

Enhancing Refugee Housing Solutions Annual Housing Needs Assessment Report

Housing Stakeholders

Fiscal Year 2026



Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Enhancing Refugee Housing Solutions Annual Housing Needs Assessment Report

Housing Stakeholders

Fiscal Year 2026

Refugee Housing Solutions (RHS) is an initiative of Church World Service (CWS) funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. RHS provides resources, capacity building, learning courses, and opportunities for innovative solutions-centered partnerships to resettlement and housing stakeholders to increase access to affordable housing for refugee families and newcomers.

CWS received a cooperative agreement through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, CA #90XR0092.

The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.



September 2026

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology & Demographics	5
Summary of Findings	8
Findings	9
Ongoing Learning & Connection	16
Conclusion	17

Introduction

Refugee Housing Solutions (RHS), an initiative of Church World Service (CWS), is supported by a team of housing and refugee resettlement specialists dedicated to addressing housing challenges and developing practical, scalable solutions for Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)-eligible populations across the United States. Through learning opportunities, resource development, and national coordination, RHS works to strengthen housing availability and stability and support long-term self-sufficiency for newcomers and the communities that welcome them.

For the past two years, RHS has administered two annual surveys: one for resettlement agencies and another for a broader group of partners serving ORR-eligible populations. Together, these surveys provide a national snapshot of emerging housing trends, housing-related challenges, and promising practices.

This report presents findings from the FY 2026 survey of landlords and property managers. The survey was designed to better understand the challenges and opportunities landlords and property managers encounter when renting to refugees and other newcomers, as well as factors that may influence their willingness to expand access to housing for ORR-eligible populations.

Findings will help RHS identify priority areas for technical assistance, resources, and other support to strengthen relationships with housing providers and improve housing outcomes and optimize services, ensure efficient use of funds, and implement effective solutions that enhance housing stability and self-sufficiency for ORR-eligible populations.

Methodology & Demographics

EMAIL SURVEY

The FY 2026 *Enhancing Refugee Housing Solutions Annual Housing Needs Assessment* survey was designed to take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey was distributed via email to landlords and property managers in the existing RHS network and promoted through RHS social media channels.

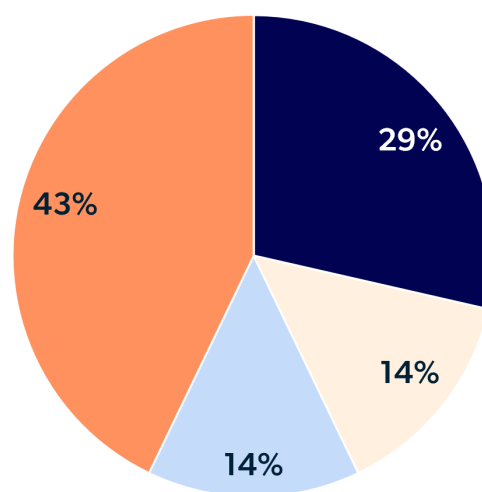
A screening question was used to ensure that respondents were landlords or property managers. The survey sought to understand the challenges, barriers, and opportunities landlords and property managers encounter when considering renting to, or expanding rentals to, refugees and other ORR-eligible populations. The findings are intended to guide RHS in identifying priority areas for supporting housing providers and expanding access to housing for newcomers. The survey was open from June 1-30, 2026.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION

The survey received 14 responses from 11 states. Half of respondents were property owners or landlords, while the remainder primarily represented property management organizations. Respondents managed a range of housing portfolios. To know the size of properties managed, respondents were asked how many units they managed. Chart A below shows that 43% managed between 100 and 999 units, while 29% managed 1-4 units and 28% managed 20-99 units.

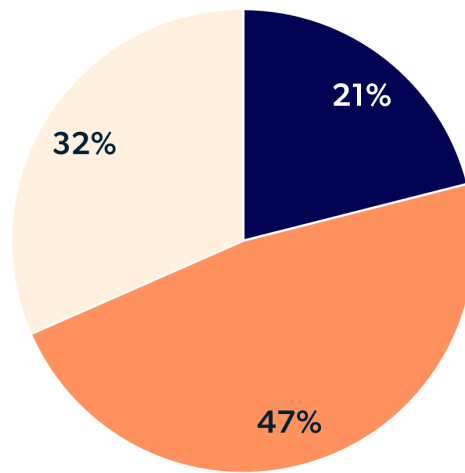
Respondents were asked about the makeup of their rental portfolio. Chart B shows that across respondent portfolios, 47% offered market-rate units, 32% offered mixed-income units, and 21% accepted Section 8 vouchers.

Chart A. Size of property managed (n=14)



■ 1-4 units ■ 20-49 units ■ 50-99 units ■ 100-999 units

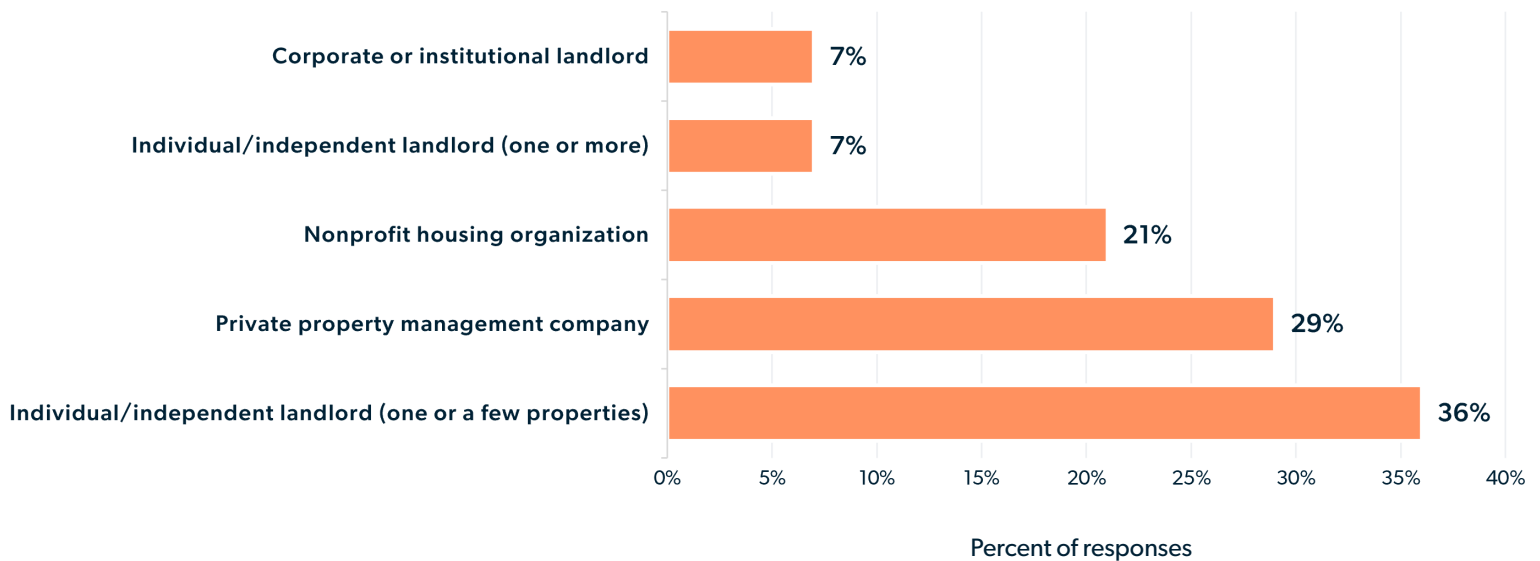
Chart B. Makeup of rental portfolio (n=14)



■ Accept Section 8 vouchers ■ Market-rate units ■ Mixed-income units

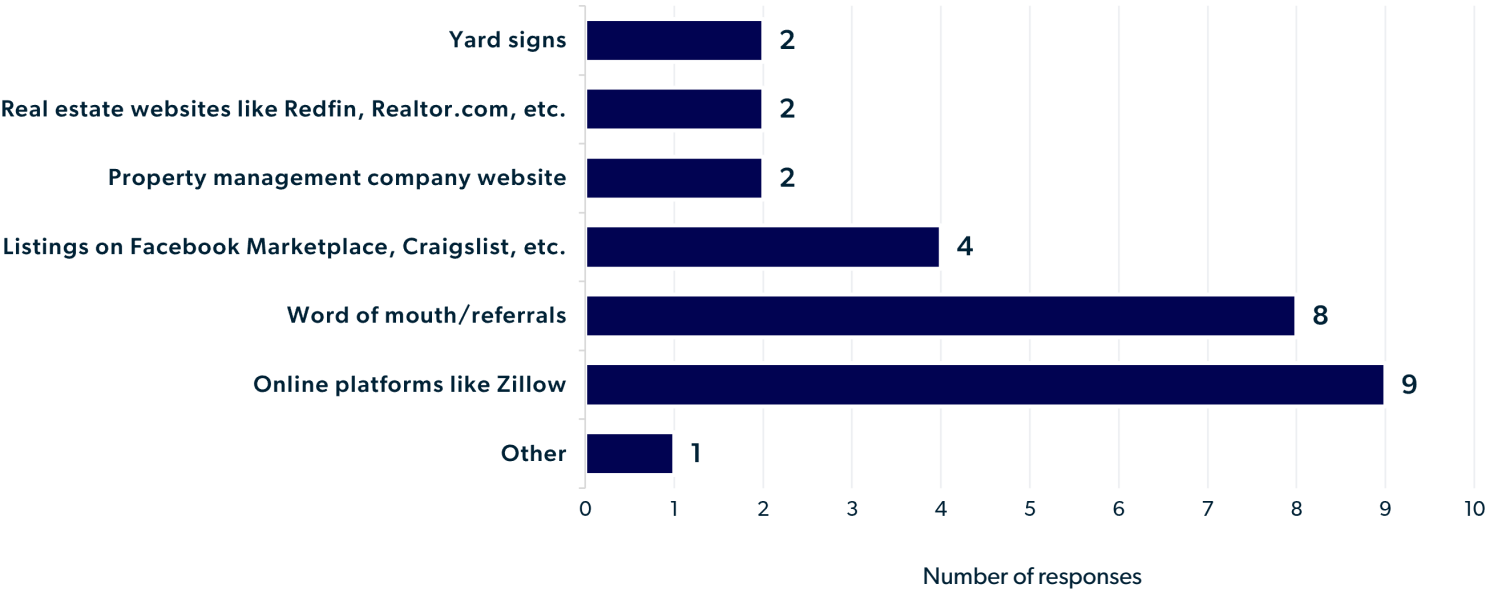
The survey also asked about the organization/company type of respondent. Chart C shows that more than one-third of respondents (36%) were individual or independent landlords, while 29% were affiliated with private property management companies and 21% represented nonprofit housing organizations. One respondent represented a corporate institution, and one was an individual landlord.

Chart C. Organization/company type (n=14)



The survey asked, “By what timeframe do you generally need a vacant unit to be filled in order to meet your operational or financial targets?” Most respondents reported needing to fill vacant units within two to four weeks (43%). Another 29% reported a typical vacancy-filling timeframe of one to two weeks, while 21% reported needing to fill units within one week. Respondents were also asked how they share vacancies. Chart D shows that respondents most commonly reported using online and referral-based channels to market vacancies, like Zillow, and word-of-mouth and referrals, as well as Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist.

Chart D. Listing method (n=28)



Summary of Findings

The survey explored respondents' familiarity with refugee and newcomer populations, the challenges and successes they have encountered as landlords, their openness to renting to this population going forward, and the types of support that would facilitate the process. It also examined operational practices, such as screening criteria, documentation requirements, and tenant onboarding, that shape how accessible housing is for newcomer applicants. The findings below are intended to inform how RHS and its partners can better support landlords, reduce barriers for refugee and newcomer tenants, and strengthen connections between landlords and available resources.

The results point to strong potential for expanding housing opportunities for this population. Most respondents were already familiar with renting to newcomers (71% very familiar), 86% had done so in the past, and 93% were interested in continuing going forward. Experience was also largely positive: 71% reported feeling very confident in their ability to rent to newcomers successfully.

Respondents identified communication and language challenges, payment reliability, cultural differences, and documentation as their key concerns. At the same time, they were open to a range of solutions, including tenant orientation, rental guarantees or direct payments, interpretation services, housing navigators, and organizational tenant support. On documentation specifically, half of respondents said they were very open to accepting alternative forms, and another 36% were somewhat open.

The findings suggest that landlords and property managers are a receptive and important housing resource. Strengthening connections between housing providers and resettlement organizations, paired with practical tools to address documentation, communication, and onboarding, could help convert this existing willingness into greater housing availability for newcomers. There is also room to build awareness of RHS resources directly: none of the respondents had previously visited the Housing Hub and Directory, and 71% expressed interest in receiving the RHS newsletter.

Findings

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Chart E shows that the majority of respondents were very familiar with renting to refugees and other newcomer tenants (71%). Twenty-one percent were somewhat familiar, while one respondent was not familiar at all.

Eighty-six percent had rented to refugees or other newcomer populations in the past, and 83% reported renting to 50 or fewer refugees or other newcomers in the past 12 months (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026). Among respondents who had rented to this population (12 respondents), 75% reported that the tenant had always been connected to a resettlement provider or other supporting organization, while 17% said this was sometimes the case.

Chart F below shows that respondents generally reported having easy to moderately easy experiences: 17% described their experience as very easy, 25% as somewhat easy, 33% as moderate, and 25% as somewhat difficult. No respondents reported having a very difficult experience.

Chart E. Familiarity renting to refugees/newcomers (n=14)

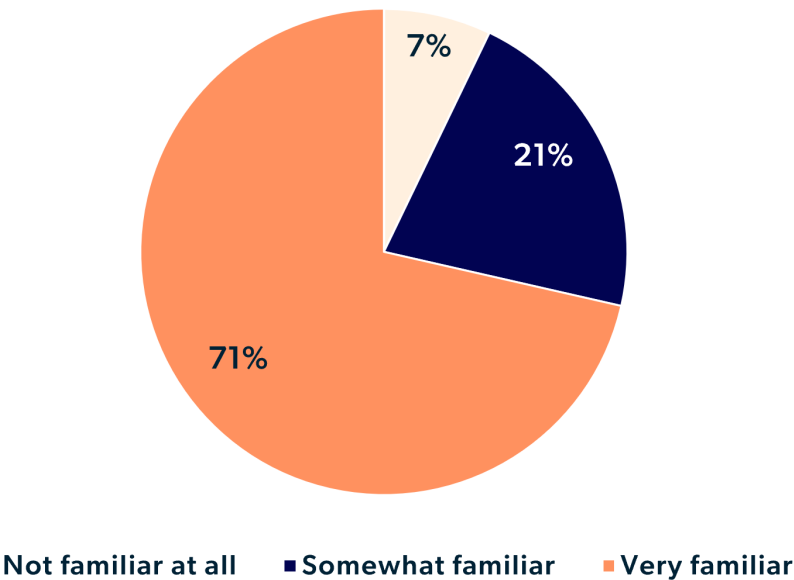
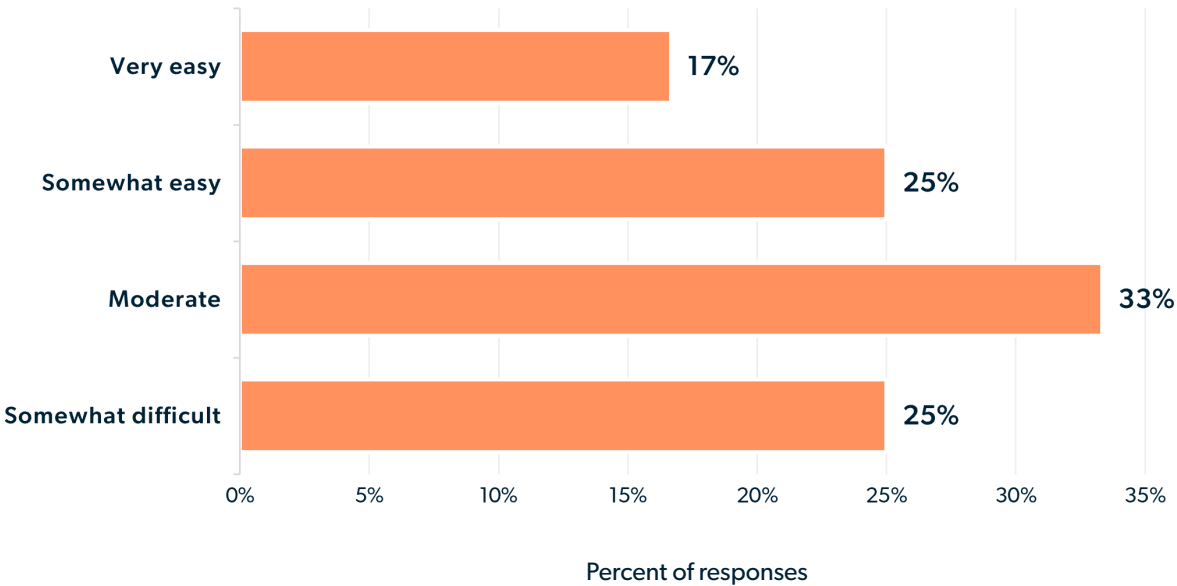


Chart F. Experience renting to refugees/newcomers (n=12)

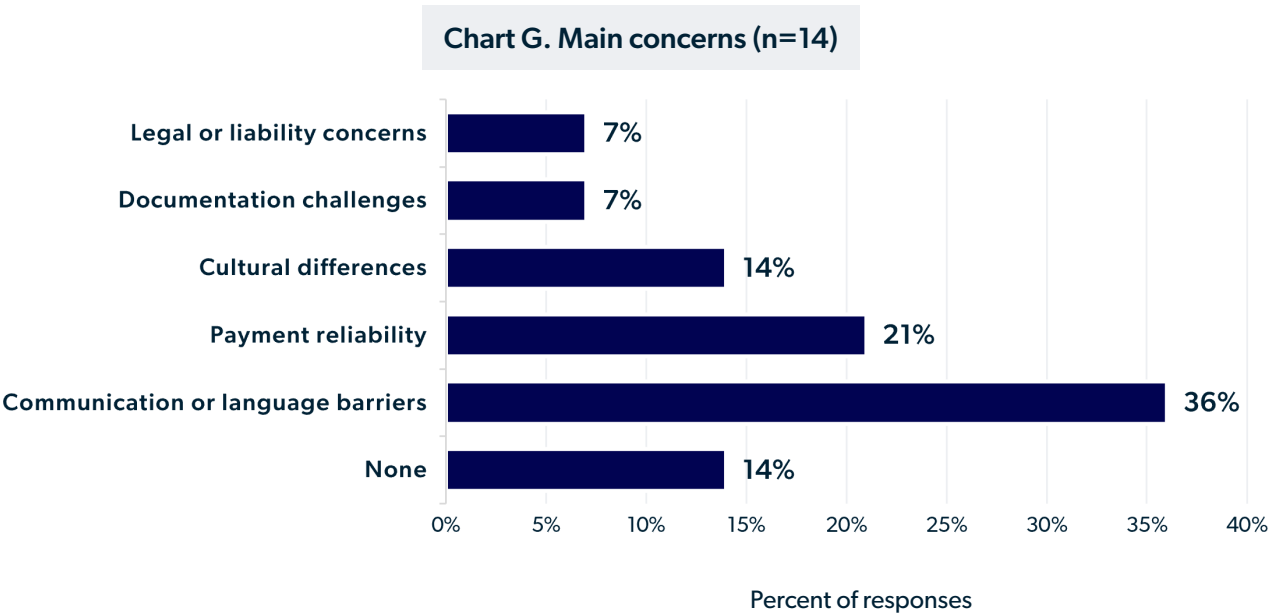


Importantly, 93% of respondents reported that they would be interested in renting to refugees and other newcomer populations in the future, while one respondent was unsure.

These findings suggest that there is a pool of participating landlords that is both experienced and receptive: most already have direct experience renting to this population, and nearly all want to continue. This existing base may be a valuable resource for peer referrals and word-of-mouth recruitment of new landlords. At the same time, the fact that a quarter of respondents described their experience as somewhat difficult indicates that even willing, experienced landlords encounter friction, and identifying ways to support existing landlords could be beneficial.

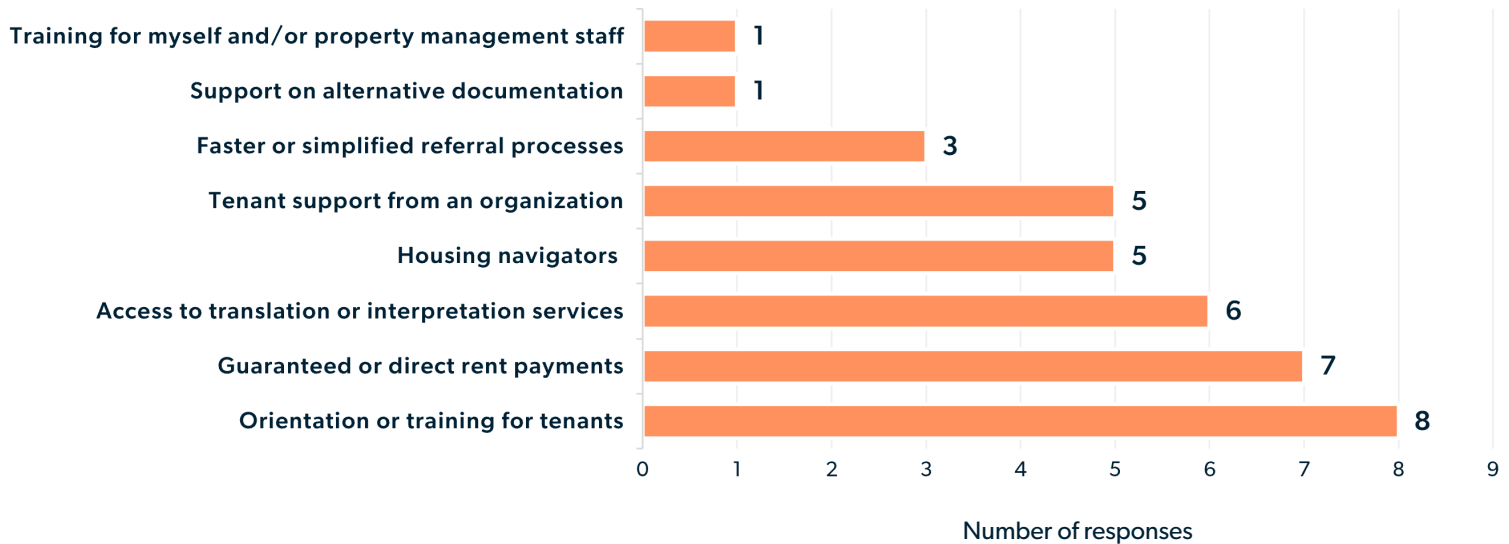
SUPPORT

To understand what type of support would be most helpful, respondents were asked about common challenges they face when renting to this population. Survey results show communication and language barriers were the most commonly reported concern (36%). This is depicted in Chart G along with other concerns. Other concerns included payment reliability (21%) and cultural differences (14%), followed by documentation challenges, such as paystubs and IDs, (7%) and legal or liability concerns (7%). Notably, 14% of respondents reported having no concerns about renting to this population).



The types of support respondents identified as most helpful are in Chart H, and included tenant orientation or training (22%), guaranteed or direct rent payments (19%), access to translation or interpretation services (17%), housing navigators with knowledge of both cultural backgrounds and housing systems (14%), and tenant support from a resettlement provider or other community organization (14%).

Chart H. Helpful support (n=36)

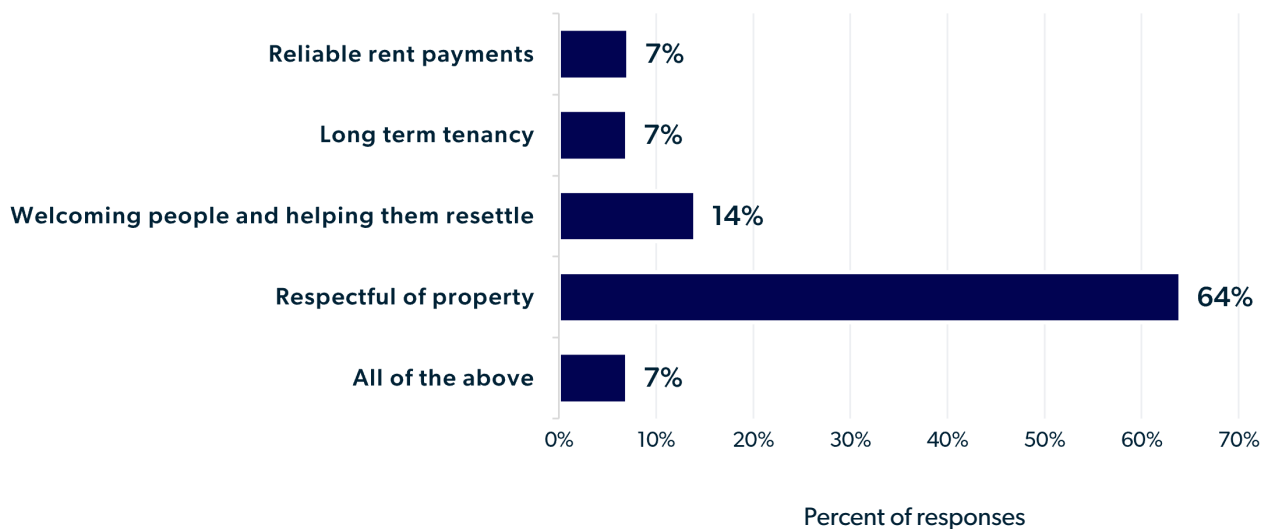


These results suggest that communication, rather than tenant reliability or risk, is the primary friction point landlords experience. The strong preference for training, translation services, and third-party navigators indicates that support programs focused on bridging communication gaps, rather than purely financial incentives, may address the most commonly cited concern directly. That said, the meaningful share of respondents pointing to guaranteed or direct rent payments suggests that financial assurance still plays a complementary role and shouldn't be deprioritized in favor of communication supports alone.

PERCEPTIONS & NEAR-TERM RENTING

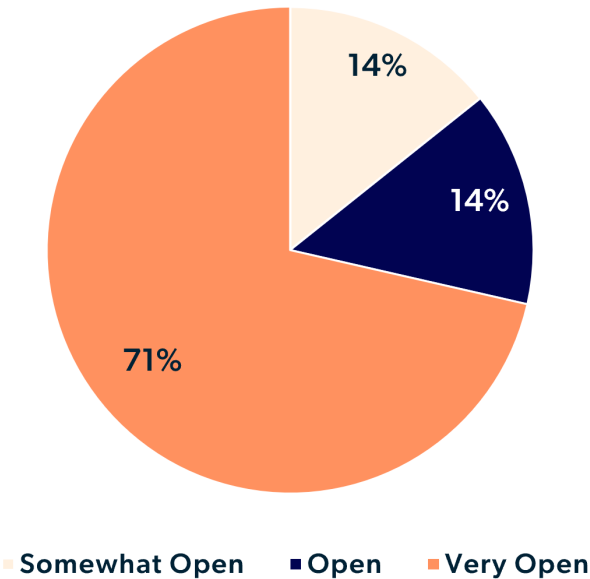
Being respectful of property was the most commonly identified positive quality associated with renting to refugees and other newcomer populations, with 64% of respondents selecting this response. Other positive perceptions included tenants being welcoming and helpful (14%), reliable rent payments (7%), and long-term tenancy (7%). These responses are shown in Chart I below.

Chart I. Associated positive qualities (n=14)



The majority of respondents (71%) reported being very confident in their ability to successfully rent to refugees and other newcomer populations and 71% reported being very open to renting to this population over the next 12 months (see Chart J).

Chart J. Openness to renting to refugees/newcomers in next 12 months (n=14)



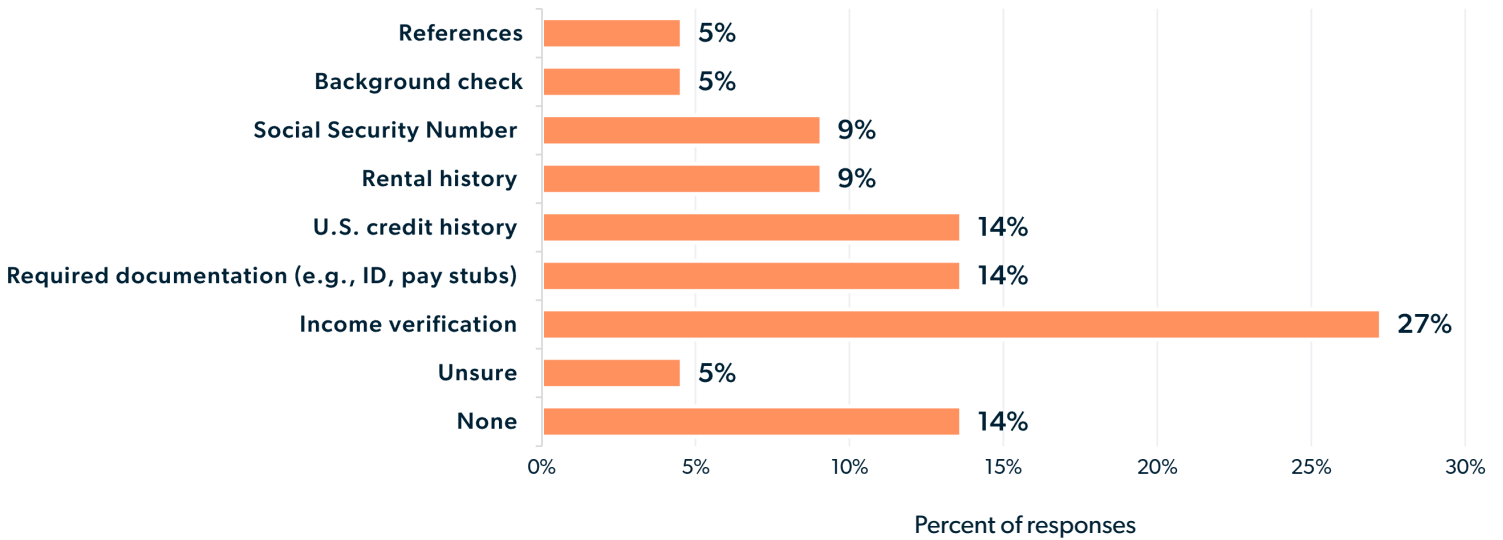
The positive perceptions, including reliable rent payments indicate that, contrary to common assumptions about newcomer tenants representing higher financial risk, landlords with direct experience associate this population with financial dependability and remain very open to renting to this population. This perception, combined with high confidence and openness to renting again, suggests that positive experience of landlords, rather than abstract outreach or messaging, may be the most persuasive factor in expanding a landlord base. Highlighting these firsthand accounts in outreach materials could be an effective way to increase rental properties.

CHALLENGES TO RENTING

When asked which application requirements may be difficult for refugees and other newcomer populations to meet, respondents most frequently identified income verification (27%), required documentation (e.g., ID and paystubs) (14%), and U.S. credit history (14%). These responses are shown in Chart K.

Given that ORR-eligible populations and other newcomers sometimes have varying types of related housing documents, such as extensive employment history if they’re new to a job, or U.S. credit and rental history, the survey asked, “In the application process, how open are you to accepting alternative forms of documentation for refugee or other newcomer applicant.” Respondents showed substantial openness to accepting alternative forms of documentation during the application process: 50% of respondents were **very open** to doing so, while 36% were **somewhat open** and 14% were unsure. This is important because alternative forms of documentation can make it possible for ORR eligible populations to find housing, while at the same time, housing providers can have clear guidelines to ensure all applicants meet the same standards, even if proof of those standards looks a little different.

Chart K. Difficult requirements (n=22)

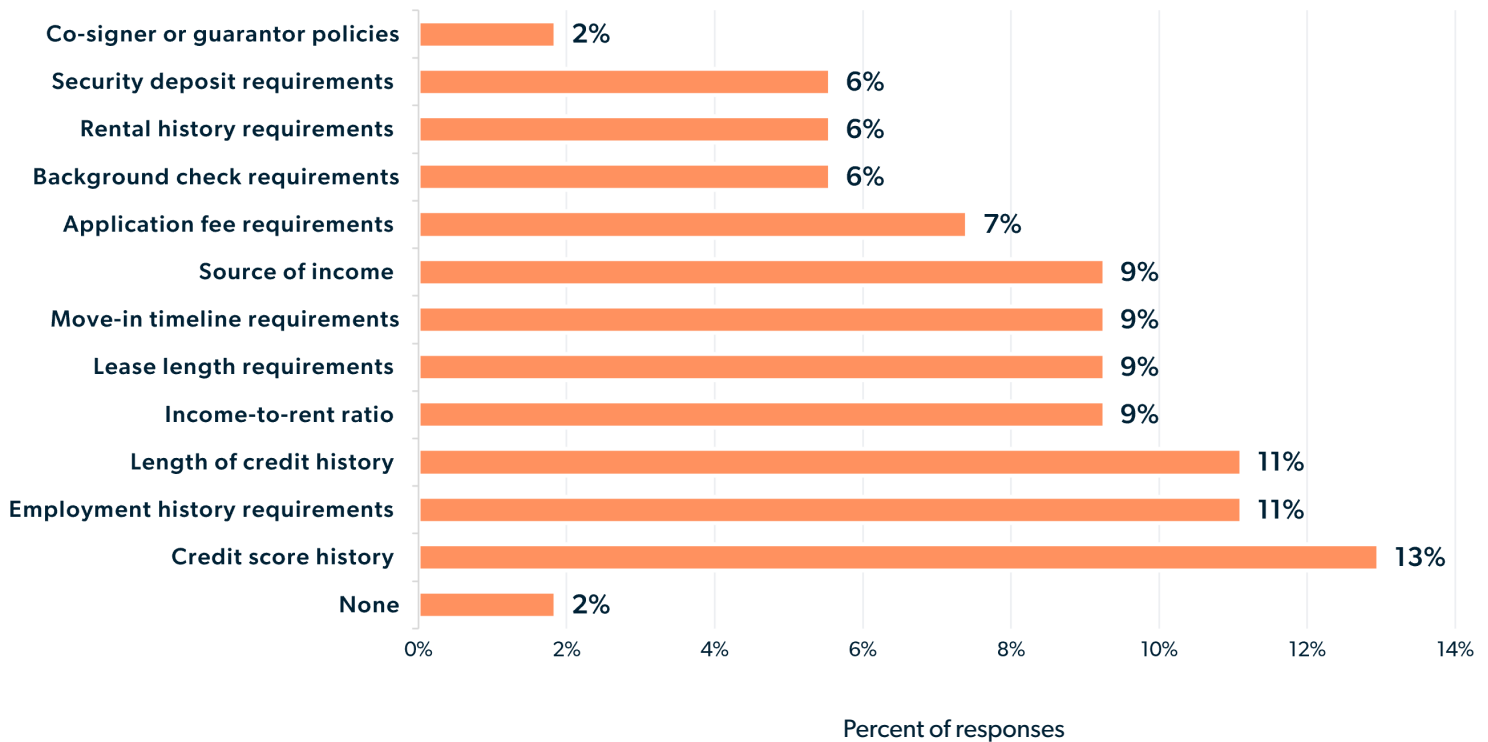


Respondents were asked to select alternative forms of documentation they would consider in their rental process (they could select as many as they would consider). Chart L below shows the alternative forms of documentation respondents were most willing to consider included verification from resettlement providers (17%), rental guarantee funds (17%), letters from community-based organizations (14%), foreign identification documents (14%), and employer verification from U.S. or overseas employers (10%). Very few respondents (2%) selected “none.”

Chart L. Alternative documents respondents would consider (n=42)



Chart L. Screening criteria willing to adjust (n=54)



Respondents were also asked what screening criteria they would be willing to adjust for ORR-eligible and other newcomer populations. They were given the option to select as many criteria as they would consider. Their responses show there is a willingness to adjust screening criteria for newcomer applicants. Chart M shows the criteria most frequently identified for potential adjustment included credit score history (13%), length of credit history (11%), employment history requirements (11%), source of income (9%), and income-to-rent ratio (9%). Only two percent selected “none.”

These findings suggest there is an opportunity to work with landlords and property managers to create standard policies and processes for accepting alternative forms of documentation and adjusting their screening criteria for their rental applications for ORR-eligible and other newcomer populations. Income verification, documentation, and credit history are the requirements most likely to disqualify newcomer applicants under conventional criteria, yet respondents expressed considerable openness to alternative documentation and adjusted screening standards. This suggests that formalizing and publicizing a set of accepted alternatives, such as resettlement provider verification, could reduce barriers without requiring landlords to change their underlying risk tolerance.

OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

The survey asked respondents about their overall operational challenges and onboarding processes in order to gain insight into existing challenges and practices that could be further examined and supported when helping companies and organizations that work with refugees and newcomers. The most commonly reported operational challenges respondents face with **all tenants** are shown in Chart N and include communication (30%), turnover and vacancy management (18%), inspections and compliance (18%), maintenance requests (18%), and paperwork and administrative tasks (15%).

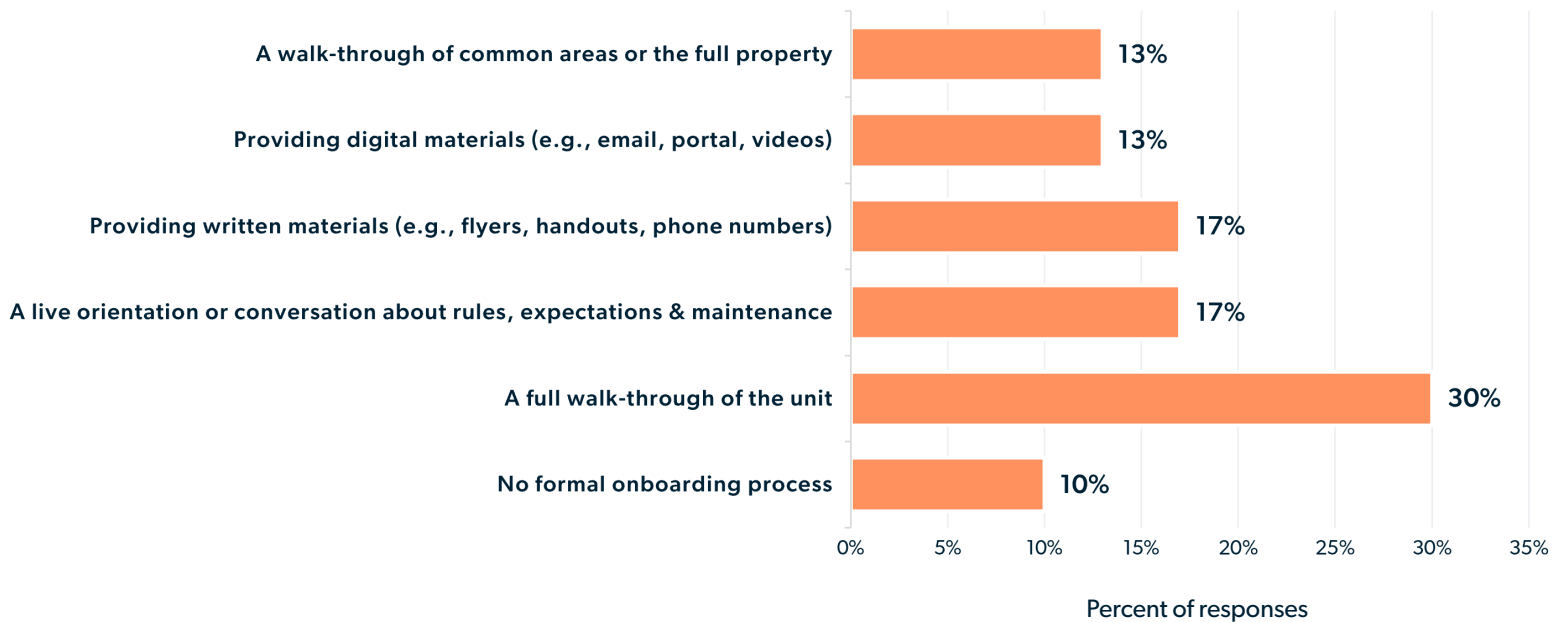
Chart N. Top operational challenges (n=33)



The survey asked, “Which of the following best describes your current onboarding/orientation process?” Chart O shows respondents most commonly reported conducting a full walkthrough of the unit (30%), followed by a live orientation or conversation covering rules, expectations, and maintenance (17%), providing written materials, such as flyers, handouts, and contact information (17%), a walkthrough of common areas (13%), providing digital materials (13%), some (10%) reported not having a formal onboarding process.

These data suggest that highlighting the importance of walkthroughs, and providing walkthrough guidance tailored to refugees and newcomers, is likely a useful area to focus on.

Chart O. Current onboarding/orientation offered (n=30)



It is also notable that the top operational challenges shared — communication, turnover, inspections, and maintenance — are not specific to newcomer tenants but affect landlords' entire tenant base. This suggests that improvements to general onboarding and communication practices, such as more structured walkthroughs or standardized written materials, would likely benefit all tenants while also reducing friction for refugees and newcomers specifically. Given that walkthroughs are already the dominant onboarding practice, embedding newcomer-specific content into that existing routine may be a lower-effort way to reach this population than building an entirely separate onboarding process.

Ongoing Learning & Connection

Awareness of RHS resources appears to be an area for further engagement. None of the respondents reported having previously visited the Refugee Housing Hub and Directory, while 71% expressed interest in staying connected by receiving the RHS newsletter.

Respondents also showed a positive perception of HUD housing counseling programs among those familiar with them. Half (50%) viewed renting to tenants enrolled in a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing counseling program as **very helpful**, while 43% reported being unsure or unfamiliar with the program.

The complete absence of prior visits to the Refugee Housing Hub and Directory, paired with strong interest in the RHS newsletter, suggests an awareness gap rather than a lack of interest. This points to outreach and visibility as a more pressing need than resource development itself. Similarly, the near-even split between positive views and unfamiliarity with HUD housing counseling programs suggests that simply raising awareness of the program could meaningfully increase its use.

Conclusion

The survey was designed to better understand the challenges and opportunities landlords and property managers encounter when renting to refugees and other newcomers, as well as factors that may influence their willingness to expand access to housing for ORR-eligible populations. The findings indicate that landlords and property managers are open to renting to refugees and other newcomer populations, with many having prior experience and positive perceptions. The primary challenges identified, particularly communication, payment reliability, and documentation, appear to be areas where targeted information sharing and technical assistance can make a meaningful difference.

RHS has an established track-record of providing technical assistance, creating resources, and other supports that help to strengthen housing partners and improve housing outcomes for ORR-eligible populations.

The survey results indicate that RHS's priority areas for this population moving forward should focus on supporting landlord engagement. Offering tenant orientation, translation services, and flexible documentation options could help expand the pool of housing providers willing and able to rent to ORR eligible populations and other newcomers. Technical assistance and resources should be provided to help established and new housing partners develop alternative documentation approaches and guidelines, and to tailor their existing onboarding procedures. RHS could also play an important role in connecting housing partners with translation services and developing programming to support housing navigators.

The results also point to the importance of RHS's ongoing network and partnership development work. With many housing providers interested and willing to rent to this population, sharing stories, successes, and firsthand experiences with new partners will be valuable. The strong interest in future engagement from respondents also presents an opportunity for RHS to continue to build relationships with housing providers and connect them with practical resources and tools that support successful, sustainable tenancies. Continuing to raise awareness of RHS, its existing resources, and the Housing Hub and Directory will also be important for connecting housing providers with practical tools and support.



Refugee Housing Solutions (RHS) is an initiative of Church World Service (CWS) funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement.

RHS provides resources, capacity building, learning courses, and opportunities for innovative solutions-centered partnerships to resettlement and housing stakeholders to increase access to affordable housing for refugee families and newcomers.

CWS received a cooperative agreement through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, CA #90XR0092.

The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.