



# Office of Refugee Resettlement Refugee Program Social Adjustment and Integration Promising Practice



## HIAS Women's Empowerment Program

HIAS utilized private funding to develop and implement a Women's Empowerment Program that equips women with the financial, emotional, and social management skills to succeed in their new communities. The program offered weekly group sessions, opportunities for peer mentorship, and financial assistance to support women's efforts to address barriers to self-sufficiency and enhanced their capacities to make decisions and plan for their future.



## Practice Description

HIAS developed and implemented the Women's Empowerment Program at a select number of its resettlement affiliate agencies. HIAS implemented the first phase of the program at three affiliates from January to June 2021 and a second phase at four additional affiliates from July 2022 to April 2023. The Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, featured HIAS' Phase I program in its Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse Case Studies linked here: [Case Study](#). This promising practice summary focuses on Phase II.

In Phase II, 78 women initially formed eight groups, representing six language groups. Across the three affiliates, there was a 19 percent attrition rate, resulting in 63 women completing the full program. At each affiliate, women attended a weekly group meeting lasting 90 minutes for 20-22 weeks. A trained community member fluent in the languages of the participants facilitated each group. Facilitators conducted pre- and post- assessments, helped participants identify their needs and goals, and guided participants through a HIAS-developed Women's Empowerment curriculum. The curriculum contains eight modules covering topics on safety and protection; digital literacy; cultural orientation; whole health, wellbeing, and resilience; women's health; and professional development. Outside of the group meetings, facilitators moderated a peer support group using free messaging software. HIAS also provided direct funding to participants to cover costs, such as for childcare or certification fees, to incentivize their participation in the program and help them achieve their goals.



## Need for the Practice

Due to a variety of intersecting factors, such as gender, race, language barriers, limited access to education, familial obligations, and beliefs about women's participation outside the home, refugee women in the United States face multiple barriers to overall wellbeing and integration. The Women's Empowerment Program is specifically designed to help women address those challenges through the provision of several peer group activities. The group programming offered through the Women's Empowerment curriculum aims to address common barriers faced by refugee women in gaining the skills needed to succeed financially, emotionally, and socially as they build new lives in the United States. This approach further takes into account that the success of women in resettlement directly impacts the likelihood of overall success for the entire family system.



## How to Implement the Practice

HIAS described the following key steps to implement this practice:

- Develop a multi-module curriculum that contain individual lessons plans.
- Develop translated presentations and pre- and post- assessment tools.
- Hire, train, and provide ongoing coaching and support for facilitators in delivering the curriculum.
- Hold weekly group sessions covering the curriculum.
- Facilitate peer building outside of scheduled sessions using messaging software.
- Provide personal development funds to women.



## Preliminary Results

At program's end, of 57 participants who completed pre- and post- assessments across the Phase II affiliates:

- Eighty percent of women reported increased confidence in **financial literacy**.
- Approximately 80 percent of women reported increased capacities in **financial literacy; navigating health, human and school systems; and personal health and wellbeing**.
- Sixty percent of women reported increased awareness of **social and economic opportunities**.



## Inputs/Resources

Below are key inputs and resources potentially needed to adopt this practice:

- Agency costs, including staff time, to manage program implementation
- Monetary remuneration for facilitators
- Training for facilitators
- Charted referral pathways for mental health and or domestic violence resources
- Program materials, including a curriculum and translated presentations and pre-and post-tests
- Messaging software application to promote communication among participants, as desired, outside established group meeting times



## Contextual Considerations

Agencies should consider the following contextual factors that may impact the implementation of this practice:

- Agencies can offer in-person and virtual participation options.
- The provision of direct financial assistance is helpful but not necessary for overall program success.
- Ideally, facilitators should have a high level of understanding of how to respond to individuals who have experienced violence and trauma and how to coordinate survivor lead care to those situations appropriately.

**What is a Promising Practice?** A promising practice is a unique and/or innovative approach, method, or technique that has demonstrated effectiveness and is replicable. ORR's Refugee Program primarily identifies potential promising practices during recipient and subrecipient monitoring and engages in a validation process to ensure the practice meets the standards to classify it as "promising." Each practice falls under one of the following domains: Physical and Behavioral Health, Employment and Economic Stability, Education and English Language, or Social Adjustment and Integration.