



Overview

This Executive Summary provides a brief overview of key findings from a community-engaged assessment conducted in 2023-2024 by the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition (SDRCC) to better understand the needs, challenges, priorities, and strengths of youth from local refugee communities across San Diego County, with a focus on behavioral health. These findings are intended to:

- Help inform policy, systems, and environmental changes
- Increase access to culturally and linguistically responsive services
- Address barriers related to the social determinants of health
- Build on community-identified strengths
- Improve health and well-being among refugee youth, families, and communities

Methods

SDRCC member organizations partnered with the Refugee Health Unit (RHU) within the University of California San Diego (UCSD) Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute (ACTRI) Center for Community Health (CCH) for this assessment. A comprehensive survey was administered with local youth/young adults and parents, along with focus groups in collaboration with SDRCC’s leadership and Young Leader Council (YLC). SDRCC and YLC members partnered with the RHU on instrument design, supported data collection through the SDRCC’s peer-based staff of community health workers (CHWs), and provided feedback on preliminary results.



“ Oftentimes, youth have to take up responsibilities such as paying rent and bills. It is especially difficult for them to support their families if they are illiterate and do not have job opportunities. They are (at) risk of substance use and illegal activities to provide for their home. To put food on the table. Pursuing education is important if they want to live a life they want in the future. But even then, it is still difficult. They need education that can help them develop intellectually and morally as a human being, while contributing to the progress of their community.”

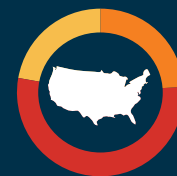
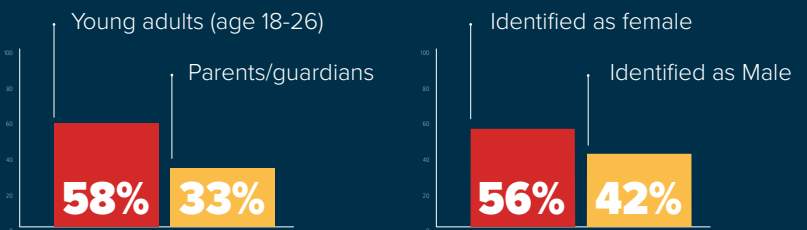
- SDRCC Assessment Survey Respondent



Participants

516 surveys were collected from youth and parents representing diverse refugee youth and families across San Diego County.

16 Ethnic Backgrounds Represented



- 24% born in the U.S.
- 54% in the U.S. for more than 5 years
- 22% in the U.S. 5 years or less



57 youth/young adults also took part in focus groups around youth substance use facilitated by SDRCC youth leaders.

TOP 5 YOUTH NEEDS/CONCERNS

- Job opportunities and income
- Safe housing, transportation, and/or neighborhoods
- Educational opportunities and support
- Social, emotional and mental health
- Access to quality healthcare

TOP 3 YOUTH BARRIERS ACCESSING SERVICES

- Lack of awareness of services/resources
- Lack of trust
- Fear of discrimination

TOP 5 YOUTH PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Believe in themselves
- Have good decision-making skills
- Have positive adult role models
- Have support from family members
- Feel connected to their community



Solutions & Future Recommendations

Youth and young adults are integral members of our community that require support and protected pathways to success and growth.

Overarching recommendations to support thriving refugee youth, families, and communities include:

- **Leveraging collaborations** between community organizations to address refugee youth priorities
- **Culturally relevant, responsive, and healing-focused services** for refugee youth and families
- **Cultural sensitivity training for service providers, interpretation services, and translation** of materials
- **Increased financial support** to build on existing community resources for refugee youth and families

The SDRCC was launched in 2019 as a collective of a dozen ethnic-led community-based organizations (ECBOs) serving diverse refugee youth and families across San Diego County, with a mission to lead coordinated action to ensure that individuals and families from refugee communities are healthy, safe, and thriving. Member organizations: Haitian Bridge Alliance; Horn of Africa Community; Karen Organization of San Diego; License to Freedom; Majdal Center; Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans; Refugee Assistance Center; Slavic Immigrants and Refugee Service Organization; Somali Bantu Community of San Diego; Southern Sudanese Community Center of San Diego; United Women of East Africa Support Team; SDRCC Afghan Project.

“
 I've learned that the youth just need to feel supported more on a daily basis and they will feel more confident in themselves and their future.”

- SDRCC Assessment Survey Respondent

TOP 5 YOUTH SERVICES/ACTIVITIES NEEDED

- **Youth job fairs**
- **Financial literacy training**
- **Employment services**
- **Mental health education**
- **Cultural activities**