

ONLINE APPENDIX OF TABLES

We Thought It Would Be Heaven: Refugees in an Unequal America

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In our interviews with Congolese refugee families resettled to the United States, many reported institutional obstacles and supports similar to the families featured in our book, *We Thought It Would Be Heaven: Refugees in an Unequal America*. Since there was limited space to include these examples in the book, here we offer a supplemental online appendix with the results of the in-depth interviews. These examples show both the obstacles the families faced (Table 1) and the institutional resources they were able to access (Table 2). As in the book, these obstacles and supports were not just in one field (or type of system), but in multiple arenas, including financial institutions, school systems, workplaces, and social welfare agencies.

Table 1. Institutional Obstacles Faced by Refugee Families Across Fields

Obstacles in Social Welfare Agencies				
Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Ayubu	Moving disrupts food stamps: Moved from Iowa to Ohio, apply to reinstate in Ohio, no response to application	“My family relies on my income alone, and I have to pay for water, rent, and electricity. I have to buy food and pay the hospital bills. Not long after we moved, my wife gave birth, we received a bill of \$3500.... And the work I do is not sufficient for all these needs. During the application process [for food stamps and Medicaid], we were asked to submit all ID s and children’s certificates. We did that. But there hasn’t been any feedback... It has now been two months since we started trying to apply for food stamps and Medicaid, but we have not received any feedback.”	- Social welfare - Housing - Government IDs and documentation	- Cut off from food stamps (for at least 6 months)
Jabari	Issue with food stamp documentation	“Honestly, the food stamps were really helpful, but they stopped them. We were told to reapply from time to time [for recertification]. For a year and half, my wife has been sick and was laid off from work, but we have not received any kind of help. The money I earn is all we depend on.”	- Social welfare - Workplace - Health care	- Cut off from food stamps
Hamisi	Benefit cliff for food stamps and Medicaid	“The government has done us a favor [but]...the moment you get a well-paying job, you find that both food stamps and Medicaid will be discontinued...The kind of work I do, you are paid \$10 an hour, or maybe \$13. That is the salary scale for most people who can’t speak English.... With the other expenses at home, like car insurance, fuel for the car, rent, and electricity, you find that you have about a \$100 or \$150 left.... And you no longer have food stamps or	- Social Welfare - Workplace - Health care	- Cut off from food stamps - Cut off from Medicaid - Avoids medical expenses

Medicaid. It becomes a big challenge... You lose all hope of getting treated in the event you fall sick. You find that at that point you live life like a prisoner.”

Obstacles with Health Care and Medical Services

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Ndabe	Run-around seeking health insurance	“The only thing stressing me is the green card and the medical insurance card.... I have tried time and time again till now. Ever since my insurance form the government was cut off, till now.... I have made several applications and I have gone to several appointments, where they keep sending me back and forth. The welfare department refers me here and there. I got tired of it all. It has been about a year now without success.... It has now become a menace and taking up much of my time.... I have been given so many appointments to the point that I was scared to ask for more time off work, ‘Ooh, bring your bank statement.’ ‘Oooh, bring this.’ And I bring it. I think I am just my wasting time.”	- Health care - Social welfare agencies - Workplace	- No health insurance - Time consuming to navigate - Threatened job, due to time off work
Martha	Change in doctor leads to challenge scheduling appointments	“I had eye problems... ever since I was in Africa. When I came here, I was taken to the doctor. At the doctor’s, I was diagnosed with [high] blood pressure. That doctor was like a sister to me. She would give me appointments after every two weeks. Then she moved to Denver, and we were [transferred to another] doctor. She has never called me in for an appointment.... I used to call our interpreter, and she told me that nowadays doctor’s no longer do	- Health care	- Missed medical care and check-ups

		consultations. I can call her, and she promises to get me an appointment, but then she doesn't."		
Banduka	Injured at work, denied request time off: injured lifting at work, request 2 months off work, given 2 days, eventually have surgery, lost job	"The kind of work I do is very difficult. So, while I was lifting stuff back in November last year, I felt [my back] dislocate. I was experiencing pain. But, you know, in America you have to work. So, I had to go to work. I... asked for leave. I needed about two months leave, so that I could seek treatment. Instead, I was given two and a half days. I went back to work still injured.... In July... I decided to go to the hospital. They recommended surgery. So, I underwent surgery. But all this started while at work."	- Workplace - Health care	- Delay medical surgery - Laid off from work, lost income

Obstacles in School Systems

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Victorina	Language barrier in helping children with homework	"It was hard. And especially, we didn't know the language. We didn't know how things worked..... Every day when the children brought homework, the children expected us to teach them about that. We had no choice, we had to help them. But in English—not French or Swahili. No Lingala. [Our kids] were shocked how we didn't know these things."	- School system	- Struggled to help with homework

Obstacles in Housing

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Banduka	Double pay water bill: Decide to move, pay water bill to landlord, move, then landlord asks to pay again	“Since we didn’t know English, we suspected that [the landlord] was extorting us.... We wanted to move in June. So, we told him, and he was like, ‘You want to move yet you still owe the water bill?’ So, we asked him to give us the bill. He gave us it, and we paid for it. Then, we moved out of that house on [September] 29 th . Then come October, he sent us another bill for that house. He asked us to pay the water bill for the month of September and October—a total of \$360. We just had to pay. And so, we feel they are really abusing us just because we can’t speak English. That was it. If they bring a bill and we tell them that we have already paid for it, they threaten to take us to court. For a refugee to be taken to court, we are scared of that.”	- Housing - Police - Courts	- Overpay by \$360

Obstacles with Immigration Services

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Beatrice	Moving disrupts green card application: Submit green card application, move to cheaper apartment, change address with	“By bad luck, we applied for green cards while in [our old neighborhood], and while waiting for the green cards to be processed, we moved. So, we had to change our addresses at the hospital, and everywhere else. So, we started receiving the letters at our new house, including one letter indicating that we would receive our green cards ‘in August on this and this date.’ In August we didn’t receive the green cards.... We asked the aid worker to check that out.... The	- Immigration services - Housing - Communication services (post office) - Resettlement agency - Health care	- Green card application delayed: takes 8 months - Extra work for Beatrice, resettlement case worker,

	institutions, but don't receive green card in mail, must re-submit documents	letter indicated that we would receive them here... We went to the headquarters, and again 'the green cards were sent.'... A social worker [at the hospital] followed up... [telling] them that 'The green cards got lost. They received the letter but not the green cards.' So, they asked us to send them copies of our all our documents. We made copies and sent them. I thank God because it took about three months after following up, and we received the green cards."	- Workplace	and hospital social worker - Delay threatened employment
Ndabe	Bureaucratic mix-up in green card application: Sought help from lawyer, appointment at wrong department, lawyer disappears, pandemic hits	"I am stressed because I don't know how to get [a green card]. We once called a certain department about that, but my lawyer...we asked him about the green card, and instead they gave me an appointment for a passport. After four months, I was asked to pay \$400. So, I told them, 'I don't want a passport.'... We followed up on the process, and they told us that the lawyer had not reported to work—at some point he just vanished. I am not sure if he had been fired at work.... Now the pandemic started, I am not sure I will even get the numbers to call. I am not sure."	- Legal services - Immigration services - Health care	- Never received green card - Time consuming and stressful - Almost paid \$400 for incorrect service

Obstacles in Financial Institutions

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Baraka	Stolen credit card	"I went to the ATM to check my balance, and when I checked, there was no money. I had zero balance.... I called the bank. But since I could not speak good English, they asked me to go to the bank. So, I went to the bank, and... I told them about the issue, and they checked the system. They said, "True, all the	- Financial institution	- \$2,500 stolen: the bank refunded \$1,500 with a net loss for

		money has been taken from your account. It has all been spent.” ... Apparently, those people had taken note of my card number. I had about \$2,500 in the bank. They stole all that money... I had \$2,500, but I only managed to get \$1,500 back.”		Bakari of \$1,000
Pierre	Error closing credit card: Called to close credit card, company says account is closed but in an error the account is not closed, unknowingly fined, demanding credit score	“I got a credit card. But... I decided to go to college. I did not want to have other bills while in college.... So, I decided to pay off that card. I called the bank to cancel the card. So, I closed the account. I moved on and went to college...My brother started calling me, ‘We are getting these bills from this company. Do you still owe them money?’... I called [the credit card company], and they said, ‘We do not see anything in our system. We do not see the bills in the system.’ [Years later] when I went to buy a house, they pulled my social security number. And it came up that I owe \$1,500... When I called [the bank for the credit card] that day, they said, ‘You are supposed to go to court for this charge, because you have not been making payments and we already sued you.’ What?... I think the mistake I made was when I talked with the bank to close my account. I did not get the confirmation letter or anything like that. I didn’t know... It took me time to build my credit back because of that.”	- Financial institutions - Housing - Workplace	- Credit score plummeted - Denied approval for home loan and can’t buy house - Denied approval for business loan and can’t expand business
Beatrice	Complicated process for credit	“I had [a credit card] set up... I filled out some forms. I went to my [caseworker] and asked him to help me fill out the forms and then I mailed them. He set up everything for me... They notified me that I have a card, but I do not know how to use it. They mailed me the card. So, they informed me that... they gave me [a credit limit of] \$300.... I haven’t used it	- Financial institutions - Resettlement agency - Postal service	- Unable to access credit

till now. Even if I use the card, how will I pay back the money? I haven't found someone who will show me how to use the card. I went to see [my caseworker], and he told me... 'You wanted the card, so you have to figure out how to use it. Or ask someone else.'"

Obstacles in the Workplace

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Beatrice	School requirements constrain work schedule: To make school pick up, work night shifts, using public transit late at night	"First off, I worked as a dishwasher when I came from Africa. I had to work the night shift and my mother would work in the morning so that we could drop off and pick up the children from school... I would go to work at two o'clock in the afternoon and come back at two at night... I would take the bus. It was about 20 minutes walking distance from work, and since there aren't many people at night, I would have to get to the bus station and wait. [On the way home one night] there was a man who offered to give me a ride... I told him, 'No thank you. I am almost home.' He kept on following me... By instinct, I decided to look back and I saw the car following me. I ran. He chased me. By good luck, I spotted a dumpster and hid in the trash.... He couldn't find me, so he left.... I decided not to go back to that job, it was risky."	- Workplace - School system - Transportation	- Lost job and income

Hamisi	Mix-up with English application forms	“The challenge was that I didn’t understand English. So, the [employer] came in and gave us two sheets of paper—such that those who wish to continue working [as a cleaner] with [the university I was at] will write their names on one sheet, and those who wish to work for [the subcontracted cleaning company] to write their names on the other sheet. We chose to remain at [the university] We didn’t quite understand what they wanted us to do after writing our names on that sheet of paper. So, we continued working there. Then, we came to work one day on a night shift and found the rest with a different kind of uniform. So, we asked them, ‘How come you have a different kind of uniform from ours?’ Most of them laughed at us. We were left wondering, ‘What will we do?’ ... So that was how we lost that job.”	- Workplace	- Lost job and income
Pastor Jean	Language and credentialing hurdle to employment	“I worked as a teacher back home in Congo and then in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. But I have not worked as a teacher here [in the U.S.]. I used to work as a cleaner at a certain hospital in New York... There was a [resettlement] organization which was helping refugees get jobs.... They would look at your level of proficiency in English. If you could speak a little English, then you would get a job at the hospital.”	- Workplace - Resettlement agency	- Not able to get job as teacher - Entry level job as cleaner with lower pay

Obstacles with Police and Child Protective Services (CPS)

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Problem	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
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Zamari	Problem with transportation: boarded the wrong bus and got lost, when no one picks up the children from school, they're sent to the police station	“When I had been here for about a month, the resettlement agency suggested that we enroll for English classes. We asked for permission to leave early one day because we were supposed to go pick up the children [from school] ... During that time, the bus routes were changed.... We got lost... While changing buses, there was a police officer who was alighting. So, he helped us and showed us the way... [When we got home,] the children weren't there.... I called the police...So apparently the children came home after school, and when they did not find us, they decided to go back to school. At school, they were taken to the police station... That is the biggest challenge I have ever faced here, and I will never forget about it.”	- Resettlement agencies - Transportation - Police - School system	- Threat of CPS intervening and taking children away - Children not allowed to play outside, no friends
Beatrice	Work conflict picking up child from school: Teachers threaten to call police when late	“When I first arrived, I really wanted to get a job, but I was told, ‘...You cannot leave the child at home on their own. The child cannot go to school on their own. You have to take him and pick him up.’ And so, that was such a challenge. The child would go to school, and they would not allow him to leave on his own, unless I showed up. So, he would remain in school, and I would call the teachers and ask them to wait a little longer ‘till I pick him up. Sometimes they would threaten to call the police to come and take the child away. That was very challenging.”	- School system - Workplace - Police	- Threat of CPS intervening and taking children away - Challenge scheduling work
Hamisi	Gave the wrong ID: involved in a car crash, police ask for ID, gives ID	“We were driving as usual, but there was another driver, who was driving at a high speed. He came and hit our car... It was such a big accident.... The police came and took a statement.... So, they asked me, “Where is your ID?” So, I gave them my American ID—when you come here, you are given an ID card,	- Transportation - Police - Court system	- Cited for driving without a license (dismissed) - Court time taken by case

card not driver's license, cited for driving without a license and sent to court, explain in court, and case dismissed

so, I gave them the ID I have always had.... They wrote in their statement that I was driving the car and that I only had an identity card—they had wanted me to give them a driver's license ID card.... So, when I went to court, they asked me, "Why are you driving the car using your ordinary ID card?" And I said, 'They asked for my ID and so I gave them my ID... They did not ask for a learner's permit. They asked for my ID... But I have a learner's permit, not just this ID.'... And they said, 'If you have a driving license then it seems like the fault wasn't yours—the one who is at fault is the one who came to ask you for your identification documents. This case has been dismissed.'"

Table 2. Institutional Resources Received by Refugee Families Across Fields

Social Welfare Benefits				
Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Zainab	Food Stamps	“After arriving [in the US], we were never hungry. They gave us food stamp assistance. We were still new with no jobs, but we were given houses [to stay in]. They told us, ‘You use food stamps when you go to the store’.... We used it to buy groceries, and just like that we never went hungry. No kids were complaining of hunger.”	- Social welfare - Commercial stores	- Had enough food - No kids hungry
Janvier	Food Stamps	“As long as you go to work in the morning and come back in the evening. You will make some good money. But, if you have a big family, then the money becomes little. You can then seek government’s cash assistance... So, we apply for cash assistance... We received food stamps for a long time.”	- Workplace - Social welfare	- Had enough food - No kids hungry
Jabari	Food Stamps and Unemployment: Laid off during pandemic, applied for benefits	“When [the] corona[virus] hit, things were really difficult. We were laid off at work, and we were told to apply for unemployment. I was the only one [in my family] working... Paying for our bills was challenging ‘till we got the unemployment [assistance] after about six to seven months... There wasn’t anyone I could turn to for help. I applied for several things online, including food stamps, and that helped me.”	- Workplace - Social welfare	- Financial support to get by during pandemic

Benefits in Health Care and Medical Services

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Martha	Access to medical treatment	“I thank God that I live a good life, because I am no longer having body aches as before. Even though I have high blood pressure, it is not as bad as before. I used to suffer from malaria and fever a lot while in the camp. But I no longer have fevers. I thank God for that.... When we came here, we had daily appointments with the doctor. The case managers would take us to the doctors’ appointments. Then they showed us..., and so we started going there on our own. I would go with my children... We never paid. Medicaid covered the cost.”	- Health care - Resettlement agency - Transportation	- Improved health

Supports in the Workplace

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Beatrice	Unemployment benefits: work hours reduced during pandemic, case worker helps apply for cash assistance	“I get money from my job, but the number of hours have been reduced and the pay, too. I get about \$400 or \$500. But I pay \$500 for rent, electricity, and the phone bill. So, I visited a certain caseworker who normally helps us. I told him, “I only work for three days and the money I get is not enough. What do I do?” He said, ‘Let me send in an application, and see if they will give you some cash assistance....’ He sent in the	- Workplace - Resettlement agency - Social welfare	- Receives supplemental income

		application for me, so now I receive an extra \$500.”		
Ayubu	Caseworker helped get job, translators at home	“I got my first job through my case worker who welcomed me here.... He really helped me. He was Hispanic and Christian. He got me that job and took me for the orientation.... There were American translators at work who helped us fill out applications online.”	- Workplace - Resettlement agency	- Got job

Housing Benefits				
Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Pierre	Housing Assistance: Subsidized rent	“My brother first moved to Indiana [and] I stayed in Vermont. I was in school there. After I finished, I went to Indiana and joined him. He had Section 8 [housing assistance] in Indiana. After that we lived together for a couple of years, saving money, and then we all decided to buy our own homes.”	- Housing - Social welfare - Financial	- Received housing assistance - Saved money - Bought house
Beatrice	Housing Assistance: Subsidized rent	“By good luck we met a certain lady who told us that life in this state is expensive, and that rent is on the higher side. We may not be able to pay all that. So, she sent in an application for subsidized rent rates. She was just trying her luck.... We were lucky to get that [subsidized] house. So, I pay half and [the assistance] pays the other half.”	- Housing - Social welfare	- Received housing assistance - Saved money
Martha	Housing Assistance:	“We used to pay \$1,350 [for rent] When we moved here, [a caseworker] ... took us to certain	- Housing - Social welfare	- Housing savings of \$650 per month

	Subsidized rent	offices, and we were allocated houses in Section 8... I am paying \$700 in section 8.”		- Increased savings
Zamari	Assistance paying utility bills: Lost job during pandemic, gets emergency assistance	“After I told the [non-profit] organization about my challenges, they offered to pay my electricity bill for three months.... I think I will start paying again in January. They helped me with that.	- Housing - Social welfare - Utilities	- Assistances with 3 months of utilities

Supports in School Systems

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Hamisi	Free K-12 education	“The children are in school. It is free education. They are getting free education for all this period until when they are eighteen years old.”	- School system	- Free K-12
Ayubu	Given food at school	“When we came here, the children started attending school. They were given food at school. They would come home full. That is the difference in terms of food. It is much better here.”	- School system - Social welfare	- Received food at school - Children not hungry
Victorina	Educational materials	“Here, the teachers are obligated to make sure that the kid passes the class. Back home, the teacher is very strict, very severe—the teacher will do his best to fail you. In American schools,	- School system	- Student support

		they have all the [academic] materials for you to learn.”		
Austin	Full-ride scholarship: high school and college, and free books	“I received a scholarship for my [private high school], so I didn’t have to worry about money. As for [my university], I got a full ride to go there... “Last year I never had to pay for anything except maybe two books.”	- School system	- Free K-12 - Free university
Austin	Free college-prep program	“They have like this two-week program before fall semester... It’s a summer institute program for first year low-income students... You come in before everybody else, and they run you through the whole college experience.”	School system	- Felt ready for college
Austin	Support from professor: Goes professor’s office hours, professor helps secure summer internship	“I wanted to be a doctor and I really wanted to do research during the summer, but I didn’t have experience... [or] the science classes So, I went to my professors and was like, ‘Is there something I can do with the math experience that I have?’ ...And he was like, ‘Yeah. The chair of the math department... has this summer internship... where he hires a couple of students to work with him on this website.’ So, I applied for the job. That is how I got it—through my math professor.... I got to know him through his office hours.”	- School system - Workplace	- Got summer internship

Support in Banking and Financial Institutions

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Pierre	How to make financial transactions: Resettlement agency taught Pierre, now he teaches other new refugees	“When I first got my bank account, Lindy was the one who helped me. I thank God for the experience that I had being a refugee back then in Vermont... Because in Vermont when you first come, they teach you step by step. They will show you how to write those checks, how to use those ATM machines, how to apply for credit card and things like that... [Now] I am running my own store; I am working hard to help other refugees go through the process... Some will come with a check from work, their bank card... So, I teach them how to order those checks from the bank, how to write the check, and the meaning of it.”	- Resettlement agency - Financial institutions	- Able to navigate financial institutions - Teaches other refugees

Immigration Services Benefits

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Amani	Green card	“A year after we arrived, we had a caseworker, who guided us in the process of getting the green card. He took us first to get vaccinated. Then he took us to where our fingerprints are taken. After all that process, we were told to wait and then they came. All of us have green cards.”	- Resettlement agency - Immigration services	- Received green card
Martha	Citizenship	“There are some agencies who help people out with the citizenship process. You will fill in an application form, and then they direct you on	- Immigration services	- Received citizenship

what to do. It is a bit hard because you have to learn about the American laws.”

Support from Police and First Responders

Refugee Interviewee	Summary of Benefit	Interview Quote	Institutions Involved	Consequence
Fadhili	Police help	“The police are of greatest help to people here in the USA. The life here is very different from the life at home, because back home you can have a problem and talk to your neighbor who will help you. Here... the police will be the ones to help you.”	- Police	- Trust police
Esha	Police help in road accident	“I had incident—a road accident. I was stopped at a red light. Someone came and hit me, so we had to call the police... I decided to call [the police] because they save lives from accidents that happened.”	- Police - Transportation	- Help in car accident
Pastor Jean	Police and firefighters help put out fire	“I have not had any problem with the police.... A fire broke out in my house while I was still living in New York. I knew the fire would escalate, and so I called the police. I called 911. And the police came. The firefighters also came.”	- Housing - Police - Emergency responders	- Fire extinguished - Prevents damage to house