

Integrating refugees in the United States: The successes and challenges¹ of resettlement in a Global Context

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Abstract. In 2014 there were more than 14 million refugees worldwide and almost a million places for permanent resettlement were needed. This article reviews administrative and survey data on the characteristics and integration outcomes of refugees resettled in the United States, Canada and Scandinavia. Refugees to these destinations are increasingly diverse in their origins and languages-posing challenges for host communities. Refugees in the United States tend to be employed due to an early focus on self-sufficiency there, but those in Sweden and Norway have low employment rates, with Canada representing a middle ground. While limited English skills slow integration in the United States and Canada, acquiring Norwegian and Swedish is tougher because refugees are seldom exposed to these languages before resettlement. In the United States, older refugee cohorts have reached income parity with the U.S.-born population, but those resettled since the 2008–09 recession have started at a greater employment and income disadvantage. This article describes the administrative and survey data on U.S. refugees in rich detail, but the available administrative data for refugees in Canada, Norway and Sweden have yet to be fully mined.

Keywords: Immigration, refugees, Canada, Norway, Sweden, United States, administrative data

1. Introduction

The unprecedented levels of forced migration resulting from the continuing conflicts in Syria and Iraq – and the emerging crisis in Yemen – have drawn attention to the limits of the global refugee protection system. More than 16 million refugees were displaced worldwide as of mid-2014, a number that was almost certain to grow amid raging conflicts in the Middle

East and elsewhere.² Nearly 4 million people³ have become refugees outside Syria according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), although many more remain internally displaced inside the Syria. More than 425,000 Iraqis were refugees in July 2014, although this number has likely grown substantially since an outbreak of violence in the summer of 2014; estimates put the internally displaced population in Iraq above 3 million as of January 2015.⁴ Most

¹This paper was prepared for the MPI Roundtable “Mismatch: Meeting the Challenges of Refugee Resettlement” held in April, 2014. It was revised subsequently and finalized in August, 2014. The paper assumes basic familiarity with the U.S. resettlement program on the part of the reader. MPI is grateful to the Kaplan Foundation for contributing support to this project.

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²UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR: Mid-Year Trends 2014* (Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR, 2015), 21, www.unhcr.org/54aa91d89.html.

³UNHCR reports 3.9 million registered refugees from Syria, but reports indicate many more may have chosen not to register with authorities. See: UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

⁴UNHCR, “2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Iraq,” accessed February 17, 2015, www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486426&submit=GO; Internal Displacement Monitoring

refugees in the region have been hosted by neighboring countries (such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon).⁵

In light of the Middle Eastern refugee crisis, permanent resettlement – one of the three “durable solutions” for refugees promoted by UNHCR – has attracted renewed attention as a tool supporting overburdened countries of first asylum and sharing the responsibility of caring for refugee populations.⁶ In Europe, which has traditionally supported relatively small numbers of resettlement places (approximately 7500 individuals were resettled in total during 2014),⁷ several new countries have stepped forward to provide places for refugees.⁸ Germany, for example, has committed to bringing in a total of 30,000 Syrians through its new humanitarian admissions program, which is similar to resettlement.

Despite renewed attention to the plight of refugees, the number of resettlement places relative to the number of individuals displaced globally still remains very small, and few countries have expressed an interest starting new programs or expanding existing initiatives. Just over 70,000 individuals were resettled through UNHCR in 2013.⁹ In Europe, concerns regarding reception capacity and integration outcomes for re-

settled refugees have tended to prevent broader use of resettlement as a protection tool, particularly in light of long-standing debates around immigration and integration in many European countries.¹⁰

As the world’s foremost destination for resettlement, the U.S. program has often been looked to for lessons on how to successfully take refugee resettlement initiatives to scale. Yet the program has come under criticism recently for insufficient investment in integration support, particularly at the local level.¹¹ Similar concerns regarding integration capacity and support have been echoed by municipalities in established resettlement countries in Europe.¹² Such doubts flourish in the absence of solid data and analysis about the outcomes of refugee resettlement. But the small size of resettled populations relative to those who arrived through asylum channels in most countries makes it difficult to track resettlement outcomes within larger data sets in most countries, and few resettlement authorities collect such data themselves. A lack of information also makes it difficult to identify issues that may have policy solutions, or that may be specific to particular groups of resettled refugees rather than to the resettled population as a whole.

Understanding outcomes and trajectories for resettled refugees both in the United States and elsewhere will be crucial to designing new initiatives and retooling existing programs to meet increasing resettlement needs. To this end, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analyzed recent, previously unpublished administrative data from the U.S. government agencies that operate the resettlement program and data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). The size of the U.S. resettlement program and

Center (IDMC), “Iraq IDP Figures Analysis,” updated January 15, 2015, www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/iraq/figures-analysis.

⁵Turkey is currently hosting almost one million registered Syrian refugees, Lebanon has registered 1.1 million, and over half a million are registered in Jordan. Beyond the Syrian conflict, UNHCR figures indicate approximately 86 percent of the world’s refugees are hosted by developing countries, most neighbors of countries in conflict. See: UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal,” <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>; and UNHCR, *Global Trends 2013*.

⁶In September 2013, UNHCR launched an appeal for an additional 30,000 resettlement places for Syrian refugees by 2014. That number has now been exceeded (largely through special humanitarian admission programs outside the normal resettlement channels), and in February 2014, UNHCR expanded this goal to 130,000 places by 2016. Under the leadership of Sweden, resettlement countries have further established a Core Group on Syrian Resettlement with a goal of increasing cooperation and support for resettlement as a response to the Syrian crisis. UNHCR, “Finding solutions for Syrian Refugees: Resettlement and Other Forms of Admission of Syrian Refugees,” 17 November 2014, www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.pdf.

⁷EUROSTAT, “Resettled persons by age, sex and citizenship Annual data (rounded) [migr_asyresa],” updated May 8, 2015, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyresa&lang=en.

⁸Germany, Austria, and the United Kingdom have established special relocation programs for Syrians. Brazil has also created a humanitarian visa scheme for Syrian refugees.

⁹UNHCR, *War’s Human Cost: UNHCR Global Trends 2013* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2014), 20–21, <http://www.unhcr.org/5399a14f9.html>.

¹⁰At the same time, resettled refugees are often better received as they are perceived to have gone through the appropriate channels in accessing protection, as opposed to asylum seekers who usually arrive illegally and then seek protection.

¹¹Anastasia Brown and Todd Scribner, “Unfulfilled Promises, Future Possibilities: The Refugees Resettlement System in the United States,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 2, no. 2 (2014): 101–20, <http://jmhs.cmsny.org/index.php/jmhs/article/view/27>.

¹²Norway and Sweden, for example, have had difficulty finding placements for refugees in municipalities. Both countries work with local authorities to settle refugees (both asylees and resettlement cases) in municipalities after they are granted status. Accepting refugee cases is voluntary for municipalities, and in recent years, Swedish and Norwegian authorities have struggled to find sufficient places for newly arrived refugees. As reported at a roundtable hosted by the Migration Policy Institute Europe and the Open Society Foundations International Migration Initiative, October 15–17, 2014, “Europe in a Global Context: Refugee Protection Challenges and Potential Ways Forward.”

the availability of data on refugee populations provide a unique opportunity to track outcomes for resettled refugees specifically. Drawing on these data, the findings in this report highlight specific factors underlying the integration challenges facing refugees and U.S. resettlement service providers. For purposes of comparison, these data are placed alongside existing studies of resettlement trends and outcomes in other major resettlement destinations, with a particular focus on Canada, Norway, and Sweden where the availability of administrative data has made it easier for researchers to separate resettlement from asylum flows.¹³ This allows us to identify certain features of the U.S. system that may be unique, as well as challenges that are commonly shared.

Following a brief description of the methods, the report describes what is known about resettlement trends and outcomes in Canada, Sweden, and Norway. The authors then present the findings of MPI analysis of U.S. admissions data on trends in arrivals and outcomes over time (with specific attention to income, reliance on social benefits, education levels, and language learning), and concludes with some comparative observations and recommendations for further inquiry. A full description of the methodology is provided in an appendix.

2. Methods

Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysts developed the profile of refugees resettled in the United States presented here using two main data sources. First, MPI analysis used U.S. government administration data to describe the characteristics of refugees at arrival – during federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2000–13. The analysts obtained these data from the Department of Homeland Security, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and the Department of State’s Worldwide Refugee Admissions

Processing System (WRAPS), among other sources. WRAPS was the primary data source. While these data have some limitations, they represent the best available information about *arriving* refugees. The data are generally self-reported during the resettlement application process.

The analysis of refugee outcomes over time draws on American Community Survey (ACS) data from the U.S. Census Bureau. MPI analysts used the data to describe demographic characteristics and socioeconomic outcomes for refugees who arrived in the United States since the refugee program officially began in 1980. Refugee status is assigned based on characteristics available in the ACS.

More than two-thirds of the ACS population assigned refugee status arrived before 2000: 28 percent arrived in 1980–89, and 40 percent in 1990 through 1999. The remaining 32 percent arrived in 2000 through 2011. Fifty-seven countries of origin comprise the refugee population captured by the ACS sample. Vietnam and Cuba are the most common countries of refugee origin, each accounting for 20 percent. The next largest origin countries are Russia and Ukraine, at 7 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Laos, Iran, Iraq, Bosnia, and Cambodia each account for 3 to 4 percent of the refugee population. No other country comprises more than 3 percent of the refugee population.

The report disaggregates the ten countries with the most refugee arrivals during FY 2000 through FY 2011, according to administrative data. These countries are Bhutan, Burma, Cuba, Liberia, Iran, Iraq, Russia, Somalia, Ukraine, and Vietnam. The report does not disaggregate those countries with high refugee inflows before 2000 that were not in the top ten after 2000.

The ACS does not identify Bhutan, one of the ten national origins represented by the most refugee arrivals, and so this report uses 2010 Census tables for persons reporting Bhutanese ancestry. Almost all individuals who reported Bhutanese ancestry in the 2010 Census arrived after 2000, and the estimated population closely approximates the number of Bhutanese refugee admissions. Assessments of refugee progress over time are based on cross sectional analyses of groups, not longitudinal analyses of individuals.

3. Resettlement in Canada and Europe

As of June 2014, UNHCR estimates more than 950,000 resettlement places are needed globally. A to-

¹³Elsewhere in Europe, data on resettled refugees is difficult to obtain, as they are generally not distinguished from asylees in national statistics or reception programming. The availability of microdata for scientific use from national registries has made evaluation of resettled refugees as a specific group easier in these countries. In Sweden, the STATIV database provides longitudinal microdata on immigrants based on administrative sources, and includes information on route of entry. The Longitudinal Immigrant Database (IMDB) in Canada, and linked data from the Central Population Register run by Statistics Norway provide similar information. As most European countries also receive asylum flows from the same countries of origin as resettled refugees, it is difficult to distinguish the two groups in data without an indication of entry routes.

tal of 27 countries now operate regular resettlement programs, yet demand still far exceeds capacity.¹⁴

The top 10 resettlement providers have historically been the United States, Australia, Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Denmark, and the Netherlands.¹⁵ The programs in the top three have, however, typically been much larger than the rest: the United States has offered 70,000 places each of the last two years,¹⁶ and Australia and Canada pledged to respectively resettle 6,500 and 7,600 refugees in 2014.¹⁷ By comparison, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Norway each resettle between 1,000 and 2,000 refugees a year, with most other resettlement programs providing fewer than 750 spaces.¹⁸

Partly due to the small nature of these programs, there has been limited comprehensive evaluation and analysis of trends and outcomes for resettled refugees in most countries.¹⁹ As a further complication, administrative data in many countries do not allow researchers to distinguish between resettled refugees and other humanitarian admission categories, such as asylum applicants. Furthermore, in Europe, the high volume of asylum arrivals from the same origin countries targeted for resettlement programs makes imputing resettled refugees from country of origin much more difficult for Europe than the United States.

However, the availability of comprehensive longitudinal datasets on immigration linked to admissions and other registry data in Canada, Sweden, and Norway provides the opportunity for some evaluation and analysis of resettlement in these countries.

3.1. Canada

Canada's unique resettlement program dates to 1978. Unlike most other resettlement countries, Canada offers two channels for refugee admissions:

¹⁴In 2014, around 80,000 resettlement places were available. UNHCR Resettlement Progress Report, June 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opensslPDFViewer.html?docid=51e3eabf9&query=resettlement>.

¹⁵UNHCR, *Global Resettlement Statistical Report 2012*, www.unhcr.org/52693bd09.pdf.

¹⁶See: PRM, "Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2013," <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186106.pdf>; and PRM, "Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2014," <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/219137.pdf>.

¹⁷UNHCR Resettlement Handbook.

¹⁸UNHCR, *Global Resettlement Statistical Report 2012*, www.unhcr.org/52693bd09.pdf.

¹⁹Eleanor Ott, "The Labour Market Integration of Resettled Refugees," UNHCR, 2013, www.unhcr.org/5273a9e89.pdf.

a Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) program and a private sponsorship stream. UNHCR submits GARs to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for processing and interview by case officers. If accepted, GARs receive full resettlement support and services from the government for up to one year after their arrival. Privately-sponsored refugees are identified and supported by family members or civil society groups in Canada; sponsors are then responsible for providing for resettled refugees after their arrival.²⁰ In the United States, by contrast, refugees are generally resettled through partnerships among the federal government, state governments, and private sponsors, in many cases with a mixture of public and private financial support.

There are two primary administrative sources of data on resettlement in Canada. First, the Field Operations Support System (FOSS), operated by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, records data on temporary and permanent residents. Second, the longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) links microdata from FOSS to tax records from the Canada Revenue Agency and allows for tracking of immigrants' economic outcomes over time. IMDB is administered by Statistics Canada.²¹

Canadian refugees have diversified in their origins, as in the United States.²² Most arrivals in the 1980s were nationals of Vietnam, Laos, or Poland, and in the 1990s many came from the former Yugoslavia. More recently, refugee arrivals include a mix of those from Africa (including Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Congo) and the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan). Arrivals since 2000 have also included substantial shares from Colombia, Burma, and Bhutan, depending on the year.²³

About 70 percent of principal GAR applicants, as opposed to dependents or spouses, are working age (25 to 54). Refugees in more recent cohorts have become slightly older. Prior to 2000, 25 percent of principal applicants were ages 25 to 29. In more recent cohorts, this share drops to 17 percent, and more refugees are in

²⁰A third stream, "blended visa referrals," also exists. Blended visas allow UNHCR to refer refugees to private sponsorship organizations. UNHCR, "UNHCR Resettlement Handbook – Country Chapters – Canada," <http://www.unhcr.org/4a2ccf4c6.html>.

²¹CIC, "Evaluation of Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) and Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)," March 2011, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/gar-rap/index.asp>.

²²See Section 3 below.

²³CIC, "Government-assisted Refugees: Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)," *IMDB 2008 Immigration Category Profiles*, March 2012, www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/imdb/GAR_3.pdf.

their 30s and 40s. Accompanying spouses and dependents tend to be much younger, as might be expected.²⁴

According to FOSS admissions data for 2005–09 reporting period, 30 percent of new arrivals had knowledge of Canada’s official languages (English or French). Knowledge of either language had declined over time: The share of new arrivals reporting no knowledge of either language rose from 66 percent in 2000 to 75 percent in 2009.²⁵ Canada’s resettlement program has an advantage here: Widespread use of English in business and education globally means that many refugees arrive speaking the language. This advantage is shared by resettlement programs in the United States and Australia, but other major resettlement countries such as Germany and Sweden do not have English as an official language.

More recent Canadian refugees tend to be less educated than earlier arrivals. The share of new arrivals without any formal education increased from 7 percent in 2000 to 20 percent in 2009.²⁶

Resettlement assistance in Canada operates similarly to the U.S. model (discussed in greater detail below), though Canada’s assistance is somewhat more generous. The Resettlement Assistance Program provides direct financial support to refugees for the first year after their arrival. This program also funds service providers to deliver life skills training and temporary accommodation, and to help refugees access mainstream services. Some providers also offer language training, employment guidance, and other services using other funding streams.²⁷

Because they are provided with benefits during their first year in Canada, GARs have highest social insurance use of all immigrant groups at arrival (70 percent used social insurance in the first year), but this share declines substantially over time.²⁸ Five years after arrival the share of GARs receiving social insurance fell to 30 percent, though remaining much higher than the Canadian average and average for all immigrants (both about 5 percent). Correspondingly, resettled refugees’ use of employment insurance increased

dramatically with Canadian experience. After 5 years, over 14 percent of GARs were using employment insurance, although this was close to the share for all immigrants (around 13 percent) and just somewhat above the Canadian average of 10 percent.²⁹

In part because of high use of social insurance, GARs are among the least likely immigrant groups to be employed during the first year in Canada.³⁰ Data from the IMDB suggests that just 45 percent of GARs report income from employment one year after arrival. However, resettled refugees quickly reach employment parity with other groups, as within five years their employment rate increases to 65 percent – in line with the Canadian average and the average for all Canadian immigrants.³¹ Other, regression-based analyses have provided further evidence that, controlling for other factors, immigrant employment rates eventually reach parity with other Canadian immigrant groups.³²

GAR’s earnings also improve with Canadian experience. GARs have the lowest earnings of any immigrant group at arrival: \$10,000 CAD. With 15 years of experience, GARs reach parity with the immigrant average of \$35,000 CAD, but still lag the Canadian average of \$40,000. The pace of earnings improvement is similar across GAR entry cohorts dating to the early 1980s.³³

GARs also improve their language skills over time. According to a CIC survey of GAR arrivals, after 5

²⁴CIC, “Government-assisted Refugees: Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB).”

²⁵CIC, “Evaluation of Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) and Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).”

²⁶CIC, “Evaluation of Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) and Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).”

²⁷CIC, “Evaluation of Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) and Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).”

²⁸Social insurance refers to subsistence benefits provided outside the employment insurance system.

²⁹Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Government-assisted Refugees: Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB).” *IMDB 2008 Immigrant Category Profiles*, March 2012, www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/imdb/GAR_3.pdf.

³⁰Likely due in part to labor market barriers such as a lack of language skills or transferable credentials, as well as their participation in integration programs during the first year. See for example: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Government-assisted Refugees: Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB);” and Pieter Bevelander and Ravi Pendakur, “The Labour Market Integration of Refugee and Family Reunion Immigrants: A Comparison of Outcomes in Canada and Sweden,” *IZA Discussion paper*, October 2012.

³¹Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Government-assisted Refugees: Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB).”

³²See for example: Bevelander and Pendakur, “The Labour Market Integration of Refugee and Family Reunion Immigrants.”

³³Statistics Canada also makes available tabulations of annual income by immigration category. See: Statistics Canada, “Income of immigrants, by sex, landing age group, immigrant admission category, years since landing and landing year, 2011 constant dollars,” [table 054-0001], <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a05?lang=eng&id=0540001&pattern=0540001&searchTypeByValue=1&p2=35>; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Government-assisted Refugees: Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB).”

years close to 60 percent reported knowing English well or very well.³⁴

3.2. Sweden and Norway

The Swedish and Norwegian resettlement programs are substantially smaller than those of Canada and the United States in absolute terms, but are similar relative to these countries' total populations. Moreover, Sweden and Norway have two of the largest resettlement programs in Europe.

Since 2011, Sweden has set an annual resettlement quota of 1,900 refugees,³⁵ and Norway typically offered between 1,100 and 1,200 places for refugees annually. In 2014, Norwegian authorities announced a quota of 1,620 refugees that included a supplement of 500 places for Syrians.³⁶ Authorities in both countries consider submissions for resettlement by UNHCR as well as by their embassies abroad, and Norway also considers submissions by NGOs in places where UNHCR does not have facilities. Both countries accept emergency cases (which must be processed and resettled within seven days), cases with special medical needs, and victims of particular forms of trauma.³⁷

An important source of data on resettlement in Sweden is the STATIV database, maintained by Statistics Sweden. This database links microdata from administrative registries, allowing it to provide details on integration outcomes, routes of entry, and years since migration. In Norway, the primary data source on refugees is the Central Population Register managed by Statistics Norway.

Despite the relatively small scale of both programs, their resettlement cases are diverse. Sweden resettled refugees from over 20 countries of origin in 2013, and Norway resettled those from at least 13 countries.³⁸ Afghanistan, Somalia, and Eritrea have been important

source countries for refugees in Sweden since 2010, and a substantial number of Syrians and Colombians were resettled there in 2013. Norway has resettled substantial groups of Afghanis, Somalis, Iranians, and nationals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.³⁹

An analysis of 2007 STATIV data suggested refugees resettled in Sweden had lower educational attainment than asylees or family arrivals. Refugees from Vietnam were the most likely to have just a primary or low secondary education, while Iranians and Iraqis were the most likely to have a university education. But higher education levels did not always translate into better employment outcomes. Resettled refugees had lower employment rates for their education levels on average than other immigrant groups, potentially reflecting credentialing or language issues, or delayed labor market entry.⁴⁰

Social and economic integration of refugees has been a significant concern in Europe, particularly given the special needs of some resettlement cases. Sweden and Norway have invested heavily in reception and integration programs for resettled refugees and other non-selected immigrant groups. Both countries take a "train first" rather than a "work first" approach to refugee settlement, dedicating the first few months (or even years) after arrival to intensive orientation and language training programs. Employment is a later priority. By contrast, the U.S. resettlement program limits cash assistance to several months, during which time refugees are expected to obtain employment with sufficient wages to support themselves; after this initial period, U.S. resettlement assistance is limited.

In Sweden, resettlement beneficiaries are immediately enrolled in a full-time introduction program run by the national Public Employment Service. This program provides language instruction, social services guidance, employment counseling, and training. The duration of the program depends on the needs of the individual and can last up to two years. These courses provide access to valuable skills training but also delay entry into the labor market.⁴¹ Municipal authorities in Norway administer a similar introductory program that

³⁴CIC, "Evaluation of Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) and Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)."

³⁵Swedish Migration Board, <http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/The-refugee-quota.html>.

³⁶Ministry of Justice and Public Security, "The quota for resettlement in 2014," <http://udiregelverk.no/en/documents/circulars-and-instructions-from-the-ministries/2013-12-19-jd1/>.

³⁷ICMC, *Welcome to Europe! A Comprehensive Guide to Resettlement*, July 2013, http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/ICMC%20Europe-Welcome%20to%20Europe_0.pdf.

³⁸It is important to note that EUROSTAT figures round resettlement numbers to the nearest 5. As a result, it is possible that both countries resettled fewer than five cases from additional nationalities.

³⁹EUROSTAT, "Resettled persons by age, sex and citizenship Annual data (rounded) [migr_asyresa]."

⁴⁰Pieter Bevelander, "In the Picture – Resettled Refugees in Sweden."

⁴¹ICMC, *Welcome to Europe! A Comprehensive Guide to Resettlement*, 2013; Henrik Emilsson, *No Quick Fix: Policies to Support the Labor Market Integration of New Arrivals in Sweden*, MPI 2014, <http://migrationpolicy.org/research/no-quick-fix-policies-support-labor-market-integration-new-arrivals-sweden>.

can last between two and three years depending on the location. In both countries, refugees receive financial support payments while participating in the introduction programs.⁴²

Local authorities are highly involved in both resettlement programs. City or local officials must agree to the placement of refugees in their communities, and are also responsible for providing some integration services and housing from public housing stocks.⁴³ The strain placed on local services by the settlement of refugees (and those admitted through the asylum route) has led to resistance from some communities to participating in resettlement programs.⁴⁴

In both Sweden and Norway, resettled refugees have very low employment rates for their first year in the country, and their employment lags other groups over time. Refugees may be unemployed initially because they are encouraged to participate in rigorous introduction programs that do not leave them enough time to work. They may also face labor market entry barriers such as language difficulties or lack of relevant skills. Analysis of 2007 data from the STATIV database found that refugees had the lowest employment rate at arrival of any immigrant group in Sweden: just over 20 percent. Refugees there reach parity other refugees and family reunion immigrants after about 15 years (with an employment rate of about 65 percent); this is a longer timeframe than that observed in Canada (about 5 years).⁴⁵

A 2008 study by Statistics Norway suggested that refugees there start with very low employment rates, but reach parity with other immigrant groups (60 percent employment) after 10 to 15 years in the labor market.⁴⁶

Other studies show similar earnings trends for refugees resettled in Sweden and Norway. Although refu-

gees' initial earnings are lower than those of asylees or family arrivals, their earnings triple after 20 years of experience, almost gaining parity with the other two immigrant groups.⁴⁷ Few studies of refugees' education or language outcomes in Sweden and Norway are available in English.

4. The U.S. approach to resettlement

The U.S. refugee resettlement program is the largest – and one of the oldest – in the world. In recent years, the program has aimed to resettle between 70,000 and 80,000 individuals per year. These numbers declined with processing delays and security restrictions in the late 2000s, when they were well below the ceilings set by the U.S. president following consultations with Congress.⁴⁸ Arrivals recovered recently, nearly reaching the ceilings in fiscal years (FY) 2013 and 2014.⁴⁹

Box 1. Who Is A Refugee? The U.S. Government's Definition

The United States defines a refugee as “any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” The president may also designate as refugees persons who are within their country of nationality or habitual residence. The term does not include any persons who ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of others.

Source: U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act 101(a) (42).

Once a refugee has been referred for resettlement, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determines whether to admit the applicant on the basis of an interview and the other evidence.⁵⁰ After a deci-

⁴²ICMC, *Welcome to Europe!*

⁴³ICMC, *Welcome to Europe!*

⁴⁴As reported at a roundtable hosted by the Migration Policy Institute Europe and the Open Society Foundations International Migration Initiative, October 15–17, 2014, “Europe in a Global Context: Refugee Protection Challenges and Potential Ways Forward.”

⁴⁵Peter Bevelander, “The Employment Integration of Resettled Refugees, Asylum Claimants, and Family Reunion Migrants in Sweden,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol 30, No. 1, 2011.

⁴⁶Verbjørn Aalandslid, “Overforingsflyktningers integrering i det norske samfunn,” 2008, Statistics Norway, cited in: Long & Olsen, “Evaluation: The Norwegian Program for the Resettlement of UN Refugees,” Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), 2008, <http://www.udi.no/en/statistics-and-analysis/research-and-development-reports/evaluation-of-the-norwegian-program-for-the-resettlement-of-un-refugees-2008/>.

⁴⁷Pieter Bevelander and Ravi Pendakur, “The Labour Market Integration of Refugee and Family Reunion Immigrants: A Comparison of Outcomes in Canada and Sweden,” *IZA Discussion Paper*, October 2012.

⁴⁸See DOS, DHS, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2013: Report to the Congress* (Washington, DC: DOS, DHS, and HHS, 2012), iv–v and 5, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/198157.pdf>.

⁴⁹DOS, DHS, and HHS, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015*, 5.

⁵⁰The United States accepts resettlement cases through three streams. Priority one (P-1) refugees must be outside their country of origin and are referred by UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or nongovernmental organization for resettlement on the basis of a fear of persecution or return to a country where they are at risk of persecution.

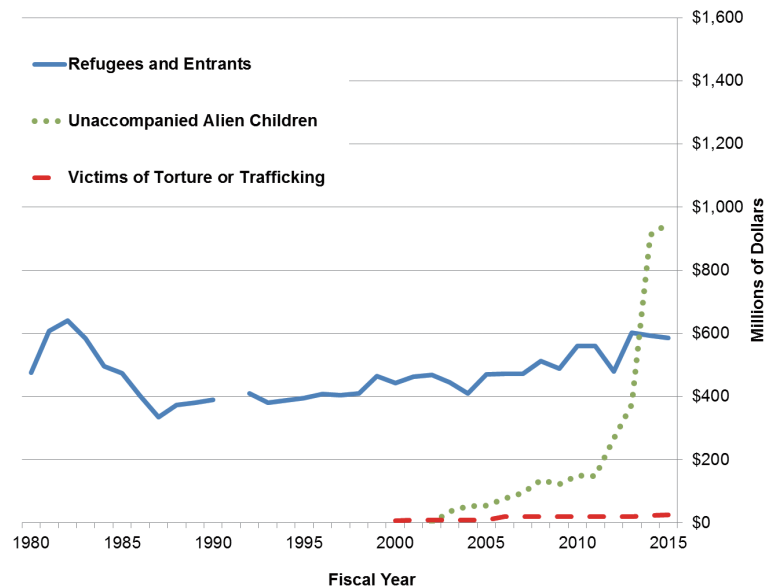


Fig. 1. U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement Budget, by Service Population, FY 1980–2015. *Note:* All budget figures are in U.S. dollars, not adjusted for inflation. The ORR Budget for FY 1991 could not be located. *Sources:* Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of budget data from Andorra Bruno, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, versions updated in 2015, 2012, 2006, 2002), <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL31269.pdf>; Joyce Violet, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy: Facts and Issues* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1999), http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/98-668_19991206.pdf; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR), *Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: HHS/ORR, 1980–2012), <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/annual-orr-reports-to-congress>. (Colours are visible in the online version of the article; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/SJI-150918>)

sion to admit an applicant is made, the case is referred to a resettlement agency, a nongovernmental organization that receives funding from the Department of State (DOS) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to resettle refugees in local communities.

The U.S. resettlement program emphasizes getting refugees in jobs as fast as possible – a key difference with the Scandinavian resettlement model. The DOS Reception and Placement Program provides resettlement agencies with funding to support refugees' recep-

tion and accommodation for the first 30 days after their arrival, including food, housing, clothing, and support for employment guidance and language training. After this initial period, refugees are expected to enroll in mainstream social benefit systems and/or obtain employment. Local resettlement agencies provide ORR-funded employment, language, and other services to refugees during their first five years in the United States, though these services are mostly concentrated during refugees' first few months in the country.⁵¹

While the scale of the program implemented by the U.S. government and its partners is impressive by almost any international standard, it has come under recent criticism for not increasing funding and support for reception and integration sufficiently to address the growing size and needs of resettled populations.⁵² ORR's total budget increased sharply starting

P-1 refugees may also be referred on the basis that a long-term solution to their displacement is not possible in their current country of residence. Priority two (P-2) refugees must be members of groups identified by the United States as a particular protection priority. Nationals of the former Soviet Union, Cuba, and Iraq, and minors in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala may apply for resettlement from within their country of origin; nationals of other priority groups must apply from outside their origin country. Finally, priority three (P-3) individuals are nationals of certain countries who are admitted as immediate family members of refugees already present in the United States, or of U.S. permanent residents or citizens who originally entered the country as refugees. See Government of the United States of America, "Country Chapter: The United States of America," in *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2014), 4, www.unhcr.org/3c5e5a764.html.

⁵¹DOS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, "Refugee Admissions, Reception, and Placement Program" (fact sheet, December 27, 2012), www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/onepages/202396.htm.

⁵²Brown and Scribner, "Unfulfilled Promises;" U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Refugee Resettlement: Greater Consultation with Community Stakeholders Could Strengthen Pro-*

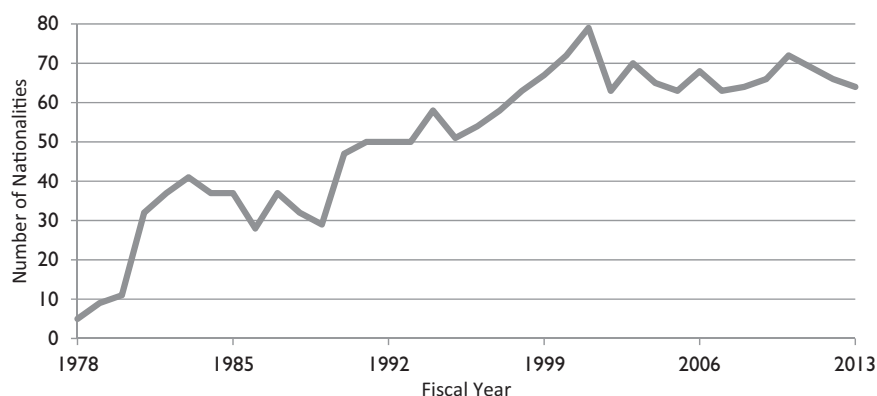


Fig. 2. Number of Nationalities among Arriving Refugees by Fiscal Year, FY 1978–2013. *Source:* MPI analysis of data from the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) for individual years FY 1978–FY 2013.

in FY 2013 in response to a rise in unaccompanied children crossing the U.S.–Mexico border. Funding for services to refugee populations, however, has been flat for almost 25 years (see Fig. 1). Additionally, in June 2014 ORR diverted \$94 million to serve unaccompanied children from programs serving formally admitted refugees, although almost \$23 million was returned to refugee programs later that summer.⁵³ Another concern has been that ORR-funded employment services focus too heavily on immediate employment at the expense of obtaining better job matches, especially for highly educated refugees. Service providers, for example, have expressed frustration that funding does not allow them to prioritize training or skills development programs that might help refugees find higher-skilled and better-paid work in the longer term.⁵⁴

5. U.S. Refugees' Characteristics at Arrival, FY 2002–2013

The characteristics and origins of refugees targeted for resettlement by the United States have evolved substantially since the U.S. program was formally created in 1980. Not only are the refugees being resettled today more diverse in terms of national origin, they also tend

to have a wider range of education levels and linguistic backgrounds, potentially complicating service delivery for resettlement providers.

From FY 2002 through FY 2013 the United States admitted 644,500 refugees from 113 countries. The number of nationalities rose steadily during the 1980s and 1990s, and stabilized over the past decade, when refugees came from an average of 66 different nation origins annually (see Fig. 2). The increased diversity reflects efforts by the U.S. government to be more responsive to refugee crises worldwide, rather than a change in the number or nature of these crises.⁵⁵

In addition to more national origins, refugees have increasingly diverse ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics that distinguish even those from the same national origin. For example, many Iraqi refugees who came to the United States before 2000 were from Kurdish regions, while many arriving in the last ten years are from Baghdad.⁵⁶ Such intra-national differences may not be reflected in the aggregate data employed here, but can greatly affect the needs of refugee groups.

The president, after consultations with Congress, set annual refugee resettlement ceilings at 70,000 for both

gram (Washington, DC: GAO, 2012), 30, www.gao.gov/assets/600/592975.pdf.

⁵³Tina Griego, "Immigration Policy Leaves Refugee Programs Scrambling for Funds," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/news/storyline/wp/2014/08/13/immigration-policy-unintended-consequences-refugee-programs-left-scrambling-for-funds/?tid=ptv_rellink.

⁵⁴GAO, *Refugee Resettlement: Greater Consultation with Community Stakeholders*.

⁵⁵Most resettlement slots are allocated to specific geographic regions and crises, with the exception of a few thousand "unallocated reserve" slots. The most recent refugee admissions report explains the shift in resettlement priorities as a post-Cold War policy shift: "The end of the Cold War dramatically altered the context in which the USRAP [U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program] operated. The program shifted its focus away from large groups concentrated in a few locations (primarily refugees from Vietnam, the former Soviet Union, and the former Yugoslavia) and began to admit refugees representing over 50 nationalities per year." See DOS, DHS, and HHS, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015*, 3.

⁵⁶Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) data.

Table 1
Age distribution of arriving refugees from ten largest national origin groups, (%), FY 2002–13

Country	Under age 14	Ages 14 to 20	Ages 21 to 64	Ages 65 and older
Burma	32	15	51	1
Iraq	27	12	57	4
Somalia	34	22	42	2
Bhutan	22	16	58	5
Cuba	19	11	64	6
Iran	13	12	67	8
Ukraine	31	15	46	8
Liberia	36	25	37	2
Russia	27	15	49	9
Vietnam	26	11	57	6

Source: MPI analysis of WRAPS data, FY 2002–13 pooled.

FY 2014 and FY 2015. Resettlement slots continue to be distributed among a number of priority regions, suggesting that the national origin of refugee arrivals will remain diverse.⁵⁷

5.1. Age profile

Most recently resettled refugees are working age: The median age of refugees resettled in the United States in FY 2013 was 25. The majority of arrivals (66 percent) were of working age (16 to 64), while only 3 percent were ages 65 and older. Thirty-four percent were school age (5–18) or younger.⁵⁸

Seen in a wider time frame, 28 percent of the refugees resettled in the United States during FY 2002–13 were younger than age 14 when they arrived. Some groups were younger than others: 36 percent of Liberian and 34 percent of Somali refugees were under 14, compared with only 13 percent of Iranian and 19 percent of Cuban refugees. At the other end of the age spectrum, Russian, Ukrainian, and Iranian refugees were more than twice as likely as other refugees overall to be 65 and older at the time of resettlement. Burmese, Somali, and Liberian refugees were the least likely to be ages 65 and older.

Age at arrival can have implications for refugees' integration outcomes. In the short run, refugee groups with more children and fewer adults might be expected to have lower incomes and greater reliance on social benefits. But in the longer term, refugees who arrive as children will almost certainly have more opportunities than adults to complete additional education and develop stronger English language skills.

⁵⁷DOS, DHS, and HHS, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015*.

⁵⁸Ibid., 59.

5.2. Native language diversity

Refugees' linguistic backgrounds are increasingly varied and complex (see Fig. 3).⁵⁹ From FY 2004 to FY 2013, the United States admitted refugees who were native speakers of at least 228 languages.⁶⁰ The ten most common native languages of refugees arriving during this period were Arabic, Nepali, Somali, Spanish, Sgaw Karen (a Burmese language), Russian, Farsi, Hmong, Chaldean (a language primarily spoken by Christians in northern Iraq), and Burmese. Sixty percent of refugees were native speakers of one of these languages.

Refugees resettled in FY 2013 spoke at least 162 native languages; 1,277 spoke what can only be classified as "other minor languages" (see Fig. 3). Many of these languages (92) had fewer than 50 speakers in the United States. Refugees arriving nine years earlier, in FY 2004, spoke somewhat fewer native languages – 114 – most of which (59) also had fewer than 50 speakers.

The linguistic diversity within some origin groups is notable. For example, Somali refugees resettled in FY 2004 through FY 2013 reported speaking 31 native languages, while Burmese refugees reported speaking 61 languages.

⁵⁹Refugees reported their native languages during pre-arrival intake interviews. Only one native language is coded per individual even if that individual is proficient in multiple languages. There may be inconsistencies in the way refugees define their native languages, with some individuals reporting languages indigenous to their ethnic groups, and others reporting the languages in which they were educated. Also, there may be cases of incomplete or missing information.

⁶⁰Data on the native languages and literacy of refugees admitted to the United States from fiscal year (FY) 2002 to FY 2003 were incomplete, and these years are therefore excluded from MPI's analysis.

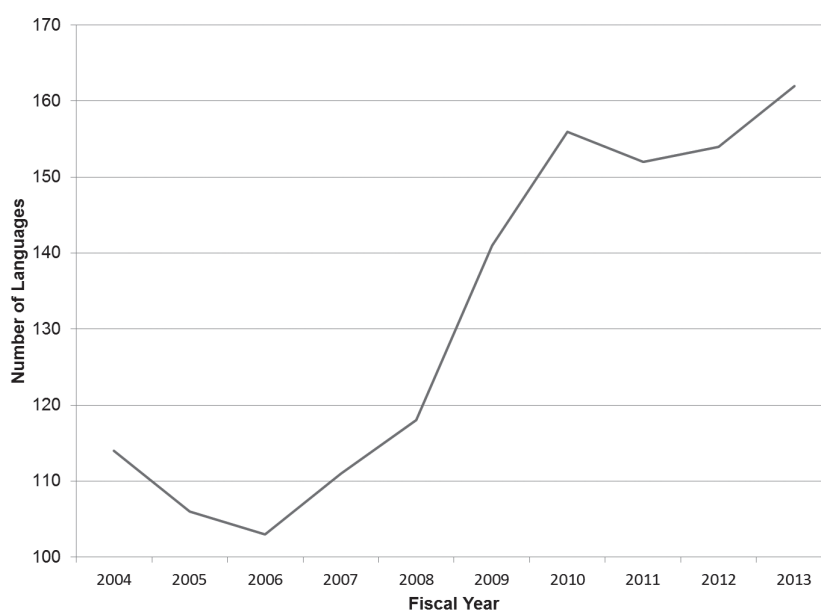


Fig. 3. Number of Native Languages Reported by Arriving Refugees, FY 2004–13. *Source:* MPI analysis of WRAPS data for individual years FY 2004 through FY 2013.

It is possible that many refugees who report a native language that is relatively rare in the United States are proficient in another, more widely spoken language. Among arrivals from Iraq, approximately 14,600 refugees who entered the United States in FY 2003–13 reported their native language as Chaldean. An informal telephone interview that MPI conducted with a Chaldean human service agency based in metro Detroit revealed that the vast majority of Chaldean-speaking refugees were also able to read and write in Arabic.⁶¹ However, there are no administrative data on languages that refugees speak other than their native language and English.

The broad and growing linguistic diversity of U.S. refugees may complicate their resettlement and increase costs for resettlement agencies and for the state and local government agencies that serve them. Providing refugees who are not conversant in English with information and case management in their native language promotes their integration; for instance, one ORR-funded report finds that the development of trust and rapport between case managers and clients is facilitated by speaking a shared language.⁶² Language services are also required by law in some cases: un-

der federal regulation 45 CFR 40.156(e), refugee social services must be provided in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner – to the maximum extent feasible – regardless of the number or proportion of refugee arrivals who speak a particular language.⁶³ More broadly, any agency or organization that receives federal funds is legally mandated to take steps to ensure meaningful access to its programs and services for clients with limited English proficiency.⁶⁴

Recruiting qualified staff to meet refugees' diverse linguistic needs, however, can be difficult.⁶⁵ With the exception of Arabic, Spanish, and Russian, refugees' most common native languages are rarely spoken in

Programs (Washington, DC: DHS, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2008), 28, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/refugeeselfsuff/report.pdf>.

⁶³U.S. *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980*, Public Law 45 U.S.C. §400.61(c)(1), 400.55, 400.156(e) – Refugee Resettlement Program, www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title45-vol2/pdf/CFR-2011-title45-vol2-part400.pdf.

⁶⁴Department of Justice, "Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – National Origin Discrimination against People with Limited English Proficiency; Policy Guidance," *Federal Register* 65, no. 159 (August 16, 2000): 50123–25, www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20867.pdf.

⁶⁵Randy Capps, Bret Barden, Everett Henderson, and Mike Mueller, *The Evaluation of the Refugee Social Service (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Programs: Houston Case Study* (Washington, DC: The Lewin Group, Urban Institute, and HHS/ORR, 2008), 26, www.lewin.com/~media/Lewin/Site_Sections/Publications/3872.pdf.

⁶¹Co-author telephone interview with staff at the Arab American and Chaldean Council, December 5, 2013.

⁶²Peggy Halpern, *Refugee Economic Self-Sufficiency: An Exploratory Study of Approaches in Office of Refugee Resettlement*

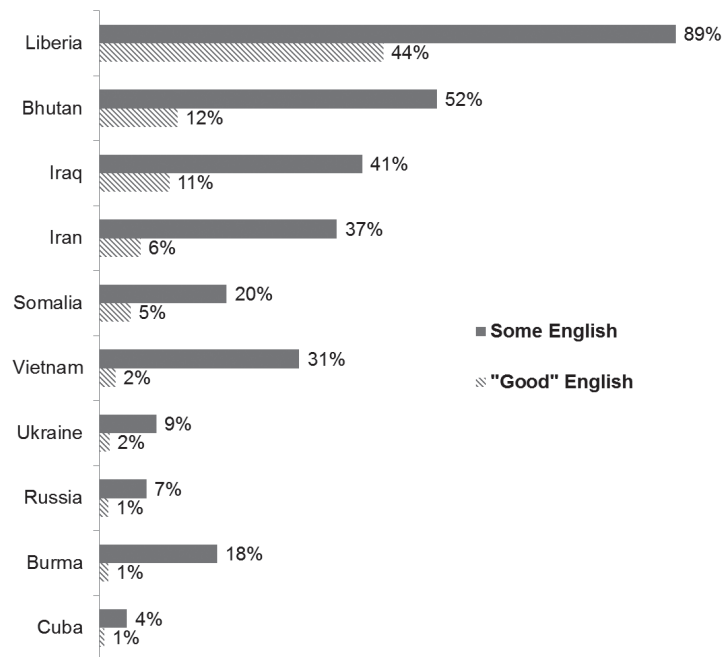


Fig. 4. Share of Arriving Refugees among Ten Largest National-Origin Groups Who Reported Speaking at Least “Some” or “Good” English (%), FY 2004–13. Source: MPI analysis of WRAPS data for FY 2004 through FY 2013, pooled.

the United States. According to WRAPS data, Nepali was the second-most commonly spoken language of refugees arriving in FY 2004 through FY 2013, but U.S. Census Bureau data suggest only 35,000 U.S. residents spoke Nepali in 2006–08. Officials in Virginia reported struggling to find a Tedim Chin translator for a young adult refugee from Burma who needed educational and mental health services. There are fewer than half a million Tedim Chin speakers worldwide, and the United States admitted more than 5,300 in FY 2004 through FY 2013.⁶⁶

The costs to local communities of providing linguistic services for refugees can be high. In Manchester, New Hampshire, for instance, the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Committee reported that the school system was struggling to adequately meet the needs of the 2,316 students who spoke a total of 76 primary languages.⁶⁷

⁶⁶M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds., “Chin, Tedim,” in *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 7th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2013), www.ethnologue.com/language/ctd.

⁶⁷Manchester City Government, Refugee Resettlement Advisory Committee, “Report on Refugee Resettlement in Manchester,” in *Board of Mayor and Alderman Meeting Minutes 07/11/2006* (Manchester, NH: City of Manchester, 2006), 3, 11, 24, www.manchesternh.gov/Portals/2/Departments/city_clerk/agendas_and_minutes/BMA/2006-07-11_Meeting_Agenda_with_attachments.pdf.

5.3. Language proficiency at arrival

Refugees who arrive in the United States with strong English skills may achieve economic self-sufficiency more quickly than those with limited English skills. The U.S., Canadian, and Australian resettlement programs are at somewhat of an advantage in this respect: the wide use of English in business and education around the world has ensured that at least some refugees arrive speaking the language. According to WRAPS data, 33 percent of refugees resettled in FY 2008 through FY 2013 spoke some English, versus 25 percent of those resettled in FY 2004 through FY 2007. However, the percentage of arriving refugees who spoke “good” English remained quite low, at about 7 percent.

Refugees report their own English-language ability during pre-arrival screenings, and their self-assessments may be inaccurate. Liberian refugees, for example, are the most likely of the groups we analyzed to report that they speak English well prior to their resettlement (44 percent) and at arrival. Their assessment may not accurately reflect their preparation for resettlement in the United States, however, as their English dialect may not be easily understood by speakers of American English.

Reported English proficiency varied greatly by nationality across the largest refugee groups resettled in

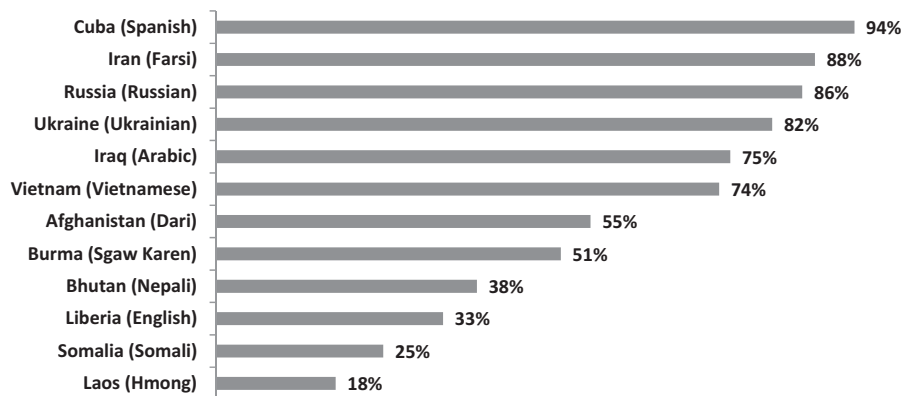


Fig. 5. Arriving Refugees Literate in Their Native Language, Selected Nationalities and Linguistic Groups, (%), FY 2004–13. *Source:* MPI analysis of WRAPS data for FY 2004 through FY 2013, pooled.

FY 2004 through FY 2013 (see Fig. 4). These differences did not necessarily correlate with previous exposure to formal education, measured by refugees' literacy levels in their origin countries' predominant languages (see Fig. 5).⁶⁸

The DOS resettlement program has taken steps to provide refugees with an opportunity to improve their language skills prior to arrival. Resettlement officials recently launched several pilot programs in Kenya, Thailand, and Nepal that provide English language instruction as part of pre-departure orientation. An initial evaluation of the pilot projects found that they successfully provided refugees with basic English skills and facilitated further language learning post-resettlement.⁶⁹ In fact, the Bhutanese arriving from camps in Nepal have relatively high English proficiency at arrival. Pre-departure English classes may be a promising model to build on in other resettlement contexts, particularly if paired with vocational or work-focused language training.⁷⁰

While low levels of English proficiency may pose initial resettlement challenges, most refugees resettled in the United States improve their English proficiency

over time. Russian and Ukrainian refugees in particular have relatively high levels of educational attainment (see Section 4), and are therefore likely to learn English quickly.⁷¹ Of greater concern are those who do not learn the language after substantial time in the United States; refugees and immigrants without sufficient English skills are among the least likely to be employed – as described later in this report.⁷²

5.4. Literacy in a native language

Inconsistencies in data provided by WRAPS unfortunately prevent a direct analysis of education levels among newly arrived refugees.⁷³ Instead, refugees' self-reported literacy in their native language provides a proxy for basic levels of formal education.

For refugees who arrived in the United States in FY 2004 through FY 2013, literacy rates varied greatly by country of nationality and native language (see Fig. 5).⁷⁴ Among the most common nationality/

⁶⁸Other studies directly measuring educational attainment have found the same lack of a correlation. See Capps et al., *Evaluation of RSS and TAG Grant Programs*, 26.

⁶⁹DOS, DHS, and HHS, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015*, 4.

⁷⁰Language instruction that is paired with skills training or includes work-focused vocabulary has been found to be more effective in improving non-English speakers' access to the labor market or further educational opportunities than English education alone. See Margie McHugh and A.E. Challinor, *Improving Immigrants' Employment Prospects through Work-Focused Language Instruction* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2011), <http://migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/workfocusedlanguageinstruction.pdf>.

⁷¹Thomas Espenshade and Haishan Fu, "An Analysis of English-Language Proficiency Among US Immigrants." *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 2 (1990): 288-305; Barry R. Chiswick and Paul W. Miller, "A Model of Destination-Language Acquisition: Application to Male Immigrants in Canada" *Demography* 38, no. 3 (2001): 391-409.

⁷²HHR/ORR, *Report to the Congress FY 2011* (Washington, DC: HHS/ORR, 2013), 41, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/fy_2011_orr_annual_report.pdf.

⁷³MPI explored the data on educational attainment provided by WRAPS and found inconsistent recording of educational attainment across years and nationalities, and no data on a substantial share of refugee arrivals.

⁷⁴In some cases, the language in which refugees are educated may not be the same as their native language, or their native language may not be commonly written (as in the case of Chaldean among Iraqi refugees, Mai among Somalis, and Krahn among Liberians). For this

language groups, the highest literacy levels were found among Cuban Spanish speakers, Iranian Farsi speakers, Russian speakers, Ukrainian speakers, Iraqi Arabic speakers, and Vietnamese speakers. Literacy levels were lower among Afghan Dari speakers, Burmese Sgaw Karen speakers, Nepali speakers from Bhutan, and Liberian English speakers. Some of the lowest literacy rates were found among Somali speakers (25 percent) and Laotian Hmong speakers (18 percent).⁷⁵

Lack of literacy in a first language may impede refugees' integration, as it indicates a lack of basic educational attainment – a needed foundation for building English language skills.⁷⁶ Refugees without basic literacy skills experience significant challenges finding employment; while they may be able to find entry-level jobs initially, they are likely to face difficulties moving up employment ladders without additional education or training.

Those with very low levels of educational attainment (e.g., less than sixth grade) may require basic education in their native languages in order to build foundational literacy skills. Moreover, a basic level of literacy may be required for enrollment in English-language instruction classes. Many of those with fewer than eight years of formal education will not be able to enroll in mainstream workforce training programs because of program design and accountability rules. When the U.S. labor market is weak – as in the years following the 2008 recession – low literacy levels force refugees to compete with other workers at the low-skilled end of the market, where unemployment is highest. Low literacy therefore impedes many of the basic elements of refugees' self-sufficiency: their educational progress, English language acquisition, and ability to find stable jobs with wages that allow self-sufficiency.

5.5. Refugee camp experience

Having fled their country of nationality, refugees may languish in a country of first refuge for years –

reason, MPI's analysis excludes languages that are not written and focuses on the most common language spoken by top national origin groups.

⁷⁵Here the analysis focuses on the most common nationalities and native languages of refugees arriving in 2004 through 2013. MPI did not review literacy levels for all refugees because of the complexity of analyzing the data for the many uncommon languages provided by WRAPS.

⁷⁶Espenshade and Fu, "An Analysis of English-Language Proficiency"; Chiswick and Miller, "A Model of Destination-Language Acquisition."

Table 2

Number and share of arriving refugees with last prior place of residence at a refugee camp, selected nationalities (%), FY 2002–13

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Bhutan	70,729	100
Burma	69,665	59
Somalia	40,347	60
Liberia	11,012	54

Source: MPI analysis of WRAPS data for FY 2002 through FY 2013, pooled.

with limited rights and no legal status – before they are able to return to their homelands or secure permanent third-country resettlement. Some host country governments restrict the free movement and access to legal employment and educational opportunities of refugees living in camps, whether for security concerns or to limit local integration.⁷⁷ The level at which host countries and international organizations invest in camps varies widely. In many cases, refugees in camps have better services and safety conditions than do refugees outside (many of them in urban areas), who lack access to the protection of international agencies such as UNHCR.

Whether or not refugees resettled in the United States have had experience living in a camp depends to a large degree on their nationality. Virtually all Bhutanese refugees resettled during the 14-year period studied here lived in one of Nepal's seven refugee camps prior to their arrival. The majority of Somali, Burmese, and Liberian arrivals also lived in refugee camps. Given the protracted nature of the Burmese refugee situation, some of these refugees are likely to have spent 20 or more years living in a camp in Thailand with no legal freedom of movement.⁷⁸

In contrast, virtually none of the Iraqi or Iranian refugees resettled in FY 2002 through FY 2013 lived in camps immediately prior to U.S. arrival. Russian, Ukrainian, and Cuban refugees were also unlikely to have lived in camps.

There is some correlation between refugee camp experience and low literacy rates. All four groups with a majority of refugees resettled from camps (see Table 2) had the lowest native-language literacy levels (see Fig. 5) of all groups except Hmong refugees. Although low literacy likely stems from home-country experi-

⁷⁷See, for example, Katy Long, *From Refugee to Migrant? Labor Mobility's Protection Potential* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2015).

⁷⁸Kitty McKinsey, "Departures of Myanmar Refugees from Thailand Top 20,000 Mark," UNHCR News Stories, December 11, 2007, www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=475e975b4&query=mae%20la.

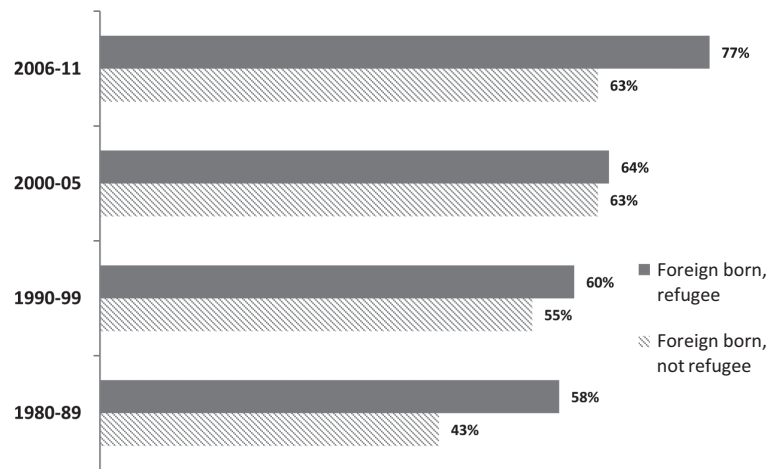


Fig. 6. Share of LEP immigrant adults, by refugee status and period of arrival, (%), 2009–11. *Source:* MPI analysis of data from the American Community Survey, 2009–2011 pooled.

ences, it may also be the case that the camps hosting these populations before U.S. resettlement do not provide adequate basic education for children or adults. Further international investment in educational opportunities in these camp settings may be warranted.⁷⁹

6. Integration outcomes for refugees resettled to the United States during 2009–11

Refugees' characteristics at arrival often correlate with their later socioeconomic integration. As might be expected, groups with more working-age refugees and greater language proficiency usually integrate better. Those with already established communities in the United States also tend to fare better on socioeconomic indicators. Overall, the data suggest that many refugees integrate into the U.S. labor market and society successfully over time.

6.1. Employment

During the 2009–11 period, refugee men ages 16 and older were more likely to work than their U.S.-born counterparts: 67 versus 60 percent. Among the ten most common origins of recent arrivals, Burmese, Iraqi, and Somali men had employment rates at or be-

low U.S.-born men, while the other seven groups had higher employment rates. The employment gap between resettled refugees and other immigrant groups is therefore much lower in the United States than in Canada, Sweden or Norway – where resettlement programs place more emphasis on long-term integration and less emphasis on immediate employment.

Refugee women were as likely to work as U.S.-born women, at 54 percent. Refugees' employment rates exceeded those of U.S.-born women in four of the ten most common origin groups (Vietnamese, Liberians, Ukrainians and Russians), while six sending groups fell below the U.S. born: Cubans (49 percent), Iranians (46 percent), Burmese (42 percent), Somalis (41 percent), Bhutanese (36 percent), and Iraqis (27 percent).

The relatively low employment rates of women from some refugee groups often translates into fewer workers per household and, in turn, lower household incomes. Nonetheless, with their relatively high employment rates overall, refugees in the main are meeting the U.S. refugee program's goal of promoting refugees' self-sufficiency.

6.2. Spoken-language proficiency

In the long term, improving English language proficiency is crucial to refugees' self-sufficiency and integration. Like other immigrants, refugees gain English proficiency with time in the United States (see Fig. 6).⁸⁰ Nonetheless, in 2009–11, fifty-eight percent

⁷⁹Sarah Dryden-Peterson, *The Educational Experiences of Refugee Children in Countries of First Asylum* (Washington, DC: MPI, forthcoming 2015); Selcuk R. Sirin and Lauren Rogers-Sirin, *The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children* (Washington, DC: MPI, forthcoming 2015).

⁸⁰According to U.S. Census Bureau convention, the population that reports speaking English less than "very well" is considered

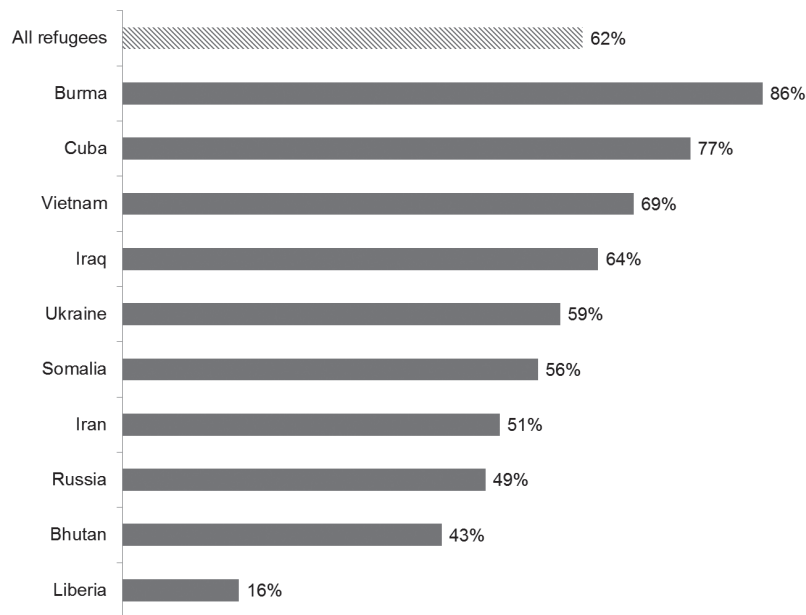


Fig. 7. Share of LEP refugee adults, total and ten largest national-origin groups, (%), 2009–11. Source: MPI analysis of 2009–2011 ACS data.

of refugees with more than 20 years of U.S. residence were Limited English Proficient (LEP). Among all arrival cohorts, immigrants who are not refugees were more proficient than refugees; this proficiency gap did not differ much between people with more and less U.S. experience.

Refugee children reported higher proficiency than adults: 30 percent of refugees under 18 were LEP, versus 62 percent of those 18 and older. Some of these children may have received English instruction in schools in refugee camps or other settings in first-asylum countries.⁸¹

English proficiency varied widely among the ten largest refugee-origin groups, and did not seem to be correlated to the amount of U.S. experience. LEP rates were relatively high among adults joining the two largest, most established refugee groups in the United States: Cubans (77 percent) and Vietnamese (69 percent). In the case of Cuban refugees, limited English proficiency could be a function of their geographic lo-

cation, as many Cubans settle in areas of Florida (south Florida in particular) where Spanish is the predominant language.⁸² In Canada, a Citizenship and Immigration Canada survey of resettled refugees who had arrived within the preceding five years found that over 60 percent now reported speaking English very well, well, or fairly well (a substantial improvement from 30 percent at arrival).⁸³

6.3. Educational attainment

Among all U.S. workers, educational attainment generally correlates with income and other socioeconomic indicators, although many highly educated immigrants are underemployed, particularly in sectors where formal credentials and certifications are highly valued.⁸⁴

The overall educational attainment of refugees falls between the attainment levels of other immigrants and the U.S. born. During 2009–11, refugee adults were

Limited English Proficient (LEP), which some may consider to be too high a standard. More specifically, LEP individuals speak English “well,” “not well,” or “not at all” – and speaking English “well” might not be considered full proficiency, though some argue “well” should be the standard. The American Community Survey (ACS) does not include measures of reading or writing proficiency. English proficiency in the ACS is self-reported.

⁸¹Dryden-Peterson, *The Educational Experiences of Refugee Children in Countries of First Asylum*.

⁸²Ruth Ellen Wasem, *Cuban Migration to the United States: Policy and Trends* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2009), <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40566.pdf>.

⁸³CIC review of GAR 2011.

⁸⁴Madeleine Sumption, *Tackling Brain Waste: Strategies to Improve the Recognition of Immigrants' Foreign Qualifications* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2013), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/tackling-brain-waste-strategies-improve-recognition-immigrants-foreign-qualifications.

Table 3
Educational attainment of refugees, non-refugee immigrants, and U.S.-born adults, ages 25 and older (%), 2009–11

	No high school degree (%)		High school, some college, or associate's degree (%)		Bachelor's or advanced degree (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
U.S. population, ages 25+	15	14	56	58	29	28
U.S. born	12	10	60	61	29	28
Foreign born, not refugee	33	31	39	42	28	26
Foreign born, refugee	23	27	49	45	28	28
Bhutan	42	56	32	35	26	9
Burma	54	58	24	19	21	23
Cuba	29	29	55	52	16	19
Iran	10	14	35	40	55	46
Iraq	27	35	44	39	29	26
Liberia	7	29	62	56	30	14
Russia	5	6	32	31	62	63
Somalia	27	48	59	44	14	7
Ukraine	9	9	42	42	49	49
Vietnam	29	38	47	41	24	20

Source: MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data, pooled.

less likely than U.S.-born adults to have completed high school, although the two populations were equally likely to have a bachelor's degree. Refugee men were a few percentage points more likely than refugee women to have completed high school, and there was no gender difference in college attainment among refugees overall (see Table 3).

Educational attainment varied by origin. Refugee men and women from Russia, Iran, and Ukraine were the best educated. More than 60 percent of refugee men and women ages 25 and older from Russia had a bachelor's degree – the highest rate among refugees and far higher than the U.S. population (20 percent). The least educated refugees came from Burma, Bhutan, Cuba, and Somalia. More than half of refugees from Burma 25 and older did not have a high-school diploma. Likewise, 42 percent of men and 56 percent of women from Bhutan had not completed high school. Refugees from Cuba and Somalia were also less well educated than refugees overall, non-refugee immigrants, and the U.S. – born population. The low educational attainment of Cuban refugees – a large and well-settled group – is also notable in combination with their low English proficiency.

Gender gaps in educational achievement vary across groups. Forty-eight percent of Somali refugee women lacked a high school education, compared with 27 percent of men. The gap in college completion between Bhutanese men and women was 17 percentage points. Cuban women were better educated than Cuban men, and there was no gender gap in education among Russian or Ukrainian refugees.

Educational attainment did not differ much between refugees with more and less U.S. experience. For ex-

ample, 31 percent of refugees who arrived in 1980–89 had less than a high school diploma, versus 29 percent of those who arrived in 2006–11.

It is important to note that ACS data do not report where the respondent's education was obtained. Degrees completed in an origin country or country of first asylum may not transfer directly to the U.S. labor market (a problem also documented in Sweden). The content and quality of degrees obtained abroad may differ from those of U.S. degrees, and employers may not recognize unfamiliar degrees or credentials.⁸⁵ Compared to other immigrant groups, refugees may have difficulty proving their credentials or qualifications if they were forced to flee their country of origin hastily or if conflict in their home country makes education records difficult to obtain.⁸⁶ Credential recognition is a common policy concern for resettlement programs in other countries.⁸⁷

Education obtained after U.S. resettlement may offer refugees opportunities to fill education gaps or certify existing credentials. Some refugee resettlement providers have criticized ORR for not prioritizing support for training or certification programs in its resettlement funding. Lack of support for credential transfer and recognition can hold back highly educated refugees from obtaining jobs commensurate with their skills.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Long, *From Refugee to Migrant?*

⁸⁷Germany, for example, recently made adjustments to its credential recognition law to enable refugees to access recognition procedures more easily.

⁸⁸See, for example, GAO, *Refugee Resettlement*.

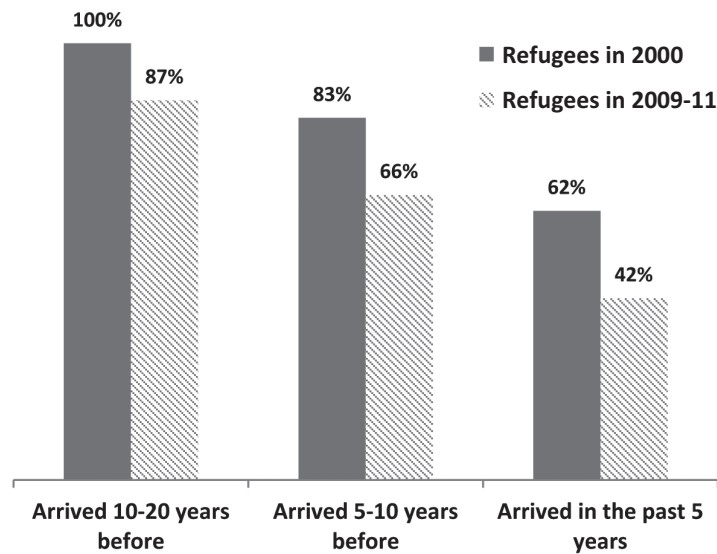


Fig. 8. Median Refugee Household Income as Share of Median U.S.-Born Household Income, by Length of U.S. Residence, (%), 2000 and 2009–11. *Note:* Refugee households are headed by refugees; U.S.-born households are headed by U.S.-born individuals. Median income for U.S.-born households was \$42,000 in 2000 and \$50,000 in 2009–11. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data (pooled) and 2000 Census data.

ACS data are not longitudinal, and therefore do not enable us to track individual refugees to see if they have made education gains since their arrival. However, it is possible to compare attainment over time among similar groups of refugees by comparing data from the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2009–11 ACS.⁸⁹ Using this method, MPI estimates that an additional 10 percent of refugees arriving in 2000 or before had completed high school by 2009–11, and an additional 5 percent had obtained a bachelor's degree. The nationalities showing the largest gains were those with relatively low high-school completion rates in 2000. For example, more than 40 percent of refugees from Cuba and Iraq had not completed high school according to the 2000 Census. The high school completion rates of both populations subsequently rose by 15 percentage points, as measured by the 2009–11 ACS. Among the ten origin countries analyzed, Somali refugees' completion rates rose the most: from 57 percent in the 2000 Census to 77 percent in the 2009–11 ACS.⁹⁰

⁸⁹This report cannot track individuals across the 2000 Census and 2009–11 ACS, but it is possible to track groups of refugees who arrived before 2000, assuming that the same group was present in both time periods. Some individuals may have emigrated or died between the two periods, and different individuals may have been sampled.

⁹⁰This may be a factor of age at arrival. Somali refugees had the second-largest shares under the age of 20 at arrival, and many in this group may have completed high school or college between the two survey periods.

6.4. Median household income

Despite relatively high educational attainment and employment rates, refugees have lower incomes than other immigrants. Refugees' median household income in 2009–11 was \$42,000, about \$3,000 below other immigrants' and \$8,000 less than the median for the U.S. born. Nevertheless, refugees' income notably rises with length of U.S. residence. The median income of refugees who arrived in 1980–89 was \$31,000 higher than the median income of those who arrived in 2006–11.

Refugees from Vietnam and Russia had the highest median incomes, at \$52,000 and \$50,000, respectively. Both populations have been in the United States for a relatively long period of time: 70 percent or more arrived before 2000. The lowest household incomes (\$20,000 or less) were found among Somali, Iraqi, and Bhutanese households – all recent arrivals. Three groups of refugees – Iraqis, Somalis, and Cubans – showed relatively low income gains with longer U.S. residence.

More concerning is that recent refugees' incomes have dropped relative to those of the U.S. born. This gap suggests that the income gains observed among earlier arrivals may not be replicated for those who arrived more recently. Refugees who arrived in the United States between 1995 and 2000 had median household incomes equivalent to 62 percent of U.S.-born household incomes, as measured in the 2000 Cen-

sus; but refugees who had been in the United States for five years or less in 2009–11 had median incomes equal to 42 percent of the U.S. born (see Fig. 8). Refugee incomes rose steeply relative to the native born in both periods, but in the 2009–11 period, their incomes – even after more than 10 years of in the United States – remained substantially below those of the U.S. born.

6.5. Low-income status

Refugees were more likely than natives and as likely as non-refugee immigrants to be low income in 2009–11.⁹¹ Forty-four percent of refugees and 43 percent of other immigrants were low income, compared with 33 percent of the U.S.-born population.

The low-income share of refugees varied by national origin: more than 50 percent of refugees from Somalia, Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, Liberia, and Cuba were low income (see Fig. 9). This share declined as refugees' stay in the United States lengthened. As of 2009–11, about one-third of refugees who had arrived in 1980–89 were low income, compared with two-thirds of those who had arrived in 2006–11 (see Fig. 10).

6.6. Public benefit receipt

The low incomes of recent refugees underscore the economic hardship many face. But unlike other immigrants, refugees can qualify immediately upon arrival for cash welfare benefits, food assistance, and public health insurance – programs that may mitigate their hardship.⁹²

⁹¹Low-income individuals have annual family incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). The FPL varies by family size and the number of children under 18. The poverty level is used to help determine eligibility for Medicaid and other means-tested government safety net programs, for which some refugees may qualify. For example, members of families whose income is no higher than 185 percent of the poverty level may be eligible for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition and health program as well as free or reduced-price school lunches.

⁹²In contrast, most other legal immigrants are barred from receiving most of the major federal means-tested benefit programs – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps), Medicaid, and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) – for their first five years in the United States. See HHS Assistant Secretary for Assistance and Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), *Summary of Immigrant Eligibility Restrictions under Current Law* (Washington, DC: HHS/ASPE, 2011), <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/immigration/restrictions-sum.shtml>.

Overall, refugees were more likely to receive food stamps, cash welfare, or public health insurance benefits than either non-refugee immigrants or the U.S. born. In the 2009–11 period, refugees were more than twice as likely as the U.S. born to live in households receiving food stamps: 24 versus 11 percent.⁹³ Refugees were also about twice as likely as the U.S. born to live in households receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), at 3.1 percent versus 1.6 percent. And among both adults and children, refugees were more likely than either non-refugee immigrants or the U.S. born to have health insurance coverage through Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or similar public programs.

Refugee reliance on public assistance declined as their time in the United States increased. Food stamp participation was relatively high (42 percent) for refugees with five years or less of U.S. residence, but fell sharply to 16 percent for those with more than 20 years of residence – a rate still higher than that of the U.S. born or of non-refugee immigrants, regardless of residence length (see Fig. 11). Cash welfare participation was much lower than food stamp participation among all groups, but once again recent refugees – who, again, are eligible for assistance immediately upon arrival – had the highest participation rate, at 7 percent. Cash welfare participation rates for refugees with more than five years of U.S. residence were modest (below 3 percent) and only about one percentage point higher than the U.S. born (see Fig. 12). Public health insurance coverage of refugees similarly declined with longer U.S. residence, but also remained higher than that of non-refugee immigrants for all periods of residence. Public coverage of refugee adults fell from 24 percent for those with fewer than five years of residence to 13 percent for those with more than 20 years of residence (see Fig. 13). The insurance coverage patterns of refugee and non-refugee children were similar; meanwhile, children had higher rates of public coverage than adults across all nativity and period-of-entry groups. Despite declines in public benefit use, refugees never reach the low participation rates of the U.S. born even with more than 20 years of U.S. residence – most likely because refugees' incomes do not reach parity with the U.S. born (see Fig. 8).

⁹³ORR's FY 2010 survey found that 63 percent of refugees who arrived in 2005 through 2010 received SNAP assistance (i.e., food stamps), whereas MPI analysis of 2009–11 data estimates this rate at 42 percent. Thus, the figures given in this report may underestimate refugee's SNAP participation. See HHS/ORR, *Report to the Congress FY 2010* (Washington, DC: HHS/ORR, 2010), B-23, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/fy_2010_arc_final.pdf.

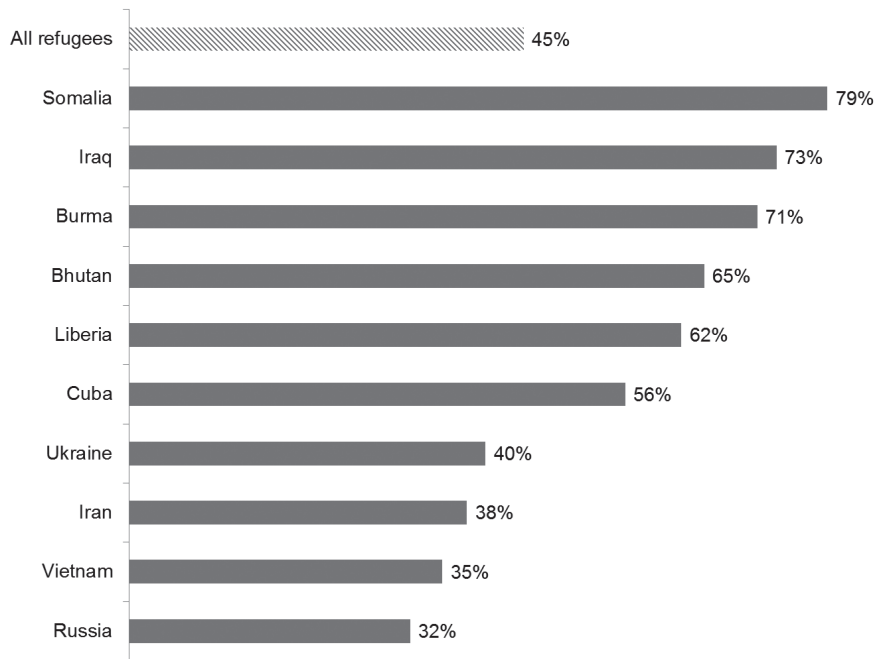


Fig. 9. Shares of refugees living in low-income households, total and ten largest national origin groups, (%), 2009–11. *Note:* Low-income households have annual incomes below twice the federal poverty level. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data, pooled.

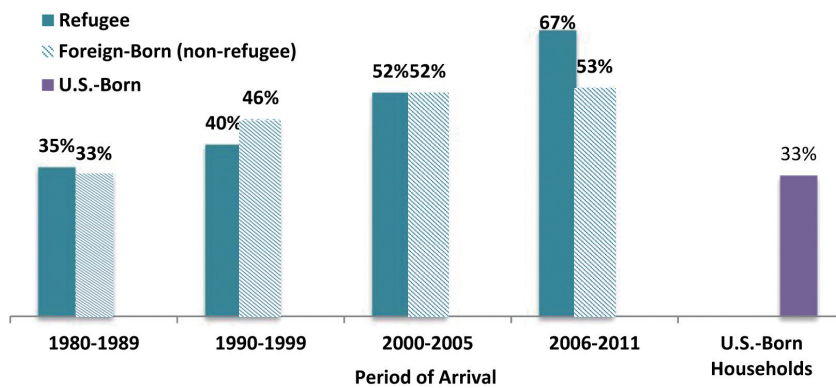


Fig. 10. Shares living in low-income households, by period of arrival, nativity, and refugee status, (%), 2009–11. *Note:* Low-income households have annual incomes below twice the federal poverty level. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data, pooled. (Colours are visible in the online version of the article; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/SJI-150918>)

7. Conclusions

The United States continues to admit more refugees for permanent resettlement than any other country. Refugee admissions remain relatively high in an era of budget constraints, while the number of nationalities and languages represented is large and growing. The increasing diversity of large U.S. refugee populations may be making it more challenging for both resettlement agencies and local communities to meet their needs.

MPI’s analysis of data from ACS and the U.S. Census indicate that as refugees’ time in the United States increases, their income levels and rates of public benefit participation approach parity with those of the U.S. born. These findings suggest that most refugees become self-supporting over time – a core goal of the U.S. resettlement program. But a comparison of data from 2000 and 2009–11 indicates that refugees resettled in recent years are at an economic disadvantage compared with those resettled earlier.

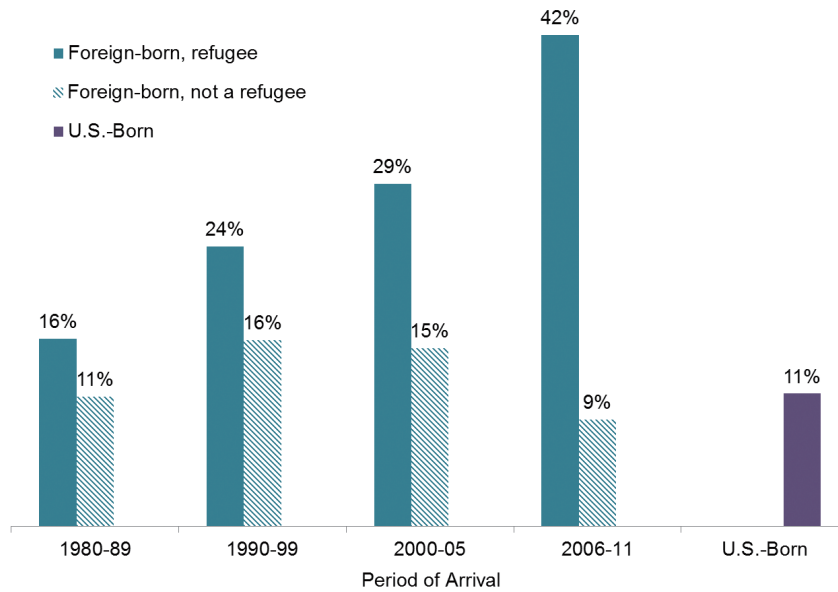


Fig. 11. Shares living in households receiving food stamps, by period of arrival, nativity, and refugee status, (%), 2009–11. *Note:* “Food stamps” refers to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Households received food stamps at any time during the previous year. Non-refugee immigrants may be ineligible for SNAP depending on their citizenship, immigration status, and length of U.S. residence. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data, pooled. (Colours are visible in the online version of the article; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/SJI-150918>)

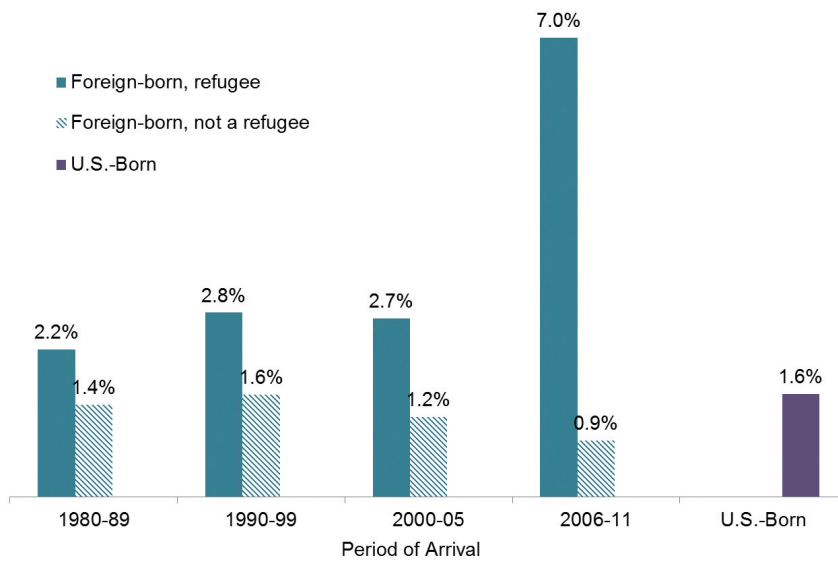


Fig. 12. Shares Living in Households Receiving Cash Welfare, by Period of Arrival, Nativity, and Refugee Status, (%), 2009–11. *Note:* “Cash welfare” refers to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), and state and local general assistance programs. Households received cash welfare at any time during the previous year. Non-refugee immigrants may be ineligible for cash welfare depending on their citizenship, immigration status, and length of U.S. residence. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data, pooled. (Colours are visible in the online version of the article; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/SJI-150918>)

This relative disadvantage could be due to changing economic conditions: the 2007–09 recession in the United States had a significant impact on low-skilled workers, whose employment levels and wages have not

yet fully recovered. This disadvantage could also be due to the changing characteristics of refugees: many recent arrivals have particularly low levels of literacy and educational attainment. Indeed, the groups with

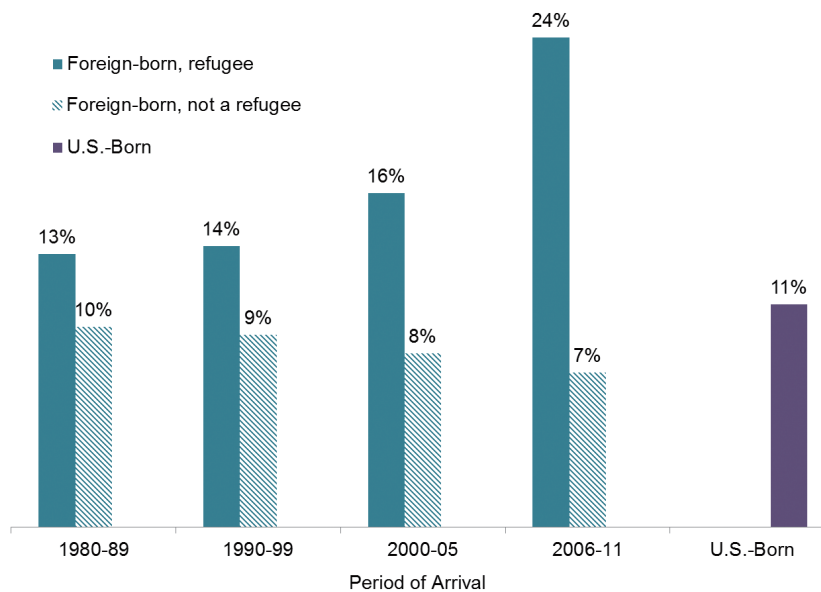


Fig. 13. Adults (ages 18–64) with Public Health Insurance Coverage, by Period of Arrival, Nativity, and Refugee Status, (%), 2009–11. *Note:* Public health insurance coverage includes Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), Medicaid, and other, smaller, federal, state, and local programs. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2009–11 ACS data, pooled. (Colours are visible in the online version of the article; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/SJI-150918>)

the lowest incomes include those with the lowest literacy and education levels: Bhutanese, Burmese, Liberians, and Somalis. It remains to be seen whether recent refugee groups with limited human capital will experience the same levels of integration success as earlier, better-educated cohorts of refugees.

The minimal level of support for employment, education, and language services provided through the resettlement program may be insufficient to meet the greater needs of these groups. Only a small share of resettled refugee adults (5–10 percent) advance their education once in the United States (this share is somewhat higher among some of the least educated groups, such as Somalis). The U.S. resettlement program's heavy emphasis on getting refugees into jobs fast, and its tight budget, may leave little room to support ongoing adult education.

Limited English proficiency in the refugee population is also a cause for concern. In 2009–11 more than half of refugees who had lived in the United States over 20 years were LEP. This number included large majorities of the two largest and longest-settled groups: Cubans and Vietnamese. Like low educational attainment, limited English skills can slow the economic integration of refugees. Of the two factors, a lack of English proficiency may represent the greater barrier to self-sufficiency. Cuban and Vietnamese refugees have similar educational attainment levels, but Cubans have lower English proficiency levels – and their in-

comes are dramatically lower than those of Vietnamese. While other differences may contribute to the income gap between Cubans and the Vietnamese, English proficiency is likely an important factor.

Many of the challenges appear to be the same in other countries of resettlement: in Canada, a similar share of arrivals reports limited proficiency in either English or French, and low education levels are an issue for similar groups in Sweden. But there are also some substantial differences in resettlement experiences between the US and other countries: language is likely to be a more formidable barrier in Sweden and in Norway, than in the United States or Canada, as global familiarity with Swedish and Norwegian is much lower than familiarity with English and French. As a result, Sweden and Norway invest more heavily in language education within the first few years after a refugee arrives.

In particular, employment, which is a key concern in European resettlement programs, is a non-issue in the US context due to the early focus on self-sufficiency. High employment in the United States contrasts with low employment in Sweden and Norway, not only at arrival but for more than a decade afterward. Canada presents something of a middle ground, as refugees resettled there are able to catch up with native employment within five years.

Over all, the sheer size of the U.S. program presents unique challenges, as the number of nationalities and

languages represented in resettled populations is large and creates particular needs. On the other hand, the size of the program may also create certain advantages: while diversity is greater, there may also a better chance of placing people with networks of co-nationals who can support them. In smaller resettlement programs, like Sweden and Norway, the numbers resettled from some communities can be quite small.⁹⁴

The richness of the U.S. data also point to a need for better data collection and evaluation of resettlement programs worldwide, particularly as interest in resettlement grows. Rich administrative datasets are available in Canada, Sweden, and Norway that could be further exploited to learn more about the needs and outcomes of resettled populations in those countries. Furthermore, the lack of such data or evaluations in other countries suggests more could be done to separate resettled refugees from those in asylum channels when analyzing outcomes for humanitarian arrivals. To date, few studies have done this in other resettlement countries.⁹⁵ Any efforts to improve or expand on current resettlement efforts will require a better understanding of the needs and challenges faced by current resettled populations to be successful.

Ultimately, refugee resettlement programs in the United States, Canada and Europe seek to provide immediate protection and long-term integration for migrants fleeing violence and persecution. These programs are small relative to the need, yet expensive because of the substantial support that refugees often need to integrate successfully. Policy debates in the major resettlement countries center around what level of support these countries can afford, whether these programs draw resources away from other policy priorities, and whether refugees are integrating and contributing economically to their host communities. The data analyzed here suggest that in the main, refugees in the United States are reaching parity with other immigrants and the general population in employment, if not in earnings; but the timeframes for their integration differ among the countries. Better data based on longi-

tudinal studies of refugees in these and other resettlement countries could help policymakers balance high global demand for resettlement against the resource limitations of host countries.

8. Appendix: Data sources and methodology

8.1. Administrative data

Administrative data on the refugees being admitted to the United States helps resettlement authorities and agencies to make placement decisions, and it generally provides an accurate and fairly comprehensive picture of the arriving refugee population – except where the administrative data are incomplete or missing. The administrative data used for this analysis were self-reported during refugees' resettlement application process abroad. The data were collected by a variety of agencies and organizations that participate in the United States' refugee admissions process, including U.S. overseas embassies and consulates, HHS/ORR, DHS/USCIS, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

MPI researchers obtained this administrative data from a number of different U.S. government sources that compile this information, including the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (DOS/PRM) and its Refugee Processing Center's Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS), the HHS/ORR, and the DHS's annual statistical yearbook. Archival annual reports from the U.S. Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Services (DOJ/INS) – an agency whose responsibilities are now housed in the DHS – provide administrative data on the number and country of nationality of refugee arrivals to the U.S. dating back to 1946.

This report's analysis of administrative data principally covers refugee admissions from FY 2002 through 2013.⁹⁶ Beginning this analysis in FY 2002 makes sense from a policy perspective, as the September 11th terrorist attacks resulted in an immediate, significant, and enduring shift in the USRAP's admissions procedures during that year. In addition, FY 2002 is also the

⁹⁴Sweden, for example, resettled just five people from Burundi in 2013. EUROSTAT, "Resettled persons by age, sex and citizenship Annual data (rounded) [migr_asyresa]."

⁹⁵Although some efforts are being made to address this gap. In the Netherlands, for example, resettlement authorities are currently undertaking a survey of resettled refugees to better understand how their outcomes differ from the asylee population. Interview with Resettlement Project Coordinator and EVF Monitor Resettled Refugees, Central Organization for Asylum Seekers, October 2014.

⁹⁶Unless otherwise noted, this report uses the U.S. government's fiscal year calendar, which starts on October 1st and ends on September 30th.

earliest year in which detailed demographic information on U.S. refugee arrivals is available from administrative sources.⁹⁷

For some demographic indicators, most notably educational attainment, data entry and storage were inconsistent at the Refugee Processing Center even following digitization of their records. Some years and some indicators are excluded due to data reliability problems, as noted throughout the paper. In addition, reported U.S. refugee admissions numbers, both by year and national origin, differed among administrative sources such as the ORR, WRAPS, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

8.2. American community survey data

Administrative data provide a snapshot of arriving refugees as well as information useful for program operation, but administrative sources do not provide data on how refugees fare after arrival or their integration over time. To address longer-term refugee integration, MPI estimated integration measures for the U.S. refugee population settled between 1980 and 2011 using demographic and socioeconomic indicators from Census Bureau data. These measures were analyzed based on a snapshot of the refugee population in 2009–2011; because the data are a snapshot in time, they include refugees whose U.S. experience ranges from a few months up to 30 years.⁹⁸ For each indicator, comparisons were drawn among refugees, non-refugee immigrants, and the US-born population overall, as well as among selected major refugee national-origin groups, and among refugees by period of arrival.

Three years of ACS data (2009, 2010, and 2011) were pooled in order to increase sample size and improve the precision of the estimates. Core indicators taken directly from the ACS data include age distribution, English proficiency, educational attainment, employment status, median household income, poverty levels, health insurance coverage, cash welfare receipt, and food stamp receipt.⁹⁹

Since the ACS does not identify refugees separately from other immigrants, the analysis relies on refugee status that has been imputed based on characteristics of immigrants available in the ACS: country of birth and year of arrival in the United States. Immigrants' characteristics available in the ACS data are matched against administrative data on refugee admissions from DHS and WRAPS, which give the number of refugees arriving by year and country of origin. Refugee status is assigned to every country/year combination in which refugee admissions in the DHS and WRAPS data exceed 40 percent of the estimated foreign-born population identified in the ACS data.

WRAPS and DHS report refugee countries of origin based on either nationality or birth. In some country/year combinations, refugee admissions in the WRAPS/DHS data exceed 40 percent of the ACS foreign-born population total when country of birth is considered, but admissions are below the 40-percent threshold when country of nationality is used. These are generally situations in which refugees in protracted situations have children before being permanently resettled in the United States. Discrepancies between country of birth and country of nationality are resolved by using ACS ancestry codes which are considered to be equivalent to WRAPS and ACS codes for nationality. For example, for Kenya in some years, refugee admissions exceed the 40 percent threshold when using country of birth but not nationality due to the large numbers of Somali refugees being resettled from Kenya. Thus, ACS respondents who report Kenya as their birthplace must also report Somali ancestry in order to be coded as refugees.

Similar to refugee admissions, DHS reports the number of asylum grants by country of nationality and year. Country/year combinations in which asylee admissions exceed 20 percent of the foreign-born population in ACS data are also assigned refugee status.¹⁰⁰ Using this method, the foreign-born population in the ACS that was assigned refugee status accounts for more than 80 percent of the total refugee flow from 2000 through 2011.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷The Refugee Processing Center – where administrative data on refugee arrivals is primarily housed within the federal government – automated their data collection in FY 2002.

⁹⁸The median year of entry for refugees in the analysis is 1994, or 15–17 years before the 2009–2011 ACS was administered.

⁹⁹All Census Bureau data were accessed from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS): Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

¹⁰⁰MPI analysts created the refugee status assignments for immigrants entering the United States between 2000 and 2011, using the methods described here. Assignments for immigrants entering between 1980 and 1999 were conducted by Jeffrey S. Passel of the Pew Hispanic Center, using a similar methodology.

¹⁰¹The number of refugee admissions reported in the administrative data totaled 1.07 million from 2000 through 2011 (1.07 million), while refugee population estimated in the ACS sample totaled 883,000.

An alternative method would be to determine the ratio of refugees/asylees to total immigrants, using only the DHS admissions data – and then apply this ratio to the ACS data. Using this method, both the refugee/asylee number in the numerator and the total immigrant number in the denominator would come from the same source. Such a method would help to overcome sampling error and undercounting of immigrant populations in the ACS. Relying on administrative data to determine the ratio of refugees/asylees to all immigrants, however, would exclude unauthorized migrants and those with temporary nonimmigrant status. Some groups of migrants of Caribbean and Asian migrants in the United States have significant shares that are unauthorized and/or admitted on nonimmigrant visas. The omission of these groups of migrants could generate bias in estimates of refugee/asylee populations when relying solely on the administrative data to identify them.

8.3. Internal consistency and external validation of results

MPI's method for assigning refugee status to the foreign-born population in the ACS is imperfect, as most of the country/year combinations include both refugees and non-refugee immigrants.¹⁰² This happens because flows from refugee countries continue for many years, and earlier waves of refugees can sponsor their relatives for admission through family-reunification channels once they become lawful permanent residents and citizens. Moreover, immigrants were only assigned refugee status if they entered the United States between 1980 and 2011; only non-refugees have entry dates before 1980. Thus non-refugee immigrants in the ACS sample potentially have more years of U.S. experience than refugees.

Based on the available evidence, refugee assignments within the ACS effectively capture the characteristics of the U.S. refugee population. For example, enrollment in government benefits follows the expected trend: Recently-arrived refugees receive benefits at considerably higher rates than other recently-arrived immigrants because refugees are immediately eligible for such benefits while other immigrants are usually ineligible. Over time, benefit participation declines for refugees while participation rises for non-

refugee immigrants. This pattern reflects the fact that refugees integrate and lose refugee-resettlement program eligibility over time, while other immigrants may become lawful permanent residents and citizens who are eligible for such benefits.¹⁰³

HHS/ORR annual reports to Congress offer another source for reliability checks. HHS/ORR annual reports to Congress offer another source that may be used to assess the reliability of MPI's refugee assignments and the estimates in this report. ORR conducts targeted surveys of recent refugee populations that include indicators similar to those available in the ACS. ORR's surveys track resettled refugees over a five-year period after their arrival in the United States, and therefore the 2010 ORR survey (covering the 2006–10 time period) best matches the 2009–11 pooled ACS survey employed in this analysis. Where possible, results from the ORR report are noted and compared with results from the ACS analysis for the past six years (i.e., the 2006–11 time period), and in general the results line up between the two data sources within a reasonable margin of error – except where noted in the report.

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¹⁰²Countries from which large non-refugee immigrant inflows likely accompany refugee inflows include Iran, Russia, and Ukraine.

¹⁰³Federal welfare reform rules restrict eligibility for non-refugee immigrants during their first five years of lawful permanent residency in the United States. Temporary legal immigrants – such as students and temporary workers – are generally ineligible for these benefits, as are unauthorized immigrants; both of these groups appear in the “non-refugee immigrant” or “other immigrant” category in the MPI analysis.

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