

# Experiences of the U.S. Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program Resettling Eritrean Youth

A study by:

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

And

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration & Refugee Services

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## Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a study done by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) on the experience of the U.S. Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) programs in resettling unaccompanied Eritrean youth. Based on interviews with 16 local service providers, recommendations were developed to better serve Eritrean youth both overseas and domestically. Beginning in 2013, the United States began to see a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied and separated Eritrean refugee youth referred for resettlement, specifically from the Mai Aini refugee camp in Ethiopia. The authors anticipate this trend will continue in the coming years, and recognized the need for a data-informed approach to serving their specific needs. This study also addresses a gap in the literature due to a lack of research on the outcomes of children and youth enrolled in the program. Over the past 40 years, more than 13,000 children and youth have received services through the URM program. The United States is one of few countries around the globe to offer resettlement of unaccompanied minors, and LIRS and USCCB/MRS are the only domestic nonprofits that serve this population.

## Introduction

This paper (1) introduces the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program and structure of the study, (2) outlines the background and context for Eritrean refugee minors, (3) presents findings from the research study, (4) offers recommendations for improvement, and (5) concludes with thoughts on future areas to explore.

Since the late 1970s, the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), has been the only program in the United States offering specialized foster care to unaccompanied refugee children. It is an outstanding example of how unaccompanied children can be welcomed into a receiving country's existing child welfare framework while adapting services to meet the special needs of foreign-born children who have experienced forced migration. The program was designed to mirror adult refugee resettlement's attention to cultural orientation and culturally competent services while attending to child welfare best practices.

By U.S. definition, an unaccompanied minor is any child who has not yet attained 18 years of age; entered the United States unaccompanied and, is not destined to join a parent or a close non-parental adult relative in the U.S. willing and able to care for the child (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). Children eligible for the URM program include refugees, asylees, victims of human trafficking, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, certain children with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and U-visa recipients.

## Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study is to improve integration outcomes for Eritrean youth due to better-informed stakeholders and service providers. Gathering information on how Eritrean youth are adjusting in URM foster care will enhance services tailored to the population's unique needs and strengths. The secondary purpose is to begin to address the lack of research on the longer-term outcomes of youth served through the URM program.

Since the inception of the URM program, more than 13,000 children and youth have received services (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). Yet, minimal research exists on youth serviced by the program. In 2001, a large group of Sudanese refugee youth and young adults entered the United States, commonly referred to as the Lost Boys of Sudan; some studies were conducted on this population to understand their experiences in migration as well as experiences in acculturation to the United States, which led to an enhanced ability to serve those youth.

In 2013 the United States began to see a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied Eritrean refugee youth referred for U.S. resettlement, notably from the Mai Aini refugee camp in Ethiopia. Considering the large numbers of youth arriving to the URM programs from the same camp in a relatively short period of time, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration & Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), undertook a project to learn more about the unaccompanied Eritrean youth and the experiences of the URM programs resettling this population. The goal of this project was to learn how the Eritrean youth are adjusting in URM foster care, and make recommendations to both pre-departure and post-resettlement processes. The goal is to share this knowledge with important stakeholders and service providers in order to improve integration and well-being outcomes for the youth.

## Methodology

For this study, LIRS and USCCB/MRS conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with staff at URM programs across the country. The programs selected to participate in the study (16 of 23 nationally) had resettled at least three youth from Eritrea between April 1, 2014 and April 1, 2015. The seven sites with fewer Eritrean arrivals were excluded. Each local URM program director identified the most appropriate person to interview based upon the local structure and the staff member(s) with the most knowledge of the Eritrean youth resettled through their program. If a program had multiple staff working with these youth, they were invited to have a small group interview. The interviewer informed them of the research purpose, confidentiality, and offered the opportunity to skip any questions. The interview consisted of 19 questions covering various topics about resettlement, culture, and adjustment to the United States. The questions are included in the Appendix of this paper for reference.

## Sample

During the federal fiscal years (FY14 and FY15), which ran from October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2015, a total of 447 unaccompanied refugee minors entered the URM program as new arrivals. Of the 447, 34 percent (n=154) were Eritrean, representing the highest country of origin resettled to the U.S. URM program during that two-year period.

The study period for this project was April 1, 2014–April 1, 2015 when 94 Eritrean youth entered the URM programs and were the subject of the staff interviews conducted:

- Males represented 80 percent (n=75) and females 20 percent (n=19)
- Nearly 77 percent (n=72) identified as Eritrean Orthodox Christian, 18 percent (n=17) identified as Muslim, and about 5 percent (n=5) as non-Orthodox Christian
- The majority of youth in the sample (n=79) were resettled from the Mai Aini refugee camp in Ethiopia while the remaining 15 were from urban settings—13 resettled from Cairo, Egypt and two from urban cities in eastern Africa.

## Background

Although relatively unreported in the Western media, the conflict and political repression in Eritrea have led to an exodus of 5,000 Eritreans each month. Escape itself can be life threatening, and unaccompanied children face even greater risks. With so many factors increasing their vulnerability, Eritrean youth made up the largest numbers of unaccompanied refugee minors referred for U.S. resettlement in FY15.

## Eritrea

Eritrea is a small country located on the northeastern shore of Africa next to the Red Sea, between Ethiopia and Sudan. The country has a population of 6,527,689 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Its major ethnic groups are Tigrinya (approximately 55 percent of the population), Tigre (approximately 30 percent) and Soho (approximately 4 percent), with the remaining 11 percent representing a number of minority ethnic groups (CIA, 2013). Official languages include Tigrinya, Arabic and English. About half of Eritreans identify as Orthodox Christian and the other half as Muslim.

Eritrea was officially at war with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000, but conflict has continued under the current government. The president, Isaias Afworki, has been in power since 1993 and has militarized the state and mandated registration in the military, which has led to indefinite

service for some. Eritrea has been referred to as “North Korea on the Red Sea” and human rights abuses are well documented.

The large numbers of Eritreans fleeing each month cite a variety of compound factors leading to their decision. They flee for multiple factors, including religious persecution, mandatory military enrollment, sexual exploitation and forced marriage, and economic need. Eritrean refugees recount experiences of torture, false imprisonment, social pressure, and unexplained disappearances (Groll, 2015 & Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC), 2013).

### Mai Aini Refugee Camp

The majority of Eritrean youth being resettled through the URM programs are coming from Mai Aini camp in northern Ethiopia. Even there, the children face significant protection concerns. The Ethiopian economy cannot absorb the number of people entering the country and their needs, which has led to kidnapping, trafficking, and forced recruitment by opposition groups, all to which children are the most vulnerable (WRC, 2013). Children are also vulnerable to the desperation of other refugees. The camps breed hopelessness and fear for lack of a future after the camp. Poor living conditions, a lack of sufficient nutrition, and the extended resettlement process exacerbate these feelings.

To offer a level of protection, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) manages group-care facilities for unaccompanied and separated children in the Mai Aini camp. Over 1,000 of the 1,400 unaccompanied in Mai Aini reside in 137 houses separated by age and gender, located in a segregated area of the camp, and protected by guards (WRC, 2013). The IRC employs over 45 social workers to provide case management, Best Interest Determinations (BIDs), and child-feeding programs. The IRC places children younger than 13 in groups of at least eight and employs a “house mother.” Often another refugee, she assists with cooking and schoolwork, and cares for younger children who cannot do so on their own (WRC, 2013).

Mai Aini, with the help of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), provides a number of services that are inconsistently available in other camps. Many children attend primary and secondary school, but the dropout rates range from 17 percent in primary school to 56 percent in secondary school (WRC, 2013). These rates include youth who flee the camp or resettle to a third country, and the rapid turnover of teachers also contributes to the high dropout rates. Other services include medical care and access to recreational space. As a form of mental health support, there are two areas with computers, a library, and organized activities such as dance, sports and theater are available, in addition to traditional counseling.

## Findings

This study exposed many important factors and lessons learned specifically relating to the Eritrean youth population. The research highlighted the strength and resilience of these youth as they overcome significant challenges. In a number of instances, interviewees expressed their appreciation and admiration for the outgoing nature of the Eritrean youth they served.

### Pre-departure and Cultural Orientation

Cultural orientation is one important tool used to prepare refugees for the variances in cultural norms among their country of origin, country of refuge, and the receiving community. URM programs operate under the assumption that children in refugee camps and urban settings receive cultural orientation prior to departing to the United States. However, there is no requirement for

children or adults in refugee camps to receive this prior to admission into the United States. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Resettlement Handbook states that “All resettlement countries are encouraged to provide refugees they have accepted with an orientation prior to departure”, yet the actual implementation of this guidance varies by location (UNHCR, 2011).

Expectations about life in the United States are often misguided. All 16 programs interviewed shared the belief that the Eritrean youth were not adequately prepared for arrival to a foster family placement, and 11 programs reported that youth had a significant misunderstanding regarding foster care. While some youth were unsure about what would occur in the United States, others had anticipated living in their own home absent of government and social restrictions based on their experiences of the group care homes in the camp. Furthermore, some were unnerved by the imposition of “house rules” by the foster families. One program staff suggested that *“it would be nice if they received more accurate information on what life would be like in foster care.”*

As is similar with many refugee populations, expectations are often high upon arrival to a new and safe country. Therefore, both caseworkers and foster parents struggled in managing the expectations of youth who have based their idea of the United States on pop culture, movies, books, music, and the promise of a better life. Programs reported that youth had very high expectations and did not have a full understanding of the struggles of a refugee navigating the U.S. school, social, and legal systems. Youth hear stories of adults in resettlement receiving homes, cash assistance, and luxuries and are confused when this doesn’t happen the same way in foster care. Instead of their own apartment, youth live with a family and are expected to follow rules and prioritize their education over earning money. Many do not realize the life portrayed in the American media is difficult to achieve. Many arrived with feelings of entitlement and were disappointed when placed with families who do not have the means to provide the expensive electronics or clothing they desired. These misunderstandings can disrupt family dynamics and make the adjustment process more difficult.

### Transitioning to Life in the United States

The URM program seeks to establish stability and permanency, supporting the transition to the United States by providing caring, culturally competent, and strengths-based foster care. Interviews with program staff demonstrated that lack of supervision and structure in the Mai Aini refugee camp impacted the Eritrean youths’ transition to life in the United States and their adjustment to foster care. Twelve of the programs indicated that youth arriving from Mai Aini experienced various difficulties in acculturation. For example, youth had conflicts with authority figures and foster parents; difficulty following a schedule and attending school; and left the home without alerting foster parents. While there is not sufficient information to draw a correlation, it is important to consider this information in conjunction with the previous information detailing the lack of cultural orientation standards for unaccompanied refugee minors and the lack of compassionate, supportive adult figures in their life pre resettlement.

Despite challenges faced by many youth in adjusting to educational, social, legal, and community systems, 13 of the programs reported that the Eritrean youth are successful in attainment of life skills and that the youth are very dedicated to learning. One program commented on their sense of adventure, describing Eritrean youth as *“good-natured, and up for trying anything.”*

LIRS and USCCB/MRS identified five recreational and social interests that appear to be commonly shared among Eritrean youth.

- **Education:** Eritrean youth are generally found to succeed at their schoolwork and express dedicated to learning.
- **Soccer:** Interviews indicated widespread love of soccer among Eritrean youth, both to play and to watch, which creates bonds with many other youth in the program.
- **Recreation:** Athletics are a common interest, and Eritrean youth tend to enjoy outdoor activities such as running and swimming.
- **Arts:** Several Eritrean youth have demonstrated an interest in art, drawing, dancing, music and acting as ways to express their creativity and imagination.
- **Religion:** The majority of Eritrean youth turn to their religion as a source of strength and an important personal interest.

All of these interests and activities strengthen youths' resilience and help them to transition to life in the United States.

### Residential Placements

Each URM program works to ensure smooth transitions for youth as they arrive into the foster care program, regardless of the level of care. Among the programs interviewed, group care and family-based foster homes were the most common initial placements. One program reported better success in adjustment of youth living in group care, as opposed to those in foster families. This could be attributed to the fact these youth were also in group care while in Mai Aini; they were familiar with the rules of a group home, and comfortable and trusting when living with peers as opposed to adult parental figures. It can be noted that only two of the 16 programs interviewed stated that all of their Eritrean youth have adjusted well. Many youth have struggled adapting to their placements and some have had placement disruptions as a result. As one program mentioned, *"All [youth] have moved at least once. Some disruptions were because of mismatch, and some because of child's expectations. Secondary placements have been much more stable."*

As more Eritrean youth have been referred and arrive into URM care, the programs have made adjustments. Because of the higher rate of placement disruption with these youth than with other refugee minor populations, programs are becoming more mindful of foster family placement matching upon receipt of an Eritrean case referral and placing Eritrean youth together in the same foster home to reduce feelings of isolation.

### Supervision and Service Needs

From the perspective of the service provider, youth served by the URM program have a variety of needs which should be addressed through service planning and assistance by the foster parents. Yet this study revealed that Eritrean youth require slightly different services than other URM populations resettled. Interviews indicated five areas of focus: (1) supervision; (2) mental health; (3) physical health; (4) education; and (5) connection to culture and religion.

#### Supervision

The factors that complicated the transition process also influence the necessary level of supervision. Independence, confidence, and a sense of adventure can lead Eritrean youth to unintentionally put themselves at greater risk. On this note, four programs reported that the



Eritrean youth need more supervision upon initial placement than typically provided for other refugee youth populations in order to keep them safe in the community and orientate them to rules. Due to their desire to be independent, they may not ask for help even when it is needed. One respondent said, *“Youth are used to managing their own time so foster parents have expressed frustration that Eritreans resist efforts of foster parents to discipline them and help the youth organize their lives.”* Overall, staff felt that the youth from Mai Aini have lower independent living skills when they arrive to the United States than other refugee youth.

### Mental Health

Availability and quality of mental health services varies widely in refugee camps. When mental health services are available, engaging clients can be challenging as the western models of talk therapy are not common in the Eritrean culture. There was not enough information to demonstrate a correlation between the youths’ Eritrean culture and their resistance towards accessing services. There are multiple other factors that may influence decision-making including: the framing of mental health services; personal history; and availability of a culturally appropriate therapist.

Three programs specifically reported that the mental health needs of these youth are higher than for other refugee youth entering the program. The political persecution and torture that youth have faced, along with the difficult camp conditions, have contributed to their vulnerability. It also appears that youth arriving from Egypt did not have any avenue in which to process traumatic experiences prior to arrival to the United States.

Programs strive to provide culturally appropriate services so while traditional mental health services are available, many programs also use less-structured, more informal options, and these sites report that youth will occasionally engage in groups or with a mentor. Youth are more receptive to informal models of counseling and processing trauma and often seek comfort in spirituality, community, and family (including fictive family). One program noted that once youth bond with their therapist, they are less likely to view the sessions as “counseling or directives”, and instead view it as a conversation.

### Physical Health

The Eritrean youth welcomed by the URM programs have a variety of physical health needs. However, most of these needs have not been significantly different from other refugees. Skin rashes, respiratory issues, and headaches were commonly reported as minor health ailments among these youth. A few also arrived with physical injuries such as bruises and scars from altercations in the camp or on their migration journey. Other health needs included lactose intolerance, intestinal parasites, and positive tuberculosis readings. A majority of programs noted that youth have arrived very malnourished and underweight, which is logical given that adequate nutrition is often not available in the refugee camp. Programs commented that after a few months in the United States the youth gained weight and muscle mass, and were receiving proper medication which resulted in them appearing to be much healthier.

One physical health need area that has been strikingly different from other refugee minor populations is the fact that several Eritrean youth were diagnosed with epilepsy or seizure disorders while in the camp. Fortunately, some of these youth have seen a decrease in seizure episodes since arrival into the program as a result of proper medical care, monitoring and medication management.



## Education

Interviews overwhelmingly confirmed the importance of education for Eritrean youth and their resilience as major factors in their achievement. A vast majority of the programs reported the youth are performing average to well academically, and making good progress in their attainment of the English language. A sizeable number of programs also indicated that the Eritreans are very motivated to pursue higher education and well-paying jobs/careers.

When asked about how the Eritrean youth are adjusting in school, six programs reported similar to, *“they are experiencing the usual challenges in school due to lack of English but are very dedicated and motivated to learning and trying.”* Due to this, several programs also reported that the youth advocate for themselves and desire access to extra educational support and tutoring above what the URM program and/or schools typically provide refugee youth. Additionally, many programs mentioned that the Eritrean youth have had more challenges than the average refugee youth in adjusting to school, noting specifically difficulties with waking up early to go to school, adhering to a rigid schedule, and listening to authority figures at school. These difficulties may be related to the lack of education and structure in the refugee camp.

## Connection to Culture and Religion

Community connection, culture, and religion are very much entwined for Eritreans. According to the URM programs, remaining connected to other Eritreans is extremely important to these youth. The youth have a strong desire to be involved with others from their country, including their Eritrean peers in the program, adult members of the wider Eritrean community locally, and Eritrean friends they met in the refugee camp who now live elsewhere in the United States. In fact, many of the programs indicated that the youth communicate regularly via Skype, Facebook, or telephone with Eritrean youth they knew from Mai Aini who were placed in URM programs in other states. Similarly, the adults in the community want to engage with the youth, as one program said: *“The youth want to attend the religious events. The community is reaching out to the agency to ensure the kids are attending special events and are part of what is going on. Members of community are very welcoming to new Eritreans arriving- sometimes offer transportation to the kids. The youth really want to maintain the connection, and so they network to keep it alive and do it [network] easily.”*

The ability to practice their religion was also noted by programs as being essential to the Eritrean youth. Many youth expressed that they would prefer to attend (or would only attend) an Eritrean Orthodox church in lieu of other Orthodox Christian churches. Five programs mentioned that meeting the religious needs of the Eritrean youth was more challenging than for other refugee populations. Struggles include the distance between foster homes and Eritrean Orthodox churches, the desire to only practice in a church of their specific sector, as well as fasting and dietary restrictions. However, it is important to note that there are varying degrees of spirituality/desire to practice religion among individual youth—some want to attend church daily while to others, regular practice is not as much of a priority.

All programs interviewed indicated that the youth have maintained a strong connection to their culture. Most of the programs reported that religion was the primary factor in youth maintaining a connection to their culture, again highlighting the link between the two. A vast majority of the programs reported that the wider Eritrean community has been instrumental in helping the youth maintain a cultural connection by welcoming newly arriving youth, serving as mentors and interpreters for the youth, and including youth in the Eritrean community events.

Maintaining contact with family back in Eritrea is also important to the youth. Many have voiced concerns about the ongoing safety of their family members back home and worry greatly about their parents and siblings. Some youth have expressed the need to send money home to help out financially, which is likely a contributing factor in their desire to be successful.

## Recommendations

Research indicates that the resilience and hope youth bring position them for future success, and this study in particular demonstrated the positive impact that refugee foster care can have on a young person's life. The study also revealed areas for improvement to better serve these youth.

It is expected that the URM program will continue to resettle increasing numbers of Eritrean youth. By implementing these shifts in policy, advocacy, and practice, it may help to mitigate the challenges discussed and improve integration of these youth after their arrival. Local service providers, national voluntary agencies, and overseas non-governmental organizations all must play a greater role in supporting Eritrean refugee youth and raising awareness in the communities they join.

### Services in Country of Refuge

**Additional funding should be allocated to provide structured recreational, educational and mental health services in refugee camps, beginning with Mai Aini.**

With the length of time spent in the camp, along with the lack of structure and limited services, youth have a hard time adjusting to the rigor and rules associated with foster care in the United States. They also seem to have significant mental health needs due to the unresolved trauma of fleeing their country, leaving loved ones behind, and then living under difficult conditions in Mai Aini. It is recommended that additional funding be allocated to offer more recreational, educational, and mental health services in the Mai Aini refugee camp while youth await for durable solutions including U.S. resettlement processing. Offering more services would be highly valuable to youth success in resettlement, and in order to ensure that youth take advantage of these services, targeted advertising/outreach in the camp setting is recommended.

**All unaccompanied refugee minors should receive cultural orientation to better prepare them for U.S. foster care and set realistic expectations.**

This study exposed Eritrean youths' general lack of understanding of life in the United States and the foster care program. When youth do not receive cultural orientation or are unable to fully understand the information and what it means in the United States, they often develop unrealistic expectations prior to arrival. These unrealistic expectations can cause undue pressure on social service agencies, disruptions in foster placements, and distress for the child as he/she adapts to the reality of life in the United States.

Unaccompanied Eritrean youth are often alone as they navigate a new world of different rules, expectations, and social constructs. Ensuring a better understanding would decrease the emotional stress and aid the adjustment of youth. Pre-departure cultural orientation should become a mandatory aspect of the resettlement process for all unaccompanied refugee minors, and it should include specific information related to URM foster care.

**Collaborations should be strengthened among all stakeholders including the Resettlement Support Centers, service providers working in the camp, and U.S.-based resettlement agencies.**

Cultural orientation must include information about the URM foster care program to better prepare youth. U.S.-based resettlement agencies should provide training to camp staff and Resettlement Support Center staff to enhance knowledge and increase communication about the URM program. With better understanding of URM foster care, overseas personnel will be better able to educate youth and manage their expectations. Furthermore, increased networking with Cultural Orientation Coordinators around the world would ensure access to shared information and collaboration on difficult cases.

### Post-Resettlement Services

**URM programs should develop diverse group care placement options tailored to the strengths and needs of this population.**

As noted above, the majority of Eritrean youth live in a group care setting in the Mai Aini camp. Due to the sense of freedom and adulthood that they have prior to arrival, many youth are not interested in living in a traditional foster home. Despite the U.S. foster care system discouraging the use of group homes, it should be noted that the Eritrean youth have been quite happy in a living environment that is similar to what they know, with a strong emphasis on independent living skills. These youth have learned the skills to provide for themselves, but need guidance on how to do so within the U.S. context, and in a positive manner that will lead to successful adulthood. It is recommended that URM programs develop diversified and unique group care placement options for this population, by building the capacity within their agencies and/or partnering with existing group homes in the community.

**Informal support systems should be used to address mental health concerns and supplement traditional therapy.**

The Eritrean youth are arriving to the United States with particularly high levels of trauma in their history. While it can be challenging to locate culturally appropriate therapists for this population, URM programs are encouraged to prioritize mental health services for Eritrean youth to include informal mentorships and peer support groups. While many youth are not open to Western models of mental health treatment at arrival, youth should continuously be offered the opportunity to participate in some form of mental health services throughout their time in the URM program.

**Additional resources should be provided to support youth participation in cultural and religious activities.**

URM programs place an emphasis on meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Eritrean refugee youth. URM programs are encouraged to continue reaching out to Eritrean community leaders and adult resettlement programs locally to ensure youth are connected and supported. As seen through the interviews, religion is one of the most important things in the lives of these youth. URM programs have already built relationships with local churches, and assisted youth with knowing what is available to them. However, many URM programs struggle to transport youth to religious services as the Eritrean Orthodox churches are sparsely located. It is

recommended that funding be increased to URM programs for cultural and religious activities, specifically including transportation and staff time as part of the process.

## Conclusion

The information gathered through this study represents an important step forward in understanding the experiences of Eritrean refugee youth resettled through the URM program. The recommendations put forth can improve policies and practices to better meet their needs. However, additional work is needed to develop a more rigorous analysis of the unique needs and strengths of each young refugee population.

First, the research highlights the gaps in current efforts to prepare youth resettled through the URM program. Youth need significant preparation prior to departure in order to help mitigate fears, concerns, uncertainties, and issues of heightened expectation.

Second, interviews suggest that new approaches to placement decisions and service provision will better serve Eritrean youth. By considering their experiences in group home settings prior to resettlement, URM programs can better tailor placement options and capacity. By recognizing population-specific service needs and preferences, programs can more appropriately respond.

Last, this study indicates the need for more concrete knowledge on each population to inform local programming. It exposes the need for a research agenda to assess and address the complex issue of serving these youth and other refugee populations. Although some characteristics are common across groups, many others vary from one young refugee population to another. This study offers one approach that could be replicated in comprehensive studies of emerging priority groups.

## Resources

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions utilized in the study

1. Based on your experience, what do you see as particular strengths of Eritrean refugee youth?
2. What are the particular motivations of Eritrean youth? (i.e. education, work, other) Or do these vary widely by individual? What have they expressed as their needs and wishes?
3. What are your concerns about the needs of Eritrean youth?
4. What particular service needs of Eritrean youth are different from other refugee populations?
5. Based on the youth's expectations of life in foster care/life in the U.S. upon arrival into URM, please speak to the level of cultural orientation/information about foster care you believe the youth received pre-departure. What information would have been helpful for the youth to know ahead of entering URM?
6. What differences are you seeing with Eritrean youth resettled out of Mai Aini refugee camp in Ethiopia vs. those resettled out of urban settings such as Cairo? (i.e. understanding of U.S. laws/culture, IL skills)
7. Considering the lack of supervision and structure in Mai Aini refugee camp, what impact has this had on youth in their adjustment to foster care or life in the U.S.? (i.e. rigid schedule, rules of house, feelings of hopelessness in camp and how did that translate to feelings here)
8. How have the Eritrean youth maintained their cultural connections and identity? Any specific cultural activities occurring?
9. How are the youth doing in school? In their attainment of independent living skills?
10. What are the trends in their personal interests? Recreational activities?
11. How important is religion/spirituality to these youth? What are the differences among the Orthodox Christians and Muslims? How are the youth supported in accessing/practicing their religion?
12. With whom are these youth bonding? (i.e. peers, URM staff, foster parents, community members, varies widely)
13. Some Eritrean youth have experienced particularly traumatic events, including kidnapping, trafficking and torture. What is your experience regarding providing mental



health services for them? How receptive are these youth to such services (especially counseling)? Are there any significant physical health needs among this population?

14. Are family reunification options arising with this group? If so, how, and what steps have you taken to assist?
15. How have views about gender roles impacted the youth's adjustment to life in the U.S.?
16. How have you partnered with your adult resettlement program and/or engaged resettled Eritrean adults in the community to benefit these minors?
17. How are foster parents prepared to receive the Eritreans-- in addition to presenting them with the BID and biodata information, what other information is provided to them? What other resources are put in place prior to a youth's arrival?
18. What placement levels are these kids entering upon arrival? Have these placements been stable, have there been changes in level of care? (group home in camp to group home at URM vs. group home in camp to foster home in URM?)
19. What should USCCB/LIRS, the U.S. Government, and/or UNHCR be considering or doing as this population continues to be resettled to the U.S.?