limit their success in school.*

### INTRODUCTION

As of 2015, the American Immigration Council estimates about 43.3 million foreign-born individuals resided in the United States (American Immigration Council, 2017). These include voluntary immigrant families seeking better economic conditions, and refugees fleeing war and/or other atrocities. People who voluntarily migrate see migration as an investment and a path to better opportunities (Tani, 2017), which is not the same for refugees. Regardless of their socio-economic status, refugee often start at a position of social disadvantage and they face unique challenges that prevent them from realizing their full potential in schools. For instance, they may lack preparation for basics of elementary education, face challenges in learning English, challenges in balancing differing value systems of home and school, and may lack the needed support in bridging dual cultures (Rong & Brown, 2002; Hall et al. 2017). Therefore, integrating refugees in the host country requires strong support mechanisms some of which are provided

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8283-0.ch020

non-profit organizations in the host country. The non-profit organizations provide an array of services for refugees and other vulnerable people such as food, water, shelter, legal advice, education, and healthcare.

Much of the work in the United States has been done to examine the challenges for immigrant and refugee youth in formal school programs (Morse, 2005; Rotich, 2011) and how schools can address the needs of immigrant and refugees (Birman, Trickett & Bacchuss, 2001). However, other immigrants don't face similar challenges as refugees. Immigrants choose to reside in a different country on a voluntary basis and have had time to think about their choice (Cowart & Cowart, 1993, 2002 as cited by McBrien, 2005). They often arrive after years of preparation, such as locating housing, securing jobs, and already have become somewhat familiar with the language of the host country (Dijkshoorn, 2016). Refugees, on the other hand, are forced to leave their country because of violent circumstances and poor living conditions. Moreover, post-migration experiences, like their resettlement in the United States, can be a negative experience. Many refugees are poor and have few possessions, and have to deal with long resettlement procedures (Dijkshoorn, 2016).

In spite of the enormous challenges that refugees face, the responsibility to help the refugee students succeed most of the times is left to the individual schools. It's hard for a school to effectively address these issues on its own; this is where the community support becomes the bridge in helping refugee students overcome barriers to the full realization of their schooling potential. Refugee support initiatives may provide educational reinforcement and valuable support to help refugees foster positive education outcomes. It's also important to add on these studies by examining the different support mechanisms provided by non-profit organizations towards educating refugee children. Specifically, this study investigated how programs offered by non-profit organizations that support refugees reduce barriers to refugee students' high education outcomes. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What kind of support do non-profit organizations provide to refugee students?
2. What do program staff believe helps improve students' education outcomes?
3. To what extent are refugee students' parents and guardians involved?
4. What challenges do the organizations face in providing these services?

## **BACKGROUND**

In this section I define some terms used in this study, provide the international frameworks that serve as normative legal instruments for refugee protection, and briefly review the challenges faced by refugees and the support mechanisms to help them overcome the barriers.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Non-Profit Organization**

A non-profit organization is a group organized for purposes other than generating profit and in which no part of the organization's income is distributed to its members, directors, or officers (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). Non-profit organizations that provide refugee support services are also known as Voluntary Organizations or Resettlement agencies. According to the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement website, there are nine resettlement agencies in the United States that resettle refugees

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