



Refugee Health Programs



A Refugee's Right to Adequate Food

Refugee Rights

Each year the United States resettles an average of 60,000-80,000 refugees. Illinois receives an estimated 2,200 of this population¹.

- Assist with the transition into the U.S., resettlement organizations offer refugees a range of services which are derived from the fundamental human rights to food, clothing, housing and economic security.
- In an effort to move refugees from a state of crisis to stability, these services include the provisions of housing, health care, economic security, and legal protections.

Issues with Resettlement

With a new country comes a new lifestyle. Despite best efforts toward successfully resettling refugees and their families, they still face new issues and challenges that often adversely affect their health.

- Research has linked acculturation to diet-related health problems, including weight gain and malnutrition.
- Most refugees find it difficult or financially prohibitive to procure and prepare the foods that they knew in their countries of origin.
- In addition, due to their dependent status, many refugees are limited to the resources that organizations provide. Overall, most programs fail to provide education on their new food environment.

A Rights Approach

It is important to understand the different challenges that influence refugee life and to provide resources needed to ensure their right to adequate food and freedom from malnutrition.

Recognizing food as a human right requires:

- Addressing all aspects of the dietary and nutritional needs of refugees;
- Identifying the steps that will secure all required components for an adequate standard of living particularly adequate food.

Tracking a Rights Approach to Adequate Food

1946: World Health Organization on the Right to Health²:

The right to health means that governments must generate conditions in which everyone can live as healthy as possible. Such conditions range from ensuring availability of health services, healthy and safe working conditions, adequate housing and nutritious food.

1948: United Nations Declaration of Human Rights: Article 25, Section 1³:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing...and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

1966: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Article 11⁴ & General Comment 12⁵:

The right to adequate food...and the fundamental right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition...is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.

2002: United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food⁴

The right to adequate food is a human right, inherent in all people, to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.

1. Department of State. PRM. Refugee Processing Center: <http://www.wrapsnet.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YXJq9QewoMw%3d&tabid=211&mid=630&language=en-US>. 1/22/2008

2. World Health Organization. *The Right to Health*. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs323/en/>. 1/12/2008

3. United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. <http://www.udhr.org/UDHR/default.htm>. 1/22/2008

4. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations: *Guiding Principles*. http://www.fao.org/righttofood/principles_en.htm. 1/22/2008

5. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. *General Comment 12*. http://www.fao.org/righttofood/common/ecg/51635_en_Genera_Comment_No.12.pdf. 1/12/2008

Respect, Protect, and Fulfill Refugees' Rights to Adequate Food

Barriers

- Lack of available funds allocated to nutrition programs.
- Unaddressed or inadequate access to affordable and nutritious food.
- Lack of nutrition modeling, education and resources in agencies' environments and policies.
- Lack of culturally appropriate and representative food options within communities.

New Vision

- Include food and nutrition as a component of every resettlement program.
- Increase and improve awareness of and access to adequate, healthy and sustainable food systems.
- Improve and create culturally sensitive food and nutrition-specific programming and outreach.
- Ensure that resettlement agencies' allocated resources for refugees, i.e. cash assistance, reflect food and nutrition as a priority and a human right.

Calls to Action

FEDERAL	STATE	LOCAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish nutrition assessment and education as a component of refugee Reception and Placement administered by the Department of State. • Require that the mandatory refugee health screenings include nutrition and dietary needs assessment. • Provide discretionary grants to states through the Office of Refugee Resettlement for nutrition programs, including outreach, education and promotion. • Allocate resettlement funds that reflect local prices in order to address and finance refugee dietary and nutrition needs adequately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require contracted resettlement programs to address food and nutrition as part of their programs and services. • Develop and implement nutrition education, promotion and outreach services for resettling refugees at the state level. • Develop and adapt culturally sensitive curriculum around healthy dietary behaviors and food systems comprehension for refugees. • Facilitate a proactive and uniform approach among contracted resettlement programs to prevent nutritional risk and food insecurity at health screening sites. • Encourage resettlement programs to reflect proper nutritional modeling within their policies and work environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train resettlement programs to sensitize refugee resettlement workers to clients' nutrition needs and food access issues. • Encourage resettlement programs to establish nutrition policies and foster a work environment that reflects healthy nutrition behavior and nutrition modeling. • Encourage local grocery stores, food pantries, etc., to consider and reflect their clients' culture-specific nutrition needs. • Encourage resettlement programs to develop culturally sensitive and location-specific grocery shopping lists. • Explore creative and sustainable food initiatives, e.g., community gardens, that empower refugee populations to create their own alternative solutions proactively.
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