

THE TUCSON REFUGEE EXPERIENCE:  
A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE TUCSON INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

By

LILY KEANE CHAVEZ

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Approved by:

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Dr. Thomas P. Miller  
Department of English

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	4
Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Current State of Affairs .....	10
<b>I. Refugees in the United States.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>II. Refugees in Tucson, AZ.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>III. Services Available during Resettlement .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Successful Programming .....	18
<b>I. Safe House.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>II. Economic Independence .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>III. Education .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>IV. Advocacy and Research.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>V. Case Management .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>VI. Community Outreach.....</b>	<b>24</b>
Methodology .....	26
Findings .....	29
<b>I. Participant Observations.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>II. Gender Committee Assessment.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>III. Interviews .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Conclusion .....	44
References.....	47

## List of Abbreviations

DES – Department of Economic Security

DOS – Department of State

DV – Domestic Violence

ESL – English as a Second Language

FY – Fiscal Year

GEP – Girl’s Empowerment Project

ICM – Intensive Case Management

IRC – International Rescue Committee

MPI – Migration Policy Institute

MG – Matching Grant

ORR – Office of Refugee Resettlement

SGBV – Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

SHE – Stand for Her Empowerment

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## List of Tables

Table 1: Refugee Arrivals by Year in the United States ..... 11

Table 2: Labor Force Status for Working-Age Refugees and US Individuals, 2017 Survey ..... 15

Table 3: Working-Aged Refugees’ Reasons for Not Seeking Employment, 2017 Survey ..... 17

Table 4: The Gender Continuum ..... 38

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## Abstract

In crisis zones, women and girls face discrimination, sexism, gender-based violence, and a lack of equal opportunity that threatens their lives and robs them of their potential at a much higher rate than men. Unfortunately, several of the hardships they yearn to leave behind follow them all the way through to their final country of resettlement. When the United States agrees to accept a refugee for resettlement, they must ensure all individuals have the same opportunity to resettle successfully – regardless of their gender or social status. Through various data collection methods, this report provides the Tucson-based International Rescue Committee (IRC) with suggestions on how to better serve their female-identifying clients through gender-transformative programming. In particular, it identifies the key issues and concerns female refugees face in reaching self-sufficiency in the Tucson community. Both the existing literature and findings from this study highlight the heightened need for resettlement agencies across the nation to implement effective programming directed towards the distinctive experiences of women and girls.

## Introduction

As the number of wars, human rights violations, and unbearable climate and environmental crises continue to rise across the globe, the number of displaced persons seeking refuge in a country other than their own has jumped to an all-time high. Today, approximately 70.8 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide – with 3.5 million asylum-seekers, 25.9 million refugees and 41.3 million internally displaced (UNHCR, 2018).

Furthermore, millions of people are considered stateless which denies their basic human right to education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. Over the past few decades, several international organizations have been working in tandem with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide basic necessities to these displaced peoples in crisis zones and refugee camps. Established in countries granting initial asylum, these camps are temporary until permanent solutions are found.

After spending months or even years in exile, individuals who are granted refugee status have three options to explore when seeking permanent resettlement: voluntary repatriation, local integration and third-country resettlement. Whether individuals are fleeing war-torn Syria or rural Guatemala, the first goal is always to try and return them to their country of origin. When this is not feasible, the second option of local integration is explored where the refugee gains status in the initial country of asylum. When all other options fail, permanent resettlement in a third country is sought out in one of the top 10 refugee admitting countries. According to UNHCR, only about one percent of all refugees see that third option to the end (2017). In more recent years, this percentage has only plummeted because the majority of these developed nations have done everything in their power to slash admittance numbers. In

particular, the United States has slashed its refugee admittance to the lowest rate ever recorded in history. From 135,000 in 1992 to 18,000 in 2020, the Trump Administration has diminished the United States' historic role in accepting refugees who flee extremely horrific situations. This decision undoubtedly effects the nine non-governmental resettlement agencies scattered across the nation.

From this profound decline in arrivals, resettlement agencies are faced with two main issues: uncertainty of future program planning and grant funding. It is fairly difficult for these organizations to develop effective long-term program assessments if the number of arrivals continues to drop or fluctuate. Secondly, these organizations are less likely to attain grants from social service agencies such as the Department of Economic Security (DES) when they have fewer clients. Fewer clients means fewer funding opportunities for current and future refugees. These difficulties lead to insufficient coordination of services, which then result in essential needs going unmet. As outlined in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, signatory states must provide these individuals with the opportunity to rebuild their lives and enjoy basic human rights: the rights not to be returned, discriminated against in the grant of protection, penalized for unlawful entry into the country of asylum; the right to minimum, acceptable conditions of stay, which include freedom of movement, religion and property ownership; and the right to education, gainful employment, access to public relief, and health assistance (UNHCR, 2017). As a signatory to the convention, the United States is legally bound to its articles and must guarantee these rights. When these essential services and rights are not guaranteed, these individuals face much difficulty resettling successfully and reaching self-sufficiency in their new host community.

Although these issues create extreme difficulty for all refugees, women and girls face additional barriers due to their gender and social status – barriers that do not start here. In crisis zones, women and girls face discrimination, sexism, gender-based violence, and a lack of equal opportunity that threaten their lives and rob them of their potential at a much higher rate than men. Unfortunately, several of the hardship's women yearn to leave behind follow them all the way through to their final country of resettlement. Whether that be escaping domestic violence, learning how to speak English upon arrival, or finding gainful employment and sustainable childcare, women face double challenge in their efforts to become self-sufficient. Although resettlement agencies across the United States do recognize and attempt to address these challenges, much more work needs to be done.

Established in over 40 countries and 25 US cities, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is one of nine major resettlement agencies working tirelessly across the nation to help ensure their clients build a better life for themselves. In 2018, the IRC helped more than 10,000 refugees and special immigrant visa recipients resettle in the United States. To accomplish this, they've developed 5 key areas of focus: economic wellbeing, education, empowerment, health and safety. Depending on the location, each office may address these focus areas a bit differently. In the state of Arizona, two IRC sites exist – one in Phoenix and the other in Tucson. At the Tucson office, they offer five different programs to their clients: resettlement, economic empowerment, community integration and development, protection, and health and wellness (IRC 2020). Although each program strives to meet the needs of all their clients, refugee women and girls face a number of challenges in becoming self-sufficient in the Tucson community.



To address these concerns in this report, I will conduct a gender analysis on the Tucson-based International Rescue Committee. In particular, I will outline the key issues and concerns refugee women and girls face and the ways the Tucson IRC's current resettlement procedures attempt to address those concerns. I will also briefly touch upon how women and girls' living and working experiences differ according to when they arrived in the United States and the Tucson community. This cross-sectional study was carried out between November 2019 and March of 2020. Through various data-collection methods, I will strive in this report to provide the Tucson IRC with suggestions on how to better serve the needs of their female-identifying clients. I will draw on the existing literature and my interviews to highlight the heightened need for resettlement agencies across the nation to implement effective programs directed towards the distinctive experiences of women and girls.

With adequate support and investment, women and girls can change their own future and uplift entire communities (Kabir, 2019). In this report, I will review the current state of affairs to depict the mechanics of refugee resettlement in the US in general and in Tucson, Arizona more specifically. I will describe the services available to refugees, their limited ability to assist women and girls in particular, and the need for gender-transformative programming to actively address harmful gender roles, norms and relations. Secondly, I will review related research to define successful programming for women and girls. In the third section, I will describe the methodology of the study, which emphasizes one-on-one interviews with current IRC staff members. The fourth section outlines the findings of the study and provides suggestions on how the agency can better serve their female-identifying clients. Finally, the last section of this study outlines recommendations to the Tucson-based IRC for further research.

## Current State of Affairs

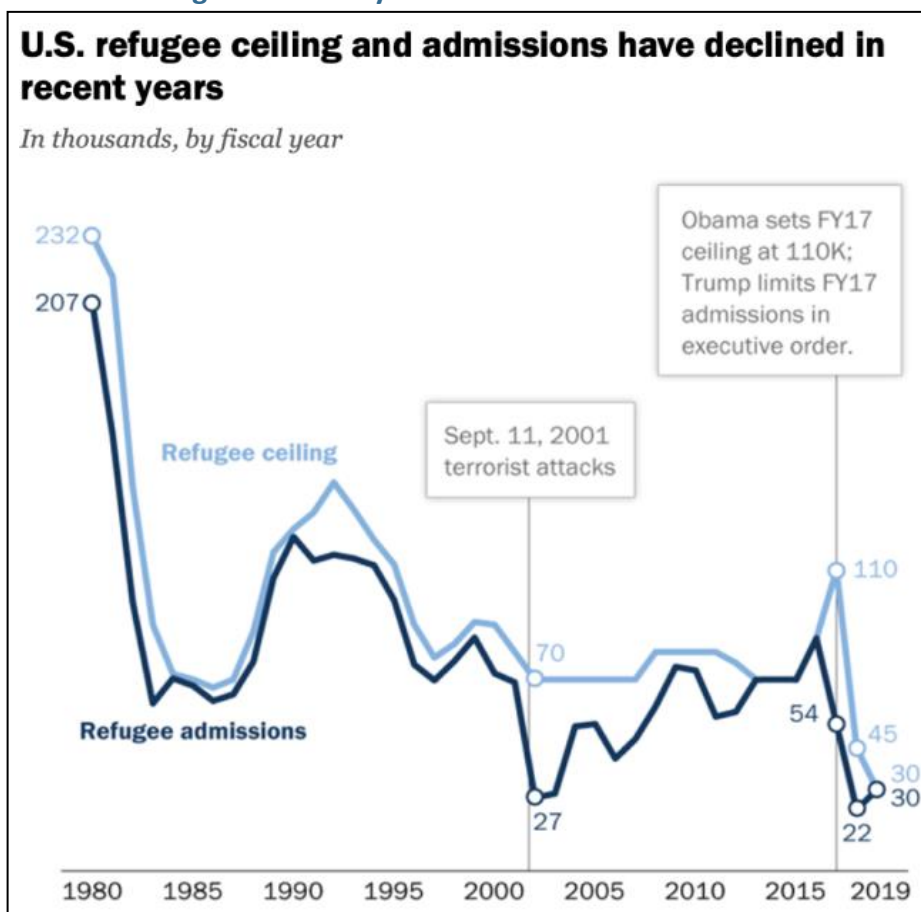
This review of refugee resettlement in the United States in general, and in Tucson, Arizona more particularly, serves as a valuable tool for understanding the additional barriers women and girls face during the integration process. First, I will provide a brief overview of refugee populations in the US over the last 10 years and then outline what the female population looks like today. Through powerful sentiments from refugee women themselves, I will explore how the time frame in which they arrive in the US, altered their living and working experiences. Secondly, I will describe the services available to refugees during the resettlement process, showing that despite these services, women and girls face many additional barriers to achieve self-sufficiency in their new host community. This review culminates with the recommendation that the Tucson International Rescue Committee consider creating specific programming directed towards women and girls to help ensure that all of their incoming clients receive the same opportunity to become self-sufficient regardless of their gender or social status.

### **I. Refugees in the United States**

Historically, the total number of refugees arriving in the United States has fluctuated as a result of a range of global events and US priorities. In consultation with Congress, the President of the US determines the number of refugees who can resettle in the country each year. From fiscal years 1990 to 1995, an average of 116,000 refugees arrived in the US each year, predominantly from the former Soviet Union (Krogstad, 2019). Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, refugee admissions dropped substantially to 27,000 in fiscal year 2002. From this point forward, admissions rebounded from fiscal 2008 to 2017, averaging to about

67,000 per year. During this time, nearly half of these refugees fled from Asia, with many from Iraq and Myanmar. Since 1980, 55% of refugees have come from East and Southern Asia, 28% from Europe, 13% from Africa and 4% from Latin America (Krogstad, 2019). Though due to continuous periods of civil unrest, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) far outnumbered those coming from any other country in fiscal 2019 – accounting for roughly 46% of the total 14,808 refugees admitted (MPI, 2019). As soon as President Trump took office in 2016, admission numbers dropped to the lowest they’ve been since the passage of the 1980 US Refugee Act.

**Table 1: Refugee Arrivals by Year in the United States**



Source: Pew Research Center, Key Facts about Refugees to the US, 2019.

In 2017, the administration increased refugee vetting procedures in a way that significantly slowed down the admissions process. The Trump administration reduced the 110,000 admission ceiling set for FY 2017 by the Obama administration to 50,000, then to 45,000 in 2018, 30,000 in 2019, and to a record low of 18,000 in FY 2020. With these significant admissions cuts, the US fell behind Canada and many others as the top resettlement country of 2018. Additionally, Trump has ensured that far more Christian refugees resettle in the country than Muslims. In 2019, the US admitted 23,800 Christians, compared to 4,900 Muslim refugees and other religious minority groups (Krogstad, 2019). This pattern marks a stark reversal from several years ago when Muslim refugees outnumbered that of Christians in 2016. In terms of age and gender, children under age 14 and women made up 70% of refugees fleeing the DRC, 68% of those from Burma, 66% from Ukraine, 63% from Eritrea, and 54% from Afghanistan (MPI, 2019). Thus, women and children under age 14 from these top five resettlement origin countries comprised 58% of the total individuals resettled in the US during 2019.

Although the total number of refugee women and children slightly surpassed that of single men, they accounted for a larger percent of the overall total before President Trump came into office (Powell, 2018). During his campaign, Trump insisted that refugees applying for the US “are all men... and not only are they men, they are young men and they are as strong as can be. They’re tough looking cookies.” Under the Obama administration in 2016, over 72% of resettled refugees were woman and children (United States DOS, 2017). Of that percentage, many were single mothers, survivors of torture, religious minorities, LGBTQ persons, or others imperiled by violence or persecution. Considering that women and children often account for

the most vulnerable, they should not be barred from resettling in the US on the basis of their gender, race or social status.

## **II. Refugees in Tucson, AZ**

Starting in 1975, refugees from all across the globe have had the opportunity to find a second home in the state of Arizona. In FY 2018, Arizona resettled a total of 1,329 refugees in the greater Phoenix and Tucson areas. Being one of the top ten states to resettle refugees nationwide, currently fifteen resettlement agencies assist incoming arrivals with the integration process. Although 80% of Arizona's refugees resettle in Phoenix and the remainder in Tucson, nearly half of those agencies operate in Tucson. According to the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), a total of 276 refugees were resettled in Tucson in FY 2018. Of that number, 141 were from the DRC, 30 from Burundi, 22 from Pakistan, 17 from Eritrea, and 16 from Rwanda (2018). The exact number of Tucson refugees based on age and gender, is currently unknown. The six resettlement agencies operating in Tucson include: The International Rescue Committee, TUSD Refugee Family Services, Catholic Social Services, La Frontera, Iskashitaa Refugee Network, and Lutheran Social Services. Historically, changes to these programs are driven by federal mandate and funding. In other words, each agency has been highly affected by Trump's decision to slash admittance numbers.

Not only have President Trump's decisions diminished funding and opportunity for these agencies, his prejudicial rhetoric has resulted in heightened discrimination towards refugees across the nation, including those in Tucson according to many commentators and direct reports from refugees themselves. For example, Nasteha Ahmed, a twenty-nine-year-old Somali Muslim woman who was forced to flee her home at the age of five informed me that:

The only time I've received racist or discriminatory remarks has been under the Trump administration. Everything was perfect under the Obama administration. I never felt out of place. I felt at home. But now with all the negative things Trump says about Muslims, Latinos, all black and brown people, it makes you feel unwelcomed – it makes you feel less than a white American.

Before arriving to Tucson in 2013, Nasteha lived majority of her life in Saudi Arabia – a country where women's rights are extremely limited. After countless encounters with racism and discrimination as both a woman and foreigner in Saudi Arabia, Nasteha came to the United States in hopes of finding freedom, safety and political autonomy – but instead found hatred in the Tucson community. Nasteha's experiences are unfortunately not unique at all. Sentiments like these are commonplace amongst many refugees in the community and across the country. According to Pew Research Center, most Americans (65%) – including majorities across racial and ethnic groups – say it has become more common for people to express racist or racially insensitive views since Trump was elected president (Horowitz, 2017).

### **III. Services Available during Resettlement**

Generally, the United States resettlement agencies provide a wide variety of services to ensure that their clients essential needs are met upon arrival. These needs include but are not at all limited to basic food, clothing, shelter, and cultural orientation in the first thirty days after arrival. In Arizona more specifically, some of these services include case management, cash assistance, employment, English language classes, temporary medical insurance coverage, behavioral health services, assistance to the elderly and victims of torture and human trafficking, and an unaccompanied refugee minor program (DES, 2018). Based on the latest

Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Report to Congress in fiscal year 2017, the labor force participation rate for refugees was 66.2%, which is slightly lower than for all US adults aged 16 to 64 at 73.9%. Of this percentage, male refugees were employed or unemployed but seeking work at much higher rates than female refugees. In 2017, only 51.5% of female refugees were employed or seeking work in comparison to 79.1% of men – nearly a 30% difference.

**Table 2: Labor Force Status for Working-Age Refugees and US Individuals, 2017 Survey**

CELL ENTRIES REPRESENT THE % OF INDIVIDUALS WITH EACH EMPLOYMENT STATUS	ALL U.S. INDIVIDUALS AGED 16 TO 64	ALL REFUGEES	MALE REFUGEES	FEMALE REFUGEES
<i>Number of Individuals Aged 16 to 64</i>		<b>3,076</b>	<b>1,609</b>	<b>1,467</b>
<b>In Labor Force</b>	<b>73.9%</b>	<b>66.2%</b>	<b>79.1%</b>	<b>51.5%</b>
<i>(MOE %)</i>		<i>(1.8%)</i>	<i>(2.3%)</i>	<i>(2.7%)</i>
Employed	<b>94.1%</b>	<b>88.8%</b>	<b>91.5%</b>	<b>84.2%</b>
<i>(MOE %)</i>		<i>(1.8%)</i>	<i>(1.9%)</i>	<i>(3.4%)</i>
Unemployed	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>
<i>(MOE %)</i>		<i>(1.8%)</i>	<i>(1.9%)</i>	<i>(3.4%)</i>
<b>Not in Labor Force</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>33.8%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>48.6%</b>
<i>(MOE %)</i>		<i>(1.8%)</i>	<i>(2.3%)</i>	<i>(2.7%)</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: ORR Annual Report to Congress, 2017.

As demonstrated in Table 2, the overall employment and unemployment rates show clear variation by gender. While the magnitude of the gender difference varies slightly by cohort, men are employed at a significantly higher rate than women regardless of when they arrived in the country. Additionally, female refugees are more likely to be out of the labor force than are refugee men. In the United States, a pay gap of roughly 29 cents for every dollar earned exists between refugee women and host men (Kabir, 2019). This disparity traces back to the unfortunate reality that these women are concentrated in more “feminine” sectors such as

health, teaching, cleaning, cooking, and service. Furthermore, this subjects them to undervalued, unskilled and low-paying jobs. Somalian refugee Nasteha on the other hand, refused to limit herself to this line of work:

Although people from my own community constantly told me that I was too old to start school at the age of 23, I refused to give up. I refused to only be a housekeeper, a dishwasher or a caregiver for the rest of my life. I wanted to get my education and do whatever I wanted – buy my dream house, work in my dream career, etc. I wanted to do all the things I never had the freedom to do in Saudi Arabia (Ahmed, 2019).

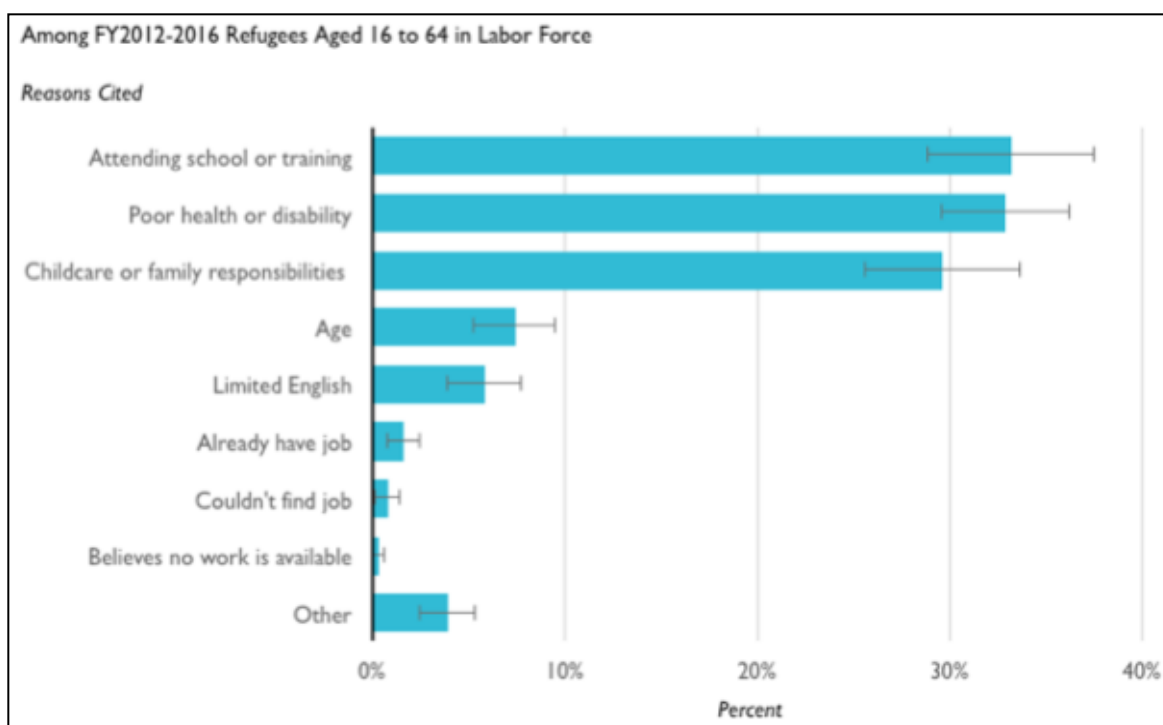
Although Nasteha now possesses an associate degree and works for a great organization in the community, getting to this point in her career was not easy. Like many other female refugees in Tucson, she had to fight against several gender and societal barriers to get to where she is today.

Enabling refugee women's access to gainful employment offers significant gains not only for themselves, but also for host countries' economies. According to the IRC's 2019 report *Unlocking Refugee Women's Potential*, refugee women could contribute up to \$1.4 trillion to the annual global GDP – if they did not have to face sexism, pay gaps, and many other administrative and discriminatory barriers in each of the top 30 refugee-hosting countries of today. Beyond monetary gain, valuable employment provides women like Nasteha with greater autonomy and opportunity to successfully integrate into their new host communities. As best described by Mary Belenky, "Through conscious raising, these women can claim their own identities & liberate themselves from the stereotypical women's ways of thinking" (1986).



For a variety of reasons, 33.8% of refugee adults were out of the US labor force in 2017 (Table 2), whether that be because they spent their time pursuing an education, watching their children, or had poor health or a disability, everyone’s situation was different (Table 3). Two of the top three reasons are highly segmented by gender: 52.3% of men were attending school versus 23.9% of women, and 42.1% of women had childcare or family responsibilities versus 4.2% of men. Although this data refers to individuals in a five-year population sample settling across the country, this data highly correlates with the challenges women and girls face in Tucson. Unfortunately, most female refugees arriving in Tucson are already locked into traditional gender roles – roles that are often very difficult to break away from.

**Table 3: Working-Aged Refugees’ Reasons for Not Seeking Employment, 2017 Survey**



Source: ORR Annual Report to Congress, 2017.

To address these gendered constraints, the Tucson-based IRC should implement specific programming directed towards women and girls. The programs they do have in place include

resettlement, economic empowerment, community integration and development, health and wellness, and protection. All of these programs rely heavily on collaboration with local stakeholders such as medical providers, government offices, social service providers, etc. In addition to these programs, the office does have a gender equality champion and gender committee in place. According to the IRC headquarters (HQ), the purpose of a gender champion is to have somebody that can help support and move forward on gender equality commitments specific to that office (IRC, 2019). The same expectations apply for gender committee members as well. Though from personal experience interning with the organization and serving on the gender committee, I know that the Tucson office has not established any gender commitments to work towards. Due to funding constraints, neither the gender champion nor the gender committee members get paid for participating in these roles. As a result, finding ample time to successfully fulfill these roles has been a challenge. Neither one of these programs adequately assess or address the core challenges refugee women and girls face in the community. Thus, the Tucson IRC must implement grant-funded programming to ensure that these individuals reach self-sufficiency in the same way as their male counterparts.

### **Successful Programming**

In order to successfully transform the lives of women and girls, agencies such as the Tucson IRC must design programming that meets the needs of all clients in gender-sensitive and gender-transformative ways. Across the United States and the world, various programs are working tirelessly to address the historical and social disadvantages of this population group. The dearth of empirical data and research assessing the impacts of these programs makes it

extremely difficult to look towards other organizations for guidance. Though one organization that seems particularly promising is RefuSHE located in Nairobi. RefuSHE has taken numerous steps to ensure young women have the healing space to learn, grow, and ultimately become leaders in their own communities.

Although RefuSHE predominantly operates out of Nairobi, Kenya, its one-of-a-kind holistic model acts as a great reference point to any agency looking to achieve gender equal program outcomes. This holistic model provides short and long-term support for refugee women and girls to access their human rights, experience economic success and skill development, and become leaders in their communities (RefuSHE, 2020). More specifically, the model operates on six key components: safe housing, economic independence, education, advocacy and research, case management, and community outreach. Although these focus areas seem relatively similar to that of the Tucson IRC, the key difference is that RefuSHE operates through a gender-sensitive and gender-transformative lens. According to Dworkin, gender-sensitive interventions *recognize* the differing needs and constraints of women and men. Gender-transformative approaches, in contrast, seek to *reshape* gender relations to be more gender equitable, largely through approaches that ‘free both women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms’ (Dworkin, 2015). In this section, I will review all six components of RefuSHE’s holistic model to define successful programming for women and girls at the Tucson IRC.

### **I. Safe House**

RefuSHE prides itself on creating the first transitional shelter of its kind in Kenya – a shelter that provides protection and recovery to unaccompanied and separated refugee girls

under 18 years old and their children. Located in Nairobi, this safe house is managed by supportive case management staff and protected by security guards 24-hours a day. Relatively similar to the Tucson IRC's intensive case management support program, residents receive counseling, material support, medical and legal support, family tracing, and life skill classes about HIV prevention, conflict prevention, and childcare. The program works to promote psychosocial healing by structuring a daily routine of homework, sports competitions, movies, chores and gardening. Ultimately, their goal here is to link residents with alternative care arrangements in the community. Many of their past residents joined their artisan collective enterprise and now reside together in nearby communities through group living. According to their 2017 impact report, 100% of all Safe House residents expressed feelings of increased security and well-being (RefuSHE, 2018). Although the Tucson IRC rarely resettles any unaccompanied refugees under the age of 18, a shelter similar to RefuSHE's could help many women and children escape domestic violence situations – situations that IRC staff members have had great difficulty navigating in the past.

## **II. Economic Independence**

Through their economic independence program, RefuSHE's social enterprise provides women and girls with the opportunity to express themselves creatively while learning tangible skills that empower them to become economically self-sufficient. Participants design, create, and manage a unique line of hand-dyed fabrics and other textiles. Their trauma-informed approach allows artisans to achieve economic and social independence at their own pace. Past members have paid their rent, fed their families, and covered household expenses with the

earnings they've made. Additionally, members attain production and manufacturing knowledge that serves as the foundation to their future success as entrepreneurs.

As a result of their incredibly supportive environment, 70% of the 160 artisans have become economically independent. Not only do participants gain a plethora of skills from this, selling their own products have inspired them to support, empower and protect other young refugee women in the community. RefuSHE proudly reinvests 100% of the revenue from this enterprise into their programs and provides monthly stipends to collective members. According to their 2017 impact report, 100% of artisans demonstrated increased financial literacy. In the past, the Tucson IRC ran a weekly sewing class for about 8-10 female refugees. Unfortunately, the class could not go on as it lacked adequate funding and facilitators. If the office were to implement something similar to RefuSHE's social enterprise, women would have the opportunity to empower one another, gain revenue for themselves and other IRC programs, and become economically and socially self-sufficient.

### **III. Education**

Also known as the Girl's Empowerment Project (GEP), RefuSHE created an alternative education program that allows participants to access education and livelihood opportunities, learn about their human rights, and cultivate leadership skills. In 2017, the GEP served nearly 260 girls in the community. Their alternative education curriculum includes various learning tracks of literacy and basic math, English, and Swahili courses. Although they've based it on the Kenyan Department of Education Guidelines, this alternative track could be implemented in the Tucson community by instead referring to US Guidelines and incorporating the top five languages of incoming arrivals into course curriculum. Additionally, the GEP offers life-skills

development trainings which focus on reproductive health, human rights, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response, peace building, and leadership.

These trainings are structured in a way so that girls gain self-confidence and a voice in the decisions that affect their lives (RefuSHE, 2020). At the IRC, the males of the household almost always make important decisions for the entire family. Women and girls rarely have the opportunity to gain the self-confidence and decision-making power that is essential in fostering independence. Furthermore, the RefuSHE program offers a 12-month vocational training to provide participants with skills in hand stitching, sewing, fabric cutting, and much more. Upon completion of the training, participants have a high possibility to work for their social enterprise. Lastly, this component of the model includes an early childhood development center where RefuSHE supports over 60 infants and toddlers of young mothers in the program. The presence of this center enables participants to attend education courses on site while also attending to their children throughout the day. As aforementioned, finding sustainable and affordable childcare is one of the main barriers refugee mothers face. Implementing a center such as this at the IRC would result in endless possibilities for refugee mothers to uplift themselves, their families, and the Tucson community as a whole.

#### **IV. Advocacy and Research**

Through advocacy and research, RefuSHE strives to educate their partners in government, the NGO sector, policy groups, and civil-society actors about the challenges experienced by the young women they serve. More specifically, their advocacy focuses on refugee protection, child protection, and the rights of women and girls. Within this sector, RefuSHE supports informal education programs that engage in discussion about discrimination,

limited spaces in classrooms, and the scarcity of resources that prevent refugee children from enrolling in school in the first place – pivotal discussions that help ensure refugee rights are included in the draft Education Bill. Additionally, their research has enabled them to conduct community-based workshops to inform and create awareness about sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), response, prevention, and community resources. Although the IRC's RescueWorks program generates a plethora of research on world-wide programming, not enough site-specific research is being done like that of RefuSHE. Simply put, the Tucson IRC does not have a designated researcher on-site to consistently assess programming and more specifically, address the additional challenges experienced by the women and girls they serve.

#### **V. Case Management**

One of the core components of RefuSHE's holistic model is their case management program. Through this program, they aim to empower each participant with the skills and resources required to advocate for their own rights and needs. Very similar to the Tucson IRC's case management team, RefuSHE provides intake needs assessments, advocacy, community integration, and resettlement support. Though, a significant difference between the two is that the Tucson IRC conducts these initial intakes with the entire family, leaving out the chance for women and girls to express their needs on an independent basis. They need to provide them with the opportunity to do so because they are far less likely to speak up about domestic violence if their abuser is in the room. In addition to their general support program, RefuSHE provides legal aid, medical support, psychosocial counseling, home visits and material support. Within the legal department, they offer legal aid clinics to support appeals, custody and child protection orders. Staff also accompany participants to their legal appointments to ensure

safety and accuracy of information is received – something the Tucson IRC has trouble accomplishing.

The psychosocial counseling team conducts comprehensive mental health counseling through individual and group sessions. Although the Tucson IRC provides therapy through their center for wellbeing program, only one clinical therapist is available to provide services for a handful of clients. In comparison, RefuSHE's team of counselors is able to reach more clients at one given time and conduct more frequent individual and group counseling sessions. These group sessions in particular provide a safe environment for refugee women and girls to relate to one another and discuss the gender-specific challenges they face in the community – something female refugees could highly benefit from in Tucson. Lastly, the RefuSHE case management program includes home visits and material support. Case managers conduct regular home-based assessments, provide renters insurance, and support host families. Furthermore, they offer material support for girls transitioning from the Safe House to independent living arrangements.

## **VI. Community Outreach**

The very last component of RefuSHE's holistic model includes community outreach. In order to advance their overall mission to advocate for awareness, rights, education, and support for refugee women and girls, RefuSHE participates in various panels and policy groups to promote dialogue and solutions for the neglect of Nairobi's urban refugees and the protection of unaccompanied refugee children and youth (RefuSHE, 2020). Their community outreach and mobilization teams actively stride to strengthen local networks by promoting awareness and education on gender-based violence. Their outreach team focuses on four major



components: community-based SGBV workshops for refugees; Woman's Ambassador Groups mobilizes and empowers refugee women to strengthen community networks through life skills certification and literacy courses; Junior Ambassador Groups of graduates of GEP ignite community dialogues around SGBV; and they partner with like-minded organizations.

Furthermore, the outreach team provides training and support for entrepreneurial refugee women to foster independence. More specifically, their livelihoods program serves the most basic needs of refugee women by providing small business loans and seed grants, psychosocial counseling, business and financial literacy training, adult education courses, and a local tour of successful businesses for participants to connect and learn from other refugee entrepreneurs. In tandem with UNHCR, the community outreach team also established a SGBV Stakeholders Committee in Nairobi. There, they created a framework to address referral strategies and effective dialogue among survivors of SGBV.

Since the inauguration of this committee in 2009, RefuSHE has been able to better identify vulnerable women and children in the community who have experienced SGBV and later assist them in finding shelter, education, and psychosocial counseling. If there were something similar to this operating in Tucson, IRC staff would not have such a difficult time navigating similar scenarios with their female-identifying clients. Lastly, RefuSHE's community outreach team has enabled the entire organization to gain a better understanding of the common trends amongst the urban refugee community in Nairobi. By constantly reporting migration patterns, common risks in transit, reproductive health needs, and gender-based barriers to livelihood assistance, RefuSHE helps countless woman and girls access the protection and services they rightfully deserve.

Through their six-tier holistic model, RefuSHE has done an incredible job at addressing the countless barriers refugee women and girls face in Nairobi. To ensure that every young woman has the right to flourish, they go beyond a one-size-fits-all program design and try to meet the needs of each individual participant. According to their 2017 impact report, 90% of RefuSHE program participants felt empowered to make a positive impact in the world and 90% felt confident in their knowledge of human rights (RefuSHE, 2018). While operating through a gender-transformative lens, RefuSHE works tirelessly to provide female refugees with the healing space to learn, grow, and become leaders in their own communities. Although the Tucson IRC works in a fairly different environment than RefuSHE, their one-of-a-kind model could serve as a great reference point for the Tucson office. With adequate funding, staff, and community resources, the Tucson IRC has the potential to provide gender-transformative programming in the same way that RefuSHE does for the women and girls they serve in Nairobi.

## Methodology

This cross-sectional study was carried out in the months of November 2019 to March of 2020. In previous sections, I have shown the heightened need for resettlement agencies across the nation to implement effective programming directed towards women and girls and discussed how RefuSHE could serve as a model. I also highlighted potential gaps in services provided to female refugees based on the current administrative framework and decline in arrivals. My vantage point from interning at the Tucson IRC enabled me to conduct participant observations, a gender-committee assessment, and one-on-one interviews with female-

identifying clients and IRC staff members. In this section, I will describe the methodology of the study which was carried out for empirical findings that could support existing literature.

To assess the possibilities of implementing gender-transformative programming at the Tucson office, I conducted participant observations to examine how women were being served. At the beginning of this study, I conducted multiple participant observations with three different programs. According to Bernard, conducting participant observations puts you where the action is and lets you collect any kind of data you want – narratives or numbers (2011). For the sake of this study, only qualitative field notes were recorded. These field notes were recorded on a busy Friday afternoon during open hours from 10am-12pm – a two-hour period when clients can seek assistance without appointments. The first session was conducted with the medical team and lasted approximately 20 minutes. The second observation was of the employment team and lasted about 13 minutes. The third and final participant observation was conducted with the case management team and lasted about 8 minutes. Conducting these observations enabled me to begin to understand how clients interact with IRC staff members and vice versa. Not only does this data highlight areas of improvement for staff, but it also identifies some of the most common barriers their female-identifying clients face.

When serving on the gender committee, I gathered field notes from each meeting I attended. The Tucson office created the committee in November of 2019, and I joined a month later in December. Prior to joining, I informed the committee of my research and asked for consent to record meetings. As of today, the committee is comprised of five IRC staff members who participate on a voluntary basis. As their availability fluctuates, members often rotate in and out of this role. Besides sharing my own ideas during these meetings, I often took note of

the key issues and concerns their female clients face and how other offices like the Phoenix IRC address those concerns. This data highlights areas of improvement for the gender committee in addition to the need for gender-transformative programming.

The last research method appropriate for this report includes one-on-one interviews with female refugees and IRC staff members. At the start of the study, I conducted personal interviews with two refugee women in the comfort of their own homes. Due to transportation issues, I found that it was much easier to interview them at their homes rather than the IRC office. These interviews were conducted in English and lasted about 45 minutes each. Unfortunately, four additional interviews with female refugees were supposed to occur until the Covid-19 pandemic hit. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced my overall research topic and asked general questions regarding their age, religion, how they identify, when they arrived in the United States, what their country of origin was, and how gender roles function in that country. Additionally, I briefly asked them about their living and working experiences in the community under the Obama versus Trump administration – sentiments I included in previous sections of the report. I then asked them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of IRC's various resettlement programs. Lastly, I asked my interviewees if they believe the Tucson IRC adequately assists them and other refugee women and girls in properly integrating into the Tucson community. These interviews provided a personal perspective on how the agency can provide them with more resources to become self-sufficient at the same rate as their male counterparts.

Considering that the office operates through five distinct teams, all except one of the five team supervisors were interviewed. These interviews were carried out over the phone and

lasted about 30 minutes each. I was able to interview all of the following department heads: Sarah Holliday with the Wellbeing and Torture Department, Katrina Martinez with the Employment and Economics Department, Lizbeth Gonzalez with the Medical Department, and Alejandra Garcia serving as an Immigration Outreach Specialist. Similar to the refugee interviews, I introduced my research topic and asked general questions regarding their age, how they identify, when they began working for the IRC, and what their current role entails. I then asked them to identify the key issues and concerns refugee women and girls face within their department that their male-identifying clients do not. As a probe of this question, I asked them to provide an example of a time when one of their female clients faced additional barriers due to her gender and social status. The final seven questions were based on the IRC's Gender Analysis Tool provided by HQ – a notable tool that will be further discussed in the findings section. Conducting interviews with department heads helped identify common issues and gaps in programming for the women and girls they serve. In the findings section, I will highlight the need to implement effective programming directed towards this population group.

## Findings

The findings section outlines key issues and concerns refugee women and girls face and how the Tucson IRC's current resettlement procedures attempt to address those concerns. I will review the data collected from participant observations, gender committee meetings, and one-on-one interviews with two female-identifying clients and four IRC staff members. Breaking down this data highlights the need to design programming that serves all clients in gender-sensitive and gender-transformative ways. Additionally, it provides a brief overview of the IRC's

Gender Analysis Tool which was used as a reference point throughout the study. Considering that the participant observations and staff interviews were conducted with each department, I provide suggestions on how to improve programming offered by the Tucson IRC on a department by department basis.

### **I. Participant Observations**

The primary findings from the participant observations reveal how clients and IRC staff interact with one another. It also identifies some of the most common barriers their female-identifying clients face. Additionally, it identifies ways in which IRC staff can improve their communication skills to better serve the client. After gaining proper consent from both staff and refugee clients, I sat in on 10-20 minute interactions with three departments during open-hours: the medical team, employment team, and case management team. Starting with the medical team, I observed a middle-aged woman from Tanzania interact with a 35-year-old female staff member. The most prominent behavior noted from this interaction was how frustrated the client got when waiting for the phone interpreter to correctly translate the information. When asking about receiving cash assistance, she raised her voice and made assertive hand motions to signal her frustration. The woman kept getting distracted from her 1-year-old daughter sitting on her lap. Although she tried her best to stay engaged in the conversation, she had to make sure her daughter was entertained so she placed her in a baby bouncer nearby. The staff member closed out the conversation by offering her a deal: if she attends the next doctor appointment for her daughter as she missed the past three, then she could have the baby bouncer. This observation reveals three core issues: lack of interpreters, transportation and childcare. Although the office has an extensive list of in-person and phone

interpreters, they are not always available and critical information often gets lost in translation. According to Morris, language barriers are a constant issue between staff and clients to retain information correctly, especially medical information (2009). Secondly, if this woman had adequate transportation to and from appointments, she wouldn't have missed three crucial check-ups for her 1-year-old daughter. Lastly, if there were a childcare center on-site, the client could have remained much more focused during the meeting.

The second participant observation was of the employment team and lasted about 13 minutes. During this session, I observed a middle-aged Congolese man interact with the IRC employment specialist. Once the staff member left the room, I engaged with the man in his second native language, French. Like many other clients I've observed in the past, the man became much more relaxed – physically, emotionally, and verbally – once we started speaking in a language more familiar to him. He got so comfortable that he began asking me to help him get a job. When the employment specialist came back into the room, the man asked why his background check to work at Amazon was taking so long to process. Considering that his question wasn't that serious, he remained fairly calm and positive throughout the interaction. Once he left, a younger Congolese woman entered the room and asked for help regarding her work schedule. She seemed very irritated as her employer would not accommodate her schedule to pick up her son from childcare. With limited resources and unreliable childcare, all the employment specialist could really do was call her employer and ask for their understanding – which unfortunately did not work. Like many other refugee mothers in Tucson, this woman had to find another job that would accommodate both her and her son.

Observing the two interactions helped me consider that male refugees don't face as many barriers in finding or attaining gainful employment than female refugees do. If the office were to implement a woman's economic independence program similar to that of RefuSHE's mentioned in previous sections, this client may have had a completely different experience. Additionally, if on-site childcare and a social enterprise were created for working mothers, they could pay their rent, feed their families, and cover household expenses with the earnings they've made – all without worrying about finding sustainable childcare in the community.

The final participant observation was conducted with the case management team and lasted nearly 12 minutes. I sat and observed an interaction between one of the case managers and a female refugee from Chad. Similar to the employment team observation, I greeted her in French, and she began asking me to assist her. Without surprise, she seemed much more comfortable explaining her situation in French than with the case manager who only spoke English. Through all of these observations, I found how important it is to hire staff members who speak at least one more language than English – something that is extremely difficult to require for non-profit work (Mincin, 2012). Before the interaction ended, the woman got very emotional and asked the case manager if he could help her 21-year-old daughter seek resettlement in the United States. She explained that her daughter has been living in a Kenyan refugee camp for 6 years and how hard it's been on the both of them living a part. The case manager told her that she could not apply for reunification until she became a citizen herself. The woman became overwhelmed with disappointment after realizing she'd have to wait another few years to see her daughter again. If the Tucson IRC were to provide reunification



information sessions for all clients, but especially for vulnerable women and children, navigating this process would be much less obscure.

## **II. Gender Committee Assessment**

As a member of the gender committee, I collected field notes from two meetings: one in January and the other in February of 2020. The primary findings from these meetings highlight areas of improvement for the committee and the need for gender-transformative programming. As aforementioned, headquarters (HQ) expects this committee to help support and move forward on gender commitments specific to that office (IRC, 2019). This data reveals that the Tucson office has not established any gender commitments to work towards. During the first meeting, we had a conference call with members from the Phoenix gender committee. To address the core challenges their female refugees face, their office implemented a program called SHE, Stand for Her Empowerment, in 2014. SHE is a funded program that ensures each department has a gender commitment to work towards. The four key commitments include: childcare, LGBTQ+, Bridge to Safety, and sexual and reproductive health. In addition to these four focus areas, they are also striving to provide more female interpreters. Additionally, they created individual action plans to ensure they eventually reach these goals.

After talking with the Phoenix office, we began discussing key issues female clients face in the Tucson community. Considering that the committee had only started a month prior to this meeting, members expressed how lost they felt without any guidance from HQ or the site supervisor. I then suggested we create a mission statement and five commitments to work towards, similar to that of the Phoenix office. Additionally, we spoke about having at least one person from each department join the committee. This would allow for a wide variety of

perspectives to be heard and gender-specific issues to be addressed on a department by department basis. In response to the conversation with the Phoenix office, the topic of childcare and Bridge to Safety came up. Members discussed how the Tucson office had already explored creating an on-site childcare system but ultimately ran into capacity issues. Though, if the on-site program called “Child Watch” received more sustainable funding, a temporary center could be held in the conference room where volunteers and interns watch children for short periods of time. Prior to transitioning into the next topic, one of the members expressed that HQ needs to step in and create more effective ways to tackle this ongoing issue. Another member also mentioned how the state benefit system (DES) makes it extremely difficult for some families to attain childcare funding at all.

The committee then discussed issues with the current Bridge to Safety program (B2S). According to HQ, the aim of B2S is to create a safe space for refugee and immigrant women to disclose experiences of violence to IRC staff; to equip staff to respond to disclosures with effective follow-up support, including safety and service planning; and to connect clients to appropriate external services such as shelter, medical, mental health, and legal assistance (2017). At the Tucson office, no funding is in place for the program, so they are not able to screen for domestic violence (DV) situations, provide safe sex information, or have sustainable partnerships with local health care providers that agree to DV screenings. Sustainable grant funding is essential for B2S to adequately assist clients facing domestic violence situations. Near the end of the meeting, the committee agreed to work on the following: split cultural orientation by gender, address B2S funding issues, and assign one commitment to each

department and ensure its progress is monitored. Lastly, the committee agreed to stay in contact with the Phoenix office by meeting every other month.

Although the second meeting was not as extensive as the first, some essential topics were covered. For one, the team created four gender objectives to be sent to HQ by the office's gender champion. These objectives included splitting cultural orientation by gender, building partnerships with Tucson's DV agency Emerge, developing a clear DV protocol by contacting other site managers for guidance, and planning events for International Women's Day on March 8th. Additionally, the committee discussed the obscurity around how gender neutrality and gender pronouns are used in the office. They proposed that the topic be discussed during cultural orientation to bring awareness to all clients and create a safe space for them to express how they'd like to be identified. Almost all of the committee meeting data helps determine the gaps in programming for the women and girls they serve. More specifically, it proves that neither the gender champion nor gender committee adequately address these core challenges due to funding, capacity and timing constraints. Although gender objectives were made, concrete commitments need to be created and shared with each department. These findings show that the office must implement grant-funded programming directed towards women and girls to ensure they reach self-sufficiency in the same way as their male counterparts.

### **III. Interviews**

The final research method used for this study includes one-on-one interviews with two female refugees and four IRC staff members. Collecting sentiments from the individuals on both sides of resettlement is essential to adequately assess program outcomes. Thus, the findings presented in this section are crucial to the overall report. As aforementioned, four additional

interviews with female refugees were supposed to occur until the Covid-19 pandemic hit – making my original goal to collect an equal amount of sentiments from both parties not feasible. The two interviews with female refugees are presented first, followed by the staff interviews. Considering that the staff interviews include almost all of the department supervisors, the data is broken down per department.

The two 45-minute interviews I held with a woman from Ethiopia and another from Somalia included powerful sentiments on their living and working experiences as refugee women of color in the community. These women identified key issues and concerns they face and how the Tucson IRC could better assist other refugee women and girls in properly integrating into the Tucson community. The two women had extremely different experiences living and working in the community because one was Christian and the other was Muslim. While the Christian Ethiopian interviewee constantly expressed her joy of working in Tucson the second interviewee, a Somali Muslim woman named Nasteha, experienced multiple encounters of racism and discrimination in the workplace due to her belief in Islam. Although the Christian interviewee did not face the same degree of discrimination as Nasteha, both of them were subjected to the “women’s ways of thinking” and did not have the chance to see their wages increase or make in-roads to male-dominated careers – neither in their countries of origin nor their new homes in the US. As best described by Mary Belenky’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, “It is through conscious raising and equal opportunity that these women can claim their own identifies and liberate themselves from the stereotypical women’s ways of thinking” (1986).

In regard to the IRC programs, the first interviewee found programs such as cultural orientation to be too long and unengaging. She also argued that the class be separated by

gender so that all attendees feel comfortable asking questions in every topic area. Nasteha claimed a lack of cultural competency on behalf of some interns and volunteers but said it could easily be fixed with more cultural competency trainings – trainings that would ultimately benefit both staff and refugee clients. When asking Nasteha about how the IRC assists other women refugees, she said majority of the staff try to assist clients equally but that much more work needs to be done. She specifically mentioned how providing at-home English classes, driver trainings, and more sustainable childcare for single mothers could immensely help women reach self-sufficiency at the same rate as their male counterparts. For the most part, both interviewees expressed how grateful they were to IRC staff for providing them with a new home in Tucson. Unfortunately, the staff strive to assist their clients equally but are held back by capacity and funding constraints that make it even more difficult to help clients overcome traditional gender roles.

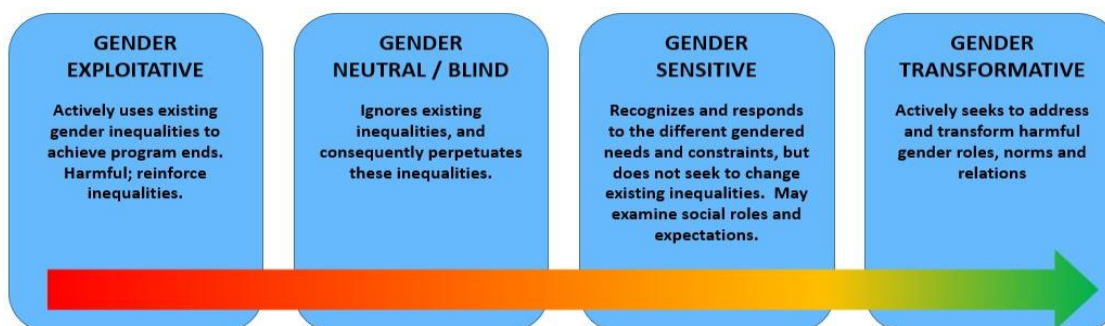
#### **Center for Wellbeing and Torture:**

In a 45-minute interview with the offices' clinical therapist, Sarah Holliday, I was able to get a sense of some of the key issues facing her female clients. Holliday explained that majority of the women enrolled in her program have experienced some sort of sexual assault or rape – a big majority being Congolese or Burundi women who've experienced it at the hands of militias. Because of the large Congolese and Burundi community in Tucson, staff have to be prepared "to navigate domestic violence scenarios such as physical violence in intimate partner relationships," which is "often culturally acceptable within these communities" (Holliday, 2020). She went on to express how much difficulty clients face when navigating our health or legal systems, especially due to language barriers. The only contact she has for DV situations is an

unreliable hotline. Holliday faces much difficulty connecting anyone to the one DV agency in Tucson – Emerge. In her department, Holliday says they need more services for women surviving domestic violence. Additionally, she said there needs to be more attention given to male perpetrators to help them acculturate to the US and essentially talk through their anger.

One thing that works well in her department though is her ability to meet with clients privately. This confidentiality creates trust between her and her clients – enabling them to speak up if need be. For the second half of the interview, I introduced the IRC’s Gender Analysis Tool. The purpose of this tool is to provide a simplified process of gathering critical information on the lived experiences and unique needs of clients of all genders. When asked which resources men have decision making power over, Holliday said finances. “The man is almost always the breadwinner. He’ll go to work, and the wife will stay home – regardless if they have kids or not” (Holliday, 2020). In the past, Holliday would conduct frequent home visits with her female clients. Today, she doesn’t have enough time to do so. The final questions were based off the IRC’s Gender Continuum – an analytical tool to understand how programs assess, understand, and impact gender inequalities:

**Table 4: The Gender Continuum**



Source: IRC Gender Analysis Tool, 2020.

Although the IRC strives to ensure all programs are, at minimum, gender-sensitive, all programs need to work towards gender-transformative outcomes. As aforementioned, gender-

transformative programming seeks to reshape gender relations to be more gender equitable, largely through approaches that ‘free both women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms’ (Dworkin, 2015). After providing the definitions to Holliday, she said her department remains gender-sensitive by keeping an eye out for domestic violence. In general, she says “all staff try to help clients overcome a barrier if they see they’re facing one.” Considering that her department is far different from the others, she does not have to follow any specific guidelines – making it a little easier for her department to work towards gender-transformative outcomes. Like any other department though, they’re held back by capacity and funding issues. Holliday mentioned that her department recently applied for additional funding for a victim advocate. Attaining this funding is crucial in helping women and girls facing DV adequately navigate the entire process.

Additionally, Holliday noted her department is in need of another full-time therapist since she’s the only one. As a result, the Center for Wellbeing does not have enough capacity to connect their clients to mental health agencies. Even when they do, women have a hard time attending these appointments as they’re stuck at home caring for their children. When asked if the gender champion or gender committee is enough to address these issues, Holliday said “members don’t have the time to complete these tasks, especially when they’re not getting paid for it.” Holliday believes the top three barriers refugee women and girls face in the community include access to childcare, education, and mental health services.

#### **Employment and Economics Department:**

Through a 30-minute interview with the supervisor of the employment and economics team, Katrina Martinez discussed the key barriers her female clients face in attaining gainful

employment. Her position oversees both the employment team and new roots program which encompasses nutrition and food security. When asked about the key issues her female clients face, Martinez discussed how different each program is. The new roots program is actually geared towards women to participate as they hold workshops, farming and gardening events during the day – a time when their husbands are typically at work. On the opposite end with employment, Martinez claims her female clients face a number of challenges to become self-sufficient. “Single moms have so much trouble finding work that can accommodate their schedules, especially if their children are not in school. So that’s a barrier we work really hard to overcome” (Martinez, 2020). The only resource they have to help them overcome this barrier is subsidized childcare through DES but if they’re not on a cash assistance program, their matching grant (MG) can only pay for childcare for so long. “How are they supposed to pay for it on their own once their MG is up? Childcare is extremely expensive without that subsidy.”

Martinez mentioned a specific example of a time when her client could not attain work because she was pregnant. “Of course businesses can’t discriminate against a pregnant woman, but they have no trouble finding ways around it” said Martinez. Once she had her baby, she still had trouble attaining work because no one would accommodate her schedule. The subsidized childcare was not enough – they would charge her an exorbitant amount of money for every minute she was late. Eventually, Martinez was able to reach out to their longtime employers and help her get a job but getting to this point was not easy. Fortunately, Martinez has a good 10-20 reliable partnerships to connect clients to. However, they’re usually fully staffed and 10-20 are simply not enough for all the incoming clients they serve. When introducing the IRC’s Gender Analysis Tool and asking what services are less accessible to women and girls, Martinez



expressed the difficulty refugee mothers have in attending English classes provided through the new roots program. Within the employment team, staff are constantly brainstorming new ideas on how to make the 9-week job readiness training more accessible to their female clients, particularly their single moms who don't have sustainable childcare. Often times, Martinez sees that the man of the house has ultimate decision-making power over the family. To help ensure gender-sensitive program outcomes, her team brainstorms on how they can rotate schedules so that each parent is taking care of the kids. Martinez wants her clients to "become self-sufficient, gain autonomy and make money," regardless of their gender or social status (2020).

In terms of transportation to and from work, Martinez noted how some men don't allow their wives or daughters to travel on the bus alone. Although this is a culturally-sensitive topic, simply getting to work is a common barrier. Additionally, Martinez mentioned that the voice of a young adult female often gets overpowered by that of her family members. When asked if her program is gender-transformative, she said that although they do strive to provide everyone with the same services, they need more time and funding to make the transition from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative programming possible. Similar to Holliday, Martinez claimed that the office needs more female interpreters for the women and girls they serve. One thing Martinez's team does that all programs should do is conduct weekly check-ins for each case they have to ensure all services are being delivered equally. Ultimately, Martinez says that with a more robust staff capacity, the office will be able to offer a variety of services that can accommodate cultural, linguistic and gender barriers. Additionally, if she had more guidance from HQ on what the transition from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative programming looks like, Martinez would feel much more confident in addressing these issues herself.

**Medical Department:**

The supervisor of the medical department, Lizbeth Gonzalez, identified some of the core barriers her female-identifying clients face when seeking medical assistance. Gonzalez is the coordinator for both health services and the ICM (Intensive Case Management) program which provides general case management during moments of extreme vulnerability. Gonzalez mentions one of the most common barriers is trying to find female service providers for the women and girls they serve – which limits the number of service providers available. Often times, these women have to reschedule their appointments for themselves or for their children due to a lack of childcare. Thus, her female clients do not have access to healthcare as immediately as their male counterparts do. In addition, Gonzalez states “when you look at gender roles and who makes financial decisions in the home, bank accounts are predominantly controlled by men. This creates limited access to money and knowledge on the banking system for women and girls” (2020). For Gonzalez, this limited access makes it even more difficult for them to navigate medical appointments on their own.

When meeting with her female clients, Gonzalez has trouble keeping them engaged as they get easily distracted by their children. Again, if on-site childcare were implemented in the Tucson office, Gonzalez wouldn't have this issue. A key service much less accessible for the women and girls she serves includes ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. To Gonzalez, these classes are imperative in attaining self-sufficiency and understanding the medical services they receive. Additionally, mothers often refrain from advocating for their children if an issue arises in school. Depending on their cultural upbringing, women believe only the father can advocate for their child. After introducing the IRC's Gender Analysis Tool, Gonzalez said that her

department is gender-sensitive considering that their services are specific to each individual client. For example, clients identify their own target goals for the ICM program. Similar to other departments, her clients have the freedom to use these services without fear of retribution. In the case of DV, Gonzalez believes that more collaboration with the program Emerge could help her department achieve more gender-transformative program outcomes. If Emerge were to include perpetrators in the program, male refugees could better acculturate to the US – preventing such abuse from happening in the future. To achieve transformative outcomes across the board, Gonzalez says carving out more community partners as well as focusing on day-to-day interactions with their clients is imperative. “Overall, women must understand their options moving forward.” Gonzalez suggests taking a community-based approach towards program planning to one day achieve gender-transformative program outcomes.

**Immigration Department:**

One of the immigration outreach specialists, Alejandra Garcia, identified various ways in which her department seeks to address the core barriers facing her female clients. As an immigration specialist, Garcia runs citizenship fairs and helps clients with the naturalization process. Considering the immigration team offers very distinct services in comparison to other IRC programs, she believes they serve both women and men equally. Though, Garcia noted common economical discrepancies in their development: “Decisions are often always made by the male figure in the family” (2020). For example, the male figure usually applies for immigration status first – leaving the wife on the backburner. In these situations, women often wait several months before applying themselves – especially considering how expensive the application process is. To ensure gender-sensitive programming, Garcia’s team respects cultural

differences when asking questions during the application process. Whenever she gets the chance, she tries to separate women and men when completing documentation. Despite these efforts, Garcia believes much more work needs to be done: “I don’t think we’re moving forward on addressing gender inequality at the same rate as other departments.”

To one-day achieve gender-transformative program outcomes, Garcia believes her department must develop more personal relationships with the clients they serve. This will enable her to address their needs on a more individualized basis. Similar to the other interviewees, Garcia noted a lack of guidance from HQ on overcoming gender inequality: “Quite frankly, this is the first time I’ve heard about gender-transformative programming – it’s never been introduced to the office before” says Garcia. When asked if the Tucson IRC would benefit from developing specific programming directed towards woman and girls, Garcia said “Absolutely. Every day we see women suffer from various gender inequalities. These inequalities magnify all areas of their lives – and that is something we must be addressing.” To help women overcome these barriers, she believes the office must empower them in continuing their education. “Not only should they promote job-readiness to pay the bills, but also to pursue an education and ultimately build a career for themselves” said Garcia. Being locked into traditional gender roles, economic discrepancies and a lack of encouragement to pursue an education are amongst the top three barriers Garcia believes need to be addressed.

## Conclusion

When the United States agrees to accept a refugee for resettlement, they must ensure all individuals have the same opportunity to resettle successfully – regardless of their gender or

social status. Through various data collection methods, this report has provided the Tucson-based International Rescue Committee with suggestions on how to better serve their female-identifying clients. Both the existing literature and findings from this study have highlighted the heightened need for resettlement agencies across the nation to implement effective programs directed towards women and girls. To ensure fairness, measures must often be taken by any and all agencies to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of this population group. The Tucson IRC in particular, must ensure their programs account for risks to safety and access, which have the biggest impact on a woman's ability to seek services and make important decisions that can affect all areas of her life.

The findings from the participant observations, gender committee meetings, and one-on-one interviews identified five key issues and concerns refugee women and girls face in the Tucson community: lack of sustainable childcare, access to ESL and higher-education classes, escaping domestic violence situations, finding gainful employment, and ultimately breaking free from traditional gender roles. After conducting both the refugee and staff interviews, I found that majority of IRC staff strive to address these gendered barriers but are held back by funding, capacity and timing constraints – constraints that many other non-governmental organizations struggle to overcome. Additionally, I found that all four departments included in the interview process strive to ensure their programs are at minimum, gender-sensitive. In other words, each department recognizes the differing needs and constraints of the women and men they serve.

To make the transition from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative programming possible, the findings highlight the need for more guidance from HQ on overcoming gender inequality. The data gathered from the gender committee meetings determined gaps in

programming and how neither the gender champion nor the gender committee adequately address the five core challenges women and girls face in the community. Although they strive to do so, members are again held back by a lack of funding and time to devote to these positions. As aforementioned, resettlement organizations are less likely to attain grants from social service agencies such as the Department of Economic Security when they have fewer clients to serve. Fewer clients means fewer funding opportunities for current and future refugees. Due to President Trump's decision to slash admittance numbers from the day he took office in 2016, agencies like the Tucson IRC have struggled to ensure that all of their incoming clients receive the same opportunity to reach self-sufficiency in their new host community.

Although this report provides an extensive review of four major departments at the Tucson IRC, further assessment of the case management team is advised. Additionally, the Gender Analysis Tool referenced throughout the report should be used to frequently assess whether or not the office is working towards gender-transformative program outcomes. With adequate funding, staff, and community resources, the Tucson IRC has the potential to provide gender-transformative programming in the same way that organizations like RefuSHE does for the women and girls they serve in Nairobi. Considering the dearth of empirical research, data, and analysis regarding resettlement programs across the nation, I only hope this site-specific assessment helps pave the way for women and girls to flourish in the Tucson community. These individuals fled their home countries in hopes of finding freedom, safety, and political autonomy – not to face additional barriers due to their gender and social status. It is up to resettlement agencies like the Tucson IRC to help ensure those promises are fulfilled and gender inequalities are frequently addressed.

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