



RESEARCH REPORT

# Bringing Evidence to the Refugee Integration Debate

*Hamutal Bernstein  
with Nicole DuBois  
April 2018*



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# Acknowledgments

This report was funded by Unbound Philanthropy. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute’s funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](https://urban.org/fundingprinciples).

I would like to thank many people who have encouraged and supported me in the writing of this brief. Thanks to my colleagues Tyler Woods and Shiva Kooragayala for their earlier work on a review of the literature, and to Audrey Singer and Rob Santos on their advice on this report. I also sincerely thank our reviewers, David Dyssegaard Kallick, Melanie Nezer, Kim Rueben, and Greg Acs, for their helpful insights. Thanks go to Elizabeth Forney for her assistance on copyediting.

# Bringing Evidence to the Refugee Integration Debate

Current immigration policy debates revolve around a push to reduce immigration across the board, with a privileging of skills-based admissions, concern over security threats and screening procedures, and a focus on the costs rather than the contributions that immigrants make to communities. Although refugees make up a small part of the immigrant population and are entering the US to escape violence and persecution, federal policy changes over the past year have targeted them alongside other groups. After months of iterations of executive orders banning the entry of individuals from Muslim-majority countries and halting refugee admissions, the administration ended 2017 with an historic cut to the annual refugee admissions ceiling and continues to limit the number of refugee entries to the US. The future of the refugee resettlement program is uncertain despite the program's long history and the success and contributions of refugees resettled in the US.

Today's policy debates do not take into account the prodigious research evidence about refugees in the US, which underscores both how refugees differ from other immigrants and how successful refugee integration is despite challenging circumstances. It is crucial to ground policies and decisionmaking in this existing research base as well as to identify questions that are harder to answer with the data tools available. To that end, this report provides key context on resettled refugees and the policy conversation, synthesizes existing evidence on integration outcomes, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the data sources and methods on which researchers rely. This clarifies what we do and do not know. We highlight key gaps in the research base that, if filled, would provide a fuller picture on both sides of the integration equation: refugees and receiving communities.

## The Basics on Refugees in the United States

A refugee is “a person who is outside his or her country and who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Bruno 2017, 1). Across the world, there are 21 million refugees registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations refugee agency. Only 1 percent who are deemed to be the most in need are eligible for permanent relocation to a host country. The US receives a portion of those individuals and has

historically taken in more refugees than any other country; however, recent reductions are moving the US away from this tradition (Connor 2017; McHugh 2018).

The Immigration and Nationality Act and the Refugee Act of 1980 authorize refugees' entry into the US. Refugees make up 8 percent of all foreign-born individuals residing in the US and a slightly lower share (7 percent) of recent legal immigrants (Kallick and Mathema 2016).<sup>1</sup> The US refugee admissions program manages and implements the country's refuge program (box 1).

Each fiscal year, the president determines how many refugees can be admitted; this ceiling does not have to be met annually, but it cannot be exceeded. In the past decade, the cap has ranged between 70,000 and 110,000 (table 1). The ceiling for FY 2018, 45,000, is an historic low.

**TABLE 1**  
**Recent Refugee Admissions to the US**

<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Ceiling</b>	<b>Total admitted</b>
2008	80,000	60,191
2009	80,000	74,654
2010	80,000	73,311
2011	80,000	56,424
2012	76,000	58,238
2013	70,000	69,926
2014	70,000	69,987
2015	70,000	69,933
2016	85,000	84,994
2017	110,000	53,716
2018	45,000	9,616 <sup>a</sup>

**Sources:** US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center; Andorra Bruno "Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2017).

<sup>a</sup> FY 2018 entries recorded as of March 16, 2018.

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*Today's policy debates do not take into account the prodigious research evidence about refugees in the US.*

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## BOX 1

### The US Refugee Admissions Program

The process of refugee screening has been subject to intense scrutiny in recent years. The screening process is extensive. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees refers resettlement cases to the US Department of State, which has nine international Resettlement Support Centers, run by nongovernmental organizations and the International Organization for Migration. Those centers collect information about the refugees and keep them informed about the progress of their cases. All refugees are interviewed and screened by US Citizenship and Immigration Service officers, based in the US Department of Homeland Security. A range of national security agencies are involved in background checks and security screenings. Medical examinations are also required. Refugees who make it through this process, which may take years, are provided cultural orientation before they travel to the US.

The resettlement system is a public-private program that is run by the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). These federal agencies work with nine national resettlement agencies (or “voluntary agencies”) that provide services to newly arrived refugees through a network of local affiliates in communities across the US.

The resettlement agencies work together to determine the local placement of new arrivals. Staff at their local affiliates support refugees’ transitions into life in the US. From the first day of arrival, refugees are eligible for certain benefits to facilitate their rapid transition to self-sufficiency. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration’s Reception and Placement program funds short-term services for 30 to 90 days, which are used to covering expenses for refugees’ most immediate needs, such as reception at the airport, housing, furniture, clothing, and food, as well as language instruction, employment placement, enrollment of children at school, and help signing up for social services. As the amount of cash support is minimal—\$2,075 for each refugee in FY 2018<sup>a</sup>—much of this initial assistance is provided by private donations and volunteers in the community.

Refugees have access to federal government benefits, subject to time limits, including cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Refugee Cash Assistance, medical assistance through Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program, and Refugee Medical Assistance, and food stamps or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, as well as other benefits, like Supplemental Security Income. Benefits vary significantly from state to state.<sup>b</sup>

ORR provides some funding and facilitates programming through states, the resettlement agencies, and other organizations to help transition refugees into employment and self-sufficiency over the first five years after initial arrival in the US. This includes employment supports like job training and skills recertifications as well as other services like child care, English language classes, and citizenship preparation. ORR also provides grants to states and school districts to help offset the costs of local reception.<sup>c</sup>

Refugees are required to apply for lawful permanent residence or green card status after one year in the US.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> “FY 2018 Notice of Funding Opportunity for Reception and Placement Program,” US Department of State, March 21, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/funding/fy2018/269042.htm>.

<sup>b</sup> Michael Fix, Kate Hooper, and Jie Zong, “How Are Refugees Faring? Integration at U.S. and State Levels” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017).

<sup>c</sup> Fix, Hooper, and Zong, “How Are Refugees Faring?”

<sup>d</sup> “Green Card for Refugees,” US Citizenship and Immigration Services, last updated June 26, 2017, <https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/refugees>.

Resettled refugees are an extremely diverse group (Capps et al. 2015). This diversity has increased over the past few decades; refugees entering in FY 2016 represented 78 nationalities, compared with 32 nationalities among refugees entering in FY 1981. In FY 2016, 10 countries accounted for 90 percent of arrivals: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Burma (Myanmar), Iraq, Somalia, Bhutan, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Eritrea (Fix, Hooper, and Zong 2017). The national and ethnic origins of those refugees identified for resettlement change from year to year, as international conflicts and circumstances shape migration and determine greatest need.

Given this diversity, there is not just one “refugee experience” in the US but many. Refugees come in with different backgrounds and have different starting points and trajectories in the US (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2015). They range in educational background, English proficiency, mental and physical health condition, age, and many other characteristics that, like any immigrant or native-born individual, shape their outcomes and experiences in the US.

Resettled refugees differ in critical ways from other immigrants who arrive in the US. First, compared with immigrants who have planned their migration decision, refugees are what migration scholars refer to as “forced” (versus “voluntary”) immigrants; they do not voluntarily choose to migrate but are forced to leave their home countries because of circumstances outside of their control. Refugees flee from persecution and violence, in many cases with hastily arranged departures that leave them with limited material possessions and separated from family members and other social networks (McCabe 2010). Because of these traumas, many face physical and mental health challenges that persist and that without adequate attention may have lasting consequences on their integration in the US (Ellis et al. 2016; Fazel, Wheeler, and Danesh 2005; Mirza and Heinemann 2012).

After their forced departure from their home country, refugees usually experience a long period of displacement—in refugee camps or other vulnerable conditions—while they wait for permanent resettlement (Capps et al. 2015; Montgomery 1996). They can live in this limbo for many years, during which they are not living a normal life; many children lack access to schooling, adults may not be permitted to work, and they may have limited access to human services and medical treatment. This experience can create significant challenges after arrival in the US (Dryden-Peterson 2016; Hooper et al. 2016).

A large share of resettled refugees arrive without family members who already live in the US. These refugees, known as “free cases,” do not have a choice of their initial destination; the resettlement agencies decide on their placement based on the refugees’ characteristics (e.g., health, age, family makeup, and language) and available services in the community (e.g., education, housing, and health



services), as well as factors like the cost of living and job availability (Fix, Hooper, and Zong 2017, 5). Refugees are resettled in a wide range of communities across the country, some in major metropolitan areas where there are public services to support immigrants and others in smaller towns where this infrastructure is limited or does not exist (Fix, Hooper, and Zong 2017, 1; GAO 2012, 1; Gross and Ntagengwa 2016). Resettlement data show that, over the last decade, around two-thirds of refugees have been placed in 10 metropolitan areas, but this extends across a wide range of localities.<sup>2</sup>

Refugees differ from other immigrants in being eligible for what is described in many countries as “integration services” to support their transition to the US.<sup>3</sup> As described in box 1, refugees receive formal resettlement services and are eligible for public assistance benefits upon their arrival in the US. Unlike other legal immigrants to the US, refugees are not barred from receiving public assistance benefits for the first five years, although eligibility for different benefits varies from state to state, and many benefits are time limited (Fix, Hooper, and Zong 2017).

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Although refugees arrive in the US with vulnerabilities, they also arrive having demonstrated resilience and strength. The National Academies note that “[refugees] are more likely [than nonrefugee immigrants] to appreciate the security of US citizenship, more likely to be escaping desperate conditions in their country of origin, and more likely to feel a strong sense of gratitude or attachment to the country that gave them refuge” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and Committee on Population 2015, 174; see also Bloemraad 2006; Portes and Curtis 1987). They also have experienced conflict and loss and have likely survived for years in difficult circumstances while hoping for resettlement. This strength and resilience can serve them as they adapt to their new lives in the US.

## Policy Debate on Refugee Resettlement

The recent federal policy changes affecting refugees have caused major shocks to the refugee resettlement system, which supports the complex task of refugee integration in communities across the US. The resettlement program is based on public-private partnership, relying on the support of organizations and receiving communities across the US to welcome new refugee arrivals and assist in

their transition and progress toward integration. Historically, communities around the US generally supported the humanitarian mission of the refugee resettlement program while acknowledging the economic and social pressures posed by newcomers (Nezer 2013). Refugees contribute to local communities through employment in key industries, the revitalization of distressed neighborhoods, and the enhancement of diversity (Kallick 2015; Kallick and Mathema 2016), but they can also impose pressures on local infrastructure like schools and hospitals, and their arrival in previously homogenous communities can lead to tension (GAO 2012).

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### *Resettled refugees differ in critical ways from other immigrants who arrive in the US.*

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Concern about refugee resettlement began to rise around a decade ago, coinciding with the beginning of the recession and a broader trend of anti-immigrant legislation at the state and local levels. Some states and localities objected to the fiscal burden of hosting individuals and families with high needs in the absence of increased federal support (Nezer 2013). There was also concern about changes to communities' ways of life, especially in small communities receiving refugees who were "visibly culturally, racially, or religiously different" (Nezer 2013, 8). Many of the new refugees were Muslim, which was perceived as a potential cultural threat (Singer and Wilson 2006). Some local leaders and residents expressed skepticism about federal decisionmaking about resettlement and felt local wishes and concerns were being ignored (GAO 2012). During this time, some politicians blamed refugees for being an economic drain on their communities, and there was significant debate and legislation at the state and local level to reduce or stop refugee resettlement (Nezer 2013).

In addition to economic and social concerns, the idea that refugees pose security threats—that the refugee resettlement program could be a means of entry for potential terrorists—arose after 9/11 and gained real traction during the Syrian refugee crisis, when large migration outflows captured the public consciousness. In 2015, images of Alan Kurdi, a Syrian toddler who drowned trying to reach Europe, made the American public more aware and concerned about the plight of Syrian refugees, and President Obama announced plans to resettle 10,000 refugees in FY 2016. That decision became more controversial following terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, in 2015, after which dozens of Republican governors said they would not resettle Syrian refugees in their states, and bills were introduced in some state legislatures to limit refugee resettlement.<sup>4</sup> Anti-refugee advocacy groups pushed an anti-Muslim campaign against refugee resettlement, using misinformation to associate Syrian

refugees with religious extremism and sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> Despite strong evidence finding no connection between refugees and terrorist violence (Nowrasteh 2016), security concerns continue to animate strong opposition to the refugee program.

On the other hand, many states and localities have remained committed to hosting refugees, with governors and mayors making statements reinforcing their welcome.<sup>6</sup> In addition to expressing skepticism about the security arguments and citing the benefits of the cultural and humanitarian aspects of resettlement, governors and mayors cite the economic benefits of refugees to their communities. Despite federal policy developments, states like Utah have reiterated their commitment to refugees,<sup>7</sup> and many communities continue to support resettlement, including Clarkston, Georgia; Lowell, Massachusetts; and Rust Belt cities and towns in upstate New York.<sup>8</sup>

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This variety of state and local responses provides the context for the past year of federal policy changes, which reflect security, economic, and cultural concerns. The Trump administration has been critical of the US's historic immigration and refugee policies. Its executive order "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," first issued in January 2017, announced a ban on the entry to the US of nationals from Muslim-majority countries and suspended refugee admissions.<sup>9</sup> In addition to halting admissions and requiring a review of screening procedures, it mandated a government study of the long-term costs of the refugee admissions program at federal, state, and local levels and an estimate of costs to provide similar benefits to refugees in countries of first asylum. A draft of the internal study, which was leaked to the press, found that resettled refugees' tax contributions outweighed the costs of providing them with government services. This echoed the findings of other research (synthesized in the Evidence on Refugee Integration Outcomes section of this report). The administration officially released a three-page version of the study that included only costs and not contributions,<sup>10</sup> and researchers commented that excluding the evidence on contributions presented a limited account of the reality of refugee integration (Bier 2017; Newland and Capps 2017).<sup>11</sup>

The refugee resettlement program has been operating in a state of turmoil since the first refugee ban in January 2017. Refugee admissions in FY 2017 hit an historic low, and entries in FY 2018 are likely to be much lower. Protracted legal battles (detailed in table 2) limited the implementation of parts of the executive orders, but despite the court rulings the administration has still slowed refugee admissions significantly. Newly created screening procedures and redirection of refugee personnel in the government to other tasks are reported to be slowing refugee admissions even further.<sup>12</sup> As of March 16, 2018, only 9,616 refugees had been admitted, nearly halfway through the current fiscal year.<sup>13</sup>

The impact has been felt by concerned communities, families, and individuals, particularly those who have family members who are refugees waiting to come to the US and who are engaged in welcoming refugees. The decline in refugee arrivals has also led to budget cuts for the resettlement agencies, which have been asked to close local offices.<sup>14</sup> This threatens communities' ability to provide services to refugees who are already here in the US and portends the loss of trained staff with valuable cultural and linguistic skills (McHugh 2018).

TABLE 2

## Summary of Travel Bans and Legal Decisions

1/27/2017	The administration issued the first of three “travel bans,” which included a 120-day refugee ban, and an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees. It also lowered the FY 2018 cap on refugees to 50,000. <sup>a</sup> A federal circuit court ruling blocked this from going into effect on February 3. <sup>b</sup>
3/6/2017	President Trump released the second travel ban, which still included lowering the refugee admissions ceiling and a 120-day refugee ban, although it did not single out Syrians. <sup>c</sup> It also faced legal challenges, and decisions from district courts in Maryland and Hawaii halted its implementation on March 15, shortly before it was carried out. <sup>d</sup>
6/26/2017	The Supreme Court allowed part of the second travel ban to be reinstated; only refugees with a “credible claim of a bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States” could enter the country. <sup>e</sup> An estimated 24,000 refugees were affected as a result. <sup>f</sup> Advocates condemned this as a de facto halt to the program, and legal disputes arose over the meaning of “person or entity.” <sup>g</sup> The 120-day ban took effect on July 12. <sup>h</sup>
9/24/2017	The administration released the third “travel ban,” although this one did not address refugees, who were still unable to enter the country under the 120-day suspension in the second ban. <sup>i</sup>
9/26/2017	The administration lowered the FY 2018 admissions cap to 45,000. <sup>j</sup> The directive also included language that suggested a narrowing of admissions requirements. <sup>k</sup>
10/24/2017	At the conclusion of the 120-day ban on refugees, the administration issued a new executive order reopening refugee admissions but under “stricter screening rules.” A memo to Congress also included decisions to halt the family reunification component, and imposed a further 90-day ban on refugees from 11 countries to conduct further security review. <sup>l</sup> The directive was vague on proposed changes and escalations of security procedures, stating only that refugees were being accepted on a case-by-case basis. <sup>m</sup> Advocates noted that entrants from the 11 countries made up almost half of all admissions in FY 2017, thus “constitut[ing] a de facto Refugee Ban 3.0.” <sup>n</sup>
12/23/2017	A district judge halted the 90-day suspension on refugees from certain countries and reinstated the family reunification (“follow-to-join”) process. <sup>o</sup> This only applied to refugees with a “bona fide relationship with individuals, businesses, or schools within the US.” <sup>p</sup>
1/24/2018	Admissions of refugees from the 11 countries are now able to enter the country but with heightened security and screening measures. <sup>q</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Michael Shear and Helene Cooper, “Trump Bars Refugees and Citizens of 7 Muslim Countries,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2017.

<sup>b</sup> Gabe Cahn, “Tracking the Refugee Ban,” HIAS blog, updated December 23, 2017, <https://www.hias.org/blog/tracking-refugee-ban>.

<sup>c</sup> Charlie Savage, “Analyzing Trump’s New Travel Ban,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2017.

<sup>d</sup> Rachel Nusbaum, “First Rulings in MuslimBan2.0 Challenge: What Do They Mean?” HIAS blog, March 16, 2017, <https://www.hias.org/blog/first-rulings-muslimban20-challenge-what-do-they-mean>.

<sup>e</sup> Michael D. Shear and Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Takes Up Travel Ban Case, and Allows Parts to Go Ahead,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2017.

<sup>f</sup> Miriam Jordan, “Appeals Court Limits Trump Travel Ban and Allows More Refugees,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2017.

<sup>g</sup> Miriam Jordan, “With 3 Words, Supreme Court Opens a World of Uncertainty for Refugees,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2017.

<sup>h</sup> Cahn, “Tracking the Refugee Ban.”

<sup>i</sup> Michael Shear, “New Order Indefinitely Bars Almost All Travel from Seven Countries,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2017.

<sup>j</sup> Joel Rose, “Trump Administration to Drop Refugee Cap to 45,000, Lowest in Years,” *NPR*, September 27, 2017.

<sup>k</sup> The President of the United States, “Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018” (Washington, DC: US Department of State, US Department of Homeland Security, US Department of Health and Human Services, October 2017).

<sup>l</sup> Sarah Pierce, Jessica Bolter, and Andrew Selee, *Trump’s First Year on Immigration Policy: Rhetoric vs. Reality* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, January 2018).

<sup>m</sup> Peter Baker and Adam Liptak, “U.S. Resumes Taking in Refugees, but 11 Countries Face More Review,” *New York Times*, October 24, 2017.

<sup>n</sup> HIAS, “New Refugee Vetting Procedures Could Decimate Refugee Resettlement Program,” press release, October 24, 2017.

<sup>o</sup> Cahn, “Tracking the Refugee Ban.”

<sup>p</sup> Josh Gerstein, “Judge Blocks Trump Refugee Order,” *Politico*, December 23, 2017.

<sup>q</sup> Miriam Jordan, “New Scrutiny Coming for Refugees from 11 ‘High-Risk’ Nations,” *New York Times*, January 29, 2018.

## The Evidence on Refugee Integration Outcomes

This section draws from recently released research reports exploring refugee integration outcomes that share a common research methodology using Census Bureau data, primarily the decennial census and the annual American Community Survey (ACS).<sup>15</sup> Table 3 provides a brief overview of these key reports, which analyze the outcomes of the national population of individuals who entered the US as refugees. These studies analyze refugees' integration outcomes relative to the native-born population and nonrefugee-immigrant populations (in some cases) and across national origin groups and arrival cohorts within the refugee population. Some of the analyses focus on a subset of refugees, examining several of the major national origin groups rather than the entire refugee population. Census data used in these studies do not allow researchers to examine changes in outcomes for an individual over the course of their lifetime. Rather, they compare the outcomes of individuals who have lived in the US for only a few years with individuals who arrived in the US 10, 20, or more years ago.<sup>16</sup> This provides a reasonable way to understand the “progress” of refugees over time.

The five major reports reviewed here focus on three major integration areas: economic, linguistic, and civic (Kallenbach et al. 2013). A wide range of additional issues related to health, well-being, and social connection are important for understanding refugee integration, but they are difficult to explore using census data.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, recent research has found that refugees integrate with time in the US. On average, their labor force participation rates rise to or exceed native-born rates, their income levels rise, and their use of public benefits declines. Their English language proficiency improves and arriving refugee youth have strong educational attainment. Most refugees become US citizens, and many become owners of homes and businesses, contributing to their communities. Refugees arrive with a wide spectrum of educational and employment backgrounds, and many remain limited by low English proficiency and low educational attainment, which influences their economic outcomes. Integration outcomes vary greatly not only by amount of time in the US, but by country of origin and educational background, as well as gender and age at arrival.

TABLE 3

**Key Research on Refugee Integration Outcomes in the United States**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Group analyzed</b>
Capps, Newland, Fratzke, Groves, Fix, McHugh, and Auclair	The Integration Outcomes of US Refugees: Successes and Challenges	2015	Refugees who arrived 1980–2011
Kallick and Mathema	Refugee Integration in the United States	2016	Somali, Burmese, Hmong, and Bosnian refugee communities who arrived 1982–2014
Fix, Hooper, and Zong	How are Refugees Faring? Integration at US and State Levels	2017	Burmese, Cuban, Iraqi, Russian, and Vietnamese refugees who arrived 1980–2013; analysis of the nation and 5 states (CA, FL, NY, TX)
Evans and Fitzgerald	The Economic and Social Outcomes of Refugees in the United States	2017	Refugees who arrived 1990–2014; separate analyses for arriving adults and arriving youth
New American Economy (NAE)	From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America	2017	Refugees who arrived 1975–2015

**Economic**

**Refugees are more likely to be of working age than other groups.** NAE (2017) finds that 77 percent of refugees are of working age (ages 25 to 64), higher than the 50 percent of the native-born population and the 72 percent of the nonrefugee-immigrant population. This demographic reality, combined with the strong focus of refugee resettlement services on rapid employment and self-sufficiency, makes it likely that refugees, notwithstanding potential barriers, would be engaged in the labor force at higher rates than other residents.

**Refugee men have high labor participation rates, which increase after their initial years in the US.** On average, refugee men participate in the labor force at rates as high as or higher than native-born men. Capps et al. (2015) find that employment among all male refugees is higher than among native-born men (67 percent compared with 60 percent). Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) find refugees participate in the labor force at a rate equivalent to the native-born within 4 years after arrival in the US.<sup>18</sup> Kallick and Mathema (2016) find increases in labor force participation for their four refugee groups of study, specifically that longer-term residents (more than 10 years) are in the labor force at higher rates than newer arrivals (10 years or less).

**Refugee women are less likely than men to participate in the labor force upon arrival, but that changes with time in the US.** On average, refugee women participate in the labor force at rates as high as native-born women, after the initial years after arrival. Capps et al. (2015) find employment among all female refugees is equivalent to that of native-born women (54 percent). Kallick and Mathema (2016) find similar patterns in their study; they find that newly arrived refugee women (10 years or less) are less likely than native-born women to be in the labor force, but rates for longer-term residents (more than 10 years) rise to nearly meet or exceed that of native-born women, except for the Hmong.

**Incomes increase with more time in the US.** Capps et al. (2015) find that, on average, income increases with more time in the US, with median household income \$31,000 higher for longer-term residents (over 20 years) compared with newly arrived refugees (up to 5 years). NAE (2017) similarly finds growth in refugees' median household income, which rises from \$21,782 for newly arrived refugees (up to 5 years) to \$67,000 for longer-term residents (more than 25 years). This is higher than the median income for *all* US households (\$53,000). Capps et al. (2015) report, however, that on average, refugees' median household income (\$42,000) was \$3,000 lower than that of other immigrants and \$8,000 below the native-born median. Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) find that refugees' median wages rise with more time in the US, but they remain lower than native-born wage levels, even for refugees with 20 years in the US. Kallick and Mathema (2016) also find that median wages increase with more time in the US, but they describe the situation differently to account for racial and gender differences within the native-born workforce. They show that refugees' wages are "in the middle of the U.S.-born wage range" as they are higher than those of black women, "the lowest earning US-born race and gender group," but lower than those of white men, who are the highest earning native-born subgroup (Kallick and Mathema 2016, 3).

**There is limited knowledge about occupation and career progress.** Kallick and Mathema (2016) show that there is evidence that refugees in their studied groups advance in their careers over time, moving from blue-collar to white-collar jobs after 10 years in the country. Fix, Hooper, and Zong (2017), however, find that underemployment is a critical issue for several of the groups analyzed; around half of Iraqi (48 percent), Cuban (44 percent), and Burmese (40 percent) refugees were underemployed compared with 18 percent of the native-born population; this means they had a bachelor's degree but were unemployed or employed in a low-skilled job. This is an area that requires more research.

**Many refugees are business owners, similar to trends among nonrefugee immigrants.** Kallick and Mathema (2016) point out that immigrants, in general, are more likely to be business owners than the native-born population, noting that 3.6 percent of the foreign-born population are business owners compared with 3.1 percent of the native-born population. In their analysis of refugee groups, 3.1



percent of Bosnians and 2.6 percent of Burmese are business owners, though this rate is lower among Hmong (2.2 percent) and Somali (1.5 percent). Using a broader conception of entrepreneurship, which includes self-employed individuals in either incorporated or unincorporated businesses, NAE (2017) finds that 13 percent of working-age refugees are entrepreneurs compared with 9 percent of native-born people and 12 percent of nonrefugee immigrants.

**Public benefits use declines with more time in the US but remains higher than for the native-born population.** Capps et al. (2015) find that, on average, refugees are more likely than nonrefugee immigrants and the native-born population to receive food stamps; cash assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Refugee Cash Assistance; and public health insurance, such as Medicaid and Refugee Medical Assistance. Receipt declines, however, with more time in the US, with a drop in receipt of food stamps from 42 percent among the newly arrived (up to 5 years) to 16 percent among longer-term residents (over 20 years); this is still above the average for the native-born population (11 percent). Looking at different cuts of census data and focusing on slightly different time frames, Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) also find a decline in benefits use with more time in the US; they show that receipt of food stamps declines from 70 percent in the first year to 20 percent after 12 years.

**Refugees' contributions outweigh their costs after several years.** Using a tax projection program, Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) calculate the net cost over 20 years following initial resettlement and find that refugees arriving as adults (aged 18 to 45) ultimately contribute \$21,000 more than they cost during this period. They calculate that after 8 years in the US, refugees are contributing more in taxes than they cost in government benefits. On the contribution side only, NAE (2017) finds that, in 2015, refugee income nationwide totaled \$77.2 billion and they paid \$20.9 billion in taxes.

**Many refugees become homeowners.** NAE (2017) finds that, on average, 57 percent of refugees own homes, higher than the nonrefugee-immigrant rate of 51 percent but lower than the 66 percent among native-born households. Kallick and Mathema (2016) find that rates of homeownership vary by national origin group; it is high for Burmese (73 percent) and Bosnians (72 percent) 10-year residents but lower for the two other groups analyzed (21 percent for Somalis and 56 percent for Hmong).

## Linguistic

**English-language proficiency improves with more time in the US but remains a major challenge.** All the reports listed in table 2 emphasize the challenge of limited English ability and the impact this has on refugee integration outcomes. Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) point out that about half of refugees report poor English skills upon entry; they also find that limited language ability is associated with weaker

economic outcomes. Capps et al. (2015) identify the same challenges finding that 62 percent of refugees have limited English proficiency (LEP).<sup>19</sup> LEP levels decline with more time in the US but still remain high; 77 percent of recently arrived refugees (up to 5 years) had LEP compared with 58 percent of longer-term residents (20 years or more). Kallick and Mathema (2016) also find that English proficiency improves with more time in the US, though they still find high rates of LEP.

Capps et al. (2015) leverage their access to State Department administrative microdata and show that, at their time of arrival in the US, recent refugees have both very high rates of LEP and low levels of native language literacy. They make the important point that literacy in one's native language is "a needed foundation for building English language skills" (Capps et al. 2015, 14), and they show that literacy is a challenge for many recent arrivals, with literacy rates as low as 18 percent among Hmong, 25 percent for Somalis, 33 percent for Liberians, 38 percent for Bhutanese, and 51 percent among Burmese.

**Educational attainment varies across national-origin groups, limiting income for some.** Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) and Fix, Hooper, and Zong (2017) make the critical observation that the wage outcomes described above are closely related to educational attainment. And Capps et al. (2015) also note that over half of recent refugee arrivals who arrive with lower literacy and educational attainment (Somalis, Burmese, Bhutanese, and Liberians) have family incomes below twice the federal poverty level; this compares with one-third among native-born families. Capps et al. (2015) also find that, on average, refugees' educational attainment is above nonrefugee immigrants' but lower than the native-born population, but this varies greatly by country of origin. There are some national origin groups that have very high educational attainment, much higher than for the native-born population, such as refugees from Iran, Russia, and the Ukraine.

**The age of arrival makes a big difference for educational attainment.** When refugees arrive as children, there is a major difference in educational attainment outcomes. Kallick and Mathema (2016) find that refugees who arrive as children have strong high school graduation rates across the four refugee groups studied, and many succeed on college completion as well. They note that the Burmese perform particularly well with nearly half of youth arrivals completing a bachelor's degree (45 percent of men and 49 percent of women). This compares with 29 percent of the native-born population. Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) add the distinction of age at arrival for youth, finding that refugees who arrive as young children have better educational outcomes than those arriving at older ages. For refugees arriving younger than age 13, high school graduation rates are similar to the native-born population, but this is not so for refugees arriving between ages 14 and 18. However, those later arrivers make up for this in their 20s and early 30s through relatively high rates for high school and college graduation.

## Civic

**Most refugees become US citizens.** NAE (2017) finds that refugees are more likely than nonrefugee immigrants to naturalize and do so earlier, with 84 percent naturalized among longer-term residents (16 to 25 years) compared with 51 percent of nonrefugee immigrants; and 89 percent naturalized among even longer-term residents (more than 25 years) compared with 75 percent among nonrefugee immigrants. Kallick and Mathema (2016) also find that the longer-term residents in their four refugee groups (21 years or more) were more likely to have naturalized (between 78 and 92 percent) compared with all immigrants (71 percent).

**Many refugees engage as voters.** NAE (2017) finds that refugees register to vote and participate in American democracy at rates higher than nonrefugee immigrants, finding that, in the 2014 midterm election, 71 percent of eligible refugees had registered to vote and 43 percent voted. In these elections, 34 percent of eligible nonrefugee immigrants and 43 percent of eligible native-born residents voted.<sup>20</sup> However, in the 2012 presidential election, only 45 percent of eligible refugees voted compared with a much higher 63 percent among native-born residents.

## The Complexity of Measuring Integration

Refugees enter the US under unique circumstances that are distinct from other immigrants' experiences, and so it can be challenging to set expectations for their progress and integration. We summarize here the existing knowledge drawing from what is accessible in census data, where comparisons are often made with the native-born and nonrefugee-immigrant groups and across refugee national-origin groups. It is important, however, to think carefully about which outcomes are important and for which groups within the refugee population. It is also a challenge to identify appropriate comparison groups, given the unique circumstances of refugees and the significant variation in outcomes among refugees by gender, national origin group, educational level, and other factors. The issue of race has not received much attention in the study of refugee integration, although it merits further study.

Although the data available provide the most consistent information on economics, economics are not the entire story, nor should they be the only story that researchers explore or that policymakers consider. Indeed, given the humanitarian nature of their admission, it is inappropriate to judge refugees' progress based solely on their economic outcomes. The recent spate of reports, including the cost report mandated by executive order, has been focused on the economic costs and contributions of refugees, and this balance sheet mentality has its shortcomings. Refugees contribute to local economies

(Chmura Economics and Analytics 2013; Community Research Partners 2015; Global Detroit 2017; Kallick 2015), but they also contribute in other ways to the communities to which they belong, bringing in new perspectives and diversity as well as potentially disrupting local communities and having a stressful effect on local infrastructure, like local schools and hospitals (GAO 2012). Changes for the receiving community can be more challenging to measure and quantify than measuring outcomes for refugees.

To inform resettlement policymaking decisions, we need to look beyond employment and collect more information on the non-economic outcomes for refugees as well. In addition to economic, linguistic, and civic factors, researchers and stakeholders agree that health, well-being, and social connection are critical from a policy perspective (Arafah 2016). Issues around neighborhood, housing, transportation, social connection and isolation, and mental and physical health are foremost in the practical demands of the refugee resettlement field (Brick et al. 2010; Gilbert, Hein, and Losby 2010), and better and more consistent data collection on these topics will support stronger decisionmaking. These also are intimately connected with how organizations and individuals in receiving communities respond to refugees; we need a better understanding of the complex effects for local communities, both positive and negative. Other sources of data may be used to verify and complement census data to explore a wide range of integration topics, which we describe in the next section.

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*Given the humanitarian nature of their admission, it is inappropriate to judge refugees' progress based solely on their economic outcomes.*

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## Data Sources on Refugee Integration

Collecting data about the refugee population is not a simple task given the vulnerable nature of refugees, their small numbers and geographic dispersion, and their diversity in terms of language background and demographic characteristics. The studies synthesized above rely on census data, using a statistical method to estimate which immigrants are refugees. These data provide answers to certain questions but are limited in many ways. Other work in the academic and policy research fields has relied on other sources of data, each with its own advantages and limitations. Researchers have studied additional integration outcomes and added to the findings of census data described above by exploring the “how” and “why”—the mechanisms underlying these quantitative outcomes. Combining multiple

sources of data provides the strongest platform for conclusions. This section discusses these commonly used data sources (table 4) and their strengths and weaknesses.

**TABLE 4**  
**US Refugee Research Data Sources**

National surveys	Administrative data	Primary sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Census Bureau data: American Community Survey (ACS)</li> <li>■ New Immigrant Survey</li> <li>■ Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) data</li> <li>■ Refugee resettlement program data</li> <li>■ Nonrefugee-specific government data such as wage records or public benefits records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Surveys of refugees</li> <li>■ Surveys of refugee resettlement staff</li> <li>■ Interviews and focus groups with refugees, staff, and stakeholders</li> <li>■ Community-based research</li> </ul>

### Census Bureau Survey Data

Although the Census Bureau does not collect any information on immigration status or admissions entry type and thus does not specifically identify individuals who entered as refugees, researchers have developed a method to calculate likely refugee status using the American Community Survey (ACS).<sup>21</sup> That method has been used to describe the current refugee population by describing the features of the portion of the foreign-born population whom researchers estimate entered with refugee status. The methodology estimates the refugee population by assigning refugee status based on foreign-born status, year of entry, country of origin, and in some cases country of birth and ancestry.<sup>22</sup> The basic idea is to use aggregate admissions data results, reported in publications like the annual Yearbook of Immigration Statistics,<sup>23</sup> to identify country-year pairs in which it is safe to assume that individuals coming from that country in a given year are likely to have entered as refugees. These methods generally look at admissions numbers and use some sort of bar—say, 40 percent or more of incoming immigrants from that year were refugees—to identify a “refugee” country-year pair. Researchers then use those rules to assign refugee status to individuals with those characteristics in the ACS data. They assign refugee status to individual records that may or may not actually have entered as refugees. Each researcher uses a slight variation of this basic approach.

#### ADVANTAGES

- **Large sample:** The ACS provides the only sample large enough for researchers to identify refugees, who are a relatively small share of the US population. The data include rich

socioeconomic information and allow comparisons with other groups, such as the native-born population or nonrefugee immigrants.

- **Historical data and consistency:** Because the ACS is collected every year, it provides a consistent source of information about population groups and allows the potential for study of groups over time.
- **Updated and long-term information:** Refugee-specific administrative data only provide information on refugees at their time of arrival in the US and during the time they are receiving services, but the ACS provides a source of updated information on all individuals who ever entered the US as refugees.

## DISADVANTAGES

- **Imprecision of identification of refugees:** Because refugee status is inferred and not explicitly identified in the ACS, we do not know how many of the individuals assigned refugee status actually did enter as refugees. We know that none of the analyses capture *all* of the individuals who actually entered as refugees.<sup>24</sup> There is both overcount (since *all* arrivals in a determined country-year pair are counted as refugee entrants) and undercount (since refugee entrants are not counted if they do not match a specific country-year pair).
- **Systematic bias:** The imputation process may produce a skewed sample. Relying on country-year pairs naturally biases the sample to countries with large flows of refugees, which are often those “with the worst violence and human rights abuses” (Evans and Fitzgerald 2017, 11). This could bias the sample toward refugees with less successful integration outcomes in the US.
- **Requires careful reporting on time frames:** Combing recently arrived refugees with long-term residents makes analysis of results quite complex. This is why we see different studies carefully cutting the data into strata and comparing recently arrived refugees with those who have been long-term residents. Merely reporting the overall number for all refugees would be misleading without these comparisons of groups segmented by time spent in the US.
- **Snapshot only:** As opposed to data that track changes for individuals over the course of their time in the US, these data only provide snapshots of the refugee population at a single point in time, and analysts have to compare different cohorts of refugees to assess progress over time.
- **Key issues of interest not captured:** Researchers are limited to the variables that the Census Bureau collects on the entire US population. These do not directly measure issues that are

important to refugee integration, such as social networks, language access, and local community reception. The data also do not capture what sorts of refugee resettlement supports individuals may or may not have received, although self-reported receipt of public benefits provides a partial view.

- **Reliance on self-reporting:** Although census data provide a comprehensive and consistent character unmatched by other possible data sources, a limitation of all survey data is that the information is self-reported.

## Other National Surveys and Administrative Data

There are several larger surveys that include refugees but that are not specifically tailored to refugee issues. One that has been used for analysis of refugee outcomes is the New Immigrant Survey, which captured information on a sample of lawful permanent residents or green card holders (Connor 2010). We are not aware of other national surveys in which the refugee population would be large enough to be able to identify a group for statistical analysis.

Another source of data collected specifically on resettled refugees is the Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR).<sup>25</sup> This is a national household survey collected annually by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), capturing a representative sample of refugees who have arrived in the previous five years. Results from the ASR are reported annually in ORR's Annual Report to Congress (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2017). The ASR has had little visibility or use among researchers. We identified only one analysis using ASR microdata (Arafah 2016),<sup>26</sup> although some have used the aggregate results as reported in the Annual Report to Congress (Camarota 2015). ASR results from ORR's Annual Report to Congress have been cited by public officials, such as in the administration's FY 2018 budget plan (Office of Management and Budget 2017). The microdata have not been made publicly available and have been of limited use to the research community. Given the potential for this source of continuously collected evidence on refugees' progress toward self-sufficiency, ORR is working to improve the quality and accessibility of ASR results for the practitioner and research community.<sup>27</sup>

Because all refugees interact with service providers at the point of admissions, and many have further interactions at later points after their arrival in the US, there is also potential in mining administrative data that are specifically collected to measure refugee admissions or refugees' experience in the context of service receipt.

Refugee admissions data reported by the US Department of State, collected in the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) are publicly available in updated and aggregate form.<sup>28</sup> WRAPS data capture the date and location of placement and a wide range of information about refugees' characteristics upon arrival.

Other sources of administrative data can provide information on refugees' experiences after resettlement in the US. These include program data from refugee resettlement service providers as well as nonrefugee-specific government data sources, such as wage records or other service records.<sup>29</sup> These have been used for several formal evaluations conducted on refugee resettlement services (Anton, Pierce, and Burns 2007; Else et al. 2003; Farrell, Barden, and Mueller 2008; Hohm, Sargent, and Moser 1999; Krotz, Else, and Budzilowicz 2003), but access to all such administrative data are limited. These data are not normally available to researchers, except in cases of partnership with resettlement providers or government-contracted research projects. In some cases, resettlement agencies have conducted analysis of client records (International Rescue Committee 2017; Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services 2008).

#### ADVANTAGES

- **No identification problem:** With the refugee-specific sources, the data are designed specifically to collect information about refugee entrants and program participants.
- **Potential to collect policy-relevant information:** The design of administrative data can capture key outputs and outcomes aligned with a specific program model, offering an opportunity to collect policy-relevant evidence to support decisions around program improvements. The same is true for the ASR, which has recently undergone a pretest of a redesigned questionnaire that improved and expanded the content of earlier versions used.

#### DISADVANTAGES

- **Only certain refugees:** Program data only capture information for those refugees who are in contact with service agencies. There is very little known about how refugees who access services differ from those who do not, whether service providers are reaching those refugees who are eligible and in need, and what happens to refugees who may only receive resettlement services upon their arrival but are never again in contact with public or private support agencies.
- **Only early stages of resettlement path:** Because resettlement agencies have the most contact consistently with refugees at the earliest stages of resettlement right after their arrival in the



US when refugees are more likely to be receiving government services, we get a very limited and short-term view on refugees' experiences in the US. Similarly, with the ASR, only refugees within five years of arrival are surveyed.

## Primary Data

Given the limitations of national survey data and the limited availability and utility of administrative data, most of the vast body of interdisciplinary academic research relies on primary data collected for individual research projects: surveys, interviews, and focus groups with refugees, resettlement staff, or stakeholders, or other targeted collection. This approach designs data collection instruments and collects data for specific projects and may be done for specific locations, focus on specific resettlement programs or a key target population, and explore different integration topics of interest to a particular researcher.

Some researchers have worked directly with refugee service providers, who offer a good window into early refugee experience after arrival and, most importantly, can provide researchers access to this relatively small and vulnerable populations. Researchers have taken eclectic approaches to collecting information—collecting and analyzing client data,<sup>30</sup> surveying staff,<sup>31</sup> surveying refugees,<sup>32</sup> and implementing original data collection through staff members<sup>33</sup> or in person through ethnographic or other methods.<sup>34</sup> There have also been community-based research efforts that have focused on both refugees, resettlement service providers, and the broader receiving community (American Friends Service Committee 2014; Onondaga Citizens League 2013).

## ADVANTAGES

- **Rich data to answer specific research questions:** Researchers can design data collection instruments to explore specific measures and topics that are not captured in census or administrative data.
- **Grounded in refugees' and organizations' reality:** Collecting primary data puts researchers in contact with refugees and refugee service providers, which permits them the opportunity to develop a project that is sensitive to realities on the ground and responsive to the needs of the field.

## DISADVANTAGES

- **Snapshot only:** Because of the expense and logistical challenge of original data collection, researchers are often limited to collecting information at one point in time rather than following participants over time to collect longitudinal information about a given individual or family.<sup>35</sup>
- **Limited national reach:** Because primary-source-based studies rely on interaction with specific programs, they rarely provide nationally representative data.<sup>36</sup> Most research has had a model of local researchers working with local resettlement programs to access or collect data jointly. This means the findings are not necessarily representative of national trends, and we do not have enough information to know how prospects for integration and integration outcomes vary across states and localities in the US.<sup>37</sup>
- **Project specific:** Although these data can provide rich answers to researchers' questions, it may not align with the priorities of other researchers and thus will not have much "shelf life" or relevance for other research efforts.

## Filling Gaps in the Research Knowledge Can Inform the Policy Conversation

Resettled refugees have entered the US on humanitarian grounds; that means they have been admitted to the US with the purpose of providing them safety and refuge from violence, torture, or discrimination, and not to contribute to our workforce. And yet, contrary to the tides of the federal policy debate, recent research shows that refugees *do* contribute to the US workforce and society. After a period of adjustment after arrival, refugees integrate on economic, linguistic, and civic measures. On average, they participate in the labor force at high rates, their earnings rise, and their use of public benefits declines. Their English language skills improve, and those arriving during their youth have strong educational attainment. Set on a fast track to obtain green cards and citizenship compared with other immigrants, most become US citizens, and many own homes and businesses. They are a diverse group, and outcomes vary greatly by amount of time in the US, country of origin, educational background, gender, and age at arrival. Many remain limited by low English proficiency and low educational attainment, which influences their economic outcomes.

Any research on this population is difficult given the vulnerable nature of what it means to be a refugee. Refugees' small numbers and geographic dispersion and their diversity in terms of language

background and demographic characteristics add to this difficulty. The data available to assess refugee integration are limited in some ways, and it is important for future work to combine multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data to be grounded in the reality of refugees and the communities in which they live.

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*Recent research shows that, after a period of adjustment after arrival, refugees integrate on economic, linguistic, and civic measures. On average, they participate in the labor force at high rates, their earnings rise, and their use of public benefits declines.*

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Though existing evidence on key integration outcomes answers some questions, there are also gaps in our knowledge that merit study. Learning more about these issues will help fill in our understanding of refugee integration in the US and further inform decisionmaking.

1. **Although we know refugee labor force participation rates are high, we do not have a strong understanding of refugees' long-term career paths.** The research base widely acknowledges that, because of the pressure to find work quickly and become self-sufficient, many refugees work in low-quality, low-paying jobs that may not align with their education or skills and do not lead to upward mobility (Codell et al. 2011; Nibbs 2016). The problem of underemployment of refugee professionals is a key issue (Abdul Satar 2017), as is the limited economic mobility of refugees across the educational spectrum. Not much is known about how refugee career paths evolve over time in the US and how they can be supported more effectively.
2. **We know that refugees arrive with a wide spectrum of skills and educational backgrounds that shape their integration outcomes, but we do not know enough about their continued learning.** The diversity of refugee flows—the hundreds of languages and cultural backgrounds and the wide range of educational backgrounds—places a tremendous challenge on service providers trying to support a wide array of needs. They have to support professionals who arrive with advanced education facing barriers to the transfer of their skills and recognition of their credentials (Abdul Satar 2017) as well as less-educated refugees who arrive with low literacy in their native languages. We need more information about prospects for individuals and effective educational strategies for individuals at all points on this spectrum. More information on basic skills (including English as a Second Language), technical, and higher educational learning would help put commonly considered outcomes, such as employment and educational attainment into context.

3. **We do not have much understanding of the intergenerational changes that take place for the children of refugees and their descendants.** The children of refugees who are born in the US are US citizens, and studies do not necessarily track the children of refugees as a distinct group. Given the intergenerational character of immigrant integration (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and Committee on Population 2015) and the importance of understanding mobility between adults and their children, studying only outcomes for arriving refugees provides a partial view.
4. **Refugees are only one side of the bidirectional process of integration. Receiving communities change in response to newcomers, including through the provision of resettlement services.** We need more evidence about the impacts of refugees on communities and the process of adaptation, as well as challenges for communities that may or may not have a strong infrastructure for integrating refugees effectively. These issues are harder to measure and quantify, but the challenges of the data collection can be surmounted through innovative efforts and partnership with refugee resettlement service providers. To inform decisionmaking, we need more evidence on what sorts of programs are most effective and for whom.<sup>38</sup>
5. **Beyond economic, linguistic, and civic integration outcomes, we need consistent information on other key factors that flesh out refugee well-being and provide information on their interaction with the receiving community and local infrastructure.** Issues around neighborhood, housing, transportation, social connection and isolation, and mental and physical health would provide a context for interpreting other integration outcomes and support stronger decisionmaking.

Emerging from decades of experience with the refugee resettlement program, researchers and practitioners have developed a strong evidence base that shows both how refugees are distinct from other immigrants and how successful refugee integration is over time in the US despite challenging circumstances. Researchers have pushed existing data sources to answer a wide range of questions that should inform decisionmaking on the future of the resettlement program. But they have also identified some key questions for which we do not yet have answers. We need to continue to push the evidence base to develop a stronger understanding of both sides of the integration equation—refugees and receiving communities.

After a tumultuous year of policy changes and at a critical moment for the refugee resettlement system, when refugees are being framed as security, economic, and cultural threats, it is crucial that policymakers consider the large evidence base on refugee integration and make decisions grounded in the realities of refugees and their local communities. The research shows that refugees contribute to the strength and vitality of communities across the US.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> As McHugh (2018, 4, footnote 15) notes, “between 1995 and 2004, there was an average of 960,000 legal permanent resident visas annually and an average of 63,000 refugees resettled annually.”
- <sup>2</sup> Cyierra Roldan and David Dyssegaard Kallick, “New Data from FPI: Refugee Placement by Metro Area and Locality,” Fiscal Policy Institute blog, November 6, 2017, <http://fiscalpolicy.org/local-refugee-population-data-metro-areas>.
- <sup>3</sup> The refugee resettlement program has long been described as the US’s “most robust federal integration program” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and Committee on Population 2015, 78).
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick Healy and Julie Bosman, “G.O.P. Governors Vow to Close Doors to Syrian Refugees,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/17/us/politics/gop-governors-vow-to-close-doors-to-syrian-refugees.html>; Sara Rathod, “The Freak-Out Over Syrian Refugees is Continuing in These States,” *Mother Jones*, February 26, 2016, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/02/anti-syrian-refugee-legislation-states/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Abigail Hauslohner and Justh Wm. Moyer, “Anti-sharia Demonstrators Hold Rallies in Cities across the Country,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/anti-sharia-marches-planned-for-numerous-cities-across-the-country-saturday/2017/06/10/40faf61e-4d6f-11e7-a186-60c031eab644\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ded3802de123](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/anti-sharia-marches-planned-for-numerous-cities-across-the-country-saturday/2017/06/10/40faf61e-4d6f-11e7-a186-60c031eab644_story.html?utm_term=.ded3802de123).
- <sup>6</sup> “We Welcome Refugees: This Is Who We Are,” Welcoming America, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/learn/welcoming-refugees-paris-attacks>.
- <sup>7</sup> Miriam Jordan, “With Welcoming Stance, Conservative Utah Charts Its Own Course on Refugees,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 2017.
- <sup>8</sup> Katy Long, “This Small Town in America’s Deep South Welcomes 1,500 Refugees a Year,” *Guardian*, May 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/24/clarkston-georgia-refugee-resettlement-program>; Jess Bidgood and Katharine Q. Seelye, “A City Built on Refugees Looks at Trump’s Plan with Fear,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/trump-refugee-lowell-massachusetts.html>; “Upstate New York Cities Welcome Refugees and Immigrants – Some Media Stories,” Fiscal Policy Institute blog, updated August 28, 2017, <http://fiscalpolicy.org/upstate-new-york-cities-welcome-refugees-and-immigrants>.
- <sup>9</sup> Exec. Order No. 13,769, January 27, 2017.
- <sup>10</sup> Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Somini Sengupta, “Trump Administration Rejects Study Showing Positive Impact of Refugees,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/us/politics/refugees-revenue-cost-report-trump.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> Another view was shared by Steven Camarota, “Leaked Refugee Report Suffers Significant Flaws,” *National Review*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/09/leaked-hhs-refugee-report-interesting-flawed/>.
- <sup>12</sup> Meredith Hoffman, “Trump Has Slowed Refugee Admissions to a Crawl,” *Politico Magazine*, February, 26, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/02/26/refugee-resettlement-confusion-executive-orders-217038>.
- <sup>13</sup> “Arrivals by Region,” US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center, updated March 16, 2018, <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>.
- <sup>14</sup> Deborah Amos, “The Year the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program Unraveled,” *National Public Radio*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/01/01/574658008/the-year-the-u-s-refugee>

[resettlement-program-unraveled](#); Yeganeh Torbati and Mica Rosenberg, “Exclusive: State Department Tells Refugee Agencies to Downsize U.S. Operations,” *Reuters*, December 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-refugees-exclusive/exclusive-state-department-tells-refugee-agencies-to-downsize-u-s-operations-idUSKBN1EF2S5>.

- <sup>15</sup> In their 2015 report, Capps et al. developed the methodology, which follows methods developed initially by Jeffrey Passel.
- <sup>16</sup> Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) call this approach the use of “synthetic cohorts.”
- <sup>17</sup> Ager and Strang (2008) offer a model of refugee integration that moves beyond these domains. Their model is made up of four domains: markers and means (which includes employment, housing, education, and health); social connection (social bridges, social bonds, social links); facilitators (language and culture, safety and stability); and foundation (rights and citizenship). The RISE Survey built on the Ager and Strang model to test 10 “pathways” to integration through a longitudinal survey of refugees living in Denver, Colorado (Puma, Lichtenstein, and Stein 2018).
- <sup>18</sup> After six years, their employment rate is equivalent to the native-born population.
- <sup>19</sup> Following standards in the research literature, limited English proficiency is defined as individuals who speak English less than “very well,” meaning “well,” “not well,” or “not at all.” Some argue that speaking English “well” is a more appropriate benchmark.
- <sup>20</sup> This finding on voting came from the Current Population Survey 2014 Voter Supplement, not the ACS.
- <sup>21</sup> As discussed, Capps et al. (2015) developed this methodology.
- <sup>22</sup> To identify their four specific refugee groups, Kallick and Mathema (2016) also use language spoken.
- <sup>23</sup> See “Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, US Department of Homeland Security, last modified November 14, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook>.
- <sup>24</sup> Evans and Fitzgerald (2017), possibly because it looked only at adult arrivers, noted that they captured only one-third of refugee entrants, but that their sample looked similar to the target group.
- <sup>25</sup> The author of this report is the coprincipal investigator of the 2016 and 2017 Annual Survey of Refugees and Redesign of the ASR, funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services.
- <sup>26</sup> That research accessed limited-use ASR data through a Freedom of Information Act request.
- <sup>27</sup> The ASR was traditionally conducted with a longitudinal design, with interviewers recontacting individual respondents annually during their first five years of arrival to capture changes over time for a given refugee household. The longitudinal method proved difficult to implement, and in consideration of that and other limitations around sampling and reporting measures, the ASR has recently shifted to cross-sectional samples to improve data quality and representativeness.
- <sup>28</sup> Access to WRAPS microdata is limited, and we have only identified a few analyses that accessed the microdata: Singer and Wilson 2006 and Capps et al. 2015. Aggregate data are available online at <http://www.wrapsnet.org/>.
- <sup>29</sup> For example, Morland et al. (2016) analyzed Head Start Program Information Report records.
- <sup>30</sup> See Allen 2009; Beaman 2012; Else et al. 2003; Farrell et al. 2008; GAO 2011; Hohm et al. 1999; Ryan 2009.
- <sup>31</sup> See Boland and Gaffney 2017; Eby et al. 2011; Fleck 2012; Forrest, Mott, and Brown 2014; Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services 2008; Shannon et al. 2015; US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2015.
- <sup>32</sup> See Colorado Department of Human Services 2016; Ellis et al. 2016; Hikmet et al. 2012.
- <sup>33</sup> See Codell et al. 2011.

<sup>34</sup> See Darrow 2015; Ives 2007; Mirza and Heinemann. 2012; Morris et al. 2009; Mott 2010; Smith 2008; Tshabangu-Soko and Caron 2011.

<sup>35</sup> The RISE survey is a notable exception (Colorado Department of Human Services 2016). It managed to collect longitudinal data through a community-based approach that relied on “community connectors” to collect the data.

<sup>36</sup> There are some exceptions to this, including recent work developed by the Stanford Immigration Policy Lab with resettlement agencies to access their national records (Bansak et al. 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Fix, Hooper, and Zong 2017 offer a rare study of refugee outcomes by state.

<sup>38</sup> Several have noted the weakness of existing evidence on resettlement programming. See Taylor Elwood, Jessica Arthurs, Lisa H. Gren, and Caren J. Frost, “Commentary: Data on Refugee Resettlement Is Lacking,” *The Salt Lake Tribune* November 4, 2017, <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2017/11/04/commentary-data-on-refugee-resettlement-is-lacking/>. See also GAO 2011; Ott 2015. A promising development is ORR’s funding of technical assistance through the Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Assistance Project, which is working to support refugee serving organizations on effective evidence collection (see <https://www.metasupport.org/>).

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# About the Author



**Hamutal Bernstein** is a senior research associate in the Income and Benefits Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her research focuses on immigration and integration, workforce development and education, and program evaluation. She has wide expertise in mixed-methods research, including original survey development, secondary data analysis, and qualitative data collection and analysis. She is a principal investigator on the Annual Survey of Refugees and Survey Redesign for the US Department of Health and Human Services. Her other areas of research focus on immigrant upskilling, immigrant inclusion at the local level, and other human services topics. Before joining Urban, Bernstein was a program officer at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, managing public opinion survey research in the United States and Europe. This position followed her work on global and US migration research as a research associate at the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University and as a migration consultant to international organizations. She has conducted fieldwork in English and Spanish in the United States and abroad, and she speaks fluent French. Bernstein received her BA in international relations from Brown University and her PhD in government from Georgetown University.

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