



# Amarillo Refugee 2021 State of the Union

## Definitions and Statistics

- Asylum Seeker:** A person who has fled across an international border and sought official sanctuary by applying for asylum--the right to be recognized as a refugee. While waiting on the application process, they are called asylum seekers. Their claim as a refugee has not yet been proven.
- Refugee:** A person who has proven themselves to have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. "Refugee" is a legal status that is conferred by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).
- Secondary Migration:** After resettlement, refugees are accorded freedom of movement around the country. They frequently relocate for the purpose of finding a job or reconnecting with family. This is called secondary migration.

## The Refugees of Amarillo

From 2015-2020, the top five countries of origin for refugees resettled in Amarillo were Burma, Congo, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iran.

- The term *refugee community* refers to specific immigrant communities composed primarily of people who initially came as refugees.
- Nationality is not the same as ethnicity. People who have fled from the same country may have no cultural, religious, or linguistic ties to each other.
- Refugees tend to cluster into sub-communities not based upon nationality, but upon language, clan, and religious affiliation.
- Certain key individuals are able to effectively serve as critical bridges for information sharing between multiple refugee sub-communities.

## What We're Already Doing

- Resettlement agencies provide case management and other social services during the initial 5 years after resettlement.
- Other programs and services include mentorship and after-school programs, legal support, medical services, and food provision.
- Amarillo has many adult ESL programs hosted both by public institutions and other non-profits. 59% of adult ESL students are at the literacy or beginning levels.

## What the Refugee Communities Are Saying

Refugee Language Project hosted meetings with four separate refugee communities to identify specific problems and consider concrete solutions. We asked questions about four main topics: Coming & Going, Community Places, Culture, and Business. Here are some of our major findings:

### Coming & Going

Amarillo attracts many secondary migrants, especially those with low levels of English proficiency who find opportunities in meatpacking plants. Many struggle to work in this industry long-term and eventually leave. Better job opportunities, access to farmland, and increased community support could cause many to remain.

### Community Places

Houses of worship, as well as small shops or market stalls, are of prime importance for community gatherings. Unfortunately, many don't own their own spaces and are forced to rent spaces for cultural events. A community center would address this ongoing need for many groups, and potentially allow for education, access to resources, and handicraft sales.

### Culture

The refugee communities shared about many cultural expressions and celebrated handicrafts—including clothing, farming practices, culinary skills, wooden furniture, baskets, jewelry, and pottery. Most of these expressions are not currently celebrated and encouraged. Instead, groups host settle for infrequent annual celebrations and focus on teaching their own children about their languages and cultures.

### Business

A vast majority of the refugee communities in Amarillo earned income back home in farming and/or in small business sales (such as selling produce in markets). Most of these people are not currently utilizing these skills due to various barriers for business development. Only the Somali community is thriving with entrepreneurship.

## A Selection of Messages from Refugees

- "We want you to know what our people went through in the past."
- "We want them to know that we love them and want to be with them and share our culture with them."
- "We are not criminals. We came here to escape war, not to create war here."

## We recommend that...

- ...local partners collaborate to open a multicultural community center.
- ...mother tongue education be promoted wherever possible.
- ...local partners collaborate to establish a refugee community leadership council.
- ...new partners rise up to engage refugee communities by developing childcare initiatives.
- ...new partners rise up to engage refugee communities by developing an approach to trauma care.
- ...new partners rise up to engage refugee communities by forming a business development program and exploring farming initiatives.
- ...organizations that offer adult education critically examine their own unique strengths in comparison to other partners.

## What Amarillo Stands to Lose

If we don't address these issues, young future leaders will continue leaving Amarillo, and they'll leave behind their aging parents who are struggling to succeed here. Our local job industry will continue to draw secondary migrants from around the country, so our best option is to help our refugee communities thrive so that they are positioned well to help future waves of incoming refugees.

For our full recommendations, the recording of the webinar, and the community dialogues report, visit: [refugeelanguage.org/state-of-the-union](http://refugeelanguage.org/state-of-the-union)