

# State Housing Needs Assessment: A Survey of State Refugee Coordinator Offices

Key Findings on Housing  
Challenges and Support



Refugee Housing  
SOLUTIONS

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# Introduction

Refugee Housing Solutions (RHS), an initiative of Church World Service (CWS), is composed of a dedicated team of housing and refugee resettlement specialists focused on helping all relevant stakeholders address the significant housing challenges faced by newcomers to the United States.

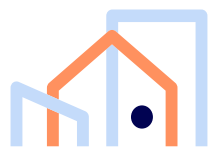
As part of the Enhancing Refugee Housing Solutions initiative funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), RHS has developed the Housing Hub and Directory. This innovative project is designed and underway to create a centralized platform that provides access to localized housing resources to newcomers eligible for ORR support.

To gain a deeper understanding of the housing landscape and challenges faced by these newcomers, RHS conducted the State Housing Needs Assessment of State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) offices. SRC offices are responsible for overseeing refugee resettlement programs and services at the state level, including coordinating housing, employment, and other support services for ORR-eligible populations.

The survey and its results are a critical component of the Enhancing Refugee Housing Solutions initiative, designed to identify current housing needs, gaps in resources, and opportunities for strategic interventions.

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected by an email-distributed survey using the platform JotForm sent to all SRC offices to gather information and insights directly from those engaged in refugee resettlement at the state level.

Survey results play a crucial role in informing RHS' ongoing work and in forming strategic partnerships. Survey findings will also shape ongoing Housing Hub and Directory development and broader housing solutions to better meet the needs of ORR-eligible populations.

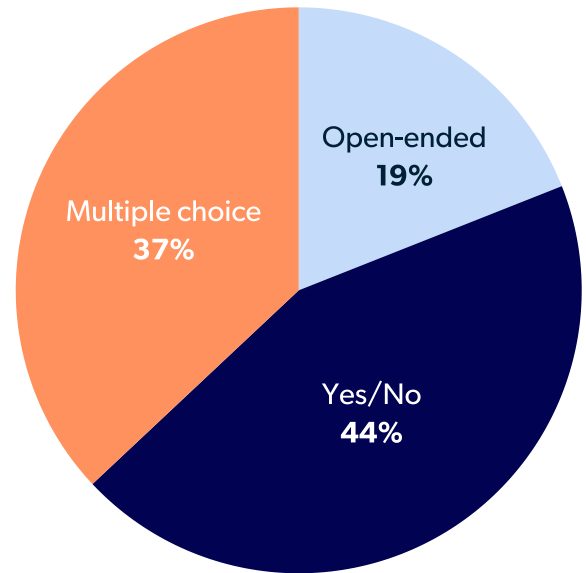


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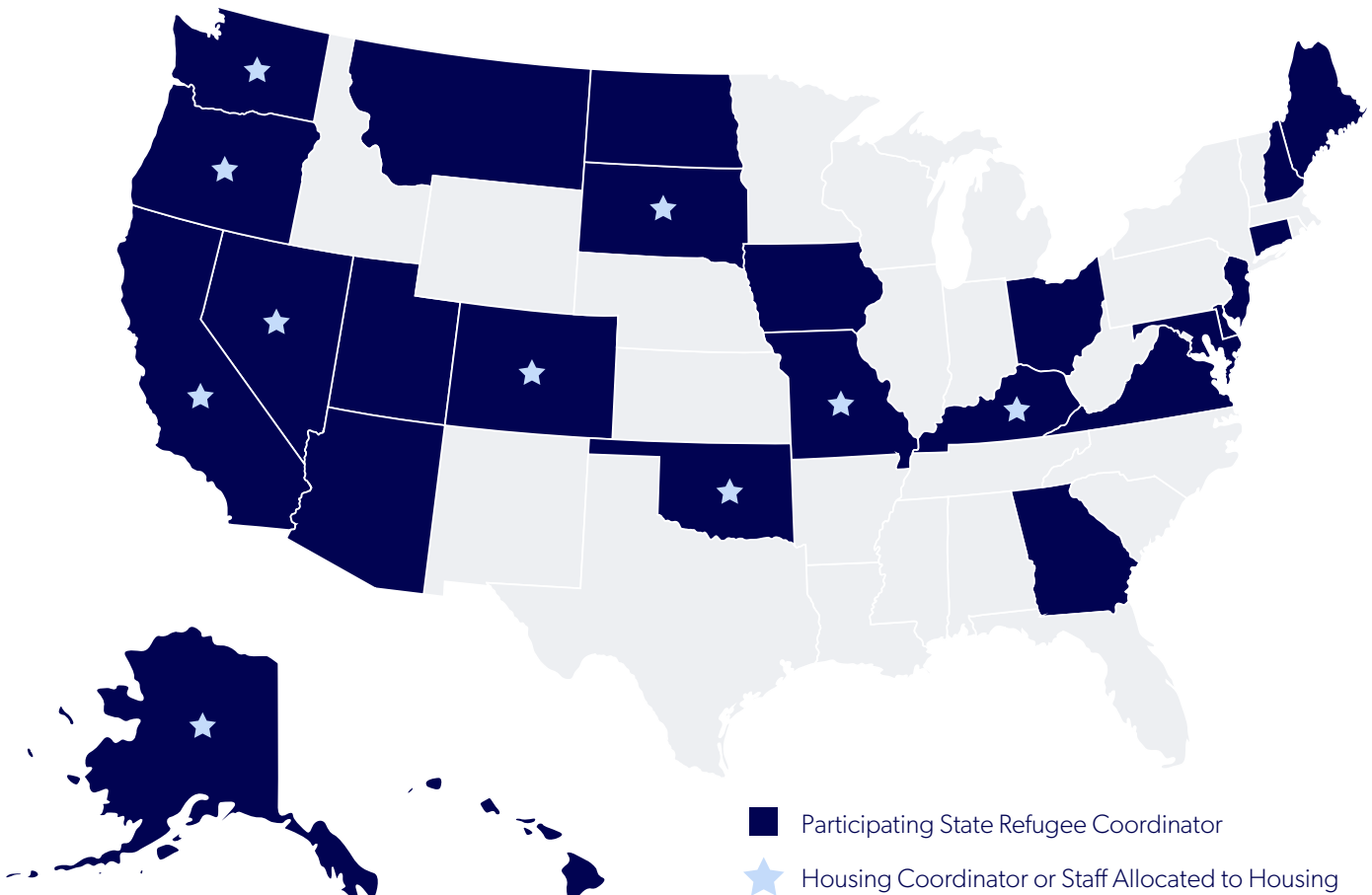
# Methodology and Demographics

## Email Survey

The State Housing Needs Assessment survey was designed to take about five minutes to complete. Individual surveys were sent directly to each State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) office. SRCs had the choice to send the survey to a state housing coordinator or another colleague best positioned to provide insights into the state's housing situation. The survey, conducted from May 30, 2024, to June 14, 2024, included 15 questions, with a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, allowing for quick completion while capturing valuable individual insights.



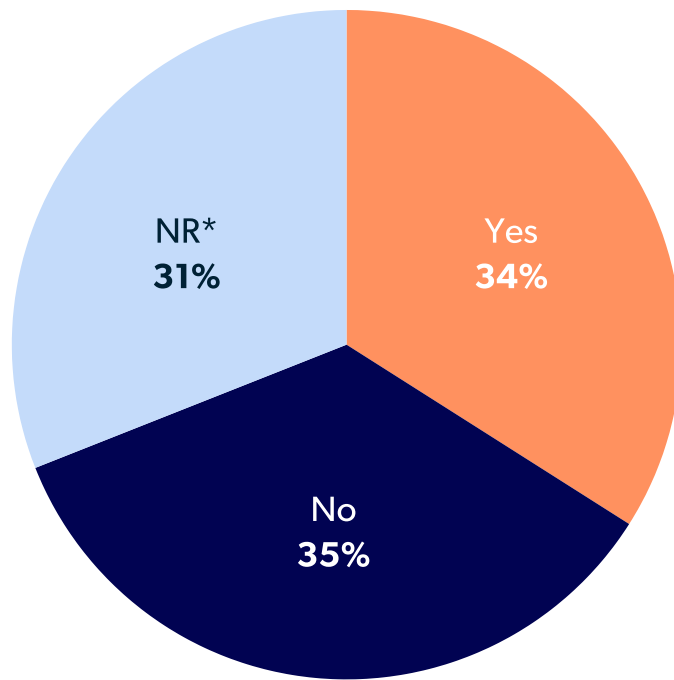
## Survey Engagement: Participating State Refugee Coordinators by State



## Respondent Information

The survey received **31 responses, representing 26 states**. Of these, 25 responses came from individual state representatives, and the remaining 6 responses were from representatives in Oklahoma. For Oklahoma, where multiple representatives submitted responses, the quantitative data was averaged to maintain consistency. Among the 26 states represented in the survey, ten states reported having a housing coordinator or housing-specific staff member on their team.

Do you have a housing coordinator or housing-specific staff on your team?



\*No Response

# Summary of Findings

## Increased Difficulty in Housing ORR-Eligible Populations

The survey showed that over 50% of respondents experienced an increased challenge in securing housing for ORR-eligible populations compared to the previous year. A majority of those respondents rated this difficulty as a 4 out of 5, indicating significant obstacles and strain on housing resources, which underscores the growing challenges faced by resettlement agencies in accommodating newcomer housing needs.

## High Rental Burden Among ORR-Eligible Populations

More than 30% of survey respondents reported that rental burdens for ORR-eligible individuals in their state fall between 61%-80% of their household income. This figure is well above the national average of 48%, highlighting severe financial strain and limited affordability for newcomers receiving ORR support. This elevated rent burden may suggest that many ORR-eligible households are struggling to make ends meet, potentially leading to broader issues of financial insecurity and instability.

## Limited Awareness and Availability of Supportive Services

Survey results showed two major barriers that resettlement offices face in accessing supportive community services: insufficient awareness of what local services are available and limitations

within local services. A majority of respondents highlighted these barriers, indicating opportunities to improve both awareness of existing resources and access to them in order to better meet needs.

## Widespread Housing Instability and Risk of Homelessness

Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that ORR-eligible populations in their state are either at risk of homelessness or currently experiencing homelessness. This finding points to significant housing instability among ORR-eligible individuals and highlights the need for enhanced support systems and interventions to prevent homelessness and promote long-term housing stability.

## Capacity Constraints of Resettlement Agencies

Approximately 35% of respondents reported that resettlement agencies in their state are operating at 76%-100% capacity concerning housing resources, signaling that many agencies are reaching or have reached their operational limits. This high level of capacity utilization indicates that resettlement agencies are likely struggling to manage the current demand for housing support, potentially leading to further challenges in addressing the needs of ORR-eligible populations.

# Results

## Housing Capacity Overview

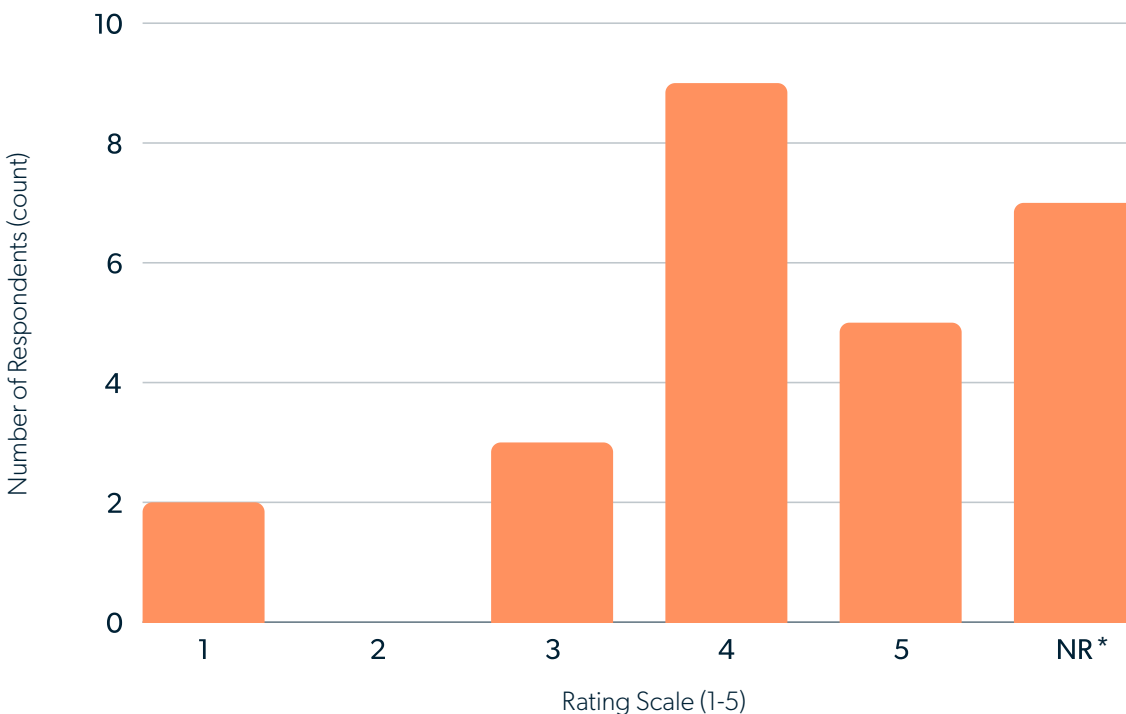
RHS conducted the Housing Needs Assessment Survey to comprehensively understand housing capacity trends. In the context of this survey, “capacity” refers to the ability of organizations and agencies to effectively manage and provide housing resources and support. This includes ensuring housing availability, operational efficiency, financial support allocation, and service provision, both direct and indirect.

Survey respondents were asked to **rate the level of difficulty in housing ORR-eligible populations this year compared to last**, using a scale of one to five, where one indicates “no change” and five indicates “significant change.” Of the 26 responses received, 35% of respondents rated the difficulty as 4, with the

second highest response rate of 19% being 5. To assess state and local housing capacity, RHS inquired about **budget allocation and capacity**. Nearly 46% of respondents reported that their organizations allocated between 0%-25% of the state refugee assistance budget to address newcomer housing needs. However, almost 50% of respondents selected “not applicable” or “not sure,” or left the response blank, which may indicate gaps in knowledge.

Approximately 35% of respondent states reported that their cities were operating at 76%-100% capacity for housing resources related to resettlement. Similarly, 54% of respondents indicated that their resettlement agencies were also operating at 76%-100% capacity when addressing housing needs.

How would you rate the level of difficulty in housing ORR-eligible populations this year compared to last year, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “No Change” and 5 indicates “Significant Change”?



\*NR = No Response

Related to this, around 70% of respondents **expressed interest in housing education, training, or other capacity-building sessions for their SRC team.**

Since survey info-data highlights considerable strain on housing resources for newcomers, it suggests that increased investment in housing support and comprehensive training for state offices are crucial to improving capacity and housing stability.

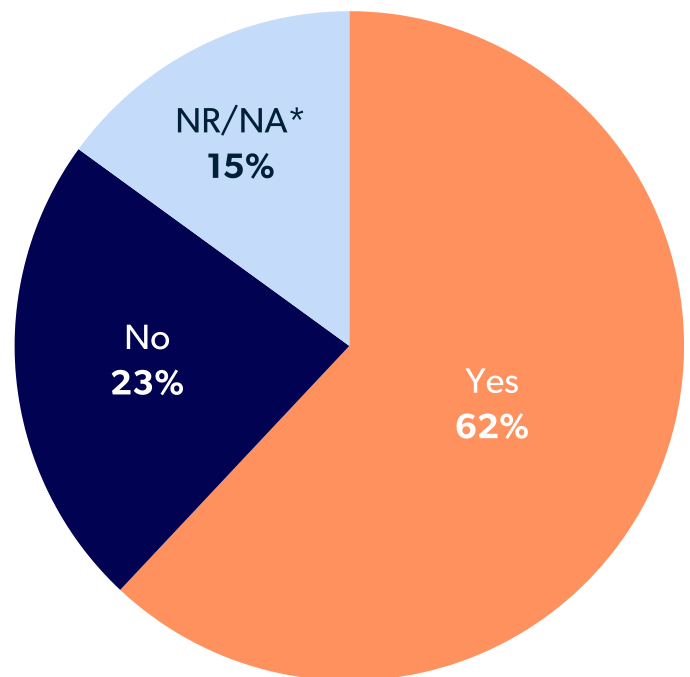
## Housing Instability and Rental Burden

To gain insight into rent burdens and housing instability, RHS specifically surveyed SRC offices about the issue. Rent burden is understood as the percentage of a household's income spent on rent, with amounts exceeding 30% indicating moderate to severe financial strain. Based on [U.S. Census data](#), the average rental burden for U.S. households has increased from a former standard of 30% to approximately 48% between 2018 and 2022. When assessing the rental burden of ORR-eligible populations, **more than a third** of survey respondents indicated rental burdens between 61%-80% in their state, well surpassing the national average. 23% of respondents reported ORR populations carried a similar rent burden to the national average, and only 4% reported a rental burden below the national averages.

Approximately **60% of respondents reported that ORR-eligible newcomer populations in their state are at risk of homelessness or currently experiencing homelessness.** Among those respondents, approximately 30% indicated that 0-25% of their city's resettlement agencies are facing challenges related to homelessness or housing instability among the ORR-eligible population. This suggests that

while a significant proportion of respondents acknowledge widespread risk, the level of impact on individual cities may vary, with some cities reporting lower percentages of affected households. These findings highlight a gap in housing stability for ORR-eligible individuals, emphasizing the need for increased resources and targeted interventions to address the severe financial strain and elevated risk of homelessness reported across states.

Are ORR-eligible individuals within your state currently experiencing homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless?



\*No Response/Not Applicable



# Additional Barriers to Securing Housing

To assess additional factors that could be associated with housing challenges experienced by ORR-eligible populations, RHS asked questions related to newcomer employment trends and engagement with community support systems. There were also questions about communication between state offices and local-level resettlement organizations.

## Employment Factors

Survey respondents were asked questions to better understand employment security and its impact on securing housing for ORR-eligible individuals in their state.

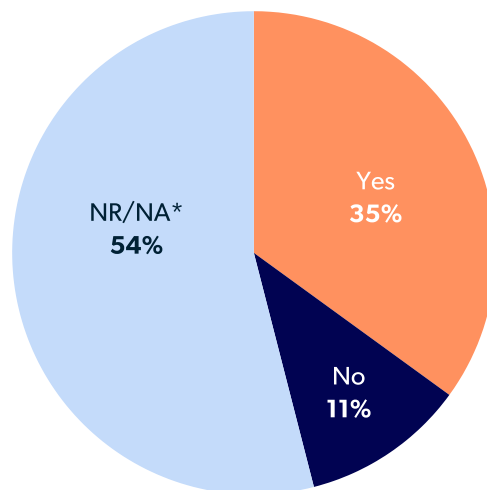
In response to the question, “Have any affiliates or ORR-eligible individuals in your state reported housing instability directly linked to challenges in securing sustainable employment in the past year?,” 35% of respondents agreed that housing instability contributed to difficulties in securing sustainable employment.

A follow-up question asked respondents to estimate the percentage of ORR-eligible individuals in their state who faced difficulty accessing stable housing due to limited employment opportunities. About one-third of respondents indicated that between 0%-25% of ORR-eligible individuals experienced this issue.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate trends in employment security for ORR-eligible individuals on a scale of 1 to 5 over the past year, with 1 being **Decreased Significantly** and 5 being **Increased Significantly**. The average rating was 3, suggesting employment security remained relatively unchanged.

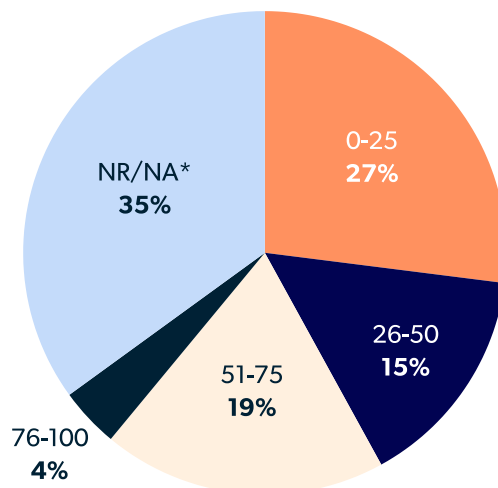
While employment security has remained stable, the data shows that housing instability may be a key factor impacting employment prospects. This suggests that addressing housing issues could be crucial to improving job stability for ORR-eligible populations.

Have any affiliates or ORR-eligible individuals in your state reported housing instability directly linked to challenges in securing sustainable employment in the past year?



\*No Response/Not Applicable

Please estimate the percentage of ORR-eligible individuals in your state who experience difficulty accessing stable housing due to limited employment opportunities.

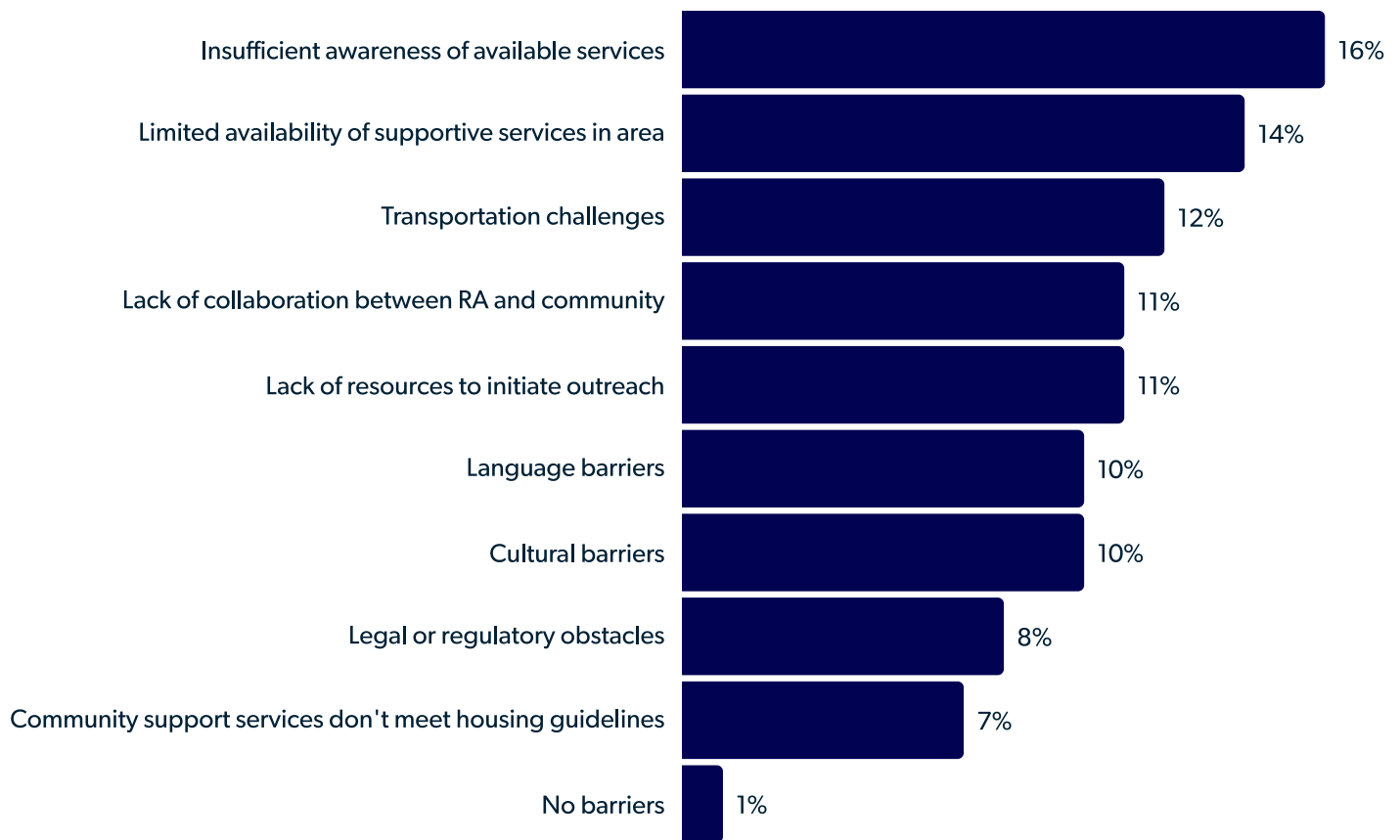


\*No Response/Non-Applicable

In the [2023 RHS Housing Needs Assessment Survey](#), 63% of participants — primarily local resettlement agencies and affiliates — reported that community-based organizations played a critical role in providing housing support for newcomers. Building on this, this State Housing Needs Assessment asked SRCs if they were aware of any barriers that resettlement offices in their state faced when accessing supportive community services to secure housing for ORR-eligible individuals. Only one respondent reported no barriers, while the others identified

an average of three. The most common obstacles were “insufficient awareness of available services” and “limited availability of supportive services in the area.”

### Engaging with Supportive Community Services\*



\*Supportive community services are defined as, but not limited to, partnering with the following organizations: community-based groups engaged in housing support, ethnic community organizations offering housing services, faith-based entities providing housing assistance, and/or higher education institutions engaging in resettlement support.

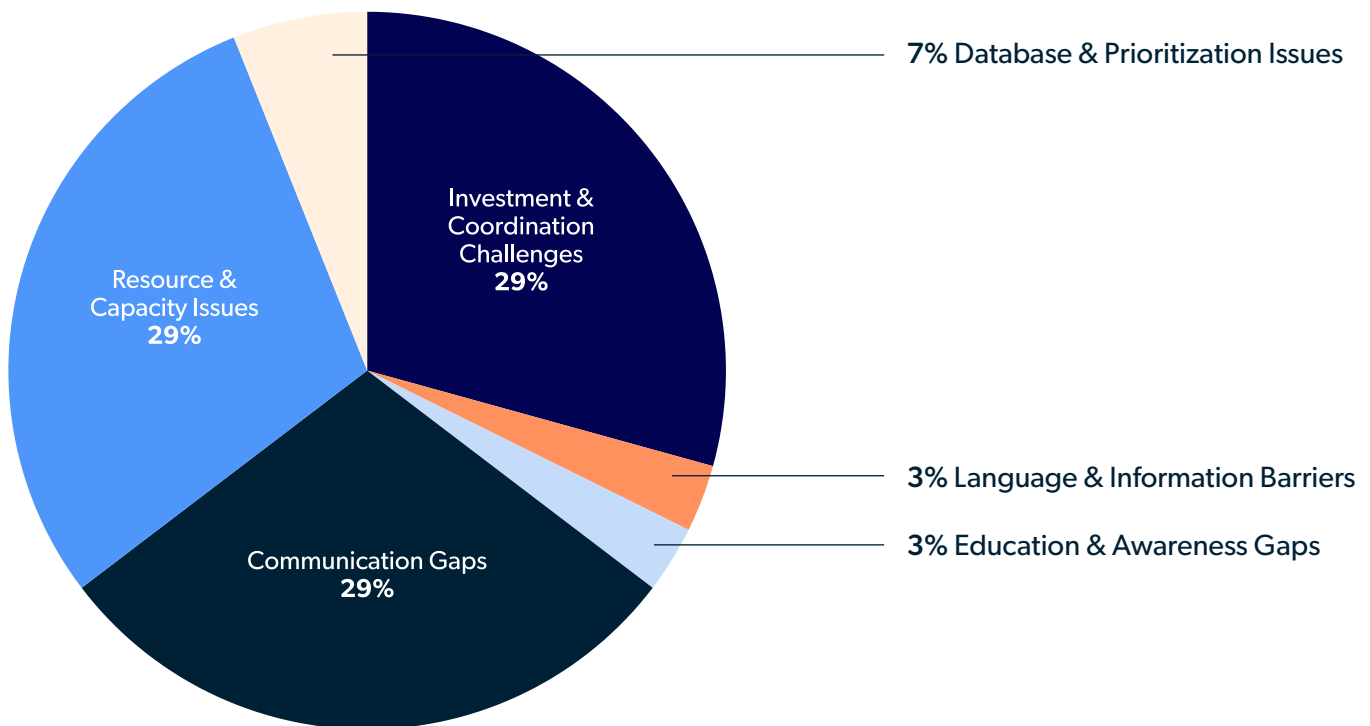
## Coordination Between State and Local Levels

The survey asked what respondents believed to be the key barriers preventing effective coordination and collaboration between state agencies and local resettlement agencies regarding housing support for ORR-eligible individuals. When summarizing qualitative responses, six main themes emerged:

- Investment and coordination challenges
- Language and information barriers
- Education and awareness gaps
- Communication gaps
- Resource and capacity issues
- Database and prioritization issues

Respondents most frequently highlighted “communication gaps between state and local agencies,” “housing capacity in state,” and “investment & coordination challenges” as the primary obstacles.

### Coordination Difficulties Between State and Local Levels



# Key Takeaways

Based on research findings, the following recommendations are made to address gaps and improve overall housing outcomes. First, high rates of “Not Applicable,” “Not Sure,” or “No Responses” may reflect challenges or gaps in tracking local housing conditions. To better support effective housing interventions and advocacy, strengthening the frequency of housing data tracking by State Refugee Coordinator offices could deepen their engagement with and understanding of local housing dynamics. **Enhanced frequency in tracking housing data and tailoring surveys to address state-specific conditions could offer a more nuanced and actionable perspective on housing needs, ensuring that support and solutions are effectively aligned with local realities.** Survey results could also indicate that housing challenges vary by state and that not all states found the questions posed to be relevant to their specific circumstances, underscoring the importance of surveys and solutions tailored to state-specific needs.

Second, RHS’ survey sample size limits the possibility to discuss causation theories. **However, survey results clearly indicate that ORR-eligible populations often face significant cost burdens due to either low incomes or challenges in accessing affordable housing, which is strongly associated with their overall housing accessibility. This situation is compounded by issues related to employment status, engagement with supportive community services, and communication gaps.** To address these challenges, RHS will further investigate the underlying causes of high cost-burden rates in states in future surveys, examining whether this is driven by expensive housing markets or other factors contributing to housing affordability issues. Further, a locality’s affordable housing stock, along with these

factors should be considered when determining funding and resource allocation at both the state and local levels.

Third, to improve communication between state government agencies and local social service/resettlement agencies, and to further improve housing resource-sharing capacity at the state level, RHS will continue to collaborate with a diverse group of stakeholders entities to ensure housing information accuracy for the Housing Hub and Directory. **Furthermore, RHS will advocate for the establishment of state-level task forces to address housing needs collaboratively and creatively.** RHS will also aim to provide capacity-building opportunities for interested SRC offices nationwide.

**Lastly, the survey findings highlight a critical need for improved support systems, both (i) increased availability of housing resources and (ii) enhanced awareness of existing supportive services.** Addressing these gaps is essential to reduce rental burdens and housing instability faced by ORR-eligible populations, and to reduce the risk of homelessness. With a large percentage of resettlement agencies operating at or near full capacity and many survey respondents expressing interest in custom education and training, there is a clear demand for capacity-building initiatives.

By designing and leading professional development opportunities, e.g., training workshops and facilitated peer learning sessions alongside new resources, RHS can empower State Refugee Coordinator offices and other stakeholders to better navigate the complexities of housing challenges, while seeking new housing opportunities, ultimately leading to more effective support for ORR-eligible individuals.

# Appendix

The table below shows how respondents answered housing capacity and budget-gearred multiple-choice questions. The column percentage ranges show how the responses are distributed for each question. Questions 2 and 3 showed a higher percentage of responses in the upper intervals, whereas Question 4 had the highest percentage of responses in the lower interval, with many respondents either not answering or indicating the question did not apply to them.

Question	Response Intervals (%)				
	0-25	26-50	51-75	76-100	NR/NA
Q2: Out of the total number of cities in your state, what percentage are at capacity regarding housing resources for resettlement?	8%	15%	19%	35%	23%
Q3: About what percentage of resettlement agencies or organizations within your state have expressed concerns about their capacity to address housing needs for ORR-eligible populations?	4%	8%	4%	54%	30%
Q4: About what percentage of the state's budget allocated for refugee resettlement or immigration services is dedicated to addressing housing needs for ORR-eligible individuals?	46%	8%	0%	0%	46%

NR/NA = No Response/Not Applicable

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Question	Response Intervals (%)					
	0-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81+	NR/NA
Q5: Can you provide an estimate of the average rental burden (percentage of income spent on rent) experienced by ORR-eligible individuals in your state?	0%	4%	23%	31%	4%	38%

Question	Response Intervals (%)				
	0-25	26-50	51-75	76-100	NR/NA
Q7: Can you estimate the percentage of ORR-eligible individuals in your state who are currently experiencing homelessness or housing instability?	27%	19%	8%	4%	42%

NR/NA = No Response/Not Applicable

# APPENDIX

## Survey Questions

1. How would you rate the level of difficulty in housing ORR-eligible populations this year compared to last year, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “No Change” and 5 indicates “Significant Change”?
  - 1 (No Change)
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5 (Significant Change)
2. Out of the total number of cities in your state, what percentage are at capacity regarding housing resources for resettlement?
  - 0-25%
  - 26% - 50%
  - 51% - 75%
  - 76% - 100%
  - Not Sure/ Not Applicable
3. About what percentage of resettlement agencies or organizations within your state have expressed concerns about their capacity to address housing needs for ORR-eligible populations?
  - 0-25%
  - 26% - 50%
  - 51% - 75%
  - 76% - 100%
  - Not Sure/ Not Applicable
4. About what percentage of the state’s budget allocated for refugee resettlement or immigration services is dedicated to addressing housing needs for ORR-eligible individuals?
  - 0-25%
  - 26% - 50%
  - 51% - 75%
  - 76% - 100%
  - Not Sure/ Not Applicable
5. Can you provide an estimate of the average rental burden (percentage of income spent on rent) experienced by ORR-eligible individuals in your state?
  - 0% -20%
  - 21% - 40%
  - 41% - 60%
  - 61% - 80%
  - 81% +
  - Not Sure/Not Applicable

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6. Are ORR-eligible individuals within your state currently experiencing homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure/Not Applicable
7. Can you estimate the percentage of ORR-eligible individuals in your state who are currently experiencing homelessness or housing instability?
  - 0-25%
  - 26% - 50%
  - 51% - 75%
  - 76% - 100%
  - Not Sure/ Not Applicable
8. Have any affiliates or ORR-eligible individuals in your state reported housing instability directly linked to challenges in securing sustainable employment in the past year?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure/Not Applicable
9. Please estimate the percentage of ORR-eligible individuals in your state who experience difficulty accessing stable housing due to limited employment opportunities.
  - 0-25%
  - 26% - 50%
  - 51% - 75%
  - 76% - 100%
  - Not Sure/ Not Applicable
10. Over the past year, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Decreased Significantly” and 5 being “Increased Significantly,” how would you rate the trend in employment security for ORR-eligible individuals in your state?
  - 1 (Decreased Significantly)
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5 (Increased Significantly)
11. Do you have a housing coordinator or housing-specific staff member on your team?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure/Not Applicable



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12. Are you interested in participating in specified housing training or capacity-building sessions for SRC offices?
- Yes
  - No
13. In your opinion, what strategies or interventions would be most effective in providing more access to affordable housing for ORR-eligible individuals at the state level? [Open-Ended Question]
14. What barriers do resettlement offices face in using supportive community services\* to secure housing for ORR-eligible individuals? [Select all that apply]
- No Barriers
  - Lack of Resources to initiate outreach
  - Language barriers
  - Community support services don't meet housing guidelines
  - Limited availability of supportive services in area
  - Lack of collaboration between resettlement offices and community organizations
  - Cultural barriers
  - Insufficient awareness of available services
  - Transportation challenges
  - Legal or regulatory obstacles
  - Other
15. In your opinion, what are the key barriers preventing effective coordination and collaboration between state agencies and local resettlement agencies regarding housing support for ORR-eligible individuals? [Open-Ended Question]

***Disclosure:** These survey results reflect the responses of 31 State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) team members and are not representative of the entire state's housing situation. While the data provides valuable insights into the housing conditions affecting Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) populations, the small sample size limits the ability to make causal claims. However, the findings offer useful estimates and shed light on broader housing systems at play in these states.*



[refugeehousing.org](https://refugeehousing.org)

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