2003

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Impact of Assistance Programs in the Adjustment of Refugees Resettlement fleeing situations of duress to the United States

Three Family Profiles from Sierra Leone, Iraq and Bosnia

Faridha Adel Salama

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Abstract

In the year 2002, the borders of countries are becoming blurred as people are forced to migrate due to internal and boundary wars that affect entire regions. Refugees are people who have fled their homes with minimal or no personal possessions due a fear of persecution by the situations occurring in their home countries. Over 20 million people have been classified as refugees.

The areas to which these people first flee for refuge are neighboring poor countries. Hence, the living conditions in refugee camps lack prospects for a future with any semblance of normalcy. Less than one percent of refugees are permitted to participate in resettlement opportunities in a third country of refuge, like the United States the host country that is the focus of this research. With the collaboration of the UNHCR, the strong economic host countries, nongovernmental organizations, and efforts by local agencies, the refugees are resettled and enrolled in programs to promote adjustment and self-sufficiency.

The research compliments hands-on experience that I gained during my volunteer work with a refugee family enrolled in the Refugee Resettlement Program carried out by the Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida (LSS). Observing three families during 2001-2002, from the volatile regions of the Balkans, the Middle East and the African continent who were enrolled in different adjustment programs and at different stages in the process, the purpose of the research is to present the issues that have both promoted and hindered their resettlement efforts.

Refugee Assistance Programs

This research project compliments the hands-on experience that I gained during my volunteer work with a refugee family that I participated within the Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida (LSS), where I received training on how resettlement works and information on helping people who are linguistically and culturally different from myself.

My personal experience of living abroad and having being raised amongst various cultures has shaped my interest, made me comfortable with new cultures and has engrained a passion for understanding International Relations between the diverse people who contribute to the wealth of culture available in the world.

Internationally the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), and locally Lutheran Social Services (LSS), provides refugees with the immediate access to shelter, food, water and medical care. Once a refugee enters the resettlement host county they are eligible to receive the resources and services to remove essential barriers such as cultural and language inexperience, economic adjustment programs and help with local navigation and transportation arrangements for at least 90 days after their arrival in Jacksonville.

This project determines the capacity of the relentless and non-profit efforts pursued by the faculty of U.S. refugee resettlement programs such as Lutheran Social Services
to alleviate the degree of human suffering and the provisions of a beneficial environment for the refugees of international persecution.

This paper begins with an introduction that incorporates general public facts from UNHCR and LSS online sources, previous research works and mostly the personal understanding gained while participating as a volunteer and networking within the LSS program with the refugee families. As an International Relations and Political Science major at the University of North Florida, my education background and interests in the lives of international people affected directly by world issues.

The introduction and constant correlation of the three particular economic assistance programs of the profiled refugee families will be assessed within the design of U.S. federal and international relations policies which focus on the promotion of economic self-sufficiency for the refugees enrolled in resettlement programs.

The paper will then turn to the country profiles and the issues that made resettlement from them necessary. These issues will be in the context of the establishment of UNHCR in 1950. Then, the motivation of the project, the stories and lives of three families who have experienced the ordeal and have enrolled in refugee resettlement will be presented to provide insight to the impact of assistance programs and the outcomes relative to each family’s length of time of resettlement in the host country of the United States.

After profiling the refugee’s home countries of Bosnia, Iraq and Sierra Leone, the paper will turn to their personal situations and barriers they faced economically, socially, emotionally and psychologically. I observed the Iraqi family during Spring 2001-2002, the Bosnian family from fall 2001-2001, and the Sierra Leone family in spring 2002. Hence, the different programs will be presented at different stages in their particular refugee resettlement process and experience. The purpose of the research is to present the issues that have all had within the programs, issues that both promoted and hindered refugee resettlement efforts.

The profiles presented will not disclose the location or identities of the refugee families but I have their permission to speak about their country’s issue and how it created their plight. Since the interview methods with the three refugee families were mostly informal some of the specifics about the effects of certain programs (such as the Matching Grant) will have more details, relative to each family’s degree of familiarity with me and the agreed upon prerogative they exercised while sharing their sensitive situation.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

The United Nations established the refugee agency called the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on December 14, 1950 and as helped at least 50 million people to date. Refugees are people who have fled their homes with minimal or no personal possessions due a fear of persecution by the situations occurring in their home countries. The following table is a break down of the regions of the world where refugees originated from, provided from the UNHCR website.

Of the 189 member states of the United Nations, only ten members participate in an
ongoing acceptance of persons arriving spontaneously at their borders or through programs of resettlement. These ten countries are: USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Once refugees cross into a neighboring country, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner personnel interviews them for Refugee staff to determine their status. Once the individuals or families meet the criteria they are documented as refugees and allowed to remain in that country, usually in a refugee camp. There is a waiting period due to strains in funds and personnel who are assigned the tasks of observing the situation in the home country of the refugee and evaluating their status. This wait period can be many months, even years. They experience harsh conditions, overcrowding, lack of privacy, and inadequate food, water, sanitation and minimal medical care. It must be kept in mind that these conditions are still relative to the region from whence the refugees originate.

Frustrations arise from the passing of time without having access to sufficient income-generating activities for the adults or educational opportunities for the children with few resources at their disposal to change their circumstances.

The refugees fortunate enough to be able to return home often find their homeland devastated by war. Some refugees stay in the second country where they are waiting, but these countries usually have difficulty absorbing refugees into their weak economies. Resettlement in a third country is an option for less than one percent of all refugees.

In 1939, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services began services in the United States to respond to post-World War I needs of people forced to flee their homes to seek refuge due to religious persecution in Eastern Europe. Now the global LIRS organization has diversified its operations to include people of all religions, races, political beliefs and from all parts of the world. LIRS works with Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to coordinate the international, national and local operations according to the legal and administrative requirements set by the United States. Participating agencies agree to match the ORR grant with cash and in-kind contributions; twenty percent of their match must be in cash. In 2001, ORR funded through the voluntary agencies, 248 sites in 42 States with slots for more than 30,000 clients.

The United States is traditionally a nation of immigrants that must continue to be fair and supportive to new comers in our country and stand beside its goals of ensuring liberty and justice for all. The virtue of institutions that are dedicated to create partnership programs to condition
environments that are conducive in securing basic human rights of offering protection and assistance to refugees and others in an impartial manner, on the basis of their need and irrespective of their race, religion, political opinion or gender are commendable and can profitable.

**US Resettlement and Agency Assistance Programs**

In the United States, every year the President, in consultation with Congress, sets the number of refugees who may be resettled in the United States. Refugees who want to come here must register with a U.S. State Department representative and be interviewed by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service staff. Those approved for admission are allocated among the 10 U.S. resettlement agencies including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

The process of refugee resettlement begins at the borders of their home country where refugee camps are absorbing the needs of providing food, shelter and medical attention monitored under the auspice of the office of the UNHCR and nongovernmental programs.

Within the United States there are over 248 sites in 42 States that have adequate slots for more than 30,000 clients. Usually the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) include religious agencies such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services that handles a portion of the entries into the United States, and the lives of the three families covered in the research. Other religious NGO groups include the Church World Service, the Ethiopian Community Development Council, World Relief, the US Catholic Conference Migration and Refugee Services, Immigration and Refugee Services of America.

Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, and the Iowa Bureau for Refugee Services to name a few main resettlement agencies.

The overall achievement of National Lutheran Services has been a six-decade effort that has resulted in the total of refugees resettled to reach more than 280,000 individuals from all parts of the world and of various faiths. Incorporated in 1979, a consortium of Lutheran churches formed Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida and Jacksonville community leaders who sought to address the gaps in service to poor families. The first program was the Nourishment Network, a small food pantry, which has grown to become the only food bank in this region—Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Florida. Purpose Feeding hungry children and adults for over 20 years.

Lutheran Social Services was founded as a 501 C3 non-profit organization to address the needs of the homeless, the mentally ill, the elderly and the hungry of Northeast Florida. Lutheran Social Services Mission is caring for others—providing faith based social ministry in our community that identifies needs, delivers resources and improves the quality of life. LSS exists to help those in need regardless of their race, color or creed. In 1980 the Refugee and Immigration Services Program was established in Jacksonville to absorb the influx of Southeast Asian refugees into the Jacksonville area.

This research will determine the capacity of the relentless and non-profit efforts pursued by the faculty of the local Jacksonville Lutheran Social Services to alleviate the degree of human suffering and the provisions of a beneficial environment for the refugees from international persecution. The local Institutional Budget Structure is $5,770,815 to cover total expenses of their programs, administration and faculty. The annual cost for the local LSS to operate resettlement is $141,172. Mostly funding is accrued through funding from the United States government, grants, and donations by private individuals, special interest groups and organizations that believe in nonprofit organizations’ efforts.
The availability of opportunities to increase human prosperity diminishes the overall the social strife that dominates the minds of the people creating the internal strife that leads to war, persecution, and overall increase of 25% of displaced people world-wide. Lutheran Social Service faculty commitment to Jacksonville’s community of local refugees seeks to promote their safe transition for refugees to adapt to America’s domain using multiple venues. Experts in every human-related field can use such programs to create culturally relative models along similar lines to budget reparations to provide displaced people with sustainable incentives to keep domestic civility at bay.

This research has a limited ability to determine the effects of Lutheran Social Services to meet its goal of identifying the needs and its ability to deliver the resources needed to improve the quality of life for their refugee-clients via the provisions of health benefits, language classes and the 40 languages available through Translation Services, available employment opportunities and arrangements, the school liaison to assist vulnerable/refugee children who face American public school systems alone and the individual anti-poverty strategy built on asset accumulation for low-income refugee individuals with incentives aimed to motivate refugee economic independence.

The information available on the specific aspects of the program, sources of funding and records of individual cases are located in regional offices and require authorized clearance that is hard to come by. Being a volunteer with the local LSS agency’s refugee resettlement program for the semester before having the opportunity to do the research helped to build the framework of the research idea and provided the networks of contacts crucial to the presentation of this material.

I experienced the workings of one of the assistance programs called the Matching Grant Program closely as a volunteer with a family enrolled in it. Since it was my role in helping the refugee family to understand the aspects of the assistance program, the experience enabled me to see the qualities that would make the program more efficient and issues that made the program difficult to implement due to cultural differences, language limitations and depended a lot on the relationships of the family’s caseworker within the organization’s networks and with the various employees of Lutheran Services Refugee & Immigration Services who have control over the resources crucial to the survival of the refugees.

I used the time enrolled in the IDS credit during Summer B 2001 to collect data from the various public sources at my disposal and begin the data analysis to organize the quality of questions and focus of the research, created a power point presentation and a poster board presentation in accordance with the requirements of fulfilling the grant obligations while I kept my teacher Dr. Ron Lukens-Bull informed of the status of the research’s progress. The summer of 2000 provided me with the chance to work as a research assistant with The International Center for Competitive Excellence where I learned the importance of precise data collection and the necessary procedures that are followed to provide scientific methodology to various venues of research topics.

The continual change in the faculty at the local organization provided hindrances to information, and the uncertain budgets made the staff unstable in their positions and future, hindering their ability to concentrate and effectively handle the economic needs of the multitude of cases in their care.

Each caseworker I encountered was overloaded with many refugee family cases and the agency’s budgets did not offer sufficient incentives to compensate for the enormous responsibilities of time and energy required to resolve the 24 hour needs of the refugees. After September 11th, 2001, there were huge budget cuts and staff
downsizing, refugee entry was postponed and national security was on alert frightening the refugees, and assistance program funds were frozen, making the refugee family’s already uncertain future more so.

When refugees arrive at Jacksonville International Airport or neighboring airports, LSS staff is there to greet them to handle the transportation to the apartment that has been rented and furnished with the donated basic materials. They arrive with the electricity turned on and have food waiting in the cupboard and refrigerator.

In the first few days in this country and again in Jacksonville, refugees receive donated clothing, a health screening, and other essential social services. LSS also provides an orientation program on living and working in America. As many refugees have or are young children, LSS works with families and school officials to ensure speedy school enrollment, since this education is a major contributor to cultural adjustment and some semblance of normalcy.

While LSS first responds to the immediate needs of arriving refugees, the ultimate goal is to help them begin to build a new life in the United States, especially the three families profiled in this research located in Florida. The key to this new life is for each refugee family to achieve self-sufficiency economically and to socially root themselves in the community and their interest fields.

Employment services focus on helping new arrivals become self-sufficient by locating employment within four months of their arrival. Most refugees chose to enroll in this intensive employment program or Matching grant programs which provides incentives based on the refugee’s own initiative in seeking employment and learning English.

LSS has on staff a full-time job developer to connect refugees with the Jacksonville area businesses and finding appropriate employment for each refugee for up to 36 months after their arrival in the United States, since they may change jobs till they find the one best suited to their ability to adjust and learn. It is a promising statistic to learn that over 90 percent of the employable refugees served in this program find jobs and keep them.

For a refugee who is new to the United States, even shopping for food can be an overwhelming experience. The Jacksonville area program now called REAP coordinates the efforts of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to all refugees age 16 and over who have resettled as a refugee. The goals are to attain sufficient English proficiency and basic American culture know-how to enable refugees to find employment, function comfortably and independently soon after their arrival in the country. Usually classes meet in public schools, apartment complexes, and churches in the vicinity of their accommodations and at various times during the day and evening. Classes usually meet twice a week and average 10 to 15 students, the English skills range from beginning to intermediate.

Cultural Adjustment and Goals of LSS Assistance Programs

Lutheran Social Services Refugee and Immigration Refugee Services adjustment and resettlement programs also have additional cultural adjustment components and goals. The program, New Beginnings, provides the cultural orientation and adjustment services for refugees experiencing past traumatic stress disorder. Then a portion of New Beginnings targets the cultural orientation and adjustment of refugees aged 16-19. Since education is crucial to adjustment, youths enroll as soon as possible after their arrival and 30-day adjustment period. A full-time instructor works intensively with youths before they are enrolled in high school to better address their educational and emotional needs. Once the school year begins, school liaisons work daily in different public schools to assist refugee children to make the adjustment to
the American school system. There is also a program that helps refugees develop individual accounts to help refugees understand and participate in American financial institutions. IDA is an anti-poverty strategy build to asset accumulation for low-income refugee individuals and families with the goal of promoting refugee economic independence. Participants are enrolled into a savings plan agreement that sets a savings goal, opens a savings account and upon successful completion the refugee family is eligible for matching dollars to purchase a car, home, computer or pursue educational goals. Once the refugee family arrives and proves their ability to adjust an immigration attorney who provides paralegal assistance to refugees to change their status to permanent resident or in filing the papers for naturalization. Older refugees have projects that cater to their needs to ensure that they are able to access programs designed to serve the general elderly population.

The volunteer program is another program that allows the refugees interaction with a fluent English speaker to help with the cultural adjustment in the Jacksonville area. The volunteer has to pass a background check, provided references to be checked, have a means of transportation, demonstrate adequate knowledge of ability to learn about the resettlement programs the refugees are enrolled in and participate in a training to prepare them for interacting with the vulnerable situations the refugee families have experienced.

My personal experience of living abroad and having being raised amongst various cultures has taught me to see the volunteering and research as opportunities to apply and challenge my capabilities and I believe that my educational interest brought coherence to my experience as a LSS refugee volunteer, profile three families and their country situations and the relationship of this local initiative to the scope of the International level.

The life lesson learnt through sharing time and resources with refugee families is an investment in humanity that the world on individual and national levels cannot afford to neglect. Dealing with current problems today by teaching self-sufficiency solutions will alleviate the probability of future generations in assuming the economic and conscience burdening roles of hopeless complacency to refugee situations.

Country Issues: Bosnia, Iraq and Sierra Leone

In this research, UN interventions and refugee relief web sources are examined and compared to provide a balanced account of the situations causing refugees to originate from Bosnia, Iraq and Sierra Leone. According to the UNHCR chart presented below: 478,300 refugees who originate from Bosnia, 512,800 refugees who originate from Iraq, and 400,800 refugees who originate from Sierra Leone. To understand the significance of these staggering figures, a brief background of the country situation will be presented to help in understanding the profiles of the three refugee families. This research is an effort to change the view that refugees are a faceless mass. These refugees are individuals and have the daily family experience in addition to the burden of being forced to flee from their homes and familiar surroundings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin (2)</th>
<th>Main countries of asylum</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Pakistan / Iran</td>
<td>3,580,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>568,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>512,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Uganda / D.R. Congo / Ethiopia / Kenya / C.A.R. / Chad</td>
<td>490,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
<td>Yugoslavia / Croatia / USA / Sweden / Netherlands / Denmark</td>
<td>478,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Kenya / Ethiopia / Yemen / Djibouti</td>
<td>447,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Zambia / D.R. Congo / Namibia</td>
<td>432,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Guinea / Liberia</td>
<td>400,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>376,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>China / USA</td>
<td>370,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bosnia**

The eruption of violent conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina erupted following the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991 and 1992. Refusing the cohabitation with other ethnic groups in an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic Serb extremists implemented a policy of ethnic cleansing, with the objective of creating a territorial continuity between Serb-dominated areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. People like the family profiled, became refugees due to the large-scale expulsion of civilian population, indiscriminate attacks, and fear of the mass murders occurring in their country. Ethnic armed conflict continued from all sides and towards all groups from 1992-1996 creating massive amounts of displacement and refugee populations. At the end of the conflict in December 1995, more than one million persons were internally displaced and while 1.3 million were forced to flee to other countries of asylum.

The slow relief efforts of domestic reconciliation to resolve property and right to return since Dayton Agreement (1997-1999) have allowed nationalistic armed forces to remain in control which hampers the reconstruction efforts that have been in action from 1996-2001. The World Bank coordinates assistance for reconstruction, with a modest emphasis on areas where refugees and displaced persons are returning. The persisting economic problems due to high unemployment rates that demonstrate the economic crisis that is occurring and returnees are left with insufficient possibilities to sustain their lives if they decide to return to face the limited employment opportunities that are compounded by the widespread discrimination based on ethnicity, political affiliation or gender, especially in the public sector.

Accommodation constitutes the main problem, as the housing capacity of the country is insufficient to face the needs created by the large numbers of displaced lives that has occurred during the past ten years and contested properties result during the return of refugees from abroad. The international community maintains a
massive presence to ensure the implementation of the Peace Agreement by all parties under the supervision of the High Representative. The United Nations Mission, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe focus their efforts on the restoration of the rule of law and democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular through the reform of the police and the judicial system. The social-economic security of the returnees is also gravely affected by the lack of an independent justice system, the monoethnic composition of police forces, and the discriminatory treatment regarding access to utilities, health care, or education.

The main problems facing Bosnians who want to return is the failure of competent authorities locally to provide alternative accommodation for persons due to be evicted, persisting bureaucratic obstruction, cancellation or postponement of scheduled evictions, and failure to address cases of double occupancy.

**Iraq**

Throughout the 1990s, Iraq has been the target of military attacks, draconian and protracted economic embargos that were imposed by the international community due to noncompliance of arms reductions. In 1991 the cease-fire between Iraqi and Allied forces put an end to the Gulf War, but the country had little time to recover due to the economic and life threatening hardships created by the fighting between the two Kurdish parties in northern Iraq, KDP and PUK have been fighting for control amongst themselves and the government since the Gulf War until 1998. On August 31, 1996, the Iraqi government forces entered the city of Erbil, entered the town, searched every house killing and arresting suspected opponents of President Saddam Hussein and taking them back to Baghdad. Two million people fled to Iran, Turkey, and areas still under Kurdish control.
According to UNICEF, Iraqi troops reportedly looted and vandalized the areas they entered, completely looting 500 schools and ransacking hospitals and municipal buildings diminishing what supplies and resources the civilians had to survive. The reoccupation of most of the region by Iraqi government troops led to as many as two million people fleeing to Iran, Turkey, and those areas still under Kurdish control. To add to the economic devastation the economic sanctions and bombing from the U.S. and British raids against the Hussein government.

Again in 1998, Saddam Hussein rebuffed UN inspectors that led to a four-day bombardment of Iraq by American and British forces. The September 11th terrorist attacks changed America’s thinking about Mr. Hussein. Even though the attempts to link the terrorist attacks and Iraq’s government bore no fruit, the new president Bush is once again calling for Mr. Hussein’s ousting. The new international tension created from the terrorist attacks has applied pressure on Hussein and forced him to reopen talks about weapons inspections with the United Nations.

**Sierra Leone**

A nine-year war has taken hold of the country of Sierra Leone since 1991-2000. On one side is the Revolutionary United Front {RUF} run by a Liberian dictator, on the other side is the Government supported by a Nigerian military force called ECOMOG, and caught in the middle is the civilian population such as the refugee family profiled in this research. The attempt failed, but the RUF’s seizure of Sierra Leone’s diamond fields undermined the government’s ability to wage war. More RUF attacks brought a series of government coups that ended in 1997 when a group of army officers overthrew Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, Sierra Leone’s democratically elected president. The UN responded with sanctions and in
1998 Ecomog, the West African peacekeeping force, expelled the rebels and their RUF supporters from Freetown, the capital. Mr. Kabbah assumed power once again to find his country in ruins.

All sides of the armed conflict commonly kill, force boys to join their armies, take girls from their homes as sex slaves, and their victims experience rape, mutilation or disabling wounds.

Amputation is common and especially brutal given that most of the population is composed of subsistence farmers. The conflict spread during the second half of 2000 across the border to Guinea, including RUF attacks on Guinean villages and camps hosting Sierra Leonean refugees - leading to armed activities by Guinean troops inside Sierra Leone.

Large parts of the country had for a long time been without police presence, and the national army, the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSMLF), was disbanded after its involvement in the 1997 military coup. Efforts have also been made to re-establish a national police force, and over 1,500 national officers had participated in various training programs by end-2000. An outcome of this fragile security situation has been additional internal displacement, as well as a return flow of Sierra Leonean refugees and many end up in a situation of internal displacement, as their home areas remain exposed to the RUF today.

The RUF rebels regularly abducted children, and it has been reported that use of children as combat soldiers both by RUF and pro-Government forces continued during 2000. Children constitute about 60 percent of the internally displaced people (IDPs) and as many as 1.8 million children may at some time have been displaced since the outbreak of the war – making them extremely vulnerable. More than 5,000 parents reported their children missing in...
the wake of the rebel attack on Freetown in January 1999. Women have also been exposed to grave human rights abuses by fighters on all sides.

Humanitarian access increased greatly in 2001, and recovery efforts began in the north and east of the country. However, fighting has overflowed into neighboring Guinea, and more particularly in Liberia, which has led to the premature flow of Sierra Leonean refugees back to their home countries to remain displaced in the country in areas that lack of basic community services and infrastructure, causing some people to drift back to major urban centers.

The UN website has registered 247,590 internally displaced people in Sierra Leone as of November 2001, where the majority reside in managed camps, but officials believe the real number is much higher, with many non-registered IDPs living in host communities. An estimated 94,000 IDPs need to be resettled in 2002, according to the United Nations. As of November 2001, the humanitarian community in Sierra Leone consists of some 46 international NGOs, over 200 national NGOs and hundreds of community-based organizations.

UNHCR’s budget has been shrinking due to the increase in international refugee needs and resettlement programs. The inadequate level of international financial support, especially to housing programs for returnees, undermines the search for durable solutions and endangers the sustainability of the return movements observed on the ground.

**Three Family Profiles**

Each person and family has a unique story of suffering through hardships and survival, unique hopes for happiness and security, strengths and skills and ideas to offer to a new community where they resettle. Lutheran Social Services is providing the three families profiled in this research with opportunities that they never had and trying to are fully taking advantage of the assistance and cultural adjustment programs. No identities are compromised and risk to the refugee families is minimal. No names were used on tapes or notes. Past research has demonstrated the utility of keeping identities unknown to avoid criticism toward speakers and leaders alike. I used oral consent and explained to each subject the general nature of the research. I will generally profile the Bosnian, Iraqi and Sierra Leone families by country, the number of family members, personal experiences, and subjective issues pertaining to their resettlement cases and volunteer interaction based on observations and their personal opinions.

*Bosnia (2 lives)*

In 2002, a woman 27, was fluent in Albanian, Serbo-Croat and English, and she even picked up some Spanish over the years since she arrived and was reunited a few months later with her brother, 23 in 1998-1999. Back in Bosnia, her brother and her husband were forced to flee from masked Serb gunmen into the mountains. She was forced on a bus and taken to the Macedonian border with other female neighbors, beaten and lost the child she was pregnant with. She was alone for weeks until her brother luckily found her in a camp database and was sent to join her camp, but it was not until she arrived in the United States was she able to contact the camps near her original refugee site to report her new whereabouts for her husband to find her. Her husband still remains overseas due to the process of clearance of papers, and their efforts to reclaim their property and one day return home in the meantime they discuss if it is safe for her to return even though they lost their business and home. They were met and married two years before their separation and speak on the phone once a week, communicate via emails and letter writing.

The two young adults work many jobs to save money to pay for her husbands trip
and to make ends meet with ambitions to try to go to school or a technical training college. The brother, 23, is not prone towards academic but is a hard worker. They have repaid their initial travel loan back to Lutheran Social Services, were apart of the family reunification assistance program, recipients of Refugee Cash Assistance {since they had no children}.

Major issues revolve around her husband remaining overseas and apart from her and her miscarriage during the resettlement process. These emotional barriers consume all her energy and a month of her long distance phone bills are half of her paychecks. Her brother on the other hand is carefree in comparison and is still slow and hesitant to use English since her found other Bosnians to speak within the refugee communities. Both of the young adults experience a type of homesickness, though they doubt they will ever return due to their increase living standards they now enjoy.

Iraq {9 lives}

The father, 42, was a construction worker who did not speak or understand English and suffered health problems. The mother, 32, was illiterate, did not speak or understand English and did not attempt to gain employment and got pregnant within three months of resettlement. The 2 teenage males spoke broken English, 1 teenage female spoke and understood the most English, 2 young boys and 1 young girl and 1 baby girl. It took the parents more than 4 months to learn broken English and the cultural roles to which the males were accustomed made social interactions with females a cultural mishap. The mother was illiterate and did not even entertain the idea of job placement, which made the burden on the health stricken father and both sons that were over 15 entered employment in the local area.

The Iraqi family was enrolled in the Matching Grant Program, it is a voluntary program designed to help newly arrived refugees to find jobs and achieve economic self-sufficiency quickly within four months after arrival. The program supplies financial incentives to encourage people to begin work within the first four months after arrival, without accessing public cash assistance. The Matching Grant Program is funded by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, and administered by national voluntary agencies, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). Lutheran Social Services in Jacksonville receives its federal funds through LIRS, and earn federal dollars by matching them with people’s contributions of cash or in-kind donations (including material items, time, and services).

The Matching Grant assistance is open only to employable adults and their children until the 120th day after the refugee’s arrival in the U.S. and outcomes of the program include employment within 180 days after arrival. The MG program awards bonus money according to kept-detailed accounts, from the budget accrued by federal and private funds, for the total time and goods contributed by volunteer efforts during the four-month period after arrival given to the refugee family to aid in their resettlement without accessing public cash assistance. The Iraqi family arrived in 2001 had complications due to health issues and language barriers that made the program of economic self-sufficiency difficult and burdensome on their volunteer.

Today the Iraqi family still remains eligible for food stamps and Medicaid, which is ensuring their ability to feed the nine mouths, but the enrollment in the Matching Grant program makes them not eligible for cash assistance. Matching Grant assistance included weekly cash stipends during the job search period, which than equal what participants and their families would have received on public assistance, and stipends are paid for up to four months, or until self-sufficiency is reached, whichever occurs sooner. In addition to their stipends, participants receive cash bonuses
for finding work quickly. The Iraqi family was eligible for donations of furniture and household items over and above what we generally provide for new refugees, although this is subject to availability and the resourcefulness of the case worker and volunteer efforts.

**Sierra Leone (6 lives)**

The father, 35, was imprisoned in two concentration camps in his lifetime, and was released to a refugee-processing center where he met his wife three years ago. They applied and were granted asylum in the United States in 2001. The mother 28 raised the 2 pubescent boys and 1 girl age five fathered in the war torn country, she never disclosed the identity or circumstance of her life before her current husband with whom she had a six-month-old baby boy.

They arrived in the United States in the fall of 2001 and the September 11th events only complicated their ordeal with receiving funding and adjusting easily. The effects of the 9/11/01 attacks caused resources to be immobilized for months and 22,000 cases to be backlogged and refugee resettlement personnel pulled out of refugee camps. The time of September 11th incident occurred at the busiest time in U.S. refugee admissions—during the traditional “fourth-quarter bulge” in the pipeline.

LSS worked hard to avoid the public perception that refugees and asylum seekers were any affiliation to the terrorist acts, yet the refugees claimed that they were treated with suspicion after the fact.

The Sierra Leone refugee family received the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) but due to their lack of familiarity, comfort of disclosing personal details I was unable to get much feedback about their financial obligations. They dealt with issues such as having their kids experience a prolonged delay from entering school and the family lacked social security due to the tight funds and personnel loss the LSS branch experienced due to the drastic budget cuts. The family seems to be adjusting better in comparison to their immediate arrival and when 9/11/01 was fresh on their mind and so soon after their traumatic entrance in the United States.

**Conclusion**

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Lutheran Immigration Refugee Services (LIRS) and Lutheran Social Services (LSS) Immigration and Refugee Resettlement Program in Northeast Florida offered a collaborative effort to protect the lives of these three profiled refugee families who were at risk in their home country. The access to the resettlement provisions of shelter, food, water, travel and medical care provided the qualified refugees the opportunity to start a new life in the United States and be reunited with relatives and loved ones if possible. These profiled refugee families have little hope of returning to their countries and the lives they left behind, this is why assistance and cultural adjustment programs are so important for these vulnerable lives.

The opportunity to conduct this research project provided me the hands-on experience and know-how of learning to extend beyond the data collection bound by school laboratories, studios and libraries, to provide me with field sites where issues I have learned are practically applied. Observing the Iraqi family during Spring 2001-2002, the Bosnian family from fall 2001-2001, and the Sierra Leone family in spring 2002 the different programs portrayed the different stages in their particular refugee resettlement process and experience.

The assistance programs help refugees who enter the resettlement host county the opportunity to enroll in adjustment programs to have access and be accountable for the resources and services to used to remove essential barriers such as cultural and language inexperience, economic
adjustment programs and help with local navigation-and transportation arrangements for at least 90 days after their arrival in Jacksonville with the goal of attaining self-sufficiency.

The life lesson learnt through sharing time and resources is an investment in humanity that the world on individual and national levels cannot afford to forget. Dealing with current problems today by teaching self-sufficiency solutions will alleviate the probability of future generations in assuming economic and conscience burdening roles of hopeless complacency.