



## **Assessing Barriers & Support for Refugees with Disabilities in U.S. Resettlement Programs**

**White Paper**

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## Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name	Description/Notes
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	Federal law ensuring civil rights for people with disabilities
CBO	Community-Based Organization	Typically locally grounded nonprofit serving cultural or disability communities.
CIL	Center for Independent Living	Disability-led organizations supporting independent living and advocacy.
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.	UN treaty outlining international disability rights standards
EOCIL IDSP	Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living Institute for Disability Studies and Policy	Funder of the study
ESL	English as a Second Language	Educational support program for non-native English speakers.
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	Oversees ORR and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	References in the context of disability and refugee support organizations
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD)	Representative organizations led by and accountable to persons with disabilities, advocating for their rights, inclusion, and participation in policy-making, development, and humanitarian efforts.
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement	U.S. Department of Human Services office responsible for refugee services
PII	Personally Identifiable Information	Data privacy concerns noted by participants
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration	U.S. Department of State bureau funding the R&P program
R&P	Reception and Placement Program	Federally funded program covering the initial resettlement period (first 30-90 days)
RCA	Refugee Cash Assistance	Financial assistance for refugees not eligible for TANF
RMA	Refugee Medical Assistance	Short-term health coverage for eligible refugees

RRA	Refugee Resettlement Agency	Organizations assisting refugees during resettlement
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	Federal food assistance program
SSI	Supplemental Security Income	Federal disability-related income support program
STAR	Support for Trauma-Affected Refugees	Mental health support program for refugees
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	Federal welfare program for low-income families
USICD	United States International Council on Disabilities	Lead organization conducting the study
WGSS or WG-SS	Washington Group Short Set on Functioning	International tool for collecting disability-disaggregated data

## Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) and funded by the Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living (EOCIL) Institute for Disability Studies and Policy (IDSP), explores the barriers and support systems experienced by refugees with disabilities resettled across the United States. The study was initiated in response to identified service gaps within Refugee Resettlement Agencies (RRAs), particularly concerning disability accommodations, awareness of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and accessible housing.

Conducted in two phases between January and April 2025, the study combined qualitative interviews with refugees with disabilities across eight states with an outreach survey targeting disability organizations. It applied the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WGSS) to assess disability status and examined resettlement experiences related to agency support, integration, and rights awareness.

### Key findings include:

- **Disability & Support:** Nearly half of respondents experienced significant functional limitations, yet only a minority reported receiving specialized disability services from RRAs. While most received basic support (e.g., Medicaid, SNAP), only 12% accessed SSI.
- **Employment:** Fifty-three percent of respondents were unemployed, and many felt overqualified for their current jobs. Vocational training and certification support were significantly lacking.

- **Housing & Accessibility:** Although 76% reported living in accessible homes, several noted severe shortcomings, such as inaccessible apartment units resulting in unsafe physical accommodations.
- **RRA Staffing & Referral Deficiencies:** Ninety-four percent of participants believed RRAs lacked sufficient training or capacity to serve disabled clients. More than half encountered direct challenges with their assigned agencies. Systematic referrals to Centers for Independent Living (CILs) or Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) were rare.
- **Community Engagement:** Most refugees lacked meaningful access to adaptive recreation, community activities, or peer mentorship programs, despite strong interest. Transportation and outreach challenges were cited as major barriers.
- **Civil Rights & Legal Vulnerabilities:** The report highlights significant gaps in due process protections, civil rights enforcement, and legal recourse for refugees with disabilities, placing this population at risk of systemic exclusion and discrimination.

This report calls for coordinated federal reform that embeds disability rights across all levels of resettlement policy and practice. Grounded in the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the recommendations affirm that disability inclusion is not an aspirational ideal; it is a legal civil rights obligation, rooted in values of equity, dignity, and autonomy. A cornerstone proposal is the establishment of a Joint Interagency Disability Inclusion Task Force to guide policy alignment, enforce accountability measures, and advance inclusive service standards across federal, state, and community stakeholders.

By embracing a rights-based framework and centering lived experience, U.S. refugee resettlement can evolve into a system that empowers, not overlooks, refugees with disabilities. The opportunity to act is now: with legal clarity, moral conviction, and collective purpose.

## Background

RRAs across the United States provide services to support refugees with and without disabilities, helping to ensure that they can successfully integrate into their new communities. Assigned case managers work closely with refugees to help them navigate healthcare, employment, and social services. Mental health services are available for those experiencing trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other psychological conditions due to conflict and displacement. Case managers

familiar with the needs of refugees with disabilities work to ensure these refugees receive disability accommodations, such as accessible housing.

The US Department of State's Bureau of Populations, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) provides funding to resettlement agencies through the Reception and Placement Program (R&P).<sup>1</sup> This funding covers the first 30-90 days after arrival. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) offers short-term cash assistance, medical aid, and employment services to refugees beyond their initial arrival period.<sup>2</sup> Some states allocate additional funding to resettlement agencies to supplement federal aid, particularly for housing, education, and healthcare. Resettlement agencies also rely on donations from individuals, foundations, and corporate sponsors. There are nine RRAs in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>:

1. Bethany Christian Services (BCS)
2. Church World Service (CWS)
3. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)
4. Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)
5. Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service - LIRS)
6. HIAS
7. International Rescue Committee (IRC)
8. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
9. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

The states receiving the most refugees are Texas, California, New York, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Idaho, Kentucky, and South Dakota.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. "Reception & Placement Program." U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-civilian-security-democracy-and-human-rights/bureau-of-population-refugees-and-migration/>

<sup>2</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement. "Refugee Cash Assistance and Medical Support Programs." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://acf.gov/orr/about>

<sup>3</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement. "Resettlement Agencies." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Administration for Children & Families, <https://acf.gov/orr/grant-funding/resettlement-agencies>

Over the last five years, the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) has met with leaders from the Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services – LIRS), Catholic Charities of Oregon, and disability organizations that also provide support to refugees with disabilities. During these initial discussions, we identified several gaps that exist in the services provided by RRAs to refugees with disabilities. Recognizing these gaps, such as a lack of knowledge about SSI being available to qualified refugees with disabilities, served as the driving force behind a small-scale pilot to assess the barriers faced by refugees with disabilities and the support systems available to them.

It is hoped that this research's findings will draw attention to the issues faced by refugees with disabilities across various states. By sharing this information with the U.S. government, NGOs, resettlement agencies, and local communities, stakeholders can better understand and respond to the unique challenges of refugees with disabilities, ultimately influencing future development and resettlement plans within the United States.

## Methodology

USICD conducted a two-phase study between January and April 2025 to examine the experiences of refugees with disabilities receiving services from RRAs across the U.S. The methodology employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection, ensuring a comprehensive approach to capturing challenges, needs, and available support systems.

### **Phase One: Interviews with Refugees with Disabilities**

Following discussions with refugees with disabilities, disability sector informants, and the USICD Executive Director, a comprehensive questionnaire (Appendix A) was developed to capture detailed information about individual experiences. The questionnaire was available in English, French, Dari, and Pashto, and covered critical aspects such as:

- Demographic profile - (age, gender, marital status, number of dependents, education, employment history).
- Functional limitations, based on the WGSS, assessing vision, hearing, mobility, cognition, self-care, and communication.
- Vocational training and employment assistance, including job placement, certifications, and workplace accessibility.
- Government and agency support, such as case management, cash assistance, Medicaid, social programs, and accessibility accommodations.

- Community involvement, assessing participation in religious activities, peer support groups, and mentorship programs.

To ensure clarity and ease of communication, the questionnaire was field-tested by USICD's consultant, who is also a recently arrived refugee who has a disability. Feedback ensured the questions were well-structured, culturally appropriate, and effectively conveyed.

Subsequently, structured interviews were conducted with 17 refugees with disabilities across several states, including Maryland, Oklahoma, Colorado (Denver), Iowa, North Carolina, Texas, Nevada (Las Vegas), and Massachusetts. Each response was documented using individual survey forms, and the data was later organized for analysis. Quantitative data was disaggregated by age and gender, allowing further insights into demographic trends and service gaps.

### **Phase Two: Survey of Disability Organizations**

The second phase of the study aimed to assess the involvement of disability organizations supporting refugees with disabilities, with a focus on:

- The scope of services provided (healthcare, education, employment support).
- Associated costs of delivering services.
- Collaboration between disability organizations and Refugee Resettlement Agencies.

USICD used the Alchemer online survey tool to facilitate broad participation, distributing the survey to over 160 organizations nationwide. Unfortunately, only two organizations completed the survey (Appendix B), resulting in insufficient qualitative and quantitative data for inclusion in the final analysis. The low response rate highlighted challenges in stakeholder engagement, indicating the need for stronger outreach strategies and potential incentives for participation in future research.

### **Data Analysis & Reporting**

The data from Phase One was analyzed through quantitative and qualitative methods, focusing on key themes such as:

- Functional limitations and accessibility challenges.
- Employment rates and vocational training opportunities.
- Government assistance and gaps in service delivery.
- Community engagement and barriers to integration.



Given the limitations in Phase Two, the final report emphasizes findings from refugee interviews, providing critical insights into resettlement challenges and service effectiveness. The results of this study inform USICD's broader policy work and serve as a foundation for future reforms that center disabled refugee voices, improve service coordination, and strengthen accountability measures. The final report will be published on the USICD website, contributing to broader policy discussions on refugee inclusion and disability support.

## Study Limitations

While conducting this pilot study, several challenges impacted the collection of information and the ability to fully assess the barriers and supports available to refugees with disabilities. These limitations include:

1. **Political climate and fear of disclosure** – The current Administration's policies affecting refugees and immigrants have created a climate of fear, discouraging participation due to concerns over potential legal consequences. Respondents expressed hesitation about sharing personally identifiable information (PII), citing fears it could be misused or disclosed beyond the scope of the study.  
Due to recent actions by the new U.S. administration, many people are feeling uncertain about their future. This concern has prompted several organizations to participate in phase two of the survey questionnaire. Disability organizations, in particular, are working diligently to protect benefits and entitlements from budget cuts, ensuring they can continue their essential activities and safeguard their stability.
2. **Limited access to respondents** – Despite outreach efforts, direct referrals to refugees with disabilities were unavailable, limiting engagement with individuals facing resettlement challenges. As a result, we have primarily relied on referrals from other refugees with disabilities.
3. **Compensation expectations** – Some potential participants declined to complete interviews unless compensated, making it difficult to obtain a robust representative sample.
4. **Time constraints and survey fatigue** – Many respondents faced pressing personal and economic responsibilities, which reduced their availability to complete the interviews. Additionally, survey fatigue was observed, where individuals were reluctant to engage in another questionnaire-based study.

5. **Perceived lack of immediate benefit** – Some individuals questioned if the research would lead to policy changes or direct improvements in their circumstances.
6. **Fear of misinterpretation** – Participants were hesitant to share personal experiences due to concerns that their testimonies might be misinterpreted affecting the validity of self-reported data.
7. **Literacy and language barriers** – Reading and writing skills varied among respondents, requiring additional accommodations to ensure accurate data collection. To address this, the interview form was translated into Dari, Pashto, and French, allowing wider accessibility. In-person interviews were also conducted to accommodate illiterate respondents.

Despite these challenges, the findings provide valuable insights into existing gaps in refugee resettlement services and lay the foundation for further research in the U.S. and globally.

## Study Results

The study was conducted between January 24 and April 4, 2025. USICD received seventeen completed interview forms from refugees resettled in eight states. This primary data provides direct insights into how resettlement systems are responding, or failing to respond, to the needs of disabled refugees across regions.

The majority of respondents who completed the forms were resettled in Maryland and Iowa. More than half of the respondents (59%) fell within the age range of 23 to 45, while 12% were between 47 and 69 years old. Three respondents (18%) were between the ages of 14 and 16 years old (two males, one female).

USICD used the WGSS to collect disability-disaggregated data. Respondents' date of arrival in the U.S. ranged from 2017 to 2025. The following findings are drawn from disaggregated responses across age, gender, functional domains, support services, and employment status. Participants' lived experiences reveal persistent gaps in accessibility, benefits navigation, community inclusion, and agency capacity.

### a. Biographical Information

**Gender:** 82% of the respondents were male refugees with disabilities, and 6% were female refugees with disabilities.

**Marital Status:** 82% of the respondents were married. 12% percent of the respondents were unmarried, and six percent did not disclose their marital status.

## **b. Washington Group Short Set on Functioning**

- **Overall disability prevalence:** 71% of participants reported experiencing “a lot of difficulty” or being unable to do at least one activity, thus meeting the WGSS criteria for disability.
- **Prevalence by Functional Domain:**
  - Vision: 17.6%
  - Hearing: 17.6%
  - Mobility: 47%
  - Cognition: 35.2%
  - Self-Care: 53%
  - Communication: 47%

## **c. US Government Support**

- **Refugee Resettlement Agency (RRA) Case management services:** 88% of respondents received case management services through the RRA to which they were assigned.
- **Refugee Cash Assistance:** 82% of male respondents and 18% of female respondents received cash assistance, with the majority (65%) reporting they received cash assistance for more than one year.
- **Accessible housing:** 76% of respondents reported living in an accessible home. 17% of the respondents reported that they need accessible housing. However, it was not provided by the agency. One respondent noted that he had to carry his daughter, who has a disability, up a flight of stairs each day due to inaccessible housing.
- **Vocational job training:** Only 24% of the adult male respondents received vocational training assistance. 18% of the female respondents received vocational job training assistance.
- **Job search assistance:** 77% of respondents received job search assistance. 53% received resume development support.
- **English Language training:** 41% of respondents received English language classes. 47% reported receiving translation or interpretation services.
- **Childcare:** 18% of respondents reported receiving assistance with childcare.
- **Transportation services**
  - Car ownership: 53% of male respondents and 18% of female respondents reported owning a car.

- Primary mode of transportation: 47% of respondents reported using public transportation (buses), and 6% reported using other means of transportation (e.g., bicycle).
- One individual reported having significant issues with accessing accessible transportation in Iowa.
- **Medicaid:** 83% of all respondents reported having received Medicaid services. 6% were in the process of receiving Medicaid, and 11% had not received Medicaid services.
- **Refugee Medical Assistance:** 24% of respondents reported receiving refugee medical assistance.
- **Support for Trauma-Affected Refugees (STAR) services:** 29% of respondents were receiving STAR services.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** Only 12% of respondents reported they were receiving SSI. One respondent reported he was receiving \$967 monthly from SSI.
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** 35% of the respondents reported receiving TANF.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** 88% of respondents reported receiving SNAP benefits.
- **Technical assistance for small business start-up/Refugee Microenterprise Development:** No respondents reported receiving support for small business start-ups or refugee microenterprise development.
- **Youth mentoring:** 6% of respondents reported receiving youth mentoring.
- **Refugee Family Child Care Microenterprise Development:** No respondents reported receiving this service.
- **Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program:** No respondents reported receiving this service.

#### d. Education & Employment

Seventy-six percent of respondents provided details on the type of work they did prior to arriving in the U.S. (program director, finance supervisor, security guard, manager, finance officer, and self-employed).

#### Certification

Twenty-four percent of respondents reported that their place of employment requires certification. 12% of respondents reported that they have been

assisted by their employers to receive required certifications. Only 6% reported receiving certifications from their country of origin.

### **Employment Status**

Fifty-three percent of respondents reported they are currently unemployed. 29% of respondents who are currently employed reported they feel they are overqualified for their current position. 41% of respondents indicated they are receiving between \$15 to \$20 an hour. Only 12% of the respondents reported that they work 40 hours a week.

### **Highest Education Level Achieved**

Six percent of respondents reported no formal education. 24% did not report their highest education level achieved. 12% reported having a master's degree, and 6% reported having a Bachelor's degree. Fields of study reported included economics, journalism, and computer science.

#### **e. Dependents**

Sixty-five percent of the respondents reported having children under the age of 16, and 24% of the respondents reported having dependents with disabilities or special needs. Of these, 18% specifically noted that the dependents with disabilities were members of their immediate families. Despite these needs, none of the respondents reported that their children were receiving special education services via an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). However, no respondents indicated their dependents were receiving special education services. Additionally, only 6% of the respondents' children were enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at their schools, suggesting gaps in both disability-specific and language support within the education system.

#### **f. Community Involvement**

A majority of respondents (65%) reported active participation in religious activities, highlighting them as a key part of their social integration. Additionally, 18% indicated they volunteer at local businesses, contributing to their communities through unpaid work. Peer-to-peer support was noted by 12% of respondents as a valuable engagement channel, with in-person meetings fostering both networking opportunities and increased awareness of the U.S. disability community. Access barriers persist for many, with 24% emphasizing the need for accessible transportation and noting its absence

significantly limits their ability to participate in community activities and build social connections.

Other respondents expressed interest in pursuing creative and social activities, such as art, continuing education, making new social connections, and participating in adaptive sports.

**g. Challenges with RRA services**

More than half of respondents (53%) reported experiencing challenges with services provided by their assigned resettlement agencies. Only 6% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the support they received, while 42% chose not to respond to the question. Notably, 94% of respondents believed that agency staff lacked the professional training and understanding necessary to adequately address the unique needs and challenges faced by refugees with disabilities.

## Strategic Recommendations for Disability-Inclusive Refugee Resettlement Reform

To ensure that refugees with disabilities receive equitable and effective support across all stages of resettlement, coordinated federal reform is essential. The U.S. Department of State's PRM and the HHS ORR must adopt targeted strategies that embed disability inclusion into grantmaking, service delivery, data collection, and civil rights oversight. A foundational step includes establishing a Joint Interagency Disability Inclusion Task Force with representation from disability-led organizations, refugee-serving NGOs, and resettlement practitioners to develop inclusive service standards and accountability benchmarks.

The following recommendations outline key actions that each agency can take to address current service gaps and advance equity for refugees with disabilities:

### **U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration**

- 1. Integrate Disability Inclusion into R&P Funding Requirements.** Require RRAs to include disability-focused staffing, accommodation protocols, and accessibility benchmarks within their Reception and Placement (R&P) proposals.
- 2. Mandate Disability Sensitivity Training for RRA Staff.** Implement standardized disability awareness and accommodations training for RRA

personnel. Utilize the WGSS to collect disability-disaggregated data and monitor inclusion across program sites.

3. **Expand R&P Contract Eligibility.** Include CILs, OPDs, and culturally responsive community organizations as eligible recipients of R&P and complementary service contracts.
4. **Launch Pilot Initiatives Led by Disability Organizations.** Create competitive grant opportunities for disability-led groups to pilot peer support models, benefits navigation, and accessible housing coordination.
5. **Support Accountability Mechanisms.** Collaborate in establishing an Independent Review Board, a multidisciplinary body including disability advocates, legal experts, and refugee-serving organizations, to oversee rights protections and service standards within the R&P system.

#### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement**

1. **Expand guidance on SSI and Long-term Disability Supports.** Issue clear, multilingual guidance to RRAs and medical providers on how refugees with disabilities can access SSI and other long-term federal benefits. Fund technical assistance hubs to support caseworkers navigating complex benefits systems.
2. **Incentivize State-Level Innovation for Accessible Services.** Offer pilot funding for accessible housing, transportation, and employment strategies led by culturally competent disability organizations and local governments.
3. **Strengthen Monitoring and Civil Rights Enforcement.** Integrate disability-specific metrics into annual performance reviews for all federally funded programs (RMA, RCA, ESL, employment). Ensure civil rights compliance and disability non-discrimination across grantee operations. Address the under-enrollment of refugees with disabilities in programs like ESL, special education, or vocational training.
4. **Facilitate International Technical Consultations.** Host cross-border knowledge exchanges with UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) aligned countries (e.g., Canada, UK, Switzerland) to inform U.S. disability-inclusive policy reforms.
5. **Empower Data Transparency and Accountability.** Require the collection of both quantitative and testimonial data on refugee disability inclusion. Report

outcomes publicly and use participatory evaluation methods centered on lived experience.

- 6. Establishment of an Independent Review Board.** Advocate for the creation of a multidisciplinary, independent review board composed of individuals with disabilities, disability rights organizations, legal experts, medical professionals, government representatives, and refugee-serving NGOs. This body would provide oversight, ensure safeguards, and protect the rights and welfare of refugees with disabilities across all stages of the resettlement process.
- 7. Convene National Stakeholder Forums.** Facilitate multi-sector convenings to ensure alignment across disability organizations, refugee agencies, and service providers that are centered on co-created strategies and power-sharing.
- 8. Advance Civil Rights Protections and Public Transparency.** Combat implicit bias and systemic ableism within refugee relocation programs by mandating anti-discrimination training, disability awareness education, and civil rights compliance monitoring. Refugees with disabilities must not be disproportionately excluded or underserved due to perceived burdens or misunderstandings of disability.
- 9. Legal and Judicial Engagement.** Promote strategic legal advocacy to advance disability justice in refugee resettlement. Collaborate with legal aid organizations and disability rights groups to:
  - Submit amicus briefs in cases impacting refugees with disabilities
  - Ensure due process protections and equitable service access
  - Monitor and address systemic discrimination under the ADA and Rehabilitation Act
- 10. Initiate and Monitor Federal Legal Challenges.** Establish a formal mechanism within OCR to track litigation outcomes that expose discriminatory or inadequate refugee resettlement practices. Coordinate responses to lawsuits brought under federal disability rights law, identify systemic gaps, and integrate lessons learned into program oversight and funding decisions.



## **Refugee Resettlement Agencies**

The above findings suggest a systematic lack of awareness among agency staff regarding the complex, intersectional needs of refugees with disabilities. USICD has the following recommendations for RRAs:

- 1. Mandatory Disability Screening and Community-Based Support Referrals:** Implement a standardized intake and screening process that evaluates for all forms of disability, including psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Individuals identified as having a disability must be automatically referred to a CIL or an equivalent OPD. This ensures access to peer support, service navigation, assistive technology, accessible housing advocacy, and community integration resources from the outset of resettlement.
- 2. Enhance Disability Training for RRA Staff:** Train case managers in cross-disability accommodations and intersectional service provision to better serve refugees with disabilities.
- 3. Develop Clear Benefits Navigation Protocols:** Develop clear, multilingual informational materials and dedicated advocacy services to ensure eligible refugees access SSI and other relevant supports.
- 4. Invest in Accessible Housing and Transportation:** Partner with disability organizations and local governments to expand ADA-compliant and universally designed accessible housing and public transit. Increase dedicated funding and strategic partnerships—especially in high-resettlement states—to deliver housing that meets the needs of blind, low-vision, and mobility-impaired refugees.
- 5. Vocational Inclusion and Employment Equity:** Fund and implement targeted vocational training and certification pathways in high-demand trades, e.g., electricians, HVAC technicians, advanced manufacturing, coding, and establish inclusive employment partnerships with local businesses, trade unions, and apprenticeship programs. Ensure all curricula and facilities are universally designed, offer adaptive technologies, language support, and mentorship, and provide reasonable accommodations so that refugees with disabilities can earn credentials and transition seamlessly into stable, skilled jobs.
- 6. Support for Children with Disabilities:** Ensure children with disabilities receive individualized support through IEPs and language-access programs. Collaborate with schools on adaptive learning strategies.

- 7. Community Integration and Leadership Development:** Create pathways for refugees with disabilities to engage in arts, adaptive sports, volunteering, and peer mentoring. Formalize partnerships with CILs and OPDs to build inclusion from the ground up.
- 8. Participate in Oversight and Legal Advocacy Networks:** Engage with review boards and legal partners, such as the State Protection and Advocacy Systems, to track compliance, identify service gaps, and support strategic litigation when systemic failures occur.

## Conclusion

This study reveals deep, systemic gaps in U.S. refugee resettlement for people with disabilities: 71 percent of participants report significant functional limitations, 53 percent are unemployed, 17 percent live in housing that is not accessible, only 12 percent access SSI, and 94 percent perceive a lack of disability training among resettlement staff.

These findings underscore an urgent legal and moral imperative. Under the ADA, federal agencies must uphold clear civil-rights obligations, even as the State Department's PRM unit undergoes operational restructuring. Without enforceable disability-specific metrics and accountability, refugees with disabilities remain at risk of exclusion and discrimination.

We call for the formation of a Joint Interagency Disability Inclusion Task Force, combining PRM, ORR, disability-led organizations, and refugee-serving NGOs, to codify inclusive service standards, mandate training, and publicly report progress. This Task Force should enforce the recommendations laid out herein, ensuring that every resettlement policy embeds equity, transparency, and lived experience at its core.

The evidence is unambiguous: Without immediate, cross-sector reform, U.S. refugee resettlement will continue to overlook the federally guaranteed rights, namely non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, and program accessibility under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act<sup>4</sup>, and the potential of refugees with disabilities. Now is the moment to translate data into

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<sup>4</sup> Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12131–12165 (Title II, coverage of public entities, including resettlement agencies); Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794 (Section 504, prohibition on disability-based exclusion by federally funded programs)

action, honor legal mandates, and build a truly inclusive system that empowers all refugees to thrive.

# Appendix A: Interview Form



## Section 1: Biographical Information

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last/Surname/Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
Marital Status (Married/Single/Widowed): \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of dependents in the US: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of dependents under age 16: \_\_\_\_\_  
Are you supporting dependents who have remained in your country of origin (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_  
Supportive Relatives in the US (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_  
County/State of residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
Languages spoken: \_\_\_\_\_  
Highest Education level Achieved (Primary/Middle/Secondary/Higher(College)):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If college/university education:  
Graduate or undergraduate degree:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Course of Study/ Major(s):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Job/Position before arriving in the US:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Certifications:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Arrival Date in the US: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2: Washington Group Short Set on Functioning

**VISION** – Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses? Would you say...

1. No difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Some difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
3. A lot of difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Cannot do at all Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_

**HEARING** – Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using hearing aid(s)? Would you say...

1. No difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Some difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
3. A lot of difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Cannot do at all Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_

**MOBILITY** – Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps? Would you say...

1. No difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Some difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
3. A lot of difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Cannot do at all Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITION (REMEMBERING)** – Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating? Would you say...

1. No difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Some difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
3. A lot of difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Cannot do at all Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_

**SELF-CARE** – Do you have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing? Would you say...

1. No difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Some difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
3. A lot of difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Cannot do at all Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMMUNICATION** – Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example, understanding or being understood? Would you say...

1. No difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Some difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
3. A lot of difficulty Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Cannot do at all Yes/No: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3: US Government Support

Resettlement Agency where you receive services:

Did you receive the following support from the Refugee Resettlement Agency:

Case management (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Refugee Cash Assistance (Yes/No):

Housing: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Gas/Electric: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Wi-Fi: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you received Refugee Cash Assistance:

When does the cash assistance expire: \_\_\_\_\_

If receiving assistance for housing, and you are a person with a physical disability, is the home you received accessible (e.g. elevator, bathroom, kitchen):

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Vocational Job Training Preparation (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_

Resume Development (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Job Search Assistance (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_

English language training (Yes/No/Not aware/Not required): \_\_\_\_\_

Childcare (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation(Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you own a car (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_  
If no, what is your primary mode of transportation? \_\_\_\_\_  
Translation and interpreter services (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_

Medicaid (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_  
Refugee Medical Assistance (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_  
Support for Trauma-Affected Refugees (STAR) (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes to SSI, how much is the individual/family receiving monthly? \_\_\_\_\_  
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Technical assistance for small business start-up/Refugee Microenterprise Development  
(Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Youth mentoring (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Refugee Family Child Care Microenterprise Development (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_  
Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (Yes/No/Not Aware): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the Refugee Resettlement Agency/NGO understands the challenges faced by refugees  
with disabilities? If no, what could they do better?

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Please describe any challenges you have had with the Refugee Resettlement Agency:

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Are you receiving other forms of government support (Please describe):

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## Section 4: Employment

Are you currently employed (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what is your current job(s):

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What is your salary/hourly rate or current income(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
How many hours do you work a week? \_\_\_\_\_  
Does your job require certification(s) (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_  
Is your employer assisting you with receiving certifications (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel you are overqualified for the current position (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any challenges at your place of employment? If yes, describe:

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### **Section 5: Dependents**

Do any of your dependents living with you also have disabilities or chronic medical or special education needs? (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_

If yes to children, are they receiving special education services from the local school via an Individualized Education Program? (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_

Are your children enrolled in school receiving English as a second language courses to assist with their English language development (listening, speaking, reading, writing)?

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### **Section 6: Community Involvement**

Religious activities (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Peer Support Groups (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any hobbies/interests (Art, science, etc.):

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Do you volunteer? If yes, please describe:

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What would help you access the community more (e.g. accessible transportation, mentorship):

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***Use the next page to add additional information.***

## Appendix B: Online Survey

The Survey of Organizations Supporting Refugees with Disabilities is available at:  
<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8200323/Disability-NGOs-Serving-Refugees-with-Disabilities-Survey>

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### About USICD

The United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) is a 34-year-old nonprofit organization committed to promoting the rights and full inclusion of people with disabilities globally. Rooted in the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the United Nations CRPD, USICD works to advance disability rights through international collaboration, policy advocacy, and capacity-building. By engaging with diverse stakeholders—including organizations of people with disabilities, civil society, and U.S. government agencies—USICD amplifies the voices of people with disabilities and ensures that disability is meaningfully integrated into U.S. foreign policy, international development, and humanitarian efforts.

Learn more at [www.usicd.org](http://www.usicd.org).

### Point of Contact

**For further information regarding this study, please contact:**

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