

Executive Summary

On February 24, 2017, close to 100 students, researchers, and community professionals working with refugees gathered on the campus of the University of Tennessee for the ***Refugees, Displacement, and Resettlement conference and workshop***. Presentations provided information on current research and programs related to refugees in the region and were complemented by roundtable sessions in which students, researchers, and community professionals engaged in discussion. Student note-takers served as participant-observers throughout the conference and identified crosscutting themes and calls to action. One over-arching theme tied together the more specific calls to action: Making Knoxville a model city for refugees. Participants repeatedly expressed their desire to transform Knoxville in this way and the following summarizes the suggested strategies that were discussed during the conference:

- Media – Reaching out to different cohorts of people with an increased focus on social media and community groups that would attract younger viewers.
- Community involvement – Teaching religious and secular community leaders how to interact and provide care and resources for refugees and immigrants.
- Primary and Secondary Education – Supporting teachers in gaining awareness and communication skills necessary to communicate with immigrant and refugee students in their classrooms and the parents of these children.
- Tertiary Education – Working with UT and other local colleges and universities to help facilitate further educational opportunities and pathways to admission/financial support for refugees and immigrants.
- Employment – Helping local businesses/employers learn how they can support refugees in working in their specific fields and areas of expertise.
- Language – Raising funds to support EL classes, locating teachers, and volunteers who will informally get together with refugee families to work on English, or to conduct a language exchange, is essential.
- Refugee Rights Workshops – Outreach to media, and working with religious and community leaders, and in schools, to raise awareness and cultivate an understanding of the definition of a refugee and the process of refugee vetting and resettlement.
- Know Your Rights Workshops for Refugees and Immigrants – Providing updates on current laws and policies that affect refugees and immigrants, and to help individuals and communities know, understand, and be able to access their rights in the US.
- Community Solidarity and Assistance – Volunteering with current organizations, like Bridge Refugee Services and Team Refugee, to assist resettled refugees with all kinds of basic tasks (e.g., driving people to work, school or errands; assisting with accounting/bill management; accompanying people to medical or other appointments; spending time with children/youth and socializing with adults).
- Cultural Exchange and Storytelling Events – Holding community-based events in Knoxville where locals and resettled refugees can come together as neighbors to share food, appreciate cultural diversity through performances (dance, song, storytelling).
- Directory of Resources – Creating a directory of resources for resettled refugees. This could be created and distributed free of charge and would be an excellent “experiential learning” opportunity for UTK students.

Our goal for the conference was to facilitate new connections between UT students, researchers, and community professionals. We are grateful to everyone who participated and we hope that participants will stay connected, collaborate, and answer the calls to action that arose in the conference.