

## Experiences of Trauma, Persecution, and Racism by Refugee Families: Individuals and Families Seeking Asylum in the United States

### Table Leader

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### Immigration and Nationality Laws in the United States

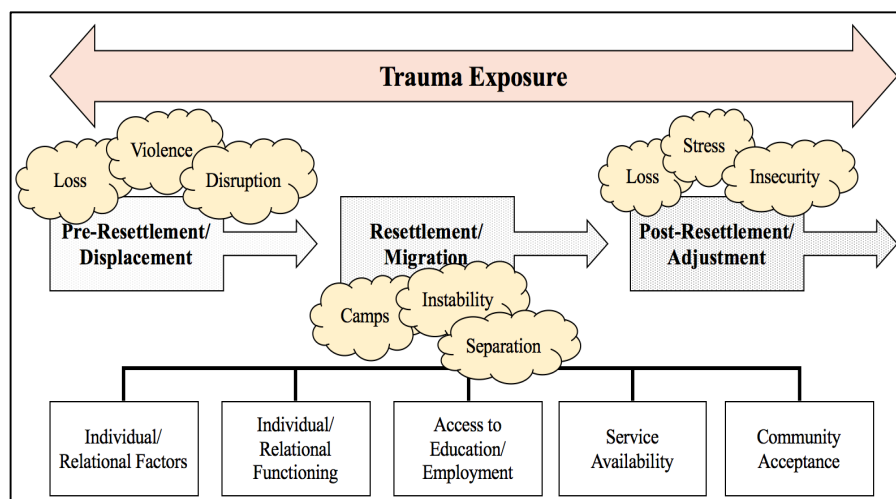
Reflecting on the experience of individuals and families fleeing from violence around the world, and seeking to rebuild their lives in the United States, requires a foundational awareness of immigration laws. Codified by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, immigration laws in the United States are complex. They are actually more complex than the Tax Code, which is nearly 27,000 pages long.

### Protection of Refugees

People fleeing from violence and persecution around the world, referred to *asylum-seekers* or *asylees* before granted *refugee* status, face countless challenges of coming to the United States. Admission is based on the inability to return to their home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution” on one or more of five grounds: 1) race, 2) membership in a particular social group or 3) political opinion, 4) religious beliefs, or 5) national origin. *Asylum* is also available to people already in the United States for one or more of the same five grounds. They may request asylum at any port of entry (e.g., airport) or within one (1) year of arriving. Both asylum-seekers or asylees and refugees are eligible to become *legal permanent residents* (LPRs) one year after admission to the United States. Admission depends on factors such as degree of potential risk, membership in a group of special concern to United States government; generally designated by the President and Congress), and whether or not they have family in the United States.

### Resettlement Stages: Post-Resettlement/Adjustment

Resettlement process of asylum-seekers or asylees and refugees can be separated into three stages (i.e., *pre-resettlement/displacement*, *resettlement/migration*, and *post-resettlement/adjustment*). Each stage has unique challenges that exacerbate existing physical and/or psychological problems (see figure below).



### **Experiencing Discrimination and Prejudice**

Due to being targeted because of their beliefs, people are often concerned with social justice and fairness. Their thoughts are consumed by feelings of humiliation, anger, hatred or hopelessness, and despair. This may be further exacerbated by limited clinical experience of therapist, no access to an interpreter, or culturally insensitive practices. Executive Order #13769 (i.e., *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States*) received wide-spread criticism around the world. It was also blocked by United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) subsequently allowed parts of the order to go into effect; specifically, permitting ban of foreign nationals who lack any “bona fide relationship with any person or entity in the United States.”

### **Effects of Rising Anti-Refugee Sentiment/Sociopolitical Climate**

Despite being partially suspended, Executive Order #13769 had a devastating effect of resettlement agencies in the United States. World Relief (WR) closed five offices nationwide. This was followed by closure of a Catholic Charities (CC) office in Tennessee, along with, fear of closure among offices in Alaska, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Utah. Significant source of prejudice and discrimination, particularly toward Syrian refugees, is misinformation. The gulf of awareness between elected officials and their constituents is also widening, which not only reinforces anti-refugee sentiment but also incites fear.

### **Discussion Questions**

To begin, please introduce yourself and what you hope to get out of this discussion. Then take a moment to review the following questions:

1. What is your current experience with the aforementioned population in the United States?
2. How has your understanding about displaced persons changed over time?
3. How has the sociopolitical climate changed in your community over the past year?
4. What can you do, or have you done for that matter, to combat anti-refugee sentiment?

### **Further Reading**

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