

Traditional Karenni Weaving
Photo Courtesy of The Weaving Women

Misconceptions About Refugees

Refugees have ties to terrorism

- Of all 750,000 refugees that have been resettled in America since 9/11, none have been arrested for terroristic attacks or threats on the United States. In fact, many refugees are fleeing terrorist groups in their home country.

Refugees take government aid

- While the United States Government does pay for the flights of all resettled refugees, they are expected to pay the cost back in full after four years of resettlement. Their main source of aid after coming to America is through resettlement agencies, which are largely donation-based.

Final Thoughts

Refugees are an especially vulnerable group of people in the United States; they have fled from persecution and continue to face it, to an extent, in their resettled homes. Knowing how to politely communicate with this demographic and encourage constructive conversation will ideally lead to both participants having a better understanding of the other's culture. Learning English leads to more independence and greater societal contributions from refugees, in turn benefitting the United States.

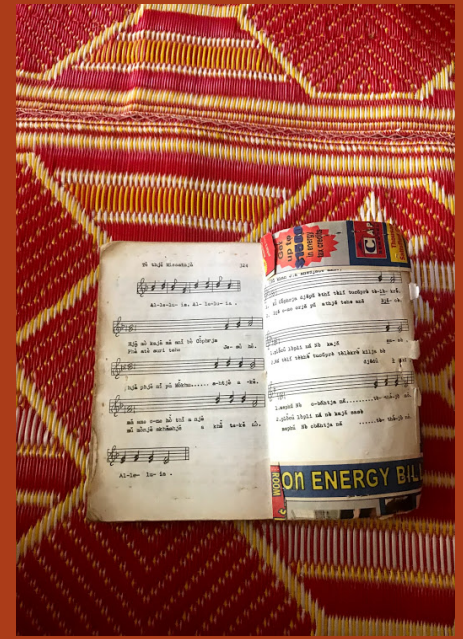
Cited Materials

- <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>
- <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/us-record-shows-refugees-are-not-threat>
- <https://venngage.com/blog/13-of-the-most-pressing-questions-about-refugees-answered-with-charts/>
- <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/261956.htm>
- Refugee Facts via Friends of Refugees

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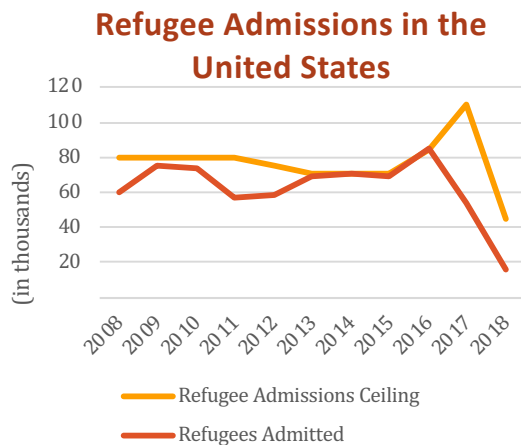


A Karenni Hymn Book
Photo Courtesy of Author

COMMUNICATING WITH REFUGEES

*A resource on English usage
with a minority population*

Leah M. Dudley



Graph of Refugee Admissions Trends, 2008-2018
Diagram Courtesy of Author

What is a Refugee?

A **refugee** is defined by the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Refugees as "someone who has been forced to flee their country due to war, persecution, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, culture, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group."

While most Americans think of refugee as a blanket term for any displaced person, there are typically strict requirements that a person must fulfill in order to be considered a refugee by governments and relief organizations.

Refugees go through an exhaustive vetting process that takes anywhere between 18 to 24 months. Afterwards they are settled in the United States, where they are aided by resettlement agencies. These agencies help them find a home in the United States, as well as English classes, citizenship classes, and other necessary courses to start their new lives.

Tips for English Speakers

Speak clearly and slowly

- Enunciating, slowing the pace of your speech, and emphasizing keywords can help an English learner better understand the point you are trying to make.

Use gestures intentionally

- For lower level speakers, gestures are often their main form of communication in an otherwise foreign language. Hand motions, nodding, and pointing are all good ways to converse with someone with a limited knowledge of English.

Initiate conversations

- Refugees in the United States have a strong desire to learn English, but often limit their English speech due to fear of misunderstanding or ridicule.
- Starting conversations and asking questions gives them a chance to practice their English skills in a comfortable setting.

Be patient

- Elaborating thoughts and feelings in a learned language is difficult and frustrating; concepts that are simple to us may not come easily to them.
- Let them finish their thought or sentence before interjecting.
- If they seem confused about what you are saying, **repeating** the main thought of your sentence(s) is a good way to help them understand.

Be respectful

- Do not ask questions that could be perceived as rude or prying.
- Make eye contact, have open body language, and smile.

Cultural Differences

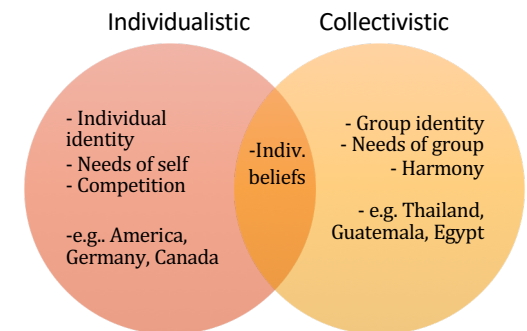
Gender roles- Some cultures and religions have firmly held beliefs on how men and women should interact. An event may be for men or women only, physical contact between the genders may be limited, and so on.

Dress- Outfits range drastically from country to country. If working with a population whose beliefs you are unaware of, it's usually best to dress in something at or below the knees and covering the shoulders.

Food- Select cultures eat with their hands rather than utensils, or prepare food uncommon in America such as certain insects or parts of animals. There can be a strong emphasis on eating together in refugee communities, so if you are offered food and do not have any health or dietary restrictions, it is most polite to eat all of what you are given.

Languages- Refugees often communicate with one another in their native language, whether or not there is an English speaker present. This is usually done due to the ease of conversation, not as an exclusionary act.

Culture- Many refugees come from countries that emphasize collectivistic culture (focus on group) rather than individualistic culture (focus on self). See the diagram below.



Core Differences Between Culture Types
Diagram Courtesy of Author