REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)

A Holistic Co-Design Approach

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Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs): A Holistic Co-Design Approach is the culmination of a yearlong research project that began in April of 2021, based on focus groups with individuals with lived forced displacement experience that took place in August of 2021.

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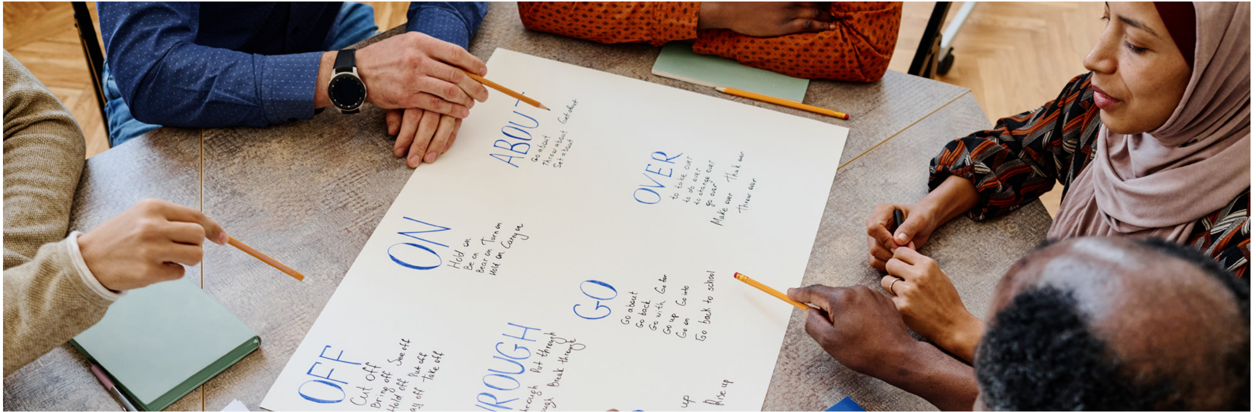

Executive Summary

Throughout its history, the United States has provided refuge to millions of forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) fleeing famine, wars, political unrest, economic instability, and natural disasters. In a 2020 report titled "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program," Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) and the Center for Migration Studies New York (CMSNY) emphasize how critical integration is to the success of the US resettlement program for FDPs. However, in the United States, refugee integration is often measured predominately by economic indicators, which only capture a slice of the full human experience. Additionally, US integration measurements often lack direct feedback, guidance, and leadership from those with lived experience in forced displacement. As a result of a reliance on narrow integration measures, resource and program design throughout the resettlement system fail to support a comprehensive and long-term understanding of integration that more closely aligns with the unique needs and goals of displaced individuals and families.

Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)

In order to fully consider how integration should be measured, it is important to include perspectives from individuals with lived forced displacement experience who arrived in the US through different pathways – refugee resettlement, asylum, Special Immigrant Visas, and other avenues.

The term Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs) is used throughout this report to convey that lived forced displacement experience is not defined by one pathway.

Although FDPs bring tangible benefits to the US economy, it is essential that the refugee resettlement program does not rely solely on employment as the measurement of FDP integration. An examination

of refugee integration in scholarship, policy, and international practice suggests that limiting assessment of refugee integration to employment outcomes alone limits the potential for truly successful integration. FDPs must lead the conversation on integration in order to find what other measurements define successful integration.

In 2021, RCUSA, Refugee Congress, and the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) undertook a yearlong research project to examine how refugee resettlement policies and local services can become more centered on the real needs and lived experiences of FDPs themselves. The study expands the narrow focus on integration through employment to consider inclusion, quality of life, and other factors more reflective of FDPs' complex lived experiences. Using a study method co-designed with FDPs, this project developed a set of FDP-led and data-backed recommendations for reframing the metrics of integration to inform the creation of more effective services and programming. This report represents an innovative and groundbreaking approach to centering the experience and voices of displaced people in the measurement of support and services intended to promote their wellbeing, as well as broader societal outcomes. It is our hope that the findings – and methodology – of this work will inform public policy and performance measurement, so that a more holistic and informed vision of what it takes for FDPs to thrive can serve as our north star.

Through an iterative process of convenings, background research, and discussions with stakeholders, the co-design team arrived at the core research question: "From the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers, what factors contribute to successful integration in the United States?" The team crafted a methodology involving: primary data collection with six focus group discussions facilitated by FDPs and consisting of six to eight participants each; a comprehensive facilitator question guide; and a participative qualitative analysis plan. The team intentionally designed a process that would benefit participants in addition to supporting project deliverables. The focus group discussions covered a number of topics directly and tangentially related to their integration journey such as orientation, housing, healthcare, language learning, and much more.

The findings are presented by topic area according to the frequency of mentions throughout the six focus groups. English language acquisition was the most frequently mentioned subject across the focus groups. A strong command of English can unlock doors for refugees, and the lack thereof poses one of the largest obstacles to their integration progress, impacting everything from housing and healthcare to employment and education. Participants shared the overwhelming sentiment that they needed more dedicated time and support for English learning during their resettlement experience. As long as challenges with English continue to hinder access to education, employment, healthcare, and other vital needs, integration will continue to suffer.

Participants considered jobs and livelihood opportunities to be important facilitating factors in their integration, yet many were overwhelmed by the early emphasis on finding employment (any employment) as they were still adjusting to their new lives. FDPs with strong educational and professional backgrounds face tremendous challenges when attempting to use their previous credentials and work experience to seek jobs in their area of expertise in the United States. Many feel compelled to accept positions below their professional levels or outside their field. While employment remains a key part of resettlement, measuring integration based on employment alone neglects whether the FDPs themselves consider their employment fulfilling.

"From the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers, what factors contribute to successful integration in the United States?"

English language acquisition

Jobs and livelihood opportunities

Access to education

Language-accessible and affordable healthcare and mental health care

Housing and homeownership

Identity and inclusion

For many, the process of accessing education was relatively smooth – from English as a Second Language (ESL), to enrollment in college and training programs. For several FDPs, educational institutions are where they found community for the first time in the United States. Still, many FDP students struggled to continue the education they began in their home countries or lacked sufficient information to make decisions about education that were right for them – including decisions relating to student loan options, the process for obtaining a GED, or the potential for gaining education and employment opportunities through trade schools.

Cost and language barriers remain key hurdles in accessing healthcare and mental health care. Some focus group participants said refugees make "poor decisions" regarding their healthcare, such as visiting the emergency room unnecessarily because they are unaware of urgent care, walk-in clinics, or other more affordable alternatives. Besides having interpreters available, some focus group participants stressed the importance of having "cultural brokers" who can bridge the cultural gap for FDPs navigating Western medicine and counseling for the first time. Many participants talked about mental health as a prerequisite for successful integration. Especially for FDPs who fled conflict, lost loved ones, and left everything behind, feelings of safety and security are linked to their ability to access quality and affordable mental healthcare.

Many focus group participants had positive associations with housing and particularly homeownership. Resettlement agencies helped most acquire long-term housing and provided assistance in budgeting and securing financing to gradually improve the quality of their housing. Yet there were also frustrations expressed by refugees who were initially placed in housing units in unsafe neighborhoods, without access to reliable transportation, in food deserts or in under-resourced school districts. In these cases, the sentiment was that resettlement agencies (RAs) were simply “checking boxes” on housing, rather than ensuring FDPs’ sense of safety and wellbeing.

Although participants were not asked explicitly to reflect on their identity and how it relates to their experience with integration, throughout the six focus groups, “identity” and “inclusion” emerged as clear, related themes that were as prominent as tangible topics such as housing, healthcare, or employment. FDPs wish to feel seen in their community, appreciated for differences, acknowledged for contributions, recognized for skills, and able to share their stories of displacement and resilience. Simple signs of patience, understanding and openness to racial, cultural, religious, and communication differences go a long way toward helping refugees feel more included and better identify with their new homes.

Additional findings outlined in the report cover the role of resettlement agencies, the quality of reception and placement (R&P) orientation, access to transportation,

reflections on race, and other topics identified by FDP participants as integral to their integration experiences.

Throughout the focus group discussions, participants volunteered substantive suggestions for how to strengthen the foundations of more successful integration. For nearly every challenge expressed by the participants, they proposed an accompanying solution with ideas spanning from small adjustments to resettlement programs to sweeping systemic reforms. Based on the findings, the research team organized participant recommendations to improve integration outcomes in the United States into four categories:

1. Expand integration measurements to accommodate a wide range of experiences.

As a complement to existing tools, resettlement agencies and other stakeholders are recommended to pilot a periodic self-assessment exercise that both provides FDPs the opportunity to reflect openly on their integration journey and supplies RAs with rich and insightful data on their clients' experience over time. The self-assessment tool (Appendix 1) includes questions to measure progress and gaps in the areas identified as critical to integration success. The survey is accompanied by a list of action items that should be taken by local resettlement agency staff to address client concerns identified in the survey.

2. Provide FDPs equitable opportunities to access resources and public benefits.

Study participants provided more than insight on how to better measure integration outcomes. Drawing from their lived experiences, participants suggested concrete improvements for resettlement stakeholders to expand the quality, accessibility, and duration of resources and support. In summary, the key recommendations are:

- Allocate more time to learn English;
- Provide ongoing professional training and skills building;
- Invest in the education of forcibly displaced students;
- Expand the scope of cultural orientation and tailor content to specific groups;
- Improve access to health services;
- Prioritize mental health as necessary care;
- Empower FDP girls and women;
- Enable equal access to benefits and support to all forcibly displaced persons.

3. Center the voices of those with lived experience in forced displacement to better understand and improve integration outcomes, and bridge the gap between FDPs and US-born citizens.

It is important to create more opportunities for refugees, asylees, and other immigrants to share their stories. Focus group participants repeatedly emphasized how refreshing it was to be asked about their resettlement and integration experience, which for some was a helpful moment to stop and reflect. Thus, co-designed programs with FDPs will help ensure that services will have a direct impact on successful integration. As one participant stated, “our stories matter” and sharing their stories more broadly can help FDPs feel more accepted and integrated in new communities.

4. Enhance collaboration and information sharing between the US government, resettlement agencies, and local communities.

To ensure successful FDP integration, more transparency and collaboration is needed between public and private sectors to create public information and accessible reporting. As a start, the Department of State and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) should more widely share specific details on FDP integration priorities and provide the necessary funding to study how FDPs are integrating into communities long-term. Such leadership should include setting consistent standards for how to measure and track integration progress across the United States informed by those with lived experience.

Introduction

Throughout its history, the United States has provided refuge to millions of forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) fleeing famine, wars, political unrest, economic instability, and natural disasters. America's protection pathways provide a beacon of hope to those seeking safety, and since the Refugee Act in 1980, approximately three million refugees have resettled in the United States.[2]

US protection programs were decimated after 2016, with refugee admissions goal reaching a historic low of 15,000 — down from an average admissions goal of 95,000 in previous years.[3] Discriminatory travel bans and Title 42, an emergency regulation that permits the Director of the CDC to prohibit entry of individuals to the US that are believed to pose a public health risk,[4] have erected new barriers to those seeking refuge through resettlement or through asylum at US ports of entry. The Biden Administration has committed to restoring and rebuilding America's protection pathways and doing so must go beyond setting higher refugee admissions goals. As conveyed in a recent study from the National Conference on Citizenship and the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, the US asylum system and refugee resettlement infrastructure must be humanely

2 "Office of Refugee Resettlement – History," US Department of Health and Human Services, November 12, 2021, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/history.

3 "U.S. Bishops Disappointed at Lowest Refugee Resettlement Number Yet," The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), October 16, 2020, https://www.icmc.net/2020/10/09/us-bishops-on-lowest-refugee-resettlement-number/.

4 John Gramlich, "Key Facts about Title 42, the Pandemic Policy That Has Reshaped Immigration Enforcement at U.S.-Mexico Border," Pew Research Center, April 28, 2022, https://global.upenn.edu/penn-biden-center/refugee-admissions-project.

reimagined and designed to be more efficient, equitable, and welcoming.[5]

Welcoming FDPs is not just about providing safety but providing opportunities to become active members of US communities. In a 2020 report titled "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program," CMSNY and RCUSA emphasize how critical integration is to the success of the US resettlement program.[6] However, despite its importance, the integration of FDPs is an area often misunderstood or misinterpreted.

In a 1997 article, John W. Berry examined relationships between minority and dominant cultures, identifying four unique strategies: separation, marginalization, integration, and assimilation – the latter two often utilized interchangeably, and incorrectly so. Barry differentiated integration from assimilation by describing *integration* as when individuals strongly identify with, and want to maintain, both original and majority cultures, while *assimilation* means having a strong relationship with the majority culture and less of a desire to maintain the original culture.[7] In the United States, the integration of refugees is a concept that can be difficult to define, and is often mistakenly used synonymously with assimilation, or otherwise interpreted in absolute terms. This is problematic when we consider that those with lived forced displacement experience have not been afforded a meaningful opportunity to define for themselves what integration means, including the factors that contribute to their success in rebuilding their lives in new communities and what solutions should be considered.

The 2020 CMSNY and RCUSA report noted that **integration as it is currently measured – primarily in terms of economic self-sufficiency – does not reflect the whole human experience, nor does it consider FDPs' firsthand knowledge of their integration journey**.[8] It also ignores the role host communities play in helping newcomers feel welcomed, engaged, and protected. Integration is not a one-size-fits-all process. The experience of becoming part of a new community varies and hinges upon several factors including country of origin, the length of time spent in displacement, age and gender, cultural norms, personal trauma, and more. As a result of the government's reliance on narrow measures, resources and program designs throughout the resettlement community fail to support a comprehensive and long-term understanding of integration, one that more closely aligns with the unique needs and goals of individual families. As we look ahead, there is a need not just to build the resettlement program back to previous levels but build forward toward programs and policies that incorporate the voice of FDPs, foster their

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5 "A Roadmap to Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," The National Conference on Citizenship and the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Public Engagement, October 2020, https://global.upenn.edu/penn-biden-center/refugee-admissions-project.

6 "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," 2020.

7 John W. Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46, no. 1 (1997): pp. 5-34, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x.

8 "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," 2020.

> There is a need not just to build the resettlement program back to previous levels but build forward toward programs and policies that incorporate the voice of FDPs, foster their inclusion and belonging, and are ultimately more reflective of America's values and historical commitment to protection.

inclusion and belonging, and are ultimately more reflective of America's values and historical commitment to protection.

To this end, RCUSA, Refugee Congress, and ECDC began a yearlong research project in 2021 to examine how FDP policies and local services can become more centered on the real needs and lived experiences of FDPs. The study also sought to broaden the singular focus on integration through employment to consider inclusion, quality of life and other factors more reflective of FDPs' complex lived experience.

The project goals, methodology, and outcomes were co-created with FDP leaders from a range of professions and backgrounds. In addition to suggesting reforms for integration measurement, this project provides a resource for FDP-serving agencies and organizations to learn how to meaningfully engage FDPs in program planning and implementation. The co-design team, over a series of months, designed a methodology for engaging FDPs in policy development and research methods, while simultaneously enhancing skills in participatory research, program design, data analysis, and research dissemination.

The project outcome is a set of FDP-led, data-backed recommendations for expanding integration indicators and improving services and programming according to FDPs' own experiential understanding of integration. Ensuring the full integration of FDPs into our communities is essential to helping them build more secure and fulfilling lives.

Background

Defining Integration

FDPs face a multifaceted and often ambiguous integration process, a complex term defined differently across academia, policy spaces, and among practitioners that results in a difficult translation into quantitative policy solutions. Globally, approaches to integration reflect the historical context, culture, and values of each resettlement country. In the United States, refugee integration policies and programs further vary from state to state and indeed, the use of the word 'integration' itself can inadequately capture the meaningful inclusion of FDPs in US communities. As such, finding a commonly accepted definition of integration is a

pivotal step toward not only measuring integration outcomes but also building the foundations for more impactful resettlement programs.

In "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework," Alastair Ager and Alison Strang provide a useful framework for defining integration, which concludes that integration is defined through measurements of "success" drawn from several core domains: markers and means, social connection, facilitation with language and cultural knowledge, and foundation.[9] Ager and Strang first describe markers and means as employment, education, housing, and health factors that can be used as measurable indicators of integration. Second, Ager and Strang consider social connection, which includes proximity to family and members of their ethnic community, friendliness of the new community, and connection between immigrants and government programs. The third component is facilitation, with language, cultural knowledge, and stability as ways to measure integration. The last component is foundation, which describes the fundamental right to citizenship. Ager and Strang acknowledge that a challenge of this framework – and any integration framework – is the lack of accommodation for diversity in cultures and values. They hope their framework may be used to inform the development of local indicators of integration and facilitate further discussion regarding integration.

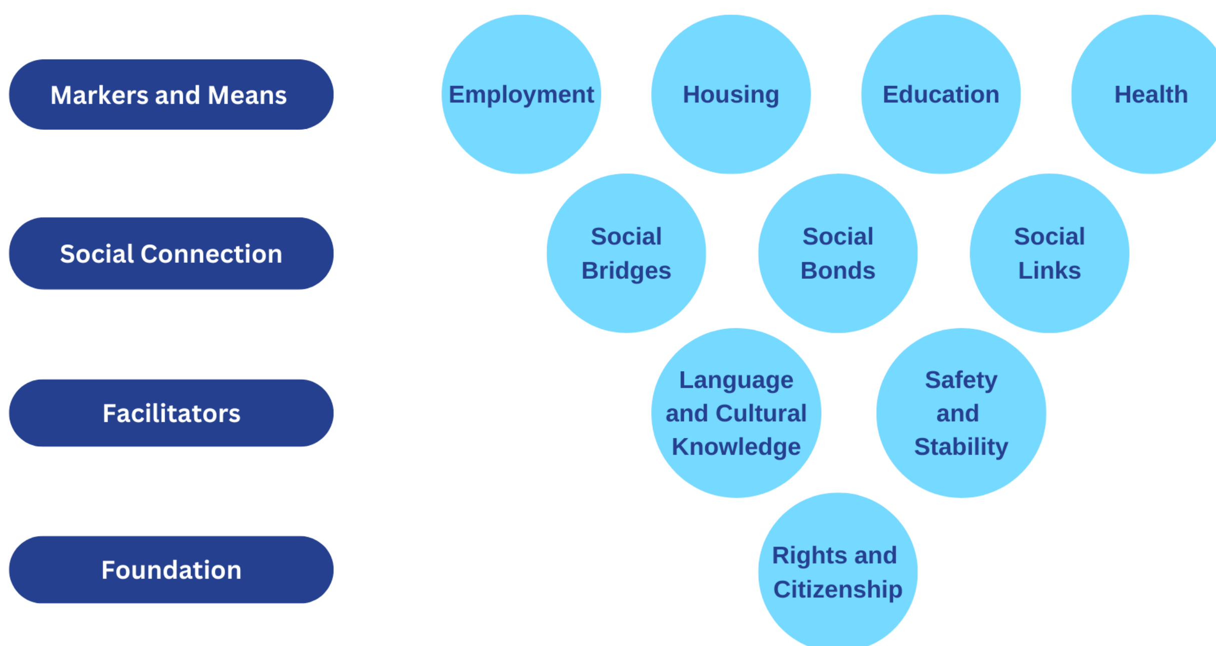

Figure 1: "A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration," Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2 (2008)"

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9 Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2 (2008): pp. 166-191, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016.

Comparative Country Examples

Understanding how countries develop their individual approaches to integration, informed by their particular history and cultures, provides lessons for improving the United States' FDP integration framework.

Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Germany was the largest host of refugees in Western Europe and the fifth largest resettlement country in the world.[10] At the end of 2020, there were roughly 10.6 million immigrants living in Germany, 1.2 million of whom were refugees.[11] The largest group of immigrants in Germany are Turks, many of whom arrived through the "Recruitment Agreement for Labor" to help rebuild Germany in the aftermath of World War II.[12] The work was intended to be temporary, so the German government invested little in integration, even as more families joined the guest workers and settled in Germany throughout the 1970s. Despite having access to employment, Turks struggled to learn German, were sequestered to undesirable neighborhoods in German cities and began building what Germany dubs "parallel societies."[13] Clearly, employment alone did not suffice for these guest workers to successfully integrate.

As a response to the policy mistakes made with Turkish immigrants throughout the twentieth century, Germany now mandates free "integration courses" to immigrants.[14] These courses primarily provide German language instruction and also cover topics including history, law, and cultural norms. After 700 lesson units (the majority of which are for language), refugees and other immigrants sit for knowledge tests. The *Integrationsgesetz* (integration law), passed in 2016, codified both the federal government's support for integration as well as expanded access to asylum seekers with pending cases. These policies were born out of the arrival of nearly one million Syrians who fled to Germany in 2015-16 and now amount to the second largest group or 7.4% of foreign-born individuals living in Germany.[15] Data show that about half of all Syrian refugees in Germany have

10 "Figures at a Glance," UNHCR (UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency), accessed May 3, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

11 "Russia and Ukraine in the Focus: Foreign Population in Germany," Federal Statistical Office of Germany, March 8, 2022, https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2022/03/PE22_N011_12.html;jsessionid=7A880391220DD802502DF517AAE598C6.live722.

12 "Integrationsgesetz vom. 31 Jul. Juli 2016," Bundesgesetzblatt Online, August 5, 2016, https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl&jumpTo=bgbl116s1939.pdf#__bgbl__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl116s1939.pdf%27%5D__1660847317785.

13 Dirk Halm and Martina Sauer, "Info 04.03 Parallelgesellschaft Und Ethnische Schichtung," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, June 23, 2021, https://www.bpb.de/lernen/angebote/grafstat/projekt-integration/134591/info-04-03-parallelgesellschaft-und-ethnische-schichtung/.

14 "Integration Courses," Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, BAMF, December 10, 2019, https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Integration/ZugewanderteTeilnehmende/Integrationskurse/integrationskurse-node.html.

15 "Russia and Ukraine in the Focus: Foreign Population in Germany," Federal Statistical Office of Germany, March 8, 2022, https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2022/03/PE22_N011_12.html;jsessionid=7A880391220DD802502DF517AAE598C6.live722.

found employment, and that German literacy has risen from 1% of Syrian refugees at the time of arrival to 44% five years later.[16] Additionally, the German federal government funded a project that helped municipalities develop and benchmark their efforts to be welcoming of refugees across different dimensions that included access to benefits and resources; intercultural and anti-racism work; and other measurements of integration.[17]

While the new law emphasizes that "work is the best form of integration," the bureaucratic nature of the German labor market imposes tough barriers to entry for FPDs, which have become aggravated by Covid-19's effects on the labor market.[18] Unemployment among asylum seekers (including those with approved cases) was still nearly 34% as of October 2021, 20% above the employment rate of all foreigners in Germany.[19]

In Canada, experts define integration as "a dynamic, multi-faceted two-way process which requires adaptation on the part of the newcomers, but also the society of destination."[20] Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act aims to promote the successful integration of permanent residents, with the understanding that it requires the involvement of both immigrants and Canadian-born citizens.[21] The government of Canada provides extensive integration services, including financial support for up to one year after arrival, language training, community networking, and employment services.[22] There are some clearly defined measurements of economic integration for refugees in Canada, including employment and earnings after receiving permanent resident status. Socio-economic measurements are not as clearly defined but include indicators such as citizenship acquisition, familial connections, and general satisfaction surveys.[23] Canada funds a program of Local Immigration Partnerships that also take responsibility for this collective work, and have a set of comprehensive performance measurements that are used to address

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16 Sekou Keita and Helen Dempster et al., "Five Years Later, One Million Refugees Are Thriving in Germany," Center for Global Development | Ideas to Action, September 4, 2020, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/five-years-later-one-million-refugees-are-thriving-germany.

17 "Integration: Eine Kommunale Pflichtaufgabe," Weltoffene Kommune, accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.weltoffene-kommune.de/magazin/das-projekt-weltoffene-kommune-eine-bilanz.

18 Sekou Keita and Helen Dempster et al., "Five Years Later, One Million Refugees Are Thriving in Germany," Center for Global Development, September 4, 2020, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/five-years-later-one-million-refugees-are-thriving-germany.

19 "Arbeit Und Bildung : Flucht & Asyl: Zahlen Und Fakten: MDI," Mediendienst Integration, accessed May 3, 2022, https://mediendienst-integration.de/migration/flucht-asyl/arbeit-und-bildung.html.

20 Soojin Yu, Estelle Ouellet, and Angelyn Warmington, "Refugee Integration in Canada: A Survey of Empirical Evidence and Existing Services," Refuge, June 1, 2007, https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/21381.

21 "Consolidated Federal Laws of Canada, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act," Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, April 28, 2022, https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/.

22 "How Canada's Refugee System Works," Government of Canada, November 27, 2019, https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/canada-role.html.

23 "Refugee Integration in Canada: A Survey of Empirical Evidence and Existing Services," 2007.

the needs of FDPs and help them settle in their new lives.[24]

In Sweden, integration policy aims for "equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background."[25] Since 2018, Sweden has accepted 5,000 new refugees per year, with the most refugees and asylum-seekers arriving from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea.[26] Sweden's integration strategy focuses on several key factors, including greater employment opportunities, more equality in education, better language skills, and effective anti-discrimination measures created through increased diversity. Sweden offers refugees income support, employment assistance, and language classes within their first years in the country.[27] Refugees also have access to public healthcare and education on an equal basis to those born in Sweden.

Measuring Integration in the United States

The Refugee Act of 1980 codified the definition of a refugee, formally established the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and gave authority to the president to establish the annual refugee admissions goal.[28] USRAP is administered by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM); the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at the Department of Homeland Security.[29]

When the Refugee Act of 1980 created the federal refugee resettlement program, it noted that the program should provide for the "effective resettlement of refugees" and "assist them to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival in the United States."[30] Though refugee resettlement has undergone major changes since then, the USRAP has continued to narrowly interpret this statutory guidance, resulting in measurements of integration being reduced to economic self-sufficiency. The refugee population has also transformed over time; different crises brought different populations of refugees to the United States through different protection programs, further illuminating the challenges of having a singular focus on one measurement.The Trump Administration effectively dismantled the refugee

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24 "About LIPdata.ca," Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, February 20, 2020, https://lipdata.ca/about/.
25 "Swedish Integration Policy Fact Sheet in English" Sweden Government, accessed May 3, 2022, https://www.government.se/contentassets/b055a941e7a247348f1acf6ade2fd876/swedish-integration-policy-fact-sheet-in-english.
26 "Sweden Fact Sheet," UNHCR, accessed May 3, 2022, https://reporting.unhcr.org/.
27 "Swedish Integration Policy Fact Sheet in English | Government.se," 2022.
28 "Statutes at Large - Refugee Act of 1980," govinfo.gov, March 18, 2021, https://www.govinfo.gov/help/statute.
29 "About Refugee Admissions - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, January 11, 2021, https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/about/.
30 "The Refugee Act," Office of Refugee Resettlement Office of Refugee Resettlement, August 29, 2012, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/policy-guidance/refugee-act.

admissions program. Although the Biden Administration increased the FY2021 admissions ceiling to 62,500 (it was originally set to a record low of 15,000), actual refugee arrivals remained low at 11,411 in FY2021[31] and 25,465 in FY 2022.[32]

Along with a varying refugee population, policy implementation has changed with each administration. This is illustrated through the refugee admissions goal, which is set by the president each fiscal year.[33] Since the program's inception, the refugee ceiling peaked at 142,000 in FY1993, with the highest refugee admissions of 132,531 in FY1991. Between 2017 and 2020, the refugee ceiling fell to its lowest point in US history, sinking to 18,000 in FY 2020 and actual refugee admissions hit a low of 11,814. Along with lowering the refugee admissions ceiling, the Trump Administration signed Executive Order 13780 on March 6, 2017. This executive order suspended entries from Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Iran, Syria, and Yemen, and imposed extra vetting for Iraqi nationals.[34]

Using a study method co-designed with FDPs, the present report expands on existing indicators to help understand what is most important to the displaced population and why. The 2020 report "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program" provided detailed analysis about the successes and pitfalls of the current refugee resettlement program. Some of the shortcomings profiled in the December 2020 report were highlighted by participants in the current project.[35] In placing FDP voices at the center of the integration conversation, this report follows through on the prior study's recommendation to "afford refugees, particularly those with vulnerabilities, a greater say in the content, length, and accessibility of programs to promote their settlement and integration."

While some other countries, such as Canada, use social metrics like the number of friends a refugee has, community engagement, healthcare needs, or volunteering,[36] in the United States, FDP integration is measured through an economic lens, and other metrics, such as education level and housing, are viewed as indicators to

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31 "Summary of Refugee Admissions," Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center, September 30, 2022, https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/.

32 "Summary of Refugee Admissions," Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center, September 30, 2022, https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/.

33 "U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present," Migration Policy Institute, April 11, 2022, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united.

34 Sarah Pierce and Doris Meissner, "Revised Trump Executive Order and Guidance on Refugee Resettlement and Travel Bans - Migrationpolicy.org," Migration Policy Institute, March 2017, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Trump-EO-RevisedTravelBan-FINAL.pdf.

35 "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," 2020.

36 Lloyd Wong and Anette Tezle, "Measuring Social, Cultural, and Civic Integration in Canada," University of Calgary, October 24, 2016, https://soci.ucalgary.ca/manageprofile//sites/soci.ucalgary.ca.manageprofile/files/unitis/publications/1-4057375/lean_on_me.pdf.

measure progress toward the overall goal of rapid economic self-sufficiency.[37] Economic factors have been important to the definition of integration for good reason. FDPs are huge drivers of economic prosperity in the United States. A study by New American Economy, which looked at a pool of more than 2 million refugees, estimated that refugees have contributed more than $20 billion in taxes and had a spending power of more than $56 billion in 2015[38] – more than double that of Iceland's GDP.[39]

Furthermore, FDPs are uniquely positioned to help address America's aging population. Estimates have projected that by 2030, nearly a quarter of America's population will be older than 65, which will put a huge strain on the national workforce.[40] This is where refugees could help. On average, more than three quarters of refugees are working age, compared to just 50% of the native-born population. Similar to other immigrant populations, refugees are more likely to start businesses than native-born Americans,[41] and in 2017, entrepreneurs comprised 13% of the working-age refugee population, compared to 9% of native-born Americans.[42]

The emphasis on economic factors is evident in the goals and the objectives of the R&P program funded each year by PRM. For the 2023 fiscal year, a main goal of the R&P program is to coordinate with resettlement agencies to use available assistance to help refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency. [43] Under program objectives, PRM requires that resettlement agencies provide services that promote refugee well-being, integration, and orientation to their new communities in support of the *overarching goal of economic self-sufficiency*. Furthermore, referencing a sample Cooperative Agreement, resettlement agencies are required to meet other basic

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37 From Struggle to Resilience The Economic Impact of Refugees in America," New American Economy, March 15, 2022, https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf.

38 From Struggle to Resilience The Economic Impact of Refugees in America," New American Economy, March 15, 2022, https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf.

39 "GDP (current US$) – Iceland, World Bank.", accessed August 17, 2022, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=IS.

40 Hamutal Bernstein and Nicole DuBois, "Bringing Evidence to the Refugee Integration Debate," Urban Institute, April 2018, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97771/bringing_evidence_to_the_refugee_integration_debate_0.pdf.

41 Hamutal Bernstein and Nicole DuBois, "Bringing Evidence to the Refugee Integration Debate," Urban Institute, April 2018, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97771/bringing_evidence_to_the_refugee_integration_debate_0.pdf.

42 "FY 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity for Reception and Placement Program - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, April 19, 2022, https://www.state.gov/fy-2023-notice-of-funding-opportunity-for-reception-and-placement-program/.

43 "FY 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity for Reception and Placement Program - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, April 19, 2022, https://www.state.gov/fy-2023-notice-of-funding-opportunity-for-reception-and-placement-program/.

needs of new arrivals. [44] These include ensuring refugees' safety and wellbeing, that they learn how to access healthcare, enrolling children in schools, and supporting them in finding employment. The R&P program assumes a connection between the provision of these services and achieving integration without mentioning the integration challenges refugees face throughout the process. Understanding those challenges is a necessary prerequisite to accurately measuring progress on integration, and ultimately improving policies and programs long-term.

ORR conducts a Congressionally mandated Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR) in order to collect data on the refugee experience during the first five years after arrival in the United States.[45] The ORR survey is the only nationally collected data on refugee self-sufficiency and integration in the US. The data collected emphasizes the economic factors underpinned by the R&P program, focusing on English language acquisition, workforce integration, and permanent residency. Questions in the ASR focus on availability of English language training programs, economic self-sufficiency, access to adult education, participation of adults in children's education, and health conditions that can hinder employment. The ASR

44 "FY 2008 Reception and Placement Basic Terms of the Cooperative Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America," U.S. Department of State, January 17, 2008, https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/prm/rls/2008/99438.htm.

45 Timothy Triplett and Carolyn Vilter, "2019 Annual Survey of Refugees Data File User's Guide," Open ICPSR, US Department of Health & Human Services and Urban Institute, July 2021, https://www.openicpsr.org/openicpsr/project/168641/version/V2/view.

is a critical piece in defining refugee integration in the United States. However, as of the latest available iteration released in 2019, it lacks inclusion of all forcibly displaced persons perspectives. It also lacks measures of integration that are not predominantly economic.

The CMSNY and RCUSA report was the culmination of a consultative process called "Resettlement 2.0," where RCUSA heard from refugees and former refugees across the US that the sole focus on early employment fails to give resettlement agencies and the government a true understanding of when and how refugees consider themselves integrated.[46] As a result, the system misses opportunities to support integration in ways that make a difference for refugees. By authentically engaging refugees, former refugees, and other forcibly displaced populations in defining integration, this project informs integration policy based on what integration means to FDPs and their communities, as well as what facilitates it. This research returns to the source to propose integration indicators generated by FDPs for FDPs.

Participatory Approach to FDP Integration

The Co-Design Process

According to the Sunlight Foundation, the concept of co-design "refers to a participatory approach to designing solutions, in which community members are

46 "What Is Resettlement 2.0?" Refugee Council USA, October 28, 2021, https://rcusa.org/resources/what-is-resettlement-2-0/.

treated as equal collaborators in the design process."[47] In recent years, solutions-oriented research has increasingly favored a consultative process with impacted communities. Yet consultations often miss a critical first step in design, namely that the design of the research – not just the outcomes of the research – reflect a fully participatory and collaborative approach. Design for Europe, an EU-funded initiative to foster innovation in Europe, suggests that the "key tenet of co-design is that users, as 'experts' of their own experience, become central to the design process."[48]

This project adopted an approach that not only considers how best to measure integration but also how best to leverage co-design in developing a methodology informed by those with lived experience. Doing so will lead to the creation of stronger programs that are inherently set up for success because they were designed by and for affected community members.

From the framing of the research goal to building a project team and determining the research methods, each element of this process was co-designed with individuals with lived forced displacement experience. Our 14-person team was composed of eight individuals with lived forced displacement experience and additional expertise from academia, public, and private sectors, and six subject matter experts from RCUSA, Refugee Congress, and ECDC.

Through an iterative process of convenings, background research, and discussions with additional stakeholders, the team arrived at the core research question: "From the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers, what factors contribute to successful integration in the United States?" and then crafted a methodology involving focus group discussions, facilitator questions, a sampling plan according to a comprehensive demographic breakdown and criteria for participation, and a qualitative analysis plan. While the final outcomes of the project were intended to benefit FDPs, the co-design team was intentional about designing a process which, based on their own personal experience, they understood to be itself of benefit to participants.

As we established our objectives, the team was asked to consider what makes a co-design process effective. Among the responses were:

- **Having equity in input, and then being equal parts of the whole process.**
- **Being personally and equally invested in the project outcomes.**
- **Providing an opportunity to concurrently learn from the design process while being an integral part of the design itself.**

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47 Greg Jordan-Detamore, "Introducing a Guide to Co-Design for Local Open Data Programs," The Sunlight Foundation, August 22, 2019, https://sunlightfoundation.com/2019/08/22/introducing-a-guide-to-co-design-for-local-open-data-programs/.

48 "What is Co-Design?" Design for Europe, https://designforeurope.eu/what-co-design/.

At the completion of the research, a survey was sent to the team to assess their experience participating in the co-design process. Below are key recommendations for ensuring the success of a co-designed project. Future projects, studies, and initiatives related to refugees and forced displacement are encouraged to incorporate elements of co-design, building on the recommendations and lessons learned here:

- **Create a co-design framework that is inclusive, flexible, and realistic with its timeline.** Co-design, by definition, brings together individuals with varied lived experiences, and it takes time to build rapport, understand differences in working styles, cultural norms, and skillsets. While some members of the team felt that a high degree of autonomy aided in their success, others preferred to have more direct guidance. Nearly all co-design team members noted that additional time spent in the beginning on team-building activities would have helped increase team cohesion. Taking the time to understand team dynamics will help foster consensus on ways of working.

- **Define the expertise, skills, and experience needed to fully execute project objectives.** At the beginning of the co-design process, one project goal was to intentionally recruit consultants with different areas of expertise so that team members would be able to both acquire research and analysis skills and then utilize those skills in the project. Because of the diversity of professional backgrounds on the team, as the project progressed, it became necessary to include additional team members with specialized research and analysis expertise to ensure the success of the research. No one project can accomplish everything. Thus, when creating a co-design process, it is important to ensure that your goals and deliverables align. Before undertaking a co-design process, take time to identify the skill sets needed to accomplish deliverables and recruit team members at the onset that collectively meet the needed skills.

- **Clearly communicate expectations, roles, and responsibilities.** In every project, there are circumstances beyond our control. It is critical that all team members understand their roles and responsibilities from the onset and are held accountable for their completion. Without clear communication, team members will find it difficult to succeed in their roles, thus creating undue burden on the entire team.

- **Allow time to emotionally process.** When crafting a co-design process, remember that the subject matter affects different team members in different ways. From focus group discussions to data analysis, the content can be emotionally triggering, and it is important to provide the space needed for reflection.

Research Methodology

The choice of a research method for this study was informed by the research question: “From the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers, what factors contribute to successful integration in the United States?”

We aimed to generate a “theory of integration” from the ideas and perspectives of FDPs themselves, with a model that can be replicated and tested. We assumed that the meaning of integration varies across and within demographic groups and is socially constructed. As such, rather than generating empirics to test an existing theory, this research adopted open, qualitative methods to collect data on FDPs’ lived experiences.

This study was done to advocate for change in policy and is thus strengthened by participatory and empowering data collection methods, focusing on collaborative, change-oriented claim to knowledge position.[49]

Sampling

Facilitators interviewed six separate groups in August 2021 with up to eight participants in each group. Facilitators found participants through purposive sampling by circulating an email invitation across the country to partners who could directly contact potential participants. Criteria for participation in the interview included being 18 years or older, living in the United States for

Problem Statement and Theory of Change

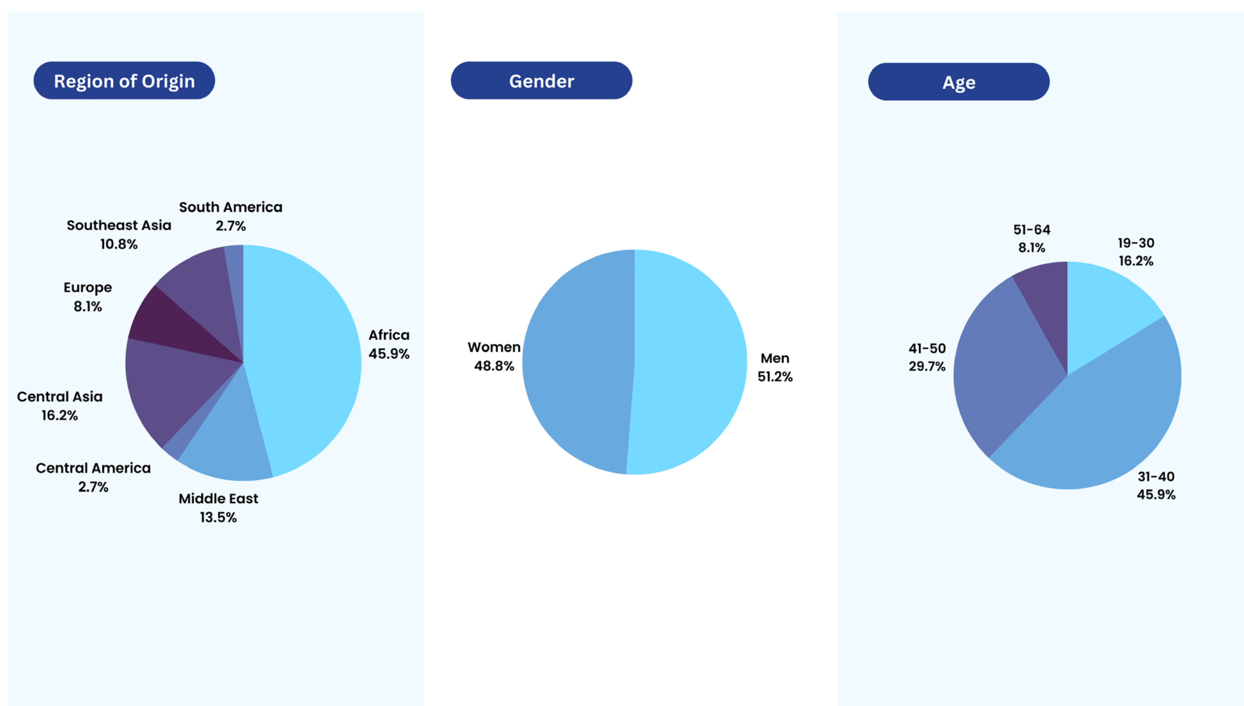
In the United States, refugee integration is measured almost exclusively on economic indicators which do not capture the full human experience. Additionally, US integration measurements lack the direct feedback, guidance, and leadership of those with lived experience in forced displacement. As a result, resource and program design throughout the resettlement system fails to support a comprehensive and long-term understanding of integration, one that more closely aligns with the unique needs and goals of individual families and takes experiential expert voices into account.

To fully understand and better measure refugee integration, the United States needs to include the voices of refugees and other forcibly displaced populations in the process. By developing and implementing an integration model that authentically engages immigrants in defining integration - what it means to them and their communities, what it looks like, and what facilitates it - we will be able to strengthen our resettlement program and policies at all stages. Engaging immigrants in defining integration will help forcibly displaced populations successfully integrate into communities across the country and build a better and more prosperous future for all.

49 John W. Creswell, “Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, Second Edition,” (Sage Publications, 2003).

at least one year, and no longer receiving services from a resettlement agency. To establish diversity, the research team considered the following factors when constructing the sample: Country of origin; Year of arrival; Program of arrival; gender (self-identified); US state of residency.

Co-design team members with lived refugee experiences created an interview guide with semi-structured, open-ended questions to guide focus group discussions (see Appendix 1). In addition to the transcriptions, each focus group had a notetaker so that data could later be cross-referenced.



Interview participants were ages 19 to 64 years old, with 21 identifying as men and 20 identifying as women. Participants arrived in the United States anywhere between 1988 and 2019 and were from 28 different countries of origin. Countries of origin included Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, Burundi, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iraq, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Somalia, South Sudan, the former Soviet Union, Syria, Uganda, and Venezuela. Of the 41 participants, 24 arrived in the United States with refugee status, 11 were asylum seekers, and 5 were Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders. Levels of education of participants varied, with 15 participants holding a master's degree, 4 holding a bachelor's degree, 3 having completed some college, 2 holding an associate's degree, and 3 holding a high school diploma. Of the 41 participants, 38 were employed at the time of their interview. Participants lived in 20 different states across the United States.

Analysis plan

To synthesize and interpret our data, the research team developed a comprehensive codebook that would enable content analysis from the focus groups' discussion transcripts (see Appendix 4). The codebook was applied using a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) called Dedoose to code and classify transcript excerpts.

The code book was organized into six groups:

- **Main Themes:** This category captured major themes and topics of conversation, such as access, the availability of resources, explicitly identified needs, and suggestions offered.

- **Entities:** This category captured mentioned entities, such as resettlement agencies, ethnic-based community organizations, government entities, and faith groups.

- **Sentiment:** This category captured the sentiment of a statement, characterized as either positive or a challenge.

- **Subjects:** This category captured the range of topics relative to the themes above, such as housing, cultural training, education, language, and quality of life.

- **Demographics:** This category captured a range of demographics as were identified in conversation by participants in the focus groups. This data was used to contextualize key relationships between codes and identify variations of those relationships relative to demographics. Note that demographic data was fully captured through the application process for participating in the focus groups.

- **Great quotes:** This single code was applied to capture notable anecdotal statements made by participants.

The codebook was updated through an iterative process that included testing the code to ensure that no significant themes and patterns were found to be missing. As gaps were identified, additional codes were added and applied using a keyword search. To understand the results of the coding, each category was studied individually and compared to the instances of co-occurrences between codes. As relationships between codes were identified, those relationships were then triangulated by cross-referencing them with raw data.

Study Limitations

By design, the study sought to collect qualitative input from refugees and others with forced displacement experience on their lived experience regarding resettlement and integration in the United States. As a result, there are important limitations regarding the chosen methodology and sampling strategy.

In order to reach potential participants across the US, and to avoid risks associated with in-person meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic, all focus groups were held online, effectively requiring a minimum level of digital literacy from all participants. This led to a potential sampling bias by unintentionally excluding refugees without the requisite computer skills or access to email and internet.

Additionally, as is common with purposive sampling in qualitative research, while focus group composition strove to reflect a diverse cross-section of resettlement experiences, the sample size is not statistically representative of America's FDP population. Likewise, the nature of qualitative coding means that findings cannot be interpreted as representative or statistically significant. While the constitution of a diverse research team sought to minimize the effects of researcher biases, such as selection, confirmation, or gender bias, to name a few, these are likely present in the analysis.

Finally, the findings presented here are reflective of FDPs' experiences as of August 2021. Major unforeseen displacement events, such as the regime change in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine, had yet to transpire at the time of data collection. These may have changed the discussion on resettlement challenges writ large as perceived by the focus group participants if data collection were instead taking place in 2022.

Findings

How FDPs participate in new countries has prompted this research to examine factors that contribute to the success of FDP integration. Yet the journey of FDPs is a combination of many factors, all attributed to how they cope and make sense of the resettlement world. During the focus group discussions, FDP participants were asked to reflect on their resettlement experience and the issues that proved crucial to integration. The following section outlines the major themes, ordered by frequency of mentions, as described by the focus group participants and how they contributed to or hindered successful integration according to their own lived experiences.

English Language

English language acquisition was the most frequently mentioned subject across the focus groups. A strong command of English can unlock doors for FDPs, and the lack thereof poses one of the largest obstacles to their integration process, impacting everything from housing and healthcare to employment and education.

Participants spoke of numerous programs that positively supported their English language acquisition. Having dedicated teachers in English as a second language (ESL) programs motivated language learners to improve. Ethnic Community-Based Organizations (ECBOs) play an important part in providing refugees scholarships to attend English classes. Participants expressed positive experiences with conversational practice sessions, which helped them to compare themselves with other English language learners.

Overall, however, participants' comments relating to the English language had an overwhelmingly negative association, by a factor of more than two to one. Language skills impact access to education. Those who command strong English skills spoke of easier experiences connecting with educational institutions whereas those who struggled to learn English found it difficult to complete school applications, engage meaningfully in classrooms, collaborate with other students, or understand materials. English language

> *"I came and did my master's degree here. For me, that was easy to learn, because I already knew a little bit of English. But for my husband, who doesn't speak English, it was very, very hard."*
>
> *– Woman, resettled as an SIV holder, age 36*

challenges not only slowed down the learning process for many FDP students but also made them a target for bullying and other discriminatory behaviors at schools. One participant recalled being "laughed at" by teachers and students for their accent.

"Some kids come here, they know mathematics very well, they know chemistry very well, physics very well. But they don't have enough English. When they go to school, they can be in the ninth grade, twelfth or eleventh. They put them in grade three, with very young […] kids, because their English is low, or they send them back to the English center to learn English again."

– Man, resettled as a refugee from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), age 40

Insufficient English-language proficiency can be a barrier to integration by limiting an FDP's ability to access employment opportunities. While many FDPs come to the United States with significant professional skills and talents, those with limited English find it extremely difficult to search for jobs, write resumes and cover letters, and handle job interviews. Participants explained how, due to linguistic difficulties, they or members of their family were unable to find job opportunities or were forced to accept entry level jobs that were below their professional level or outside their field of experience. Like in schools, language barriers contribute to making refugees a target for discriminatory behaviors and harassment at work by their employers and other workers.

Another common example that participants flagged is how language barriers prevent FDPs from seeking healthcare during emergencies. Knowing that many US-born Americans find it complicated to navigate the US healthcare system, many focus group participants highlighted how much harder it was for English language learners. Not knowing how to communicate with healthcare providers nor how to navigate health insurance policies often discourages refugees from

"I've noticed the struggle is speaking the language because a lot of refugees [are] really talented and have skills, but they end up working in cleaning or other jobs that don't match their skills just because they don't speak the language."

– Woman, resettled as an SIV holder, from Iraq, age 41

"I work in an ER [and] I've seen refugees come [...] into the hospital and for, let's say, a diabetic ulcer or whatever, and it's much worse than what it should be because they should have [sought] help earlier but they had these boundaries – whether [because they] didn't have insurance, or they don't have someone to translate for them or they don't trust the healthcare system."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina, age 22

seeking medical attention when in need.

Besides the key areas mentioned above, participants also spoke of challenges passing driver's license exams in English, navigating public transportation systems, or requesting maintenance from their landlord. In sum, without sufficient language skills, these problems are pervasive in all aspects of life. While completing required English courses during R&P is a necessary step of the resettlement process, it does not suffice to measure whether helpful gains have been made toward successful integration. As long as challenges with English continue to hinder access to education, employment, healthcare, and other vital needs, integration overall will suffer as well.

Employment and Livelihoods

Challenges and successes related to employment received the second highest number of mentions of any subject across the six focus groups. Participants considered jobs and employment opportunities to be important facilitating factors in their integration. Employment creates interactions with their community, supports language learning, and helps FDPs attain self-sufficiency. Some mentioned the decisive role resettlement agencies played in securing their first jobs in the United States or in career development more generally by providing resume support, sharing job opportunities, and supporting FDPs to develop their own businesses. Job opportunities through resettlement agencies were appreciated by participants for leading to more connections to the community and other future professional opportunities.

"The work [at a home improvement retailer] helped me so much. It helped me communicate with people. Back home, I knew English, but the communication was different. [...] So when communicating with the customers, we brush up on our English. That's my first-year experience."

– Man, asylee from Ethiopia, age 51

"I think for me, [integration is] being able to access what I need. So if I want to start a business, I know where to go to start a business. If I want to apply for a job, I know where to [...] apply for a job, I have a network of people I can reach out to and say 'Hey, will you be my reference?' So just being able to have access to the resources that you need in order to live the life that you want, I feel that's what success is for me."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Burundi, age 35

Despite being the most common measure for integration in the United States, finding employment opportunities remains a burden that many participants felt ill-equipped to face alone. For FDPs and their families, it is difficult to know how to search for jobs and how to navigate an already competitive job market. Additionally, many FDPs are not equipped with the tools and resources they need to write resumes and other job application materials. Participants also flagged that when they first arrived in the United States, they did not have professional networks that they could rely on and learn from when seeking employment, which otherwise might have helped to facilitate their sense of integration.

Throughout the study, participants highlighted a mismatch between the skills and experience they come to the United States with and the jobs and roles they are required to take on by the end of their reception and placement program. FDPs with strong educational and professional backgrounds face tremendous challenges when attempting to use their previous credentials and work experience to seek jobs in their areas of expertise here in the United States. Many feel compelled to accept positions below their professional levels or outside their area of expertise.

"If I had to change something, [it would be] not to focus so much on successful integration [through] housing, job, English classes, but also to look beyond that. Because from what I've seen, 'successful resettlement' was basically my mom getting a $7.25 minimum wage job. My dad, who was a college professor, working in a supermarket cleaning bathrooms."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from West Africa, age 41

Employment is a particular problem for asylum seekers, some of whom do not receive many of the services as resettled refugees. Former asylum-seekers participating

in this study expressed frustration that they lacked work authorization during the lengthy period their case was under review. A lack of access to information regarding their case status - being stuck in limbo and not knowing what was happening to their applications - seriously hampered their self-sufficiency by blocking access to livelihood.

> *"[I] applied for the asylum, and [I'm] ready to work, but [I'm] not legally able to work. So those were the times that were hard on me, not financially sound and totally dependent on [other] people."*
>
> *– Man, asylee from Pakistan, age 39*

Undoubtedly, many participants indicated that employment and livelihood are crucial components to helping FDPs feel safer, more protected, and more empowered to not only find housing and pay rent, but also to seek educational opportunities, pay for healthcare expenses, and secure a better future for their families. Still, measuring integration based on employment alone neglects whether the FDPs themselves consider their employment fulfilling.

Education

Education was another major theme relevant to refugee integration mentioned by the focus group participants. For many, the process of accessing education was relatively smooth – starting from ESL and progressing through college and other forms of higher education. Some participants shared stories of school counselors who helped to guide them through their college applications. Others felt accepted and welcomed in college by professors and classmates who were open and supportive. The friendships made through their positive education experiences enabled FDPs to feel more connected to their new communities.

"We had a caseworker who mostly helped with our school enrollment. So, he pushed really hard for my siblings. One of [whom…] had just turned 18 but wanted to finish high school and not [go] the job route. And [the case worker] was able to get him into a high school. And so they were helpful in many ways."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Burundi, age 35

Others experienced significant challenges associated with accessing education in general, beyond the English-related issues mentioned above. Many FDP students find it extremely challenging to find opportunities to continue the education they began in their home countries. Many also simply lacked sufficient information to make education-related decisions that were right for them, including understanding which student loans were available and how to apply for them, the options for earning a GED, or the potential for gaining an education and employment opportunities through trade schools. Several respondents pointed to the unique challenges faced by some women who are FDPs, who lacked access to education in their home countries and must first become literate before other education opportunities are possible.

"[When I] finally got into community college, that really helped me, because the [college] was small enough for me to be able to build a community and be able to [...] make friends that were outside of my community that were really genuinely wanting me to succeed and [...] thought of me not as a refugee, or a former refugee, but taught me on a human level that I was able to connect to."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from West Africa, age 41

Education unlocks access to employment, builds social and professional networks, and propels FDPs into self-sufficiency. It is an indispensable component of integration, but when employed as a measure of integration, it must be done in a nuanced and adaptable way in order to reflect the wide range of experiential realities refugees face.

Healthcare and Mental Health

Physical and mental health were the fourth and fifth most commonly discussed topics in our focus groups, respectively. In general, refugees were grateful for the availability of healthcare in the United States. Participants expressed gratitude for the support provided by resettlement agencies in helping FDPs access insurance, and for the generosity of healthcare organizations that treat life-threatening conditions (such as HIV) without asking for documentation status. Others were grateful for information on how to apply for financial assistance when facing large medical bills.

That said, when it came to accessing healthcare services, many participants faced significant challenges, usually relating to cost or language barriers. According to several participants, the high cost of healthcare, combined with inability to access good quality health insurance, forced them to choose between “going broke” or

"I've learned from experience to really take care of my health, because I don't want to end up with a huge big bill."

– Woman, resettled as an SIV holder, from Iraq, age 41

foregoing care altogether. For some, navigating the health system has been a disenchanting part of integrating into American ways of life.

Again, participants point to a lack of information as a root cause of their challenges related to healthcare. Some participants say refugees make "poor decisions" regarding their healthcare, such as visiting the emergency room for any health need because they simply are unaware of urgent care, walk-in clinics, or other more affordable alternatives.

As a refugee originally from Uganda said, "integration [means] being able to navigate through the American system [...] understand health insurance and be able to get health services." Clearly, the ability to navigate the health system contributes importantly to successful integration.

Participants identify mental illness and accessing mental health care as prevalent challenges within the FDP community. Those who were able to access therapy in their native language feel that it had a positive impact on their healing, because the therapist understood or shared their cultural identity.

"I'm still scared to go to meet any doctor because I don't trust them like, 'Oh my god, they're gonna send me a bill.' [...] So that's why when someone asks me if someone should come to America, I say, 'unless your health is very perfect, [and] you can guarantee you will never get sick, don't come because it was very scary. And unless you're like a millionaire. But I don't think that should be, because health is your basic human right, it should be universal."

– Woman, asylee from China, age 33

Some resettlement agencies provide support for mental health or psychiatric treatment. In one success story, a refugee was assisted in processing their post-traumatic stress through visits to the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), an organization that is dedicated to advancing human rights and building a future free from torture. CVT offers medical health insurance, healing services, and training on advocacy for survivors. Others mentioned a similar center – the Marjorie Kovler Center, a Chicago-based program of Heartland Alliance International. Fairfax

County, Virginia also provides mental health support reported as helpful.

> *"I think it's important for doctors to talk about mental health and reduce stigma . . . [what] I used to do is I would go to the community member, just knock on their door, and then talk to them about mental health. So, then I would say . . . you know how you [would] go, seek and ask for medication when your body's hurting? The same way, if your mind is hurting, you also need to do that."*
>
> *– Man, resettled as a refugee from Bhutan, age 45*

But mental health services were not universally available to participants and their families. Some acknowledged that this was not only due to the lack of awareness about available services, but because some FDPs face cultural stigma within their own community and therefore are reluctant to advocate for the support they need. Younger focus-group participants who immigrated to the United States as children were especially vocal about this concern for an older generation of refugees who are "suffering in silence" as well as for their own intergenerational trauma.

> *"As I kept growing up, and I learned more about the hardships that my family went through, especially the women in my family have gone through and for generations, it kind of just solidified for me, you know, a lot of the women in my family have had very traumatic experiences when they were around 14 or 15, which is when I started suffering from depression, anxiety."*
>
> *– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina, age 22*

What do these concerns over mental health mean for FDP integration? Mental health is often considered a secondary priority to physical health. Yet many participants talked about mental health as a prerequisite for successful integration. Participants – especially those who had fled conflict, lost loved ones, and left everything behind – associated their feelings of safety and security with their ability to access quality mental healthcare. Furthermore, FDP children or first-generation Americans face unique difficulties processing intergenerational trauma. Without the support and resources needed to nurture mental health, other factors of successful integration, such as education or employment, lose their potency.

"The biggest problem was that a lot of [refugee] children were committing suicide. And that shattered everything I thought I needed to know, because I thought it was just education. But what is education if you're depressed in college?"

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from South Sudan, age 25

When it comes to measuring integration based on health indicators, the impassioned conversations on mental health are a reminder that there is a new frontier of health that has yet to be fully explored, one that has particularly significant impacts on the ability of older and younger generations alike to feel fully integrated into the United States.

Housing and Homeownership

Having comfortable and safe housing is essential for helping FDPs feel grounded in their new home. Many participants had positive associations with housing and particularly homeownership. Resettlement agencies helped most participants acquire long-term housing and provided assistance in finding the financing and budgeting to gradually improve the quality of their housing. Others found housing through families and friends already living in the United States. Several participants shared that they had fulfilled, in their words, the "American dream" of purchasing their own home.

But even for those who eventually achieved homeownership, safe and stable housing is not a given. For the majority of FDPs with limited financial means, finding affordable housing - even years after they arrive in the United States – is a major challenge. Additionally, because many new arrivals don't have bank accounts and/or have no credit history, they face barriers to accessing credit. In cities across the country, this makes it extremely challenging to apply for rental properties, let alone attempt to buy a home. Many participants also flagged that they experienced some form of discrimination when seeking housing due to their limited English, racial or religious backgrounds.

"When they [my parents] originally bought the house, it was the smallest house in the whole neighborhood. And since then they built two additions. And now it's the biggest house in the neighborhood. And they actually paid off the house two years ago. So it made me very proud of them, because you know … not a lot of Americans who have been here their whole life who've been working and stuff can say that they have a paid-off house."

– Woman, resettled as refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina, age 22

There were also frustrations expressed by FDPs who were initially placed in housing units in unsafe neighborhoods, without access to reliable transportation or in food deserts or in under-resourced school districts. The sentiment was that resettlement agencies were simply "checking boxes" on housing, rather than ensuring refugees' sense of safety and wellbeing. With several focus group participants defining integration to include good housing, moving beyond a box-checking exercise may involve measuring adequate housing by its ability to sufficiently meet FDPs' self-defined expectations of safety and proximity to resources for them and their families.

"It took me a long time to find this apartment where I'm at right now. I had to call [...] loads of apartments, and at some point, before that, [...] I was in an expensive apartment, you know, I didn't have the information, so they ripped me off [charging me two times the amount]. And at the end, I finally found the one that I have right now, but my future goal is to have my own house."

– Man, asylee from Ethiopia, age 51

Identity and Inclusion

Although participants were not asked explicitly to reflect on their identity and how it relates to their experience with integration, throughout the six focus groups, "identity" and "inclusion" emerged as clear, related themes that were as prominent during analysis as tangible topics such as housing, healthcare, or employment.

Related to integration, participants often invoked identity to say they wished integration gave them more room to maintain their cultural identity. FDPs wish to feel seen in their community, appreciated for differences, acknowledged for contributions, and recognized for skills. Participants expressed a desire to participate in society through conversations about race, policy making, and sharing their stories of displacement with the host community. Participants lamented that the emphasis on learning English in order to integrate caused them to neglect or turn away from their native tongue, or to feel ashamed of their accent.

"To integrate means staying who you are and being appreciated [for] your differences, but also contribut[ing] to the society at large …. There is always positive [sentiment] in this country about [being a] melting pot…. But I never thought a melting pot was a great idea … because I'm not trying to melt into something. I'm trying to stay me, to stay fully me and be appreciated [for] that difference."

– Woman, resettled as refugee from West Africa, age 41

"And I wish that [people in the host community] were …. more inclusive and more understanding [about] where people are coming from, because a lot of the times they don't really understand people's struggles [including] learning the law, rules and regulations of this country. And it's just, I wish they were more inclusive, and more welcoming."

– Man, resettled as refugee from Bhutan, age 45

An integral part of the discussion on identity was the sentiment that integration means societal acceptance and inclusion of everyone, regardless of how they identify based on color, ethnicity, religion, gender, any ideology, disability, or displacement status. Some were careful to point out that acceptance and inclusion are a two-way street. Simple signs of patience, understanding, and openness to differences go a long way in helping FDPs feel more included, and to better identify with their new homes.

Refugees have affirmed that identity and inclusion are inseparable parts of integration. Yet since these areas cannot be reduced to a discreet service in the same way as access to housing or healthcare, there is no one way to "check the box" on their fulfillment. How identity and inclusion factor into meaningful measurements on integration – and balancing questions of identity and inclusion with improved and accessible English language acquisition – will prove a unique challenge requiring creative approaches and solutions.

"As I work with immigrants, or refugees, I tell them: 'remember who you are, remember where you came from, but at the same time, be open to learn[ing] about the others around you. There is a lot of beauty in being able to engage with people [who] are different than you, who think differently…. You can learn from them, you can widen your perspective, and … you're going to be a better person that way.'"

– Man, resettled as SIV holder, from Iraq, age 39

Support from Resettlement Agencies

While participants identified resettlement agencies as indispensable actors in setting them up for success, the limitations to their support, including structural challenges of overworked and under-resourced agencies, in turn have a limiting effect on FDPs' ability to progress towards integrating into their new communities.

Resettlement agencies play a significant role in creating a positive experience for newcomers during their resettlement. Participants expressed their gratitude to resettlement agencies for their dedication and determination in welcoming newcomers and providing support. Participants acknowledged such measures as thoughtful preparation and a warm welcome during the initial reception, provision of furnished homes, and warm food from their country of origin as making a lasting positive impact. Participants noted that what felt daunting in the beginning gradually gave way to a wide variety of opportunities. Encounters with resettlement agencies at times brought about connections to good friends that transformed their lives. Soon after their own resettlement, some participants themselves began providing translation and interpretation for other newcomers.

"When we arrived to Toledo, Ohio, they already had the apartment in our name for us. They had all the furniture in the apartment, they have donated clothing, they have a refrigerator full of food waiting for us. They have you know, warm smiles and with you know, we didn't have any problems at all."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Ukraine (former USSR), age 50

Conversely, the actions of some resettlement agencies were seen by participants as counterproductive to integration. Currently, refugees receive initial Reception and Placement support from resettlement agencies for 90 days after their arrival to the United States. Many refugee participants in this project have indicated that they struggled to become self-sufficient within such a short amount of time while adapting to a new place, culture, and language.

"You could tell [the resettlement agency] really wanted us to have all the services that we needed, even though it was tough on them sometimes. But you could also tell that they were under a lot of pressure, a lot of pressure to make sure we had the services we needed, but also they had some things to check off the list to make sure that they were also compliant."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from West Africa, age 41

For many, after their case workers leave, they feel lost and uncertain about what they need to do next. Additionally, participants felt that staff or volunteers could not provide relevant advice or support because they

"When people [who] are being put in charge of finding these apartments don't live in the neighborhood, they don't know if it's a bad neighborhood or if it's a good neighborhood. Their job is to find you a place and drop you off. So a lot of refugees end up in bad neighborhoods that they don't know anything about. [...] So hire people who live in the community; hire people who can relate to refugees, you know, hire refugees.

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from South Sudan, age 36

couldn't identify with FDPs' experience, leading to support that felt mismatched to an individuals' unique needs. Given this, there was a general feeling among participants that resettlement agencies were just "checking boxes" with a focus on compliance rather than fulfilling the specific needs of refugees and their families.

Cultural Orientation

Cultural Orientation, currently provided through PRM both before refugees travel to the US and within thirty days of arrival, is one way in which refugees learn about the US and gain the skills they need to understand and navigate US systems. A recurring theme throughout the study is that the cultural orientation participants received was insufficient. Participants discussed how they were not prepared for the hardships they faced when they first arrived in the United States. They felt if they had been prepared ahead of time it would have made their transition easier and set them up better for success.

Some of these initial challenges included, for example, the focus on finding employment within their first few weeks; the US school system, and what youth might expect in American schools; and parenting norms in the United States. Participants also said they were unprepared for how family dynamics change when children (and young adults) who quickly learn English end up helping with translation and interpretation related to important family matters, such as bills or medical needs.

> *"I think that another thing that would have been helpful is kind of like a crash course on … American culture, I guess. And I know, that's hard because America is a melting pot. And there's a lot of different people from … all over the world. But I guess, understanding … more of the acceptable practices in America and what your neighbors prefer you do and what they prefer you not do."*
>
> *– Woman, resettled as refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina, age 22*

One participant expressed the need for a "crash course on American culture," echoing other comments regarding the

importance of understanding cultural expectations tailored to different generations – and the particular need for youth to have their own orientation.

The different experiences of youth and adults were highlighted. For example, students are expected to actively participate in class, as opposed to waiting to be asked by the teacher to speak. Suggestions for parenting included information on cultural practices common in the US related to corporal punishment and breastfeeding in public. Without comprehensive cultural orientation, FDPs are left to "learn the hard way" and suffer integration setbacks when they've done something viewed as unacceptable in their new culture and community.

"I would say the importance of hiring someone who have been through the experience, that's part of organization that run by people that never left the state, they don't know what it's like, like on the other side, all they're doing is just bringing you in, and they lack the empathy, I would say. And they lack [understanding of] the sensitivity of the situation."

– Woman, resettled as refugee from South Sudan, age 36

As a way to improve cultural navigation through and beyond the cultural orientations, participants suggested that FDPs connect to support each other more, especially during the disorienting period of reception when it could be helpful to connect with others who can bridge the language and cultural divide. Cultural training taught by people who've gone through the resettlement and cultural adjustment process was considered a huge benefit. It also gives FDPs a place to learn and ask questions and share frustrations without fear, embarrassment, or shame.

In the context of discussions on integration, focus group participants frequently made suggestions on how to improve and expand the content and quality of cultural orientation prior to and after arrival to the United States, identifying this as an aspect of resettlement associated with laying the foundations for successful integration. As such, effective cultural orientation is another data point to better understand FDP integration outcomes.

Race

Immigrant justice is racial justice. At a time when communities of color continue to struggle with accessing safe jobs with living wages, seeking educational opportunities, living in equitable housing, and accessing healthcare services, racial disparities continue to hinder FDPs' ability to integrate into communities across the United States. Black FDPs in particular continue to face the burden of these

racial challenges. Some participants have indicated that prior to coming to the United States they believed that their integration would be easier due to America's diversity. In addition to ongoing racism and xenophobia in the United States, some FDPs were shocked by the discrimination they faced by people who looked like them simply because they were not born in the US.

Prior to arriving, some FDPs are not made aware of the racism that exists across the US. Thus, providing more education opportunities to learn about America's complicated racial history could help them understand the complexities of these issues. This could be instrumental to helping FDPs understand how to deal with those challenges.

"I ended up going to high school, which was very traumatizing, there was a lot of discrimination against me. There was a lot of racism. There was a lot of making fun of my language skills."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Ukraine (former USSR), age 50

Furthermore, some participants have indicated that they often feel isolated when they're resettled in communities where no one else from their FDP community resides. This not only contributes to making them a target for xenophobic attacks, but also may leave them feeling excluded, alone, and ignored - making it much more difficult to integrate in their new communities.

"Being a refugee is not easy … I will never rest. I still [live] in fear, because I have boys they are Black tall men, the police will kill them if they found them in anything. I didn't know when we can rest."

– Woman, resettled as a refugee from Sudan, age 60

Black FDPs find it particularly difficult to fully integrate in communities across the country because even if they find employment, become fluent in English, overcome other obstacles, they face systemic anti-Blackness across the US. This ultimately leaves Black FDPs feeling like they will never be fully integrated into their new lives here in the US. As one participant originally from South Sudan explained, challenges of integration are informed "more [by] my racial identity than the refugee identity, because I feel like many of the things that I interact with [or] have combated [are] because I'm Black, rather than because I'm a refugee." Participants spoke of facing racial discrimination and bullying in schools.

Additionally, participants have also indicated that sometimes they feel they are unable to discuss some of the racial challenges that they face in the United States, especially Black and Brown refugees. The need for more diverse racial representation also applied to resettlement agency staff. Alongside all the praise for R&P support, some participants recognized that none of the staff and volunteers around them reflected their own racial, religious, or ethnic backgrounds.

Lastly, some participants, particularly Black refugees, indicated that they fear sending their children to schools, or to grocery stores, because they might get harassed by police.

Transportation

Access to safe and affordable transportation is a key factor in FDP integration. Refugee resettlement agencies are required to show program clients how to take public transportation within the first 30 days of arriving in the United States. However, public transportation is often unreliable, confusing, and requires English language skills and knowledge of the area.

Due to the barriers to public transportation for newly arrived FDPs, participants reported relying on taxis or friends as their primary means of transportation until they received their driver's license. Depending on friends for transportation can be unreliable and impede feelings of independence. Relying on taxis for transportation is also an imperfect strategy for many reasons, most importantly because it is expensive and can feel difficult and unsafe for non-native English speakers.

"They can take a bus and they don't know which bus goes where so there is writing on the bus. How would you explain [it to] them? So which bus [do] you have to take [and] where you have to get off the bus or get on the bus? That is the challenging part for everybody I would say, especially for the educated people who come here and who do not understand English."

– Man, resettled as an SIV holder from Afghanistan, age 32

Many participants reported that transportation challenges continue to be some of the main barriers to integration that they face in the US. In areas where public transportation is non-existent or unreliable, not having a car could prevent refugees from finding employment, going to grocery stores, attending schools, and seeking medical care when needed. As obtaining a driver's license and car are oftentimes necessary to integrate, participants expressed the need for help in applying and preparing for their driver's license test.

Recommendations

In contrast to existing methods of measuring integration that rely mostly on economic indicators, our study focused on gathering feedback directly from a diverse pool of current and former FDPs who are still navigating their own integration journeys in communities across the United States. By centering the voices of those with lived experience in forced displacement, we can create a meaningful and lasting impact on our resettlement and asylum policies with programs that not only help make the integration process more successful, but also contribute to strengthening communities nationwide.

Throughout the focus group discussions, participants volunteered substantive suggestions to strengthen and expand the foundations of integration. For each challenge expressed by the participants, many proposed an accompanying solution with ideas spanning from small adjustments to resettlement programs to sweeping systemic reforms.

Based on our findings, the research team organized participant recommendations to improve integration outcomes in the United States into four categories:

1. Expand integration measurements to accommodate a wide range of experiences.

Instead of solely focusing on economic self-sufficiency, it is crucial that the United States expand how it measures integration outcomes. In fact, participants explicitly asked resettlement agencies to look beyond the basic measures of employment and housing for determining successful integration - the quality of these and the degree to which they meet the aspirations and expectations of the individual matter greatly.

While indicators are functionally standardized, the input from FDPs showed that there is no singular integration experience. The indicators utilized by resettlement administrators to measure integration must be expansive and flexible enough to accommodate the varied preferences of each individual.

New tools are needed to complement, or even replace, existing rigid measures that disregard the wide range of FDP experiences, and we offer examples of such tools in Appendices 1 and 2. Below is a list of indicators developed based on the input from FDPs. Resettlement agencies and other resettlement stakeholders are encouraged to use these to gather more insightful measurements on the FDP integration progress. ORR is also encouraged to integrate these measures into their Annual Survey of Refugees:

English Language Acquisition: English language proved to be the most mentioned, and arguably most vital component of participants' integration process. Due to the role of communication in every aspect of their lives, from education and employment to accessing medical care and transportation services, it is critical to gather data to understand the impact English language acquisition has on FDPs' ability to function as desired in society, even years after arrival.

- Indicator: The FDP has a sufficient command of written and spoken English to comfortably communicate in daily settings, such as jobs and livelihoods, education, health, housing, and transportation.

Employment and Livelihoods: Refugees asked for more time and support to find a job that aligns with their skills, experience, and aspirations, which would better position them in their new home and community both financially as well as socially.

- Indicator: The FDP has secured employment or is taking concrete steps toward securing a career opportunity aligned with their education, experience, and/or interests.

Education: Many refugees, particularly youth who are on the cusp of ending secondary education when they are resettled, are often forced prematurely into the workforce to support their family, even if an early investment in education could do more for self-sufficiency in the long term, or is the desired path for the individual.

- Indicator: The FDP has completed or is pursuing their preferred education path.

Physical and mental health: Refugees identified the ability to access healthcare as a key measure of integration. Even when healthcare is available, refugees face numerous access barriers, from cost to language to simply not knowing where to seek the services they need.

- Indicator: The FDP is able to access and afford routine healthcare.
- Indicator: The FDP knows how to access mental health counseling and is able to afford mental health counseling if needed.

Housing: For new arrivals with limited financial means to feel at home in their hosting communities, they need access to equitable permanent housing. This is crucial to building their sense of belonging, feeling safe and secure about their families' future, and being able to give back.

- Indicator: The FDP's housing meets their household's own standard of safety, comfort, and quality.

Identity and Inclusion: Successful integration entails more than the resources and support received. Refugees grapple with complex topics regarding their individual identity and sense of inclusion that cannot be measured by proxy.

- Indicator: The FDP self-reports feeling comfortable being themselves in their US community.
- Indicator: The FDP has access to a mentor or network representing their language and/or cultural tradition OR other FDPs undergoing similar experiences.

Self-Sufficiency: Beyond income, employment and other standard indicators of self-sufficiency, participants frequently identified that a lack of access to the right information at the right time slowed or hindered their integration outcomes.

- Indicator: The FDP has access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about issues and areas important to their lives.

An actionable tool for measuring integration

The co-design exercise has made clear that FDPs are the experts of their lived experience and are therefore best placed to measure their own integration outcomes. To measure the above indicators, and as a complement to existing tools, resettlement agencies and other stakeholders are recommended to pilot a periodic self-assessment exercise that both provides FDPs the opportunity to reflect openly on their integration journey and provides resettlement agencies with rich and insightful data on their clients' experience to track and monitor over time.

Survey questions in the proposed self-assessment tool (Appendix 1) represent the breadth of FDPs' experience and a holistic measurement of integration. The questions are based on the proposed indicators and fully derived from the content of this study. Surveys should be translated in FDPs' native languages, and resettlement staff should be made available to interpret the survey for FDPs that may be illiterate in their native language. The survey should be taken by each adult FDP, not just head of household.

The survey is accompanied by a list of action items that may be taken by local resettlement agency staff in order to address client concerns listed in the survey. Many of the actionable suggestions are extensions of wrap-around services that local RAs already provide; the self-assessment is intended to be a tool to track what FDPs identify as major areas of concern and whether progress is made over time. The tool allows RAs to plan individualized integration support as well as analyze aggregated integration outcomes for all RA clients. If using this standardized tool, ORR or other federal-level stakeholders can aggregate this information to analyze integration trends directly from the voices of FDPs over time.

2. Provide FDPs equitable opportunities to access resources and public benefits.

Informed by their lived experiences, participants suggested concrete improvements for resettlement stakeholders to expand the quality, accessibility, and duration of resources. It is important to note that, in some cases, participants may have mentioned a challenge or barrier to integration without suggesting specific solutions. And some barriers to integration received more attention than others, for reasons that may in part reflect the composition of the focus groups. This should be kept in mind when considering the reflections and recommendations included here regarding barriers based on race and identity, the challenges of racism and xenophobia, and the additional barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ and FDPs with disabilities.

Allocate more time for learning English

As mentioned in the findings section, improving access to English language training and resources is critical to ensuring the successful integration of refugees into communities nationwide. Above all, participants asked for more time to learn English. As a start, FDPs need at least three years of English language training instead of the current standard of 90 days they are offered upon arrival to the United States. A majority of participants indicated that three months is insufficient to learn proficient English for even a bare minimum of daily tasks, particularly for those who arrived with no previous English knowledge. Resettlement agencies should also provide varied English language courses that reflect the varied English skills of FDPs. Improper course placement leads to FDPs, especially school-aged children, either feeling left behind or held back.

Additionally, there needs to be an increased effort to provide intensive English training specifically aimed at helping refugees access employment opportunities and excel within their career. This coursework should include learning opportunities on how to write cover letters, resumes, filling out job applications, interview skills, and salary negotiation tips. This intensive training needs to be made available to refugees regardless of how long they have been in the United States.

Provide ongoing professional training and skill building

To be able to successfully integrate in the United States, even FDPs with a strong command of English require ongoing support to help them search for jobs, build a professional network, and navigate the competitive job market in the US. Our findings suggest that more time be given to help newcomers find a job that aligns with their skills, experience, and aspirations, as this would better position them in their new home both financially as well as socially. This also means recognizing FDPs' professional skills, licenses, and certifications that they bring with them to the United States.

While employment programs at resettlement agencies often focus primarily on job placement goals outlined by the Office of Refugee Resettlement each fiscal year, it is imperative to equally value refugees not just finding employment but careers with growth opportunities in their chosen field. Resource allocation and support duration for job seekers must be reframed in recognition of the fact that many FDPs have career aspirations beyond the initial job placement and might require advanced credentials to pursue their chosen career goals. Investing more in creating partnerships with private sector companies, academic institutions, and non-profit or government organizations to hire and train FDPs can help to reduce the barriers many newcomers face in the job market.

Invest in the education of forcibly displaced students

One of the best solutions to helping forcibly displaced youth integrate into communities across the United States is by helping them receive the education they need to build a stable future. Forcibly displaced students need ongoing English language support to help them acclimate to the US educational system, apply to schools and universities, and to know where and how to access financial support. They also require ongoing mentoring and academic counseling to help them prepare for exams such as the GED that are needed to seek higher education. Resettlement actors should foster stronger partnerships with academic institutions to better receive them into educational programs designed to accompany newcomers through their transition with the necessary support. This is not only an investment in FDP youth seeking the credentials and knowledge to pursue meaningful employment opportunities, but is an acknowledgement that FDPs' positive contribution to universities and other academic institutions brings diversity to the benefit of all students in schools across the country.

Expand the scope of Cultural Orientation and tailor content to specific groups

Participants reiterated that cultural orientation is a vital introduction to American culture. However, these orientations are not utilized to their full potential. Participants requested more content tailored to particular age groups and demographics and additional sessions once resettled in the US. Updating the cultural orientation curriculum to include sessions led by FDPs is one way to make connections and mentor newcomers from those who have been through a similar experience. Another suggestion is to actively engage previously resettled FDPs in mentorship programs as part of cultural orientation and beyond to help newcomers along their integration journeys. In addition to helping FDPs integrate into communities, cultural orientation, or at least awareness raising, should also be provided to receiving communities to help them accommodate new arrivals and understand how to best welcome them.

Relatedly, the vital information about housing, healthcare, personal budgeting, public assistance, legal rights and responsibilities, transportation, education, and employment shared during cultural orientation needs to be reiterated and easily accessible beyond the case management period. FDPs feel more empowered and self-sufficient when they can access information on their own, so offering refresher or follow-on cultural orientation courses can help ensure FDPs stay informed and aware of the services and resources available to them as new needs arise.

Improve access to health services

When misunderstandings arise regarding health services, FDPs are left paying for it — either in the form of exorbitant bills for seeking unnecessarily expensive care or suffering worse health outcomes when care has been unnecessarily delayed. Government agencies and resettlement partners must provide comprehensive and reliable information about the healthcare system, its challenges, and the importance of having affordable health insurance in the United States past the initial cultural orientation during the resettlement period. When receiving health care, it is critical for translators or ‘cultural brokers’ to be present, preferably of the same sex, for the FDPs who need it. A cultural broker facilitates the interaction between people from one culture to another, which can be vital when discussing health needs and treatment options. This will have a bearing not only on their own health outcomes but will alleviate the burden from FDP children who are often called upon to translate serious matters for their parents.

Prioritize mental health needs

Another crucial, and often ignored, indicator for successful integration is providing timely and thorough mental health support to all forcibly displaced populations. Many FDPs are survivors of war and violence and a lot of them suffer from several mental health conditions including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is paramount to provide affordable and quality mental health support to new arrivals

to help develop healthy coping mechanisms and ease their integration into communities. A mental health hub, with information available in key languages, will increase general awareness and help to make mental health support more accessible to all FDPs.

Participants have also recommended that there needs to be an effort to remove the stigma that exists among FDP populations when it comes to seeking mental health support. FDP parents of children who primarily grew up in the United States asked specifically for information and education on youth and child mental health, which is an important part of parenting that they did not learn about from their home cultures.

Empower FDP girls and women

From accessing employment and educational opportunities to navigating the US healthcare system and learning English, it is crucial that the United States invests more resources in programs to support the integration of FDP women and girls. Several of our women participants in this study indicated barriers in seeking jobs in the United States while attempting to simultaneously care for their families. Others have highlighted that due to strict religious and cultural backgrounds, some women are not able to attend schools, access public transportation, or seek medical care during emergencies, leaving them further isolated. More targeted education and language support is needed for women who were denied access to education before resettling. Particularly at risk are women facing domestic violence and abuse at home who need to be made aware of the services and support available to them. One concrete suggestion is to establish more community centers as hubs for FDP women to support one another and access services that address their specific needs. That is why government agencies, in partnerships with resettlement partners, must work together to ensure that forcibly displaced women and girls have the resources they need to not only survive but to thrive.

Provide equal access to benefits to all forcibly displaced populations

Across the diversity of populations facing displacement, and the diversity of channels for seeking safety in the United States (resettlement, asylum, special immigrant visas, and more), individuals face unequal access to benefits and services. Black and Latinx asylum seekers not only have limited access to public benefits, but also face tremendous ongoing racial injustice and maltreatment upon arriving in the United States. LQBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities also face barriers to accessing needed benefits and services. Participants in these projects emphasized the need for the US government, resettlement agencies, and civil society partners to work together to provide equal access to protection, benefits, and integration support to all forcibly displaced populations, regardless of their countries of origin, religious beliefs, immigration status, and other characteristics that can make them more likely to be met with discriminatory behavior.

3. Center the voices of those with lived experience in forced displacement to better understand and improve integration outcomes and bridge the gap with US born citizens.

It is imperative to create more opportunities for immigrants to share their own stories in their own voice. Focus group participants repeatedly emphasized how helpful it was to be asked about their resettlement and integration experience, which for some was a helpful moment to stop and reflect. Amplifying their lived experiences can also help to bridge differences with US citizens. As a start, participants have recommended establishing new community centers where citizens and non-citizens can gather, learn, and share experiences. The need for more FDP representation also applied to resettlement agencies. Participants noted that more diversity among resettlement agency staff and volunteers would help them feel more welcome, and even safe, especially in the critical early months of resettlement.

Additionally, many participants in this project have echoed that for integration to be successful, it must be thought of as a two-way street: while communities need to provide FDPs the resources they need to get back on their feet and feel more at home, FDPs in turn need to be ready to use these resources and think about how to use them to contribute to and share with their new communities.

FDPs should also be able to participate and engage in various community conversations and activities without fear of being attacked or discriminated against. Learning about and understanding the integration experience brings all Americans together and helps to move our country forward. As one asylee from Pakistan stated, “our stories matter” and sharing their stories more broadly can help FDPs feel more accepted and integrated in their new communities.

4. Enhance collaboration and information sharing between the US government, resettlement agencies, and local communities.

One of the major obstacles the research team encountered while compiling this report was accessing needed information to identify, examine, and measure integration trends in the United States. The private nature of the Cooperative Agreements between resettlement agencies and PRM added another layer of complications in learning about how different refugee-serving stakeholders intend to support the long-term integration of refugees and other forcibly displaced populations.

To ensure successful FDP integration, more transparency and collaboration between public and private sectors is needed to create public information and accessible reporting. As a start, the Department of State’s website should include a specific page that details FDP integration efforts, and provide the necessary funding to study how FDP communities are integrating into communities long-term, including consistent standards for how to measure and track integration progress. Along with this, and with consideration for privacy and security, existing information from the ORR Annual Survey of Refugees should be made more readily accessible

to the public. ORR should emphasize in its measures the importance of both FDPs and whole of society responsibility, and provide transparent access to those measures and the process by which they have been informed. The indicators and self-assessment tool presented in this report are one concrete way to move toward standardization and transparency based on measurements identified as relevant by FDPs directly.

Conclusion

For decades, the United States has provided a safe haven for millions of refugees and other forcibly displaced populations, benefiting tremendously from their contributions to strengthen our economy, cultural diversity, educational quality, and more. Today, as the Biden Administration aims to rebuild the US resettlement programs, America has an opportunity to not only offer more refuge to those in need, but also to build forward toward programs and systems that speak to our values and goals for inclusion and belonging. To do so, the US government, in partnerships with the resettlement community, the private sector, and the American public, must implement innovative and inclusive solutions to improve integration for refugees, asylees, and all forcibly displaced populations. Instead of primarily relying on economic indicators to measure integration outcomes, we need to thoroughly examine a wide range of indicators that capture the full human experience. That is why it is crucial to center the voices, feedback, guidance, and leadership of those with lived experience in forced displacement. In doing so, we will ensure that we rebuild a system that supports a comprehensive and long-term understanding of integration, one that more closely aligns with the unique needs and goals of individual families, and takes experiential expert voices into account. Engaging immigrants in defining integration will not only help forcibly displaced populations successfully integrate into communities across the country but will also strengthen our communities and build a better and more prosperous future for all.

Appendix 1: FDP Self-Assessment

English Language Acquisition		
1.	Are you currently enrolled in an ESL class?	Yes [proceed to 1a] No [proceed to 1b]
1a.	If yes, how do you feel about the following statement: *The class I am enrolled in is at an appropriate level for me (not too easy, not too challenging).*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
1b.	If not, would you like to be enrolled in an ESL class?	Yes [proceed to 2] No [proceed to 1b.b]
1b.b.	Why do you not want to be enrolled in an ESL class?	[open ended question]
2.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I know enough English to communicate comfortably in most settings.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
3.	How do you feel about the following statement? I have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about English language learning.	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree Strongly disagree
Employment & Livelihoods		
4.	Are you currently employed?	Yes [proceed to 4a] No [proceed to 5]
4a.	Did your local resettlement agency help you find your job?	Yes No
4.	Are you currently employed?	Yes [proceed to 4a] No [proceed to 5]
4b.	Do you make enough money at your job to meet living expenses?	Yes No

4c.	Are you comfortable with your work hours?	Yes No
4d.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I am happy in my current job.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
4f.	How do you feel about the following statement? *My current job aligns with my education, experience and/or interests.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree [proceed to question 6]
5.	If you are not employed, are you actively seeking work?	Yes [proceed to 5a] No [proceed to 5b]
5a.	If yes, is your local resettlement agency helping in your search?	Yes [proceed to 5a.a] No [proceed to 5b]
5a.a.	If yes, is the resettlement agency helping you find opportunities that are aligned with your education, experience and/or interests?	1. Yes, definitely 2. Yes, somewhat 3. Not sure/neutral 4. No, not really 5. No, not at all
5b.	If no, why are you not currently seeking work?	[open ended]
6.	How do you feel about the following statements? *I have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about work and employment opportunities.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
6a.	*I have a professional network I can rely on to help me with my career goals.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree

Education		
7.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I am satisfied with the level of education I have achieved or am working towards achieving.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
8.	Are you currently enrolled in an educational program (aside from ESL)?	1. High School 2. GED Course 3. Associate Degree Program 4. Bachelor's Degree Program 5. Trade School 6. Graduate or Professional Program 7. No, I am not currently enrolled in any education program. [proceed to question 9]
8a.	Did your local resettlement agency help you enroll in your program?	Yes No
8b.	How are you paying for your educational program? (Select all that apply)	1.Loans 2. Scholarship 3. Out of pocket 4. Other financial assistance
9.	Are you interested in learning more about educational programs?	Yes No
10.	Are you interested in learning more about pathways to pay for your education?	Yes No
11.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about education opportunities.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree

Health		
12.	How do you feel about the following statement? *In general, I feel physically fit and healthy.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
13.	Do you currently have a primary care provider?	Yes No I don't know
14.	Do you currently have a dentist?	Yes No I don't know
15.	Do you know how to access emergency health services?	Yes No
16.	When accessing healthcare are you provided with interpretation services, if needed?	Yes No Interpretation not needed
17.	Do you have health insurance?	Yes [proceed to 17a] No I don't know
17a.	Does your health insurance provide interpretation services, if needed?	Yes [proceed to 18] No [proceed to 17b] Interpretation not needed [proceed to 18]
17b.	If not, does your resettlement agency help you with interpretation?	Yes No Interpretation not needed
18.	Do you have any trouble accessing necessary healthcare? (Select all that apply)	1. No, I have no problems accessing healthcare 2. Yes, transportation issues 3. Yes, cost of care issues 4. Yes, translation issues 5. Yes, I don't have enough information 6. Other

19.	Do you know who to contact at your local resettlement agency with questions regarding healthcare?	Yes No
20.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about my physical health.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
	Mental Health	
21.	How do you feel about the following statement? *In general, I feel physically fit and healthy.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
22.	Do you currently meet with a mental health counselor?	Yes No
22a.	Does anyone in your household currently meet with a mental health counselor? (Select all that apply)	Yes, another adult(s) Yes, a child (children) No [if 'no' to both 22 and 22a, proceed to 23]
22b.	If yes, does your mental health counselor provide interpretation if needed?	Yes No Interpretation not needed
23.	If you aren't currently accessing a mental health counselor, why not? (Select all that apply)	1. I don't have a need for mental health counselling 2. Too expensive 3. No counselors that meet my language needs 4. No culturally appropriate counselors 5. I don't know how to find a counselor 6. I worry about stigma associated with mental health services

24.	Do you know who to contact at your local resettlement agency with questions regarding mental health care?	Yes No
25.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about my mental health.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
	Housing	
26.	*Do you have permanent housing?*	1. Yes, renting 2. Yes, property owner 3. No, I do not have permanent housing
27.	How do you feel about the following statements? *I feel safe in my home and neighborhood.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
27a.	*I am able to afford my home/ my current housing.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
27b.	*I am satisfied with the quality of my home/ my current housing..*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
27c.	*I know my neighbors and we are friendly with one another.*	1. Yes, definitely 2. Yes, somewhat 3. Not sure/neutral 4. No, not really 5. No, not at all
28.	[If renting] Are you able to communicate with your landlord?	Yes Yes, somewhat No I don’t know

28a.	If needed, does your landlord provide interpretation?	Yes No Interpretation not needed
28b.	Do you know who to contact at your local resettlement agency if you're evicted or are facing issues with your landlord?	Yes No
29.	How do you feel about the following statement? *I have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about my housing situation.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
	Identity & Inclusion	
30.	How do you feel about the following statement? *In general, I feel comfortable in my new community.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
31.	*I know how to get involved in things I care about in my community.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
33.	*I feel comfortable being myself in my new community.*	1. Always 2. Most times 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Rarely 5. Never
34.	Do you know who to contact with questions about your new community at your resettlement agency?	Yes No
	Integration Outcomes	
30.	How do you feel about the following statements? *In general, I feel comfortable in my new community.*	1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure / neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree

Appendix 2: REMAP INTEGRATION: A Tool for Resettlement Agencies to Respond to FDP Self-Assessment

REMAP INTEGRATION

A Tool for Resettlement Agencies Tool to respond to FDP Self-Assessment

The below tool provides follow-up measures that should be taken by local resettlement agencies in response to the questions answered in the FDP Self-Assessment. Please document all responses in case notes.

English Language Acquisition

Question #	IF	THEN
1a.	If the client feels that the class they are enrolled in is not an appropriate level *(neutral – strongly disagree) …*	Please advocate for your client with the ESL provider to ensure that client's concerns are addressed.
1b.	If the client indicated that they would like to be enrolled in ESL class…	Please provide a list of ESL courses in the service area and make a referral to appropriate courses as requested by client.
2.	If the client indicates they do not know enough English to communicate comfortably in most settings (neutral – strongly disagree) …	Please create a service plan to help the client overcome language barriers and improve English skills.

Employment and Livelihoods

Question #	IF	THEN
4b.	If the client indicates that they don't make enough money to support living expenses…	Create a service plan to help the client overcome this barrier. This could include training your client on how to effectively ask for a raise, educating with an employer about livable wages, or helping a client search for another job.

4c.	If the client indicates that they are uncomfortable with their work hours…	Please help the client connect with their employer and voice concerns about shift work. If needed, please help the client search for another job.
4d.	If the client indicates that they're unhappy with their current job (disagree – strongly disagree) …	Please discuss the reasons why the client is unhappy and address those areas of concern.
4f.	If the client indicates that their current job does not align with their education, experience, or interests (disagree – strongly disagree) …	Please assess the client's past education, experience, and interests and create a service plan to help the client achieve their career goals.
5b.	If the client indicates that they're unemployed and not actively seeking employment…	Please discuss with the client the barriers to employment and help create a service plan to overcome those barriers.
6a.	If the client indicates that they have no professional network (disagree – strongly disagree) …	Please facilitate connections with relevant groups or mentors who can help the client with their career goals

Education

Question #	IF	THEN
7.	If the client is unsatisfied with the level of education they achieved or are working towards (neutral – strongly disagree) ….	Please create a service plan with the client to outline how to achieve educational goals.
9.	If the client is interested in learning more about educational programs…	Please share information about local education opportunities.
10.	If the client is interested in learning more about pathways to pay for education…	Please share information about how to pay for education.

Health

Question #	IF	THEN
12.	If the client does not feel physically fit and healthy (neutral – strongly disagree) ….	Please create a service plan with the client on how to best overcome health barriers.
13.	If the client does not have, or does not know if they have a primary care provider…	Then please share information about accessible primary care providers in the area.
14.	If the client does not have, or does not know if they have a dentist…	Please share information about accessible dentists in the area.
15.	If the client does not know how to access emergency services…	Please review with client directly how to contact emergency services as well as alternative options, such as Urgent Care, depending on the needs.
16.	If the client is having trouble accessing interpretation services…	If the healthcare provider accepts Medicaid, then they should have interpretation services available. If not, please discuss with and arrange for client to get adequate interpretation during healthcare appointments.
17.	If the client indicates that they don't have or don't know if they have health insurance…	Please explore options for client to be enrolled in a health insurance program.
18.	If the client indicates that they are having trouble accessing necessary healthcare…	Please create a service plan to help client overcome barriers to healthcare.
19.	If the client indicates they don't know who to contact at your agency regarding healthcare questions…	Please share contact information for your health liaison. Please also share general contact information for agency in case of staffing changes.

Mental Health

Question #	IF	THEN
21.	If the client indicates that they don't feel mentally fit and healthy…	Please create a service plan with client to help overcome barriers to mental health care.
22b.	If the client's mental health counselor does not provide interpretation…	Please consult with mental health provider to talk about possible solutions to overcome language barrier or connect with a new counselor who meets language and cultural needs.
23.	If the client indicates a barrier to obtaining mental health counseling…	Please create a service plan to help overcome barriers to mental health care.
24.	If the client indicates that they don't know who to contact at your agency regarding mental health care…	Please share contact information for your health liaison. Please also share general contact information for agency in case of staffing changes.

Housing

Question #	IF	THEN
26.	If the client indicates that they don't have permanent housing…	Please create a service plan with client to help overcome barriers to housing.
27.	If the client indicates that they don't feel safe in their home or neighborhood (*neutral – strongly disagree*) …	Please discuss with the client why they don't feel safe and create a service plan to help overcome those barriers.
27a.	If the client indicates that they cannot afford their home…	Please help connect the client with programs that can help subsidize rent and/or help the client seek employment that can cover cost of living.

28.	If the client indicates that they cannot effectively communicate with landlord	Please connect with the appropriate employee within resettlement agency in case of any trouble with housing. Also ensure that client is connected with English language courses.
28b.	If the client indicates that they don't know who to contact at your agency for issues with landlord…	Please share contact information for the appropriate person to help overcome these challenges. Please also share general contact information for agency in case of staffing changes.

Identity and Inclusion

Question #	IF	THEN
30. 31. 32.	If the client indicates that they have any trouble connecting with their new community (*neutral – strongly disagree*) …	Please share community centers and organizations that can best support the client.
34.	If the client indicates that they don't know who to contact about questions in their new community…	Please share contact information for the appropriate person to help overcome these challenges. Please also share general contact information for agency in case of staffing changes.

Self-sufficiency

Question #	IF	THEN
3, 6, 11, 20, 25, 29	If the client indicates that they don't have sufficient information to make informed decisions (*disagree – strongly disagree*) …	Please connect them with the appropriate contact at your agency so that they can help share accurate information with the client.

Appendix 3: Focus Group Facilitator's Guide

Integration
Q: How would you define successful refugee integration in the US?

Self-sufficiency
Q: What factors, do you believe, contribute to self-sufficiency?
Q: Are you currently employed? If so, please describe your specific job tasks. How about your interaction with your employer and peers?
Q: Prior to resettlement, were you employed? If so, please describe your experience (job tasks
and interaction with employer and peers).
Q: What barriers exist for you or other refugees in gaining self-sufficiency in the US?

Life in the United States
Q: What can you tell me about what you were feeling and thinking at the time you first arrived in the US? How are you feeling today?

Services
Q: During the first year of your resettlement, what services did you receive and for how long?
Q: How would you describe your interactions with your service provider?
Q: If you had a chance to change something about the way you received services, what would it be?

Social
Q: How would you describe the community you live in today?
Q: How would you describe your interactions with people outside your ethnic community?
Q: Are you involved in your community? If yes, please describe?

Health
Q: What is your understanding of good health?
Q: What health (mental and physical) services have you received since being resettled? Please describe your experience with these particular services.
Q: What health services are important to you?
Q: Have you received mental health services? If so, can you explain your experience in receiving this service?

Housing
Q: Please describe your housing.
Q: How satisfied are you with your housing?

Linguistic
Q: How would you describe your English language skills today?
Q: How would you describe your experience with English language acquisition?

Other
Q: Are there any other pertinent issues we should discuss in regard to refugee integration in the US?

Appendix 4: Codebook

Themes

ACCESS: Statements explicitly discussing barriers to access.
BIGNEEDS: Statements that express identification of critical needs.
DEFINEINTEG: Statements that reference how people define integration.
RESOURCENOTRECEIVE: Statements about resources or programs not received.
RESOURCERECEIVE: Statements about resources or programs received.
SUGGESTION: Statements that express suggestions for changes, additions, improvements, etc. to programs or resources.

Subjects

BUSINESSOWN: Statements about opening or owning a business, company, store, etc.
CHILDCARE: Statements about childcare, lack of, etc.
CHILDRENSTATE: Statements about issues explicitly facing children
CITIZENSHIP: Statements about citizenship
CONTRIBORIGIN: Statements that discuss the desire to contribute to an individual's country of origin.
CONTRIBUSA: Statements about contributing to communities in the US
CULTTRAINING: Statements about cultural training

- ORIENTATION: Statements specifically about orientation sessions and programs pre-departure or post-arrival in the US.

DISCRIMINATION: Statements about discrimination, be it on race, religion, ethnicity, etc.
DOCUMENTATION: Statements about paperwork, processing, or identification documents, passports, ID cards, driver's license, social security, visas, etc.
DONATIONS: Statements about donations given or received
EDUCATION: Statements regarding education, schools, or learning opportunities, skills, training programs, educators, and teachers, etc.
ENGLISHLANG: Statements about English, ESL, English classes, English resources etc.
EMPLOYJOB: Statements about employment, jobs, or careers, including job hunting, employment assistance, career desires, etc.
FAMILYREUNIFIC: Statements about separation from or uniting with families.
FINANCESTAB: Statements about finances, including credit, money, income, etc.
FOOD: Statements about food, types of food, differences of food, groceries, cost of food, quality of food, water, availability etc.
FRIENDS: Statements about friends, friendship, and extended community.
HEALTH: Statements regarding health concerns, hospitals, medication
HOMEOWN: Statements discussing property ownership
HOUSING: Statements that mention housing, houses, apartments, lodging, etc.
IDENTITY: Statements about identity that include challenges, layers to identity
INCLUSION: Statements about inclusion, or lack of inclusion, and belonging
MENSTATE: Statements about issues explicitly facing men
MENTHEALTHTRAUMA – Statements about intergenerational trauma, personal trauma, mental health challenges, depression, anxiety, loneliness, etc.
OTHERLANG: Statements that mention other languages in any context
QUALOFLIFE: General statements about quality of life

RACE:[50] Statements discussing any aspects of race or ethnicity as a concept or identification of race or ethnicity by participants.
RELIGION[51] – Statements discussing any aspects of religion as a concept or identification of religion by participants.
SELFSUFFICIENT: Statements that talk about self-sufficiency
SAFETY: Statements about safety
TRANSPORTATION: Statements about transportation, access, or lack of access to, distance etc.
VOLUNTEERS: Statements about volunteering, volunteers, etc.
WOMENSTATE: Statements about issues explicitly facing women

Entities

ECBO: Statements discussing the role of Ethnic Based Community Organizations.
ELECTEDOFFIC: Statements that mention elected officials, whether local, state, or federal
FAITHENTITY: Statements discussing the role of faith entities, including churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.
GOVAGENCY: Statements that mention government agencies such as USCIS, or PRM, CBP, ICE, etc.
IOM: Statements that mention IOM
OTHER: Statements that reference other organization entities and local nonprofits
RESETTLEAGENCY: Statements about resettlement agencies, either generally or specific agencies.
UNHCR: Statements that mention UNHCR

Sentiment

CHALLENGE: Statements identifying a problem or challenge or barrier, or expressing a frustration or grievance of any kind
POSITIVE: Statements expressing optimism, satisfaction, hope or observed improvement of any kind

Demographics

AGEOFARRIVAL: Statement identifying age or age range of participant at arrival
ASYLEE: Statement identifying as asylee
COUNTRYOFORIGIN: Statement identifying country of origin
DEMOGRAPHOTHER: Any other non-stated demographic details
DISABILITY: Statements identifying as a person with physical and mental disabilities
EDUCATLEVEL: Statement identifying levels of education
GENDER: Statement identifying gender of participant
MARITALSTAT: Statement identifying marital status of participant
OTHERREFUGE: Statement identifying as forcibly displaced but not as an asylee, refugee, SIV
PARTICIPANTAGE: Statement identifying age of participant
REFUGEE: Statement identifying as refugee

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50 As a result of the iterative process that was conducted to ensure that no key subjects were omitted from analysis, subjects that were identified after the coding commenced were later applied, via a keyword search through all the data sets and applied accordingly. Key word search for RACE included: race, racis*(m/st), Black, White, Indigenous, Asian, Hispanic, AAPI, BIPOC, Latin(x), Jew, ethnic.

51 Code applied after commencement via a keyword search. Key word search for RELIGION included: faith, God, church, mosque, Muslim, Islam, Christ*(ian), Hindu*(ism), Buddhis*(t/m), Jew*(ish), Judaism, worship, religio(n/us), Sikh, Tao.

SEXORIENTATION: Statement identifying orientation of participant (LGBTQIA ETC)
SIV: Statement identifying as SIVs
USSTATE: Statement identifying US state location
USCITY: Statement identifying US city location

Great Quotes

GREATQUOTES: Applied to capture excerpts of any exceptional/notable expressions of opinion or experience