

Re-thinking Trust in Refugee Resettlement: A Contextual Perspective and Proposal for Reciprocal Integration

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Abstract : The refugee resettlement process profoundly shapes the trajectories of individuals in their new host countries, exerting lasting effects on their long-term integration. Prevailing literature underscores the pivotal role of trust in facilitating successful refugee resettlement. However, this research challenges the notion of trust as universally paramount, contending that its significance is contingent upon variables such as the nature of resettlement programs and the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of refugees. Rather than advocating for a blanket approach to trust-building, this research contends that for certain resettlement programs, trust may prove counterproductive amidst resource constraints and tight service timelines. Moreover, trust may not uniformly emerge as a primary requisite for all refugees, presenting formidable challenges in its establishment. Focusing specifically on resettlement in the United States, this study illustrates how the temporal constraints of resettlement services, coupled with refugees' varied cultural experiences, can impede the cultivation of trust between aid workers and refugees. As an alternative paradigm, this research proposes an approach centered on fostering opportunities for reciprocal engagement, positioning refugees as active contributors within their newfound communities. Embracing reciprocity as the cornerstone of burgeoning relationships promises to fortify refugees' ties with the broader community, bolster their autonomy, and facilitate sustained integration over time. The research draws upon qualitative analyses of in-depth interviews conducted with a subset of resettled refugees, as well as aid workers and volunteers involved in refugee resettlement endeavors within Hampton Roads, Virginia, over the past decade. Through this nuanced examination, the study offers insights into the complexities of trust dynamics in refugee resettlement contexts and advocates for a paradigm shift towards reciprocal integration strategies.

Keywords : Resettlement programs, Trust dynamics, Reciprocity, Long-term integration

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