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Measuring What Matters

Piloting a Self-Assessment of Integration Outcomes by and for Forcibly Displaced Persons

Acknowledgements

This report is the culmination of the Refugee Integration Self-Assessment Pilot (RISAP) Project, which began in January 2024. Refugee Council USA, Refugee Congress, and World Relief (WR) wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions to this report:

Report Authors

Tessa Coggio, Emily Wood, Nili Sarit Yossinger, Drocella Mugorewera, Ali Tarokh, John Slocum, Mandy Barb, and Stephanie Webb

Project Coordinators

Beth Gutelius and Tessa Coggio

Steering Group

John Slocum, Nili Sarit Yossinger, Emily Wood, Mandy Barb, Stephanie Webb, Susan Sperry, and Aerlande Wontamo

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Background & Methodology

The Refugee Integration Self-Assessment Pilot has its origins in a nationwide assessment of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) carried out in 2020. That assessment was documented in the report, *Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program*, released in December 2020.[1] That report recommended (1) collecting better data on integration outcomes to help inform and strengthen resettlement services; and (2) adopting a more flexible approach to resettlement that recognizes integration as broader than early self-sufficiency.

These recommendations prompted the subsequent project *Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)*.[2] That project sought to define integration measurements through a co-design process led by FDPs themselves. The final report on the *Integration Outcomes* project, released in late 2022, captured a range of experiences important to integration that extend far beyond the narrow statutory goal of early economic self-sufficiency. The *Integration Outcomes* report included a prototype refugee integration self-assessment tool, designed to collect better integration data across FDP-defined domains, including: English language, employment and livelihoods, education, physical health and mental health, housing, identity and inclusion, and access to information.

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1 Donald Kerwin and Mike Nicholson, "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program," The Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS), December 2020, https://cmsny.org/publications/rebuilding-usrap/.

2 Taif Jany et al., "Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)," rcusa.org, November 2022, https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Integration-Outcomes-for-Forcibly-Displaced-Persons-FDPs-Final.pdf.

Theory of Change

IF...

- FDPs are able to reflect on their integration experience using FDP-defined key domains
- FDP-serving organizations can reliably track this information over time

THEN...

- FDPs can better access resources and support for their integration journey
- Organizations can make better-informed service decisions
- The broader FDP-serving community can more effectively advocate for integration needs

In early 2024, Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), Refugee Congress, and World Relief partnered to launch the *Refugee Integration Self-Assessment Pilot* (RISAP). The goal of RISAP was to strengthen and pilot the self-assessment tool through a two-round longitudinal survey of FDPs in the Chicagoland area. In the process, the pilot collected meaningful data on integration outcomes – *as defined by FDPs* – that can be used to inform more responsive, evidence-based, resettlement programs.

To achieve its twin objectives of testing and evaluating the self-assessment survey tool, RISAP employed a mixed methods approach. Quantitative data was gathered through administration of the self-assessment survey with 66 recently resettled refugees across two rounds. To evaluate the rollout and effectiveness of the tool, qualitative data was gathered during focus group discussions with survey respondents and administrators.

Against the political backdrop of shrinking humanitarian protections, restricted access to life-saving food and medical assistance, and the emphasis on refugee "assimilation," the work of carrying out an integration assessment study, utilizing measures defined by FDPs themselves, has taken on extraordinary significance. By developing an approach rooted in FDPs' own definitions – what integration means, what it looks like in practice, and what facilitates it – the United States can take meaningful steps toward more effective refugee resettlement.

Survey Findings

Piloting the Self-Assessment Tool with World Relief Chicagoland clients provided important insight into FDP integration across several domains. Early findings reveal both promising indicators of stability, and areas where targeted support could strengthen integration journeys.

English language learning emerged as a critical challenge. Although FDPs consistently identified English proficiency as essential to successful integration, a majority were not enrolled in English classes during either survey round, and enrollment declined between rounds one and two. Time constraints were the most frequently reported barrier, driven primarily by work conflicts, followed by family or childcare responsibilities.

Employment patterns remained relatively stable. Two-thirds of respondents who participated in the pilot were employed, yet little change was observed between survey rounds. Notably, employed respondents were more likely than unemployed respondents to report having people in their lives who supported their career goals. This suggests that mentors – whether from social networks or refugee-serving organizations – may play a meaningful role in advancing employment.

Education goals are difficult to prioritize during the first year of resettlement. Despite a majority of respondents reporting dissatisfaction with their level of education attained, most were not enrolled in any form of schooling beyond English classes. This highlights a gap between long-term aspirations and the immediate pressures of becoming self-sufficient in the first year of resettlement.

Housing satisfaction increased between survey rounds. The majority of respondents appear to have settled into their living situation, and the ability to afford housing increased substantially between rounds one and two. Respondents largely reported feeling safe in their homes and neighborhoods, though some shared challenges addressing critical maintenance requests with their landlords.

Health outcomes present mixed signals. While a majority of respondents reported having access to healthcare, a small but notable subset lost access to primary care or health insurance between rounds. Mental health concerns intensified more noticeably; one-fifth of participants reported worsening mental well-being without a corresponding increase in access to mental health services.

Identity, belonging, and community connection show encouraging progress. By the second survey round, a strong majority of respondents reported feeling “at home” in their new city most of the time, with marked improvement in feeling comfortable expressing their identity. Yet half of respondents reported having immediate family members still abroad, many facing stalled resettlement processes, which dampens their sense of stability and successful integration.

Despite political uncertainty in 2025, FDPs demonstrate resilience. Retrospective sentiment questions added in round two show that, over time, many participants perceived increased friendliness from their community, expressed less concern about the risk of deportation, and maintained similar levels of optimism (compared to the earlier timeframe) regarding their prospects for securing long-term legal status. While new policy decisions have emerged and will continue to emerge since the timing of the survey, these findings testify to the resilience of FDPs and their ability to recognize and sustain integration progress despite heightened national rhetoric.

Pilot Evaluation Findings

As part of the pilot, RISAP also aimed to gather feedback from both surveyors and respondents on the tool's clarity, utility, and rollout. ***Findings point to the strong potential for scaling the self-assessment tool and provide constructive ideas for its improvement.***

- Across focus groups, FDPs reported feeling more comfortable completing the survey with WR staff rather than external surveyors, whose trust and familiarity enabled honest sharing and quicker follow-up on identified needs.
- High-quality interpretation emerged as a critical success factor. While most participants understood the survey, both FDPs and WR staff noted that certain abstract concepts (such as "feeling at home") were difficult to translate consistently, underscoring the need for improved interpreter training and pre-translated survey versions.
- FDPs generally found the survey length acceptable, though staff and some respondents pointed to redundant questions and recommended streamlining to reduce fatigue, especially for clients balancing work or childcare.
- Several FDPs reported that the survey increased self-awareness of their integration journeys and provided emotional validation, often noting that no one had previously asked about their integration experiences.
- Some FDPs received helpful referrals, however, others expressed disappointment when survey results were not shared back or found the resource list provided difficult to use due to literacy or digital barriers.
- WR staff noted the survey created meaningful touchpoints that surfaced actionable needs but also expressed discouragement when receiving responses about structural challenges, such as high housing costs and low wages, that are outside their control to change. Staff also expressed uncertainty about the tool's broader purpose, which limited their ability to explain its value or interpret certain questions.
- Focus group feedback suggested several areas for tool improvement, including more targeted questions on cost-of-living challenges, healthcare navigation, understanding of U.S. laws and legal rights, permanent residency and citizenship, and culturally specific questions tailored to different cultural backgrounds.

- WR leadership viewed RISAP as a valuable source of aggregated evidence – particularly because its integration domains were defined directly by FDPs. They emphasized the benefit of a standardized tool that could be used across FDP-serving organizations and "rolled up" nationally. However, WR staff emphasized that data collection represented a significant additional workload on top of their regular case management duties, and noted that time and capacity constraints remain major barriers to using data effectively.
- Despite logistical challenges, WR staff and directors found the results energizing, noting that even modest improvements across survey rounds affirmed that resettlement support is indeed making a meaningful difference in clients' integration journeys.
- From an advocacy perspective, leaders saw the survey results as timely and relevant, illuminating the effects of policy changes, such as HR.1, and reinforcing the need for English classes, job readiness support, and efficient USCIS processing. At the frontline level, survey evidence was most useful when it generated immediate follow-up for clients.

Learnings & Recommendations

The learnings from implementing the self-assessment pilot are far-reaching, and generate recommendations relevant to a wide range of resettlement stakeholders.

For System Innovators

- **Streamline the self-assessment tool while preserving meaningful integration metrics.** Future revisions should prioritize removing or consolidating questions that do not yield actionable or analytically valuable insights.
- **Increase cultural and contextual relevance for FDPs by tailoring the survey to different cultural or country-of-origin contexts.** Because many respondents viewed the survey as a learning opportunity, integrating light educational components could allow the survey to double as a real-time cultural orientation, thereby increasing its utility to FDPs.
- **Improve findings utilization through stronger digital data infrastructure.** Under-resourced agencies often lack bandwidth to fully analyze survey findings. Investments in digital tools, such as integrated case management software that displays prior responses during follow-up rounds or dynamic dashboards that automatically visualize data, would improve usability and support timely, data-driven decisions. Private donors can be engines of innovation and drive forward FDP integration by investing in this infrastructure.
- **Plan for ways to share data back with FDPs.** Respondents expressed a clear desire to see the survey findings and to understand how their participation contributed to the project's outcomes. Incorporating a simple feedback loop – such as a thank-you message, a brief summary of findings,

or prompts encouraging reflection on their own integration progress – can strengthen trust, reinforce engagement, and help respondents see the value of their contributions.

- **The business community should work with FDP-serving organizations to embrace their role in integration.** For example, survey participants identified the workplace as the primary place they learn English – employers can further support their FDP employees by providing on-site English classes.
- **Continue utilizing community volunteers as a resource to build integration program capacity.** Implementation of the self-assessment survey was made possible because of the relationships between World Relief Chicagoland and their clients. These relationships depend in part on volunteers who generously donated their time to help build staff capacity to support newcomers.
- **Government partners should prioritize measuring integration based on domains defined by FDPs.** There is significant value in scaling the use of RISAP. When stakeholders adopt the same FDP-defined measures of integration, consistent and comparable data enable deeper, system-level insights. The Office of Refugee Resettlement should utilize the RISAP survey as a resource when undertaking the Annual Survey of Refugees to ensure alignment on meaningful measures of integration.
- **Integration program funders should recognize all FDP-identified metrics to integration, including but not limited to employment and livelihoods.** Economic self-sufficiency remains vital, but not at the expense of other integration foundations.

For FDP-Serving Organizations

- Unlike existing large-scale refugee integration surveys, this tool is grounded in FDP experiences and seeks to impact integration outcomes at the individual level. **Integrating the self-assessment survey into everyday case management, rather than treating it solely as a data collection exercise, would enable FDP-serving organizations to strengthen service delivery** by identifying needs in real time, facilitating timely referrals, and maintaining intentional touchpoints with clients. In turn, community capacity to welcome at the local level would strengthen.
- **Generating reliable integration data requires time, staffing, and planning, but the pilot shows early signs that a greater investment would pay off** by illuminating emerging trends, supporting more strategic resource allocation, and contributing to unified sector-wide advocacy. Both private and public funders seeking to make an impact on integration outcomes may consider supporting FDP-serving organizations to conduct high-quality, actionable, and scaled integration self-assessment surveys.

- **Effective implementation depends on well-prepared survey administrators.** A scale up of RISAP must ensure survey administrators understand the survey's purpose, question rationale, and understand how to adapt wording while maintaining integrity. In-house administration by FDP-serving organizations supports more efficient follow-up, but staff need protected time to conduct surveys and use the data. To this end, agencies may benefit from dedicated M&E capacity, budgeted staff incentives for special projects, and donor-supported investments in staff well-being.
- **Accurate, consistent, culturally-relevant translation is essential.** Agencies using the tool regularly should prepare high-quality translations in key languages and train interpreters. If the tool is scaled across organizations, sharing translations can reduce cost and maintain linguistic integrity.
- **Many respondents want more explicit next steps after completing the survey.** Adding a clear follow-up protocol can bridge this gap. Digitally literate clients may benefit from an easy-to-access online resource list, while offline options remain essential for clients with low literacy or limited digital access.
- Recognizing the crucial role that refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and ethnic community based organizations (ECBOs) have in integration, **FDP-serving organizations, including but not limited to resettlement agencies, should utilize this tool as a means to enhance integration service delivery.**
- **Lack of family reunification continues to be a barrier to integration.** Collaboration with external partners, like the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN), could help ensure that refugees have the greatest possible access to family reunification opportunities and the additional integration support it entails.[3] In addition, data from such collaboration and from refugees themselves would help to inform family reunification policy.

For Forcibly Displaced Persons

– from people with lived experience who participated in the study:

- **Use integration surveys to "pay it forward."** Surveys like RISAP take time, but they offer a rare chance to speak honestly about systemic challenges. When many FDPs share their experiences, patterns emerge that can drive real policy and program improvements.
- **Share what you learn.** If you receive useful resource information, pass it along. Participants noted that sharing knowledge with others in the community felt meaningful and strengthened collective support networks.
- **Treat the survey as a learning opportunity.** Many FDPs said the questions helped them better understand life in the U.S. and reflect on their own integration progress. It's not just data collection – it can highlight what you know and what you still need to navigate.

3 "What is the Global Family Reunification Network?" Global Family Reunification Network, accessed January 2025, https://familyreunificationnetwork.org/.

- **Know your rights and advocate for yourself.** If you don't understand something – insurance, landlord issues, immigration steps, disability accommodations – ask for help. Request skilled interpretation for medical and legal matters and follow up with service providers when needed, including on receiving resources after completing surveys.
- **Be patient with the integration process.** Expect that reality may differ from expectations prior to arriving in the United States. Integration takes time across many domains. The resettlement program provides a foundation, but progress builds gradually with support from community members and service providers.

Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)

As in the previous *Integration Outcomes* research, RISAP recognizes that individuals with lived forced displacement experience arrive in the United States through different pathways–including refugee resettlement, to seek asylum, with Special Immigrant Visas (SIV), and via other avenues. While the study specifically surveyed refugees and SIV holders, the term Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs) is used throughout this report to reflect that lived forced displacement experience is not defined by a single pathway, and that the findings may be relevant across a range of legal statuses and pathways to the United States.

Project Background

To understand the motivation behind RISAP, Refugee Integration Self-Assessment Pilot (RISAP), it is essential to recognize its grounding in co-designed integration research. In 2020, RCUSA and the Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMSNY) issued a report titled *Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program*[4] that called for bold changes to the approach for measuring refugee integration. Specifically, it recommended commitment to collecting better data on integration outcomes, and the adoption of an approach that extends beyond early self-sufficiency.

In response to these recommendations, RCUSA, Refugee Congress, and the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) launched the *Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)* project in 2021. The year-long research project sought to define integration by measurements identified directly by those with lived forced displacement experience. Through a co-design process, this project explored the types of integration outcomes that are meaningful for FDPs, and how refugee resettlement policies and local services could more effectively center their needs and aspirations.

Published in November 2022, the final *Integration Outcomes* report recommended expanding FDP integration measures to capture a wider range of experiences than the narrow statutory goal of early self-sufficiency.[5] The participatory study identified integration indicators across seven domains, defined as: English language acquisition, employment and livelihoods, education, physical and mental health, housing, identity and inclusion, and self-sufficiency (which FDPs defined as access to the right information at the right time).[6]

4 Donald Kerwin and Mike Nicholson, "Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program," The Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS), December 2020, https://cmsny.org/publications/rebuilding-usrap/.

5 Taif Jany et al., "Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)," rcusa.org, November 2022, https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Integration-Outcomes-for-Forcibly-Displaced-Persons-FDPs-Final.pdf.

6 Ibid. pg 49.

Additionally, the *Integration Outcomes* report recommended that resettlement agencies (RAs) and other service providers pilot a periodic self-assessment exercise that would provide FDPs the opportunity to reflect openly on their integration journey and supply RAs with insight on their clients' experiences over time.[7] To this end, the *Integration Outcomes* research presented a prototype survey tool to capture these FDP-identified integration metrics. The survey was accompanied by a list of action items for local RA staff to address integration gaps identified by their clients in the survey.

To put the recommendations of the *Integration Outcomes* report into practice, RCUSA and Refugee Congress partnered with WR to implement the *Refugee Integration Self-Assessment Pilot* (RISAP). Partnering with the WR Chicagoland regional office, the study strengthened the self-assessment prototype, developing a longitudinal survey (tracking over time) to measure integration progress and help enhance FDP-serving programs. The RISAP team set out to produce and test a final survey instrument that was both easy-to-use for FDPs and survey administrators and effective at collecting meaningful data on integration outcomes – as defined by FDPs – to inform more evidence-based, responsive resettlement programs.

The key objectives of RISAP are to:

1. **Strengthen the survey instrument** by refining questions and testing methods for survey administration.
2. **Ensure meaningful survey outcomes** by examining the relevance of integration measures to FDPs and whether evidence is actionable and utilized by resettlement stakeholders.

FDP-Serving Organizations

Refugee resettlement is a public-private partnership, in which RAs, ECBOs, and RLOs are all essential partners. The RISAP survey instrument is designed to be utilized by any FDP-serving organization as a tool to collect meaningful, FDP-defined integration outcomes. The term "FDP-Serving Organization" will be utilized throughout this report to acknowledge all organizations that provide integration services to FDPs.

7 Ibid.

December 2020

"Charting a Course to Rebuild and Strengthen the US Refugee Admissions Program" Report Published

January 2021

Integration Outcomes Research Launched

November 2022

"Integration Outcomes" Report Published

August 2023

RISAP Project Launched

Aug 2023 - Sep 2024

Self-Assessment Refining and Rollout Planning

Sep 2024 - Jan 2025

Round 1 Surveys

July - Sep 2025

Round 2 Surveys

Political and Local Context

National Policy Shifts

The U.S. political and policy context shifted dramatically over the RISAP timeline – the first survey round was conducted during the final months of the Biden administration, and the second round was conducted at the start of the second Trump administration. When the RISAP Steering Committee first convened in early 2024, the U.S. government was supportive of USRAP after three years rebuilding overseas and domestic capacity.

After U.S. refugee admissions had fallen to historic lows under the first Trump administration and during the Covid-19 pandemic, U.S. civil society successfully advocated for higher refugee arrivals, investments in resettlement capacity, and innovations in refugee processing infrastructure during the Biden administration.[8]

In the first quarter of fiscal year 2024 alone, the United States had resettled 17% of the 125,000 refugee admissions goal for that year.[9] The U.S. government and civil society were also celebrating the one-year anniversary of Welcome Corps, a program that empowered everyday Americans to help refugees from around the world build new lives in the United States.[10] The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had just concluded the Global Refugee Forum, during which the United States made 27 pledges on solutions and integration.[11]

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8 "Where are the Refugees?" Refugee Council USA, March 31 2018, https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/RCUSA-Report-1.pdf.

9 "FY24 First Quarter Refugee Arrivals Report ," rcusa.org, February 28, 2024, https://rcusa.org/resources/fy24-first-quarter-refugee-arrivals-report/.

10 "The Welcome Corps Celebrates First Year of New Service Opportunity for Americans to Privately Sponsor Refugees," Welcome Corps, January 19, 2024, https://welcomecorps.org/the-welcome-corps-celebrates-first-year-of-new-service-opportunity-for-americans-to-privately-sponsor-refugees/.

11 "Outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum 2023," UNHCR, 2023, https://www.unhcr.org/media/outcomes-global-refugee-forum-2023.

A year after RISAP launched, the U.S. refugee, asylum, and immigration policy landscape was fundamentally altered by the return of a sharply restrictionist approach. The impact of the Trump administration's immigration agenda has been swift and staggering. Immediately after inauguration, President Trump suspended the U.S. resettlement program through the signing of Executive Order 14163.[12] The executive order also introduced the Administration's priority to give states a more upfront role in determining arrival capacity in their jurisdictions. Four days later, a "stop work order" was issued to RAs for initial resettlement programming, triggering a halt in critical funding and mass furloughs and layoffs at both national and local RAs.[13]

Throughout 2025, the Trump administration continued curtailing access to humanitarian protections and the programs that serve newcomers. In June, a travel ban issued by presidential proclamation restricted or limited entry to the United States for nationals of 19 countries,[14] including many significant countries of origin for FDPs.[15] Asylum protections were rolled back; for example, the Trump administration held that women fleeing domestic violence should "generally" be denied asylum, and the administration has repeatedly attempted to end asylum for families and children fleeing targeted violence.[16]

Meanwhile, FDPs already resettled in the United States faced direct harm due to the passage of H.R.1, the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, which – for the first time in U.S. history – excluded refugees, asylees, and certain others from immediate access to basic healthcare and nutrition assistance programs.[17] In late October, the White House issued a historically low and highly restrictive Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions (PD), setting the refugee admissions goal for fiscal year 2026 at 7,500, primarily for Afrikaners (white South Africans), while simultaneously – and unlawfully – failing to send a report to Congress (as required by statute) to conduct statutorily–required congressional consultations

12 "Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program," The White House, January 21, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/realigning-the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program/.

13 Jennifer Ludden, "Trump Freeze on Resettlement Funding Leaves New Refugees Scrambling to Adjust in U.S.," NPR, March 8, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/03/06/nx-s1-5309763/refugees-limbo-trump-freeze-resettlement-programs.

14 Note that on December 16, President Trump issued an expanded travel ban, increasing the number of countries to 39 plus nationals of the Palestinian-Authority.

15 "Restricting the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Project the United States from Foreign Terrorists and other National Security and Public Safety Threats, Presidential Proclamation, June 4, 2025 https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/06/restricting-the-entry-of-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-united-states-from-foreign-terrorists-and-other-national-security-and-public-safety-threats/.

16 "Trump Slams the Door on Women and Families," Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, September 3, 2025, https://cgrs.uclawsf.edu/en/news/trump-slams-door-women-and-families.

17 "On the Eve of July 4th, Refugee Council USA Condemns the House Passage of the Budget Reconciliation Bill and Its Blatantly Anti-Refugee, Anti-Asylum, Anti-Immigrant, Anti-Family, Anti-American Provisions," rcusa.org, July 3, 2025, https://rcusa.org/news-and-media/on-the-eve-of-july-4th-refugee-council-usa-condemns-the-house-passage-of-the-budget-reconciliation-bill-and-its-blatantly-anti-refugee-anti-asylum-anti-immigrant-anti-family-anti-american-provisi/.

prior to issuing the PD.[18] All the while, the Trump administration took steps to weaken international refugee law by proposing an overhaul of the globally recognized refugee protection system, such as by treating refugee and asylum as "temporary" protections and seeking to *refoul* individuals back to the harm they fled.[19]

The White House resumed its work from Trump's first presidency to prioritize "assimilation" over integration. After the Biden administration named "integration and inclusion" as key to a more "fair and efficient" immigration and refugee policy,[20] Trump's January 2025 Executive Order *Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program* immediately changed course. The Executive Order directed federal agencies "to admit only those refugees who can fully and appropriately assimilate into the United States and to ensure that the United States preserves taxpayer resources for its citizens."[21] In the *Presidential Determination on Transferring the United States Program of Initial Refugee Resettlement* (published in the Federal Register on the same day as the refugee admissions PD) the Trump administration re-emphasized the goal of "assimilation," stating that resettlement must support "refugees in achieving early economic self-sufficiency and assimilation into U.S. society."[22]

This sentiment was nothing new; during the first Trump administration, there were reports that refugees would have to complete an "assimilation assessment" prior to resettling in the United States.[23] Reverting to the term "assimilation" has profound implications. In emphasizing "assimilation," the Trump administration places the responsibility for adaptation primarily on newly arrived refugees, minimizing the role of receiving communities to welcome and embrace newcomers as individuals with distinct experiences, identities, and cultures.

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18 "RCUSA Condemns Historically Low FY 2026 Refugee Admissions Goal and Abandonment of Refugees Most At Risk," rcusa.org, October 30, 2025, https://rcusa.org/news-and-media/rcusa-condemns-historically-low-fy-2026-refugee-admissions-goal-and-abandonment-of-refugees-most-at-risk/.

19 "Trump Administration Moves to Undermine Global Framework to Protect Refugee Lives," Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, September 26, 2025, https://cgrs.uclawsf.edu/en/news/trump-administration-moves-undermine-global-framework-protect-refugee-lives.

20 "FACT SHEET: President Biden Outlines Steps to Reform Our Immigration System by Keeping Families Together, Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration, and Streamlining the Legal Immigration System," National Archives and Records Administration, February 2, 2021, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/02/fact-sheet-president-biden-outlines-steps-to-reform-our-immigration-system-by-keeping-families-together-addressing-the-root-causes-of-irregular-migration-and-streamlining-the-legal-immigration-syst/.

21 "Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program," The White House, January 20, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/realigning-the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program/.

22 "Presidential Determination on Transferring the United States Program of Initial Refugee Resettlement," The Federal Register, October 31, 2025, https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-19753.pdf.

23 "HIAS Responds to Reports of 'Assimilation Test' for Refugees," HIAS, September 28, 2017, https://hias.org/statements/hias-responds-reports-assimilation-test-refugees/.

Against the challenging backdrop of diminished humanitarian protections, restricted access to life-saving public benefits, and emphasized usage of "assimilation" over integration, the work of carrying out a refugee integration assessment study, one that utilizes measures defined by FDPs, has taken on extraordinarily new significance. The *Refugee Act of 1980* established the U.S. refugee resettlement program with the goal of supporting the "effective resettlement of refugees." Building on insights from the *Integration Outcomes* research, RISAP upholds its commitment to using *FDP-defined* integration measures to strengthen the U.S. resettlement program.[24] FDPs know best what they need for effective resettlement. By developing an approach rooted in FDP's own definitions – what integration means, what it looks like in practice, and what facilitates it – the United States can take meaningful steps toward more effective refugee resettlement.

Piloting in Chicago

Chicago, as a diverse city with a long history of incorporating newcomers and a strong community- and neighborhood-based approach, was enthusiastically selected as the piloting location for RISAP. The project was conducted with FDPs residing in and around three primary locations where World Relief Chicagoland has offices: Aurora, Chicago, and DuPage County. Each location is distinct, ensuring the assessment included a cross-section of FDPs in urban and suburban contexts.

FDPs participating in RISAP from the City of Chicago primarily reside on the far north side, in a two-square-mile area encompassing the neighborhoods of Rogers Park and West Ridge. In this area, many stores are within a short walking distance, and public transportation (both buses and trains) is readily available, allowing easy access to employment, medical care, schools, and community colleges, English classes, and more. High housing density makes it easier for FDPs to build community quickly and reduce typical barriers, such as feelings of isolation, and accessing childcare – though overall cost of living tends to be higher.

The other half of FDP respondents reside in suburban settings throughout the "collar counties" of DuPage and Kane (the latter including the City of Aurora), in the greater Chicago region. With the post-pandemic housing crisis still ongoing, available and affordable housing has remained scarce, resulting in the dispersal of resettled FDPs across an area of 180 square miles. Despite inadequate public transportation and a relative lack of proximity to other FDPs, suburban resettlement makes use of agency-provided transportation, carpools, and community and volunteer support to allow FDPs to access basic services, including healthcare and employment. To foster community building, World Relief Chicagoland provides group programming, in-person English classes, and virtual after-school programming.

24 Taif Jany et al., "Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs)," rcusa.org, November 2022, https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Integration-Outcomes-for-Forcibly-Displaced-Persons-FDPs-Final.pdf.

FDPs participating in this study largely arrived in the Chicago area in late 2023 and early 2024. This timeframe coincided with what in hindsight proved to be a high-water mark fiscal year for refugee resettlement. The United States continued to rebuild its refugee infrastructure, made significant improvements to the pre-admission processing of refugees overseas, and expanded community sponsorship pathways that allowed private groups to resettle refugees. For the third year in a row, the Biden administration set an ambitious refugee admissions goal of 125,000, and by the fiscal year's close on September 30, 2024, the United States had admitted just over 100,000 refugees, the largest number in thirty years.

The Chicago region, one of the largest FDP-receiving areas in the Midwest, continued to receive an increasing number of refugees, as well as people arriving through other pathways, such as Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, thousands of humanitarian parolees, and asylum seekers, some of whom were bussed to Illinois from Texas. This compounded existing bottlenecks, including fierce competition for affordable and available housing, delays for medical appointments, and overwhelmed school systems lacking sufficient bilingual support-staff.[25] Despite these challenges, Chicago and the surrounding metro area embraced its rich history of welcoming refugees and immigrants and remained supportive of the new FDP arrivals.

Between the two rounds of the survey, the U.S. resettlement program was halted, the Trump administration issued a series of executive orders, actions, and accompanying policies, and H.R. 1 was enacted. FDP families in the Chicago area learned that they might not be able to reunite with loved ones overseas who were awaiting resettlement – or that services, such as their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, were ending. National anti-refugee/anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies put Chicago in the Trump administration's crosshairs, as federal agents were deployed to the city in September 2025 (referred to as "Operation Midway Blitz") – part of a larger effort to crack down on "criminal illegal aliens" in cities governed by Democrats.[26] Threats of arrests, actual arrests, and deportations across the country sowed confusion and fear among FDP communities as word spread that ICE was arresting refugees and green card processing slowed to a halt.[27] In fact, several RISAP participants invited to participate in focus group discussions in October 2025 cancelled, citing fears over the presence of federal agents in the region.

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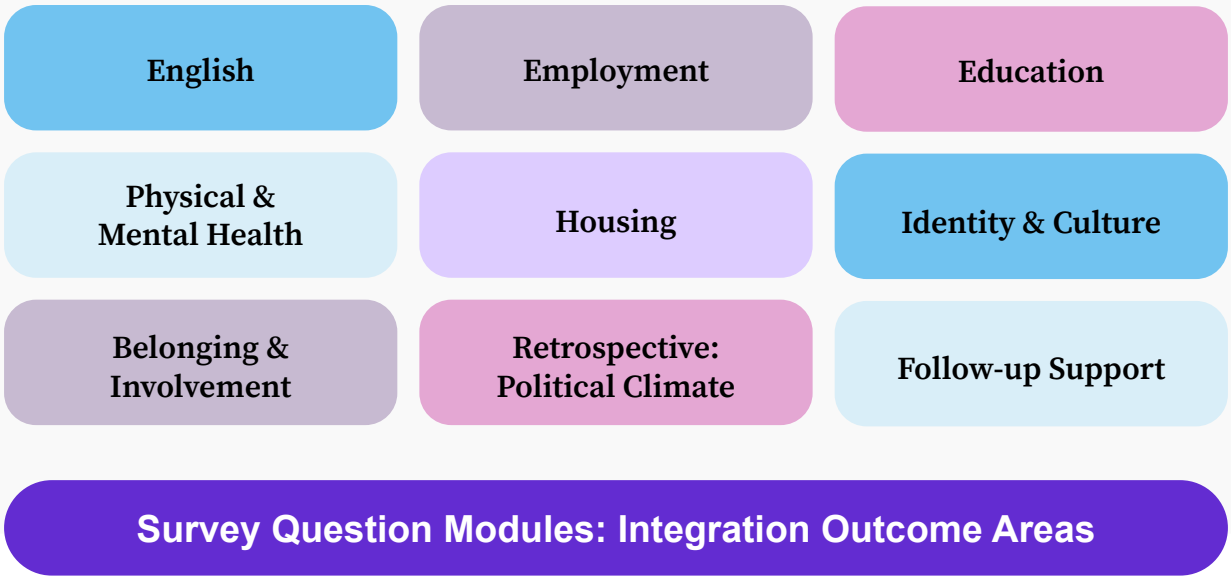
25 Peter Hancock, "Education Leaders Seek Added State Funding to Help Accommodate Influx of Migrant Students in Illinois," WTTW, April 18, 2024: Education Leaders Seek Added State Funding to Help Accommodate Influx of Migrant Students in Illinois | Chicago News | WTTW.

26 "ICE Launches Operation Midway Blitz in Honor of Katie Abraham to Target Criminal Illegal Aliens Terrorizing Americans in Sanctuary Illinois," September 8, 2025. https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/09/08/ice-launches-operation-midway-blitz-honor-katie-abraham-target-criminal-illegal.

27 Gillian McGoldrick , "Six former Bhutanese refugees living in Pennsylvania – who have legal residency in the U.S. – were detained by ICE,", The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 18, 2025. ICE detains former Bhutanese refugees from Central Pa.



Theory of Change

RISAP is grounded in the truth that people with forced displacement experience know their integration needs best. The *Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons* report calls upon resettlement stakeholders to widen the aperture on what constitutes "effective resettlement" beyond economic self-sufficiently alone. The report advances the hypothesis that "by developing and implementing an integration model that authentically engages immigrants in defining integration [...] we will be able to strengthen our resettlement program and policies at all stages." The result of the *Integration Outcomes* report is a model set of integration outcome domains, co-designed with FDPs themselves, that reflect the full breadth of factors impacting successful integration. Centering integration research on the lived experiences of FDPs can inform resettlement services and programming to more effectively address holistic integration needs.

RISAP put this theory of change to the test by piloting the self-assessment tool originally developed in the Integration Outcomes report in partnership with a local refugee resettlement agency. Through two rounds of testing, feedback gathering, and refinement of the survey tool, RISAP aimed to strengthen the self-assessment to generate more meaningful understanding of integration needs, thereby supporting FDPs' successful integration into their new communities.

Ultimately, RISAP tests that hypothesis that **if** FDPs are able to reflect on their integration experience according to FDP-defined key domains, **and if** FDP-serving organizations are able to reliably track this information over time, **then** FDPs can better access resources and support for their integration journey, FDP-serving organizations can make informed decisions about services, and the broader resettlement community can more effectively advocate for integration needs.

Evaluation Questions & Study Methodology

This study evaluated the pilot implementation of the Refugee Integration Self-Assessment survey to strengthen the survey instrument and understand how to meaningfully use survey outcomes. Specifically, the study was guided by the following **key evaluation questions:**

- Are the survey questions clear and accessible for FDP respondents?
- Are the questions organized or sequenced effectively?
- Is the methodology for administering the survey with case managers efficient and effective?
- Is the survey generating meaningful information about integration outcomes that offer knowledge to agencies beyond what they already know and/or bolster the evidence base for advocacy?
- How actionable is the data for program planning and implementation?

The project employed **mixed methods** to achieve its objectives. The study combined quantitative and qualitative questions in the survey tool to capture measurable indicators of lived integration experience and employed qualitative approaches to gather feedback from respondents and survey administrators to evaluate the implementation of the pilot.

Data Collection and Respondent Selection: Partnering with WR provided the RISAP team access to recently resettled refugees and SIVs, all invited to participate in the survey within one year of their arrival in the United States. Refugee and SIV clients were chosen due to similarities in their resettlement timelines and initial services received.

In order to understand changes in respondents' integration experience over time, the RISAP survey was conducted in a two-wave panel, Round 1 (R1) and Round

2 (R2), with approximately eight months between survey rounds.[28] The first round of surveys was conducted by RISAP team members or contracted interns from September 2024 to January 2025. The second round was conducted by WR Chicagoland staff from July to September 2025. For testing the RISAP survey tool, the project targeted a sample of 75 respondents, achieving an actual sample of 76 in R1 and 66 in R2. Surveys were conducted either in person, in FDP homes and at WR locations, or over the phone.

To evaluate the survey, qualitative focus groups were conducted in October and November 2025 to evaluate the survey, approximately one month after R2 surveys concluded. Discussions took place, both with FPD respondents and with the WR team that administered the survey, to understand their respective experiences using the tool. Focus groups were conducted from October 13 to 15, following the administration of R2 of the RISAP survey. All focus groups were recorded and – in addition to the lead facilitator – notetakers were present in addition to the lead facilitator to capture responses and enable content analysis.

- **Client Focus Groups** – Thirty-two FDPs participated in a total of four focus group sessions, with between six and twelve people per session. Participants represented a cross section of respondent ages, genders, linguistic backgrounds, and cultural identities. Focus group respondents were invited to participate if they had indicated an interest in providing future feedback during the RISAP survey. Focus groups took place in person at WR's Chicago office and at a community church located between WR's Aurora and DuPage offices, and respondents received a $40 gift card for their time. All sessions utilized professional interpretation, and the focus group facilitators had lived experience of forced displacement. Some focus groups were smaller than anticipated as several participants did not feel comfortable attending due fear of ongoing ICE raids in the Chicago area.
- **WR Staff Focus Groups** – Four WR staff who had been engaged in R2 survey data collection participated in a separate, virtual focus group discussion to share their experience in implementing the survey. Staff were selected via purposive sampling by WR Steering Group members.

In addition, the evaluation of the pilot implementation process was enriched by informal data reflection sessions with WR leadership, a key informant interview with a member of the WR staff who served on the Steering Committee, and a desk review of project documents.

Data Analysis

- **Survey Data** – After completion of both survey rounds, datasets were cleaned and combined to conduct longitudinal analysis of panel data from respondents who participated in both R1 and R2 of the survey. Prepared

28 The RISAP team decided on eight months between survey rounds as it was identified anecdotally by WR staff as the minimum amount of time to observe noticeable changes in integration outcomes.

survey data were analyzed with SPSS software using appropriate statistical methods, including frequencies, cross-tabulation "transition" matrices to chart respondents' change over time, and few tests of difference (chi-squared test for categorical data) to understand if change between survey rounds was statistically significant. Basic content analysis was conducted on open-ended questions to extract and quantify key themes, which were analyzed alongside closed-ended survey questions.

- **Focus Groups** – The analysis employed systematic qualitative coding to identify patterns, frequencies, and emergent themes across the 32 FDP participants and 4 WR staff. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. A combined deductive and inductive coding approach was used: deductive codes were derived from the study's three primary evaluation objectives (ease of use, question effectiveness, and outcomes and impact), while inductive codes emerged organically from participant responses to capture unanticipated themes, such as the survey's educational value and systemic integration barriers. Each transcript was coded systematically, with frequency counts tracked to illustratively quantify responses. Cross-group comparative analysis identified patterns specific to individual focus groups as well as universal themes spanning all participants. For the FDP focus group discussions, findings were triangulated across the groups to distinguish between language-specific or circumstance-specific experiences versus shared integration challenges.

Limitations

- Survey administrators changed between R1 and R2 of the pilot from WR-contracted interns and RISAP team members, who did not know respondents, to WR staff who were very familiar with the respondents (sometimes as case managers). This shift may have introduced response biases such as social desirability or courtesy bias, depending on whether respondents were interacting with external or known administrators.
- Survey administrators for R2 (WR staff) received varying levels of training due to personnel shortages resulting from sudden funding disruptions to resettlement agencies. While most survey administration was conducted as intended, these inconsistencies may have affected the delivery of some questions and, in isolated cases, the consistency of data collection.
- The overall sample size is small, so findings should be interpreted as illustrative rather than representative of the broader WR Chicagoland FDP population. The study was also not powered for disaggregated analysis by WR site or respondent demographics such as country of origin or sex.
- As a pilot, this study focused on refugees and SIV holders served by WR Chicagoland. Future applications of this tool would benefit from including additional FDP groups such as asylum seekers or humanitarian parolees to reflect a wider range of experiences.

- While administering surveys in FDP homes likely supported respondent comfort, survey administrators noted that other household members were occasionally present, which may have influenced responses in some cases.
- Sampling bias is inherent in the focus groups, as they reflect the experiences of FDPs who completed the survey and were available and willing to participate. This may have limited perspectives from those unable to attend due to work schedules, acute crises, fear of immigration enforcement (amid heightened federal presence in Chicago during the evaluation period), or dissatisfaction with the study process.

Ethical Considerations

RISAP adhered to standard ethical and consent procedures throughout all stages of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals could withdraw at any time without consequence. Because direct personal benefits from participation could not be guaranteed, respondents received a gift card for each survey round and for participating in focus groups as compensation for their time. All findings presented in this report are anonymized, and any personally identifiable information was removed from datasets prior to sharing with project partners or other stakeholders.

Survey Findings

Piloting the self-assessment with WR clients offered a valuable opportunity to better understand FDPs' integration journeys. The following section presents the key findings from R1 and R2 of the RISAP survey, with an emphasis on actionable insights. While the pilot captures only a small segment of the diverse integration experiences of FDPs nationwide, it offers early insight into the types of findings that could emerge from scaling this survey.

The results are presented per integration domain. The panel study design allows for the aggregation of results by survey round as well as analysis of how an individual respondent's situation changed between R1 and R2. These findings shed light on measurable changes in integration experience at both the individual and aggregate levels. Accompanying "Insight to Action" boxes highlight ways the findings can inform immediate action by FDP-serving organizations.

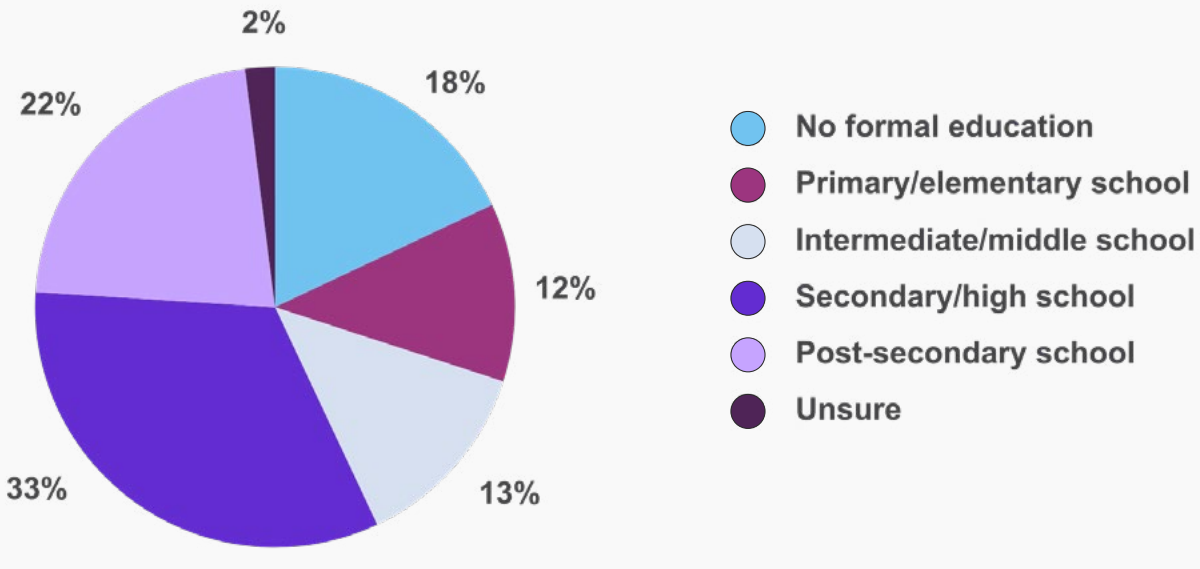
Demographics

Seventy-six people responded to R1 of the survey (53% female and 47% male), and 66 responded to R2 (48% female and 52% male) across World Relief's Aurora, Chicago, and DuPage locations. This constitutes a reasonable attrition rate of 13% between rounds, within the normal range of many longitudinal panel surveys. Respondents spanned 16 countries of origin, the largest groups from Burma, Afghanistan, and Venezuela – reflecting WR's broader refugee client population.. Respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 79, with an average age of 38 years.

A majority of respondents had some level of formal education, with the largest groups reporting completed secondary or post-secondary schooling. Still, nearly one in five respondents (18% on average between rounds) reported having no formal education. The majority arrived in the United States in January or February 2024, and the first survey round was conducted within one year of arrival, consistent with the study design. Respondents who completed both rounds of surveys were interviewed for R2 on average eight months after R1.

What is the highest level of education you completed?

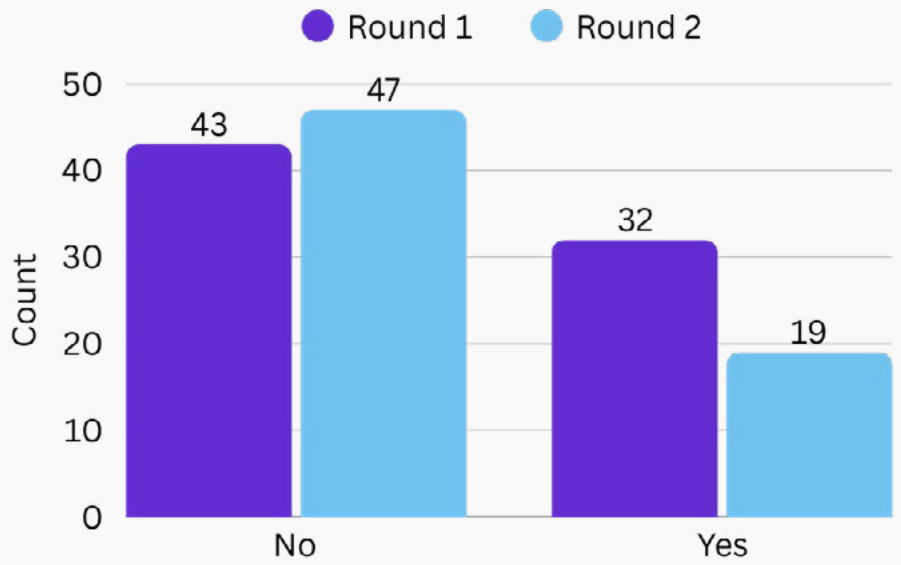
(average between survey rounds)



English Language

FDPs define understanding and speaking English as fundamental to successful integration. Findings indicate, however, that newly resettled FDPs face pervasive barriers to accessing English language education. In each survey round, a majority of respondents were not enrolled in English class, with the enrollment rate dropping between R1 (43%) and R2 (29%). Importantly, 89% of those who expressed interest in taking an English class in R1 remained unenrolled in R2, despite a majority expressing a continued interest in taking a class. **Time constraints – primarily work conflicts, followed by family or childcare responsibilities – were the most frequently cited barriers.** Several respondents also mentioned medical issues as limiting participation.

Are you currently enrolled in an English class?



In part, the lower overall enrollment rate may indicate that some FDPs are learning enough English without formal classes. By R2, two-thirds of respondents not enrolled in English classes reported being comfortable using English in their daily routine. Drilling down further, however, reveals that **three-quarters of respondents who say they do not speak enough English for their daily routine are still not enrolled in classes.** Additionally, when asked about comfort levels with English in various settings, the largest group of respondents (60%) said their **English was not sufficient to communicate specifically with doctors.**

For many, **on-the-job language learning** is acting as a stand-in for formal English classes. The most frequent response to the question of where people learn English outside of classes was “work or school” followed by “TV/music.” Furthermore, “at work” was the setting in which the respondent’s level of comfort in using English improved the most between survey rounds.

Outside of English class, where else do you learn English? (Question asked in R2 only; multiple responses possible)	
Work or school	42%
TV and music	36%
Duolingo / Language learning apps	32%
Other (e.g. family and friends, reading, volunteer tutor)	26%
Social media	21%
English class only	5%

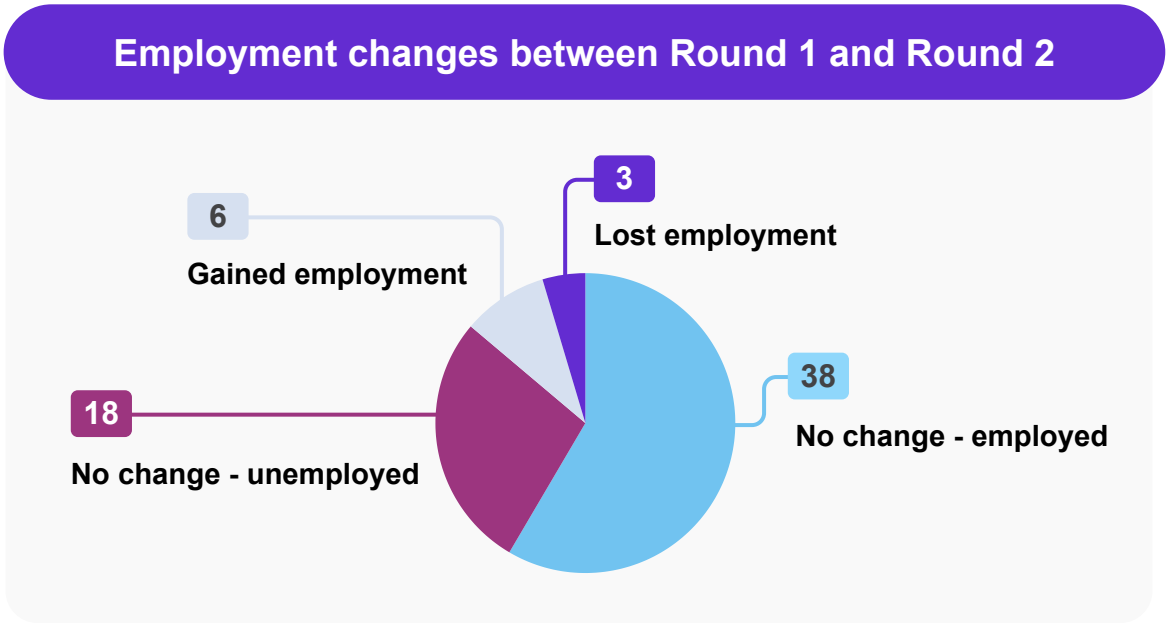
Insight to Action

In medical settings, where many clients experience particular challenges related to limited English ability, FDP-serving organizations may need to provide additional resources and ensure access to interpreters.

The time it takes to learn sufficient English needs to be prioritized. Case managers and advocates should call attention to the barriers to English class attendance, advocating for more flexible learning avenues that deconflict with work schedules, or financial support to enhance accessibility to English language classes through services such as child care or transportation.

Employment

Many resettlement stakeholders consider employment the primary factor in successful FDP integration. Among respondents who completed both survey rounds, 58% were employed. Employment status changed little over the approximately eight months between R1 and R2, with only three individuals becoming employed.



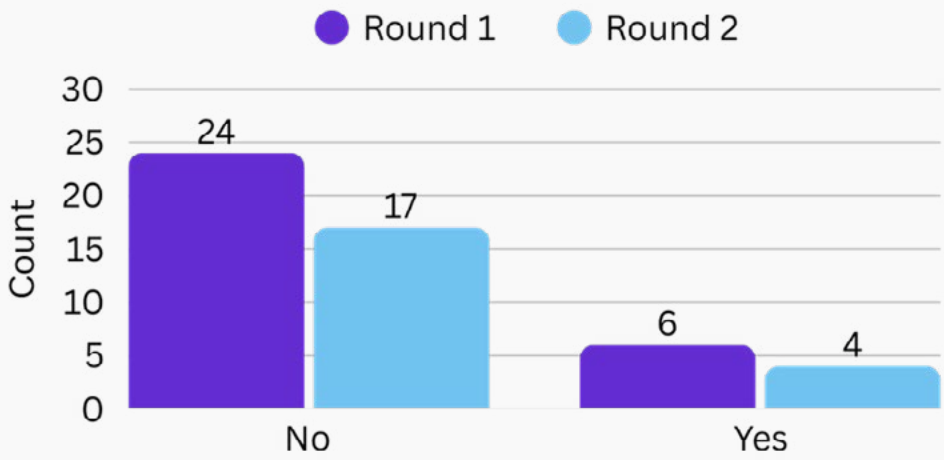
The limited change in employment status may reflect a range of factors influencing how respondents interacted with the labor market. By R2, three quarters of those already employed expressed interest in receiving information about job opportunities, indicating that many employed FDPs may aspire to find better career opportunities. Contrastingly, only one quarter of those currently unemployed expressed interest in receiving more information about job opportunities. Across both rounds, only 20% of respondents outside the workforce reported actively seeking employment, despite nearly all being of working age. This could indicate that support is required to meet other needs (e.g. health, childcare, English) before these recently resettled FDPs can seek employment.

WR representatives cautioned that this trend may change in the future, as it has historically, with policy impacts on benefits as the implementation of H.R. 1 now excludes refugees, asylees, and other humanitarian entrants from SNAP,[29] Medicare, and soon, Medicaid. Already in R2, a few respondents noted the effect of losing SNAP benefits on their ability to afford living expenses with their income.

29 "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 – Alien SNAP Eligibility," Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture, accessed November 21, 2025, https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/obbb-alien-eligibility.

Are you actively seeking work?

(of unemployed respondents)



Importantly, across rounds, **those who are employed are more likely to have people in their life helping with their career goals** (47% on average) than those who are not employed (32%),[30] indicating a benefit to career support and mentorship. The person most often providing career support is family or friends, followed by case managers.

Insight to Action

After reviewing survey results, case managers can follow up directly with unemployed working-age clients to understand and overcome the persistent barriers to seeking employment, as well as check in on any ongoing workplace challenges. RAs may explore piloting mentoring programs, including peer-mentoring among FDPs to connect to education and job opportunities.

National advocacy organizations like RCUSA can use this data to inform their policy asks on funding for the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account, which funds job training and English language classes, as well as creative funding streams through state and local governments. Funding for staff support also helps to avoid burnout and turnover.

30 Pearson's chi-squared test, p = .06. While this does not meet the conventional 5% threshold, it is statistically significant at the 10% level, indicating a modest association.

Education

As reaffirmed during the Integration Outcomes research, an education is capable of propelling FDPs into self sufficiency. Survey findings indicate that refugees face challenges prioritizing education during their first year of resettlement. Although half of respondents across both rounds are not satisfied with the level of education they have achieved or are working towards, most are not enrolled in any education program apart from English classes. **A majority of respondents were interested in receiving more information about education opportunities**, although there was a drop in interest between R1 (81%) and R2 (66%).

An open-ended question in the survey about how respondents' children are doing in school garnered many rich responses that demonstrate how interlinked a child's integration success is to that of a parent. Responses included several references to English language ability as either a catalyst for or barrier to academic success.

"How do you think your child is doing in school?"

"[W]e are surprised how well he is doing. He learns so fast and is adaptable."

– FDP Client from Colombia, R2

"They are really satisfied and happy. They are really intelligent. When they first enrolled at school they were scared, but now they come home from school happy."

– FDP Client from Afghanistan, R2

"They are doing okay. Their English language progression is going well. Academics-wise, it is different from what they used to learn in Burma, and they need more support as they continue in school."

– Refugee Client from Burma, R2

"They are doing a great job in the school and whenever I go somewhere and have a communication problem, my children help [speak] in English, like going to the doctor and shops."

– FDP Client from Afghanistan, R2

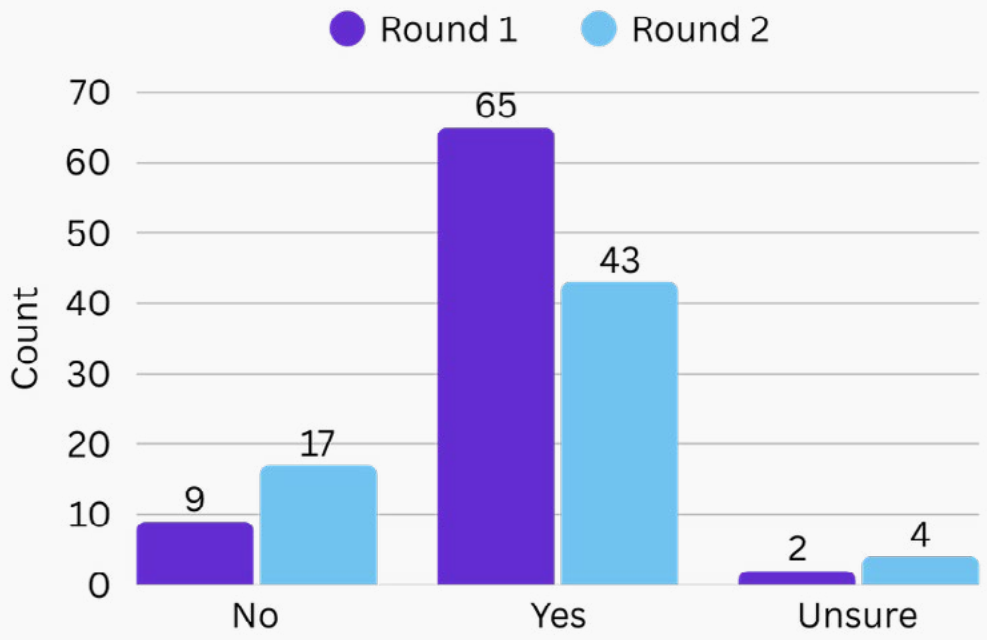
Physical & Mental Health

Physical health – and, importantly not understanding how to navigate the healthcare system – can be critical barriers to successful integration according to FDPs. Small but important changes were recorded in access to medical care. In R2, 85% of respondents reported access to a primary care doctor, down from 93% in R1. Similarly, 12% reported losing insurance between R1 and R2. While these changes do not indicate a significant aggregate trend, they highlight targeted support needs for clients who lose access to essential health services.

Insight to Action

After recognizing the reported loss of health insurance between survey rounds, advocates can confer with case managers about the cause; if the loss of health insurance was triggered by Trump 2.0 curtailing the Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) eligibility period in 2025 (or other causes such as fear, job loss (employment-based insurance, etc.), advocates can use this information when advocating for policy solutions

In the last month, have you felt that your mind is mostly at peace?



Understanding mental health and its effect on successful FDP integration is a key domain identified during the Integration Outcomes research. While many integration domains recorded only minimal change between survey rounds, **measures of mental health showed some of the highest levels of deterioration**; this was demonstrated through the proportion of respondents reporting that their mind was at peace decreasing from 85% in R1 to 65% in R2.[31] Despite this, the number accessing mental health counseling remained largely unchanged. Among those reporting mental distress, 65% did not seek counseling, often citing that they did not feel the need. This could suggest that personal, cultural, and/or cost barriers reduce acceptance of mental health counseling, even as the need for it possibly grows in the first year of resettlement.

"I didn't know I needed [a mental health counselor], but now I feel like I need it."

– FDP Client from Venezuela, R2

Insight to Action

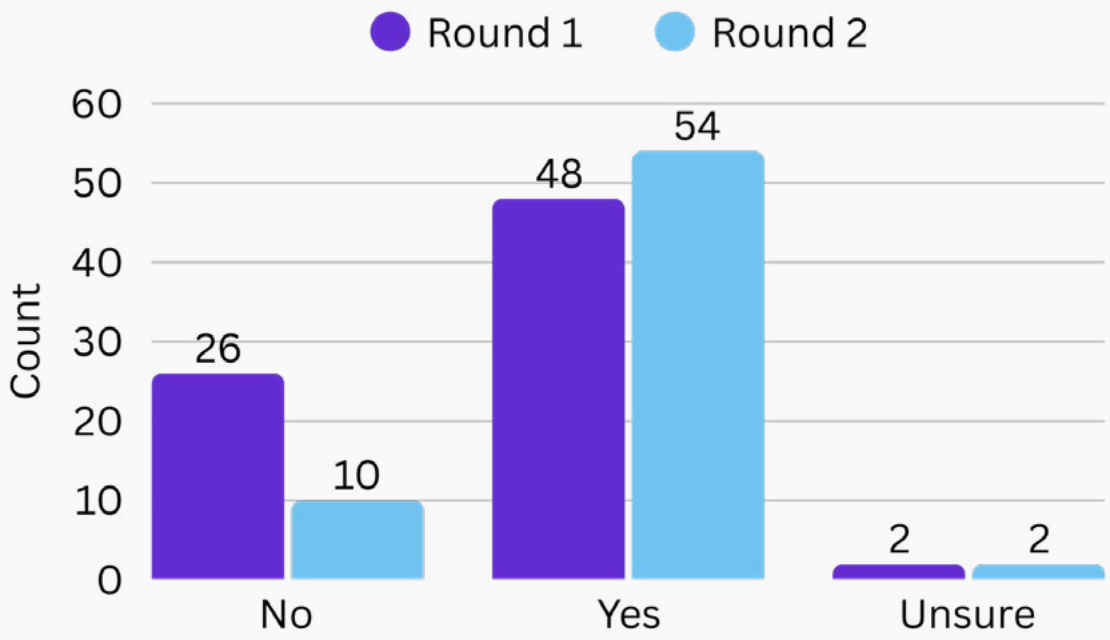
Case managers can follow up directly with clients who indicated a change in primary care and insurance access between survey rounds. Resources on mental health services can be introduced to those reporting a worsening of their mental health between survey rounds, with consideration given to cultural sensitivities around mental health, and alternatives to traditional western therapy and treatments.

31 Significant difference Chi-Squared Test, p = .030

Housing

Housing, which is fundamental to successful integration, appears stable for respondents, with on average 89% reporting they have stable housing over both survey rounds. Nine out of ten respondents also report feeling safe in their homes and neighborhoods, and two-thirds report knowing their neighbors. Notably, the proportion of respondents able to afford housing increased from 63% in R1 to 82% in R2. While a majority were interested in receiving more information about housing during R1 (71%), only a minority expressed interest during R2 (39%), possibly indicating that they have settled into their living situation.[32]

Are you able to afford your current housing?



For those who are unsatisfied with the quality and affordability of housing, open ended questions garnered more nuanced responses. Several respondents indicated they could not afford housing without external financial support (e.g. from the government or adult children). Many experienced landlord neglect and poor management, leading to sub-par living conditions (particularly broken air conditioning and heating). Sixty-five percent of respondents indicate being able to talk with their landlord about their housing issues, though there may be additional support provided for navigating such conversations and understanding tenant rights.

32 Interferences made during the Report Findings section were made in consultation with steering committee members.

> **"When cash benefits stop, it will be difficult to pay rent."**
>
> – FDP Client from Syria, R1

> **"If [I] didn't have any government support, [I] wouldn't be able to pay [rent] at all."**
>
> – FDP Client from Iraq, R1

Insight to Action

Provide a renter's resource guide for understanding tenant rights and navigating conversations with property management and landlords. Provide interpreter services to effectively communicate with tenants.

Utilize survey data to demonstrate the impact of the housing crisis when advocating for affordable housing solutions. Advocate to safeguard housing stability through cash benefits or other support programs as a foundational prerequisite to successful integration.[33]

In R2, clients were also asked: "When you think of feeling 'at home' in a place, what comes to mind?" A range of open-ended responses revealed key overarching themes:

- **Family and Relationships.** Being surrounded by family, especially children, is the most consistent marker of feeling at home. A sense of belonging also comes from good neighbors, friends, and kindness from others. Missing relatives abroad was often linked to feeling incomplete.
- **Safety, Peace, and Stability.** Respondents strongly associated home with safety, calmness, and freedom, often in contrast to insecurity in their countries of origin.
- **Comfort in a Physical Home.** Comfort, relaxation, and having one's own space or house contribute to feeling at home.
- **Future Growth and Self-Development.** Education, learning English, and securing long-term stability (like buying a house) are tied to a sense of home.

National and Political Context: Some explicitly contrasted the United States with their home countries, citing gratitude for stability, while others expressed unease due to the current political climate in the U.S.

33 "Local Toolkit to Advocate for Refugee & Newcomer Housing Policy Solutions," CWS, June - August 2023, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SCos2c3hTvkUey4QyJ49TefUG6nhky9CfKYhLPtJuzo/edit?tab=t.0.

"When you think of feeling 'at home' in a place, what comes to mind?"

"I feel freedom and safety. I have my own place."

– FDP Client from Democratic Republic of Congo, R2

"I know there are a lot of difficulties and bills, but when I have my children with me and the family is all together, that is when I feel okay and happy."

– FDP Client from Afghanistan, R2

"I imagine having my own house but with all my children here. I would like to have the whole family together and speak fluently in the language, but it is very difficult."

– FDP Client from Colombia, R2

"Lately [I] worry because [of] the new administration."

– FDP Client from Venezuela, R2

Identity & Inclusion

Responses regarding identity and inclusion showed positive trends. Seventy percent of respondents in R2 feel at home in their new city "all or most of the time." The vast majority during both survey rounds felt comfortable being themselves in their new community, with statistically significant improvement between rounds.[34] A majority feel comfortable expressing and celebrating their culture, with no statistically significant change between rounds. Nearly 80% of respondents in R2 reported interacting with people outside their cultural group, particularly in the workplace.

An ability to engage in leisure or free-time activities was explored in the survey as part of FDPs' feeling of inclusion. The strongest patterns show that fun and leisure are family-centered, often involving either outdoor activities (parks, beaches, sports), or staying home to rest. Social connections (friends, immigrant networks) are important for some, but not universal. Approximately 45% of respondents expressed interest in participating in activities such as sports, further education, or local/regional travel, but had not yet had opportunities. The most mentioned barriers to enjoying free time activities included time, cost, and transportation.

34 Pearson's Chi-Square p <.013.

Given the importance of family for establishing a sense of belonging, R2 of the survey added a question about family members who are not yet in the United States. **Two-thirds of respondents (61%) had close family members who had yet to arrive in the United States.** The dominant barriers mentioned are systemic, including most prominently the suspension or closure of resettlement programs followed by long process delays and geographic program gaps. Specific visa issues and personal legal status also appear as barriers, but less frequently. Only a few reported no barriers to family unification.

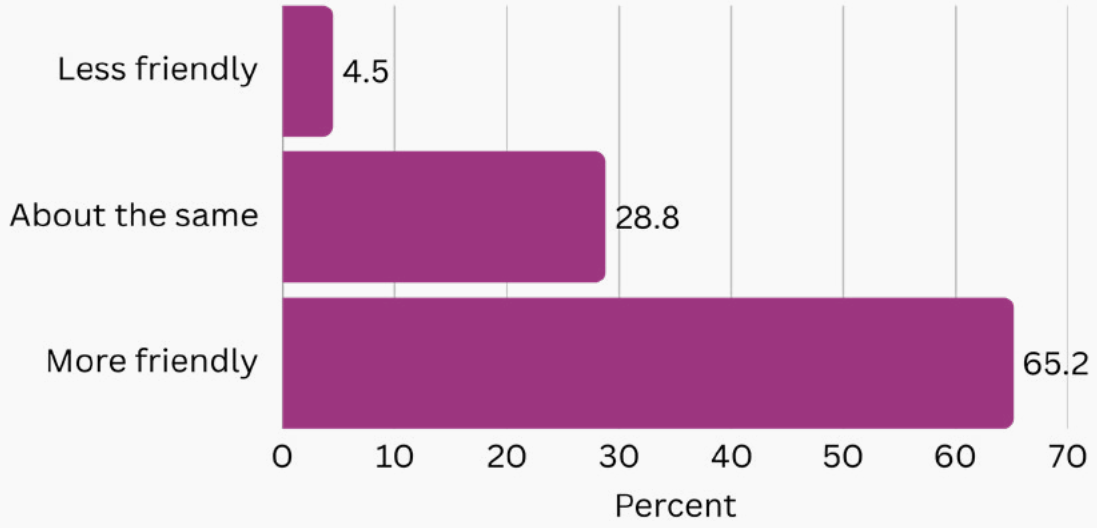
> **"They wanted to come to the U.S. but the interviews have stopped and the case is not being processed."**
>
> – FDP Client from Burma, R2

> **"My brother in Venezuela has not been able to get his visa, and my cousin is stuck in the process in the Dominican Republic; she has had her asylum approved since May of last year. She got her medical exams done, but she hasn't received a travel date."**
>
> – FDP Client from Venezuela, R2

Retrospective Sentiment Questions

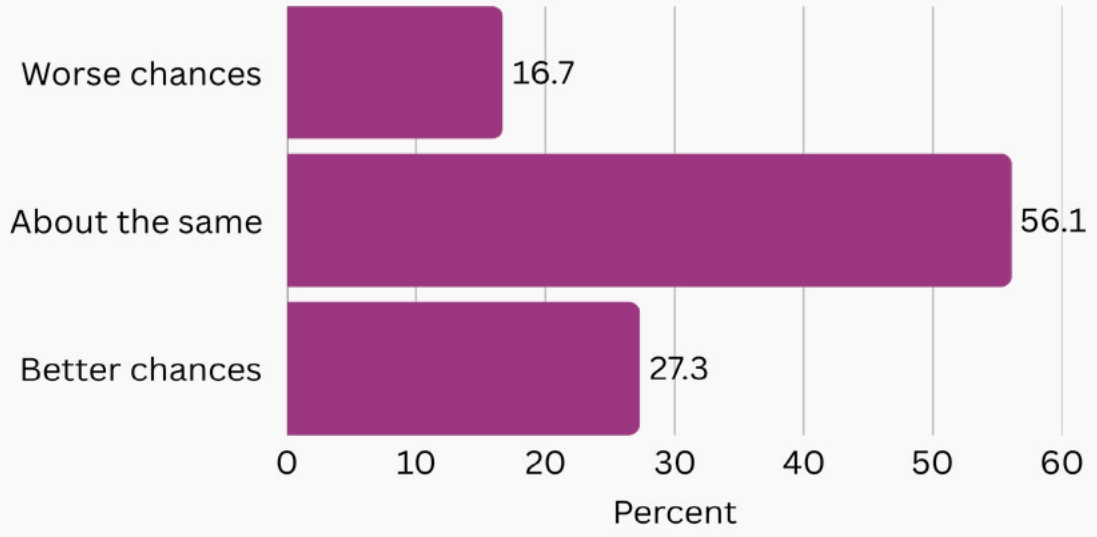
Given the vast political changes toward refugees and immigrants in 2025, the survey added retrospective questions in R2 to understand how people felt in the current climate. A series of questions asked respondents how they felt now compared to a year ago. Responses (see below charts) ran counter to the RISAP team's expectations, given prevalent negative discourse against refugee and immigrant communities under the Trump administration. These findings may demonstrate the resilience of FDPs in recognizing their own integration progress, despite heightened national anti-refugee, anti-immigrant rhetoric. Nonetheless, 21% of respondents reported increased concern about arrests or deportations compared to a year ago, with 64% of these respondents identifying as Venezuelan FDPs. If asked again today, in light of the so-called Operation Midway Blitz that began in September 2025, those numbers would likely be higher still.

Compared to how you felt a year ago, do you think people in your city are more friendly toward you, less friendly toward you, or about the same?



The completion of the study pre-dates Operation PARRIS, launched in January 2026, which for the first time rendered resettled refugees vulnerable to arrest and detention.

Compared to how you felt a year ago, do you think your chances of getting a Green Card or U.S. citizenship are better, worse, or about the same?



General Survey Findings

Integration progresses slowly. Analysis of trends between R1 and R2 underscores that FDP integration is a gradual process. Across integration themes, there is modest change recorded in the approximately eight months between survey rounds, reaffirming that holistic integration after resettlement is a slow-moving process. In some cases, limited change reflects the persistence of positive conditions; in others, it indicates enduring challenges that may require additional support.

Requests for information wane over time. During the Integration Outcomes project, FDPs determined that accessing the right information at the right time was an important part of self-sufficiency. To facilitate access to information, all integration domain question modules included the question “would you like more information about [integration topic]?” Across all domains, fewer respondents requested additional information in R2 than in R1. The reason behind this shift remains unclear; It may indicate that information needs were adequately met following R1, or conversely, that previously provided information was perceived as unhelpful or difficult to act upon. This question is worth deeper exploration.

Voicing support needs. Many respondents used the survey as an opportunity to articulate unmet support needs. Requests ranged from help with green card applications, finding new housing, resolving issues with landlords, support with the job search, family reunification, navigating government services, understanding car insurance liability policies, and more. This underscores the value of the assessment as a meaningful and actionable touchpoint with newly resettled FDPs.

Evaluation Findings

As part of piloting the survey, RISAP sought to gather feedback from both survey administrators and respondents regarding the self-assessment tool, its utility, and the rollout process. Organized by five evaluation objectives, this section details findings gleaned through a series of focus group discussions with surveyors and respondents, one-on-one interviews with surveyors, and a data reflection presentation with World Relief directors.

Evaluation Objective 1: Ease of Use of the Survey Tool

Nearly all FDP focus group participants reported feeling comfortable answering questions honestly, with no topic-based discomfort identified. An equally strong preference emerged for having World Relief staff rather than an external party administer the survey. A vast majority preferred the familiar resettlement agency staff – citing trust, continuity, reliability, and family-like relationships as key factors. Participants described feeling that World Relief staff were always "there for them" and they "can trust them," which contrasted with feelings of uncertainty toward previously unknown external survey administrators. These responses may be colored by recency bias (the WR-led surveys in R2 were most recent) or courtesy bias (not wishing to offend the resettlement agency providing services). Still, this comfort level suggests that resettlement agencies can successfully create a safe space for the authentic sharing of integration experiences using in-house staff resources.

> **"[I] feel more comfortable, because [I] know them, that they are from World Relief. They have been with [me] all the time, and [I] feel like they are, like, part of the family."**
>
> – FDP Client from Burma, R2

From the WR staff perspective, conducting the survey in-house can benefit clients, as having greater contextual awareness of a client's situation makes it easier for them to act on needs expressed through the survey and provide tailored resources. At the same time, conducting the survey in-house may introduce additional context and relationship bias into the survey process.

Applying the Survey in Practice: Trust Building through Increased Communication

Communication between refugees and the organizations that serve them is a key tool to enhance mutual trust and understanding. This survey provides a built-in opportunity for clients to communicate with resettlement staff about their integration experience, which can lead to more positive long-term integration outcomes.

During R2 of the survey, there was one scenario in which WR staff struggled with how to provide follow-up employment resources to a client whom they knew to have repeatedly turned down previous job opportunities. Because of their pre-existing relationship, the WR staff was aware of the client's education background, employment history, and health factors–all of which directly informed why they may not have been able to accept job offers.

Although the staff's next steps weren't straightforward, the survey did provide inherent benefit, as it served as an opportunity for the case manager to check in with the client, gain additional understanding into the client's integration experience, and build trust that staff was apprised of the client's needs.

From the perspective of an intern contracted by WR, conducting in-house surveys without having a pre-standing relationship with the clients presented a unique set of challenges. While the interns were trained in how to handle respondents' requests for help, including sharing appropriate resources and reporting urgent issues directly to WR leadership, interns reported that some respondents felt forgotten or deprioritized due to limitations in the interns' ability to follow up closely on client needs.

While most FDP focus group respondents reported being able to comprehend the survey tool without issue, further probing by focus group facilitators revealed that some questions proved conceptually difficult to convey across languages. As both FDPs and survey administrators noted, interpreters struggled to convey the meaning behind some abstract questions, such as "feeling at home," which several respondents understood to simply be a question about housing. Surveyors noted that mental health questions were often inconsistently translated, requiring further explanation to be properly understood.

Most FDP focus group participants approved of the survey length, perceiving the time investment worthwhile. This finding held true even among participants who found the survey lengthy, indicating that the content itself justified the time commitment. However, while the survey was appreciated for its depth, WR staff recommended shortening it or combining redundant questions to reduce survey

fatigue, particularly for those with work or childcare obligations restricting their time. Some participants reported feeling rushed due to work obligations, likely compromising data quality even when they technically managed to complete the survey. At least one FDP participant echoed a WR staff criticism that some questions were repetitive, describing the experience as “asking the same question five different ways.” Although each question was intentionally designed to assess a distinct integration concept, nuance may have been lost in translation, suggesting the need for streamlining for both interviewers and participants.

WR staff emphasized that early training sessions were critically important to a successful rollout. However, they reported needing more time to become fully familiar with the tool and its purpose. Several staff mentioned it would have been helpful to know whether rephrasing questions to help with clarity was permissible and how to best do so while maintaining a question’s integrity. While a lesson learned between R1 and R2 was the importance of practicing the survey question-by-question, WR staff say they could have benefited from greater familiarity with the questions in order to increase their comfort with improvising. Likewise, since accurate translation is crucial to the survey’s success, staff recommended providing training to interpreters and testing questions with them before finalizing survey instruments. Since simultaneous translation may compromise question consistency, FDP-serving organizations using this tool in the future may also opt to pre-translate the questions into key target languages, thus improving survey consistency.

FDP focus group participants expressed a range of preferences regarding survey modality. While about one in five believed they could have completed the survey online (with translation), a larger group preferred in-person surveys due to their inadequate skills with and/or access to technology, or greater comfort with face-to-face interactions. Meanwhile, WR interns implementing R1 noted that in-person survey administration gathered the most engaged responses; however, being surveyed over the phone was a more efficient option for certain participants, especially those without daytime availability. WR staff implementing R2 were generally comfortable with both in-person and over the phone, but lamented the logistical difficulties of scheduling in-person surveys around work conflicts for both FDPs and surveyors.

When asked about their willingness to complete the survey without a gift card incentive, FDP respondents overwhelmingly asserted that they were intrinsically motivated to respond to the survey, regardless of incentives. This was driven by a desire to help other FDPs and benefit their broader community. This authentic investment in the process suggests participants viewed the survey as meaningful rather than merely transactional. Contrastingly, WR staff specifically credited gift-card incentives with improving participation rates and maintaining respondent engagement. It also helped staff justify mustering through long surveys and scheduling challenges knowing their clients’ time was compensated. Future survey rounds could test the absence of incentives to better understand their impact on response quality and attrition.

Evaluation Objective 2: Effectiveness and Clarity of the Survey Tool

FDP focus group participants had a general understanding of the survey tool's purpose, but expectations differed in terms of the tool's intended outcome and practical applicability. Several reported greater self-awareness of their integration status and needs, stating that the survey prompted useful reflection on their integration journey. Participants reported clearer understanding of integration challenges, greater recognition of their progress, and more holistic awareness of unmet needs.

> **"[I] was losing [my] hope… after [I] finished the survey, [I'm] more hopeful to overcome [my] challenges"**
>
> – FDP Focus Group Respondent

The facilitators also asked focus group participants to reflect on content that was missing from the survey or needed more in-depth exploration to better capture FDPs' integration journeys. Several content areas emerged:

- **Cost of Living Challenges.** FDP respondents emphasized that being employed does not sufficiently capture how financially unsustainable initial job placements are. As one respondent detailed, entry-level positions paying $15 to $17 per hour yield approximately $2,000 monthly after taxes. With rent alone costing $1,600 to $1,700 monthly in the Chicago area, FDPs have scarce funds remaining for all other expenses including utilities, phone, internet, transportation, and food beyond EBT assistance. This sentiment was reinforced in the survey results, where the number one reason for job dissatisfaction was insufficient pay.
- **Healthcare and Insurance Navigation.** The survey asks about having doctors and insurance but not about understanding medical bills, navigating insurance claims, or accessing care in crisis situations. FDPs face overwhelming complexity in the U.S. healthcare system, yet the survey provides little opportunity to document or address these navigation challenges.
- **Legal Rights Education.** A critical gap exists regarding legal rights education and understanding U.S. laws. One participant stated plainly, "Nobody [is] here to help me, to teach me the law, the rule[s] for everything here... how you get your rights." FDPs face vulnerability to exploitation when they don't understand their legal rights or how to access protections. The tool should consider assessing knowledge of legal rights and U.S. laws as a core integration measure.

- **Residency and Naturalization.** Several respondents mentioned securing permanent status as a key aspect of successful integration. While the survey asked respondents to assess their perceived likelihood of getting a green card now compared to a year prior, it did not include dedicated questions on lawful permanent residency or naturalization as one of the integration domains nor did it ask about respondents' interest in receiving more information or services on this topic.

"What does integration mean to you?"

"To be a citizen, be like everyone else living here"

– FDP Focus Group Participant

- **Cultural Specificity.** Multiple participants noted the survey's – generality its lack of cultural and country-specific content.. Focus group participants suggested creating multiple, population-specific toolkits, including "a toolkit only for Spanish-speak[ers], only for Pakistanis, only for Afghan[s]" to better capture culture-specific integration challenges. While broad questions enable cross-group comparisons, they may miss particular barriers and resources relevant to specific FDP populations. The survey would benefit from incorporating both universal integration questions and culturally tailored content for different communities.
- **Future Goals.** A WR staff member recommended the tool include questions about future goals as having aspirations and the means to attain them are a key indicator of integration progress. For example, additional questions asking about the FDPs' skill set and desired career aspirations could aide states, FDP-serving organizations, and FDPs in developing career-focused goals.
- **Technology.** Another WR staff member thought understanding clients' technology skills and technological literacy is crucial for successful integration into modern U.S. society.

Nearly all WR staff noted that the purpose and intended outcomes of the survey could have been more clearly explained. Instead, based on the questions, staff inferred the purpose to be about improved service provision for clients or "giving refugees a voice." Without a shared understanding of the tool's goals, interviewers found it difficult to communicate its value to participants or to interpret the significance of certain questions, which would have improved the tool's fidelity. None of the WR focus group participants were aware of specific advocacy plans or what would happen with aggregated survey results. Even when broader goals of the survey were not clear, WR staff saw value in the exercise at the individual level, perceiving it as an important touchpoint with clients and effective at identifying some of their immediate, actionable needs.

Applying the Survey in Practice: Interrupting Cascading Vulnerabilities

The survey provides an opportunity for regular check-ins that may alert case workers to acute events or the deterioration in a client's situation in order to intervene before cascading vulnerabilities lead to crisis.

One FDP focus-group participant's experience laid bare the dangers of cascading crises. After being physically assaulted, the individual arrived late to work, resulting in job termination. Job loss triggered insurance loss. Without insurance, a subsequent car accident generated overwhelming medical bills. The car damage prevented working for Uber, eliminating their income. Without financial and social buffers, this chain of events threatened housing stability and undid integration progress – all from a single destabilizing incident. FDPs in probationary employment, without insurance, or stable housing, face cascading vulnerabilities from events that would be manageable setbacks for others.

The survey, as a crucial touchpoint with FDP clients, could help trigger intervention protocols, cash support for FDPs facing acute challenges, stronger employment protections during probationary periods, and systemic safety nets that prevent single incidents from destroying entire life situations.

Evaluation Objective 3: Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons

RISAP is intended to be a tool to improve integration outcomes for forcibly displaced persons. To what extent were these outcomes tangible from the perspective of respondents? Many focus group participants reported increased self-awareness about their integration status and needs, making the survey a useful reflection on their integration journey. Participants gained clearer understanding of integration challenges, better recognition of their own progress, and more awareness of what they knew versus what they still needed to learn. Yet anecdotal responses show there are limits. Despite the conceptual benefits, most focus group participants noted little practical outcome for their integration experience. One respondent put it bluntly: "it's just a questionnaire."

A significant, if unanticipated, result of the survey was FDPs' feelings of emotional validation from having their experiences valued and asked about. One participant emphasized that no one had previously asked these questions, making the inquiry itself deeply meaningful. The survey as a platform for self-expression proved valuable across groups, with participants appreciating the chance to "express our self-sufficiency" and share their integration journeys. Another unanticipated result expressed by some was that the survey provided an opportunity to learn more about navigating life in the United States, with some respondents better understanding what integration support they needed after the survey, and feeling more comfort and better empowerd to make use of available resources.

> **"It gave us the chance to express our feelings and how we [are doing] here, and [it gives] us the big chance to, express our self-sufficiency."**
>
> – FDP Focus Group Participant

> **"After this survey, […] if I want to go ask [for] some resources [from] one of the caseworkers, or going […] to the government offices, I know [how] because I already learned about integration in a community."**
>
> – FDP Focus Group Participant

FDP focus group participants had a mixed recollection of whether they received resources or support following the survey. Among those who did receive resources, the materials proved helpful and relevant. Others recalled speaking directly to case managers after the survey or other WR staff, a finding that matches the referrals reported by WR focus-group participants. FDPs referenced specific lists of resources including food pantries, libraries, churches, emergency numbers, healthcare numbers, and community organizations.

Yet others characterized the post-survey experience as a "non-event," with nothing notable occurring beyond receiving the gift card. This lack of tangible follow-up created disappointment, particularly for participants who expected to see survey results or witness concrete actions stemming from their participation. One participant explicitly noted uncertainty about whether the first survey helped because "the notes did not come back to them."

The RCUSA-curated resource list that accompanied the RISAP tool appeared to have been used sparingly, despite its potential value.[35] Few respondents could recall the list at all, while other respondents shared they were unable to access it due to their limited English proficiency or digital literacy skills. Meanwhile, WR staff acknowledged that the resource list was comprehensive, yet they were hesitant to share it when clients were illiterate or pre-literate. Instead, WR used their own resources or referred directly to the case manager. One WR staff helped curate the

35 "Chicagoland Resources," Refugee Council USA, accessed November 14, 2025, https://rcusa.org/resources/chicagoland-resources/.

list with RCUSA and, per the training, shared it post-survey with respondents who were technologically literate. However, since others forgot about the list, they could have benefited from more guidance on using it. Others were skeptical that the resource list would be maintained and preferred in-house referral lists instead.

When asked to consider whether survey results were actionable, WR staff mentioned that the survey process created meaningful touchpoints with clients, often surfacing unmet needs in areas such as employment, English classes, or housing. Many used responses to make immediate referrals, underscoring the survey's practical value at the client level. Several staff noted that many of the challenges FDPs face–such as affordable housing or sufficient wages–were structural barriers outside their direct control, limiting their ability to act on the findings. Importantly, WR staff questioned the utility of some sensitive questions included in the survey. Though included in R2 with the intention to inform advocacy, questions regarding family reunification or fear of deportation proved uncomfortable to surveyors, with no perceived immediate benefit to clients.

Evaluation Objective 4: Usefulness of Evidence

Directors at WR perceived clear benefits to the aggregated evidence-generated by the RISAP tool, in particular its complementarity to other ongoing evidence gathering initiatives. They found RISAP findings helpful to the ongoing, nationwide task of analyzing key performance indicators, and particularly compelling for measuring integration success. Results from RISAP could also be helpful for triangulating client feedback from ongoing WR surveys. Directors expressed strong interest in using a standardized integration tool across WR and other FDP-serving organizations for measuring integration success, improving comparability and the ability to "roll up" results, especially given that this tool puts FDPs' perspectives "front and center." In fact, a key distinction of RISAP compared to other FDP integration surveys or indices is that the integration domains are derived directly from FDP-defined priorities. According to one WR director, the significance of the survey is that it measures not necessarily what providers value, but rather "what forcibly displaced people want to see measured and asked about."

To extract the full usefulness from RISAP-generated evidence, WR staff and directors stressed the need to be able to access full survey result datasets, including demographic cross-tabulations (e.g. by sex, age group, nationality, WR site). Future rounds of the survey could benefit from being fully implemented by the organization rather than external surveyors, which could enhance a sense of ownership over the findings and analysis. Time pressures present an unavoidable limitation to making effective use of survey-derived evidence. With many competing priorities and pressing deadlines, WR staff and leadership recognized that learning from and using data takes time that under-resourced FDP-serving organizations rarely have.

From a strategic advocacy perspective, WR directors perceive the timing of these survey results to be particularly salient as the impacts of the administration's executive actions and H.R.1 take shape. Open-ended survey responses from

August and September 2025 already highlighted challenges resulting from reductions in their clients' SNAP benefits, a finding that might be amplified in future survey rounds. RCUSA staff, for their part, see survey responses as a potentially powerful advocacy tool, adding contextual depth to priority policy recommendations. For example, the survey results demonstrate the need for continued support with English language classes and job training – and this in turn highlights the continued need for federal, state, and local funding for these programs. Also, survey results that point to green card delays demonstrate the importance of advocacy to exert oversight over U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to pressure the agency to fairly process applications for relief, including adjustment-of-status applications. Overall, survey responses illuminate the need to advocate for safeguards around how the Trump administration processes refugee cases and immigration applications. Additionally, it suggests a need to advocate for post-arrival benefits in the face of reduced eligibility periods for assistance.[36]

Among WR case managers, survey evidence was seen as most useful when it prompted immediate follow-up referrals for clients. WR staff who participated in the staff focus group described creating to-do lists or action items following each survey – or, when surveys were administered on site, walking clients down the hall to their case manager immediately post-survey. This shows that the survey can be employed an effective management tool for initiating direct follow-up to address FDP clients' needs. But there was a perceived gap in understanding of the tool's overall purpose and how the evidence would be used by higher-ups. Staff conducting the survey were uncertain as to whether survey results would affect future program-wide decisions or advocacy actions.

Encouragingly, WR staff and directors were energized by the survey's final results. Despite the heavy logistical lifts involved in planning for and conducting data collection, once shown the results, many were convinced the effort was "worth it." Survey results – and in particular the modest but noticeable improvements recorded between survey rounds – helped reassure WR staff that the support they provide to FDPs is indeed helping bring about intended results.

> **"A lot of the themes that I'm hearing [from the data] is that what we are providing and the way that we're working in our communities to resettle is working and it's producing a lot of really good fruit[...] There is a lot to celebrate in that."**
>
> – WR Leadership

> **"Timing was bad, but it was so worth it when you look at the results."**
>
> – WR Staff

36 "Reduction of the Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance Eligibility Period," The Office of Refugee Resettlement, March 28, 2025, https://acf.gov/orr/policy/dear-colleague-letters/25-13.

An important gap is that usefulness of the data to FDP respondents themselves was not considered in the pilot design. At least one FDP focus group respondent expressed a strong desire to see the results shared back with them, as they hoped it would help them learn more about their integration.

> **"We do not know if the first survey helped because we see no result. [I] did not see any changes because whoever was conducting the survey was just taking notes, but the notes did not come back to [me] to show [me] the result of the survey."**
>
> – FDP Focus Group Respondent

Evaluation Objective 5: Feedback on the Pilot Process

WR staff who participated in the pilot provided valuable insights into RISAP implementation. Their reflections highlight both notable successes and important areas for improvement in future iterations.

Implementation Successes

The pilot achieved several key successes. RISAP met its target sample size and maintained an impressive 87% retention rate between survey rounds in spite of challenges common to panel surveys, such as outdated phone numbers and difficulty reaching respondents. WR staff noted that in-house data collectors could leverage connections to extended family members, and this meant they were often better equipped than interns or RISAP team members to locate respondents.

According to WR members of the steering committee, budget resources were considered largely inadequate for project needs. When WR shifted from using interns to relying on internal staff capacity in R2, cost savings were redirected to respondent incentives, thus ensuring continued participation. However, involvement in coordination meetings, tool reviews, and logistical organization relied heavily on staff time that was not directly budgeted to the pilot, meaning the budget underestimated the total level of effort the project required.

In carrying out RISAP, WR also integrated feedback on the survey tool from their own staff with lived immigration or displacement experience. Their review of the wording and flow of survey questions strengthened the survey's cultural relevance and helped validate whether questions would resonate with clients. One reviewer noted that the questions were judicious in covering important integration topics, and that reflecting on them "could directly benefit goal setting" for clients providing context of the various measures that help to define integration–a finding that proved true based on FDP focus group feedback. However, a subset of modified questions were not exposed to this review process, and this may have reduced their clarity (an example is the concept of "feeling at home"). Staff emphasized the need for systematic review, particularly by people with lived immigration experience, whenever survey questions are revised.

Advantages of In-House Data Collection

Implementing the survey required substantial cross-office coordination–including scheduling interpreters, preparing focus group spaces, and arranging participant transportation. Designating a point person at each WR office helped streamline follow-up with respondents after intern-led R1 surveys. In R2, since interviews were conducted by in-house staff, they were able to address participant concerns immediately and connect clients directly to needed services. In one case, a participant disclosed domestic violence, and staff promptly followed protocol to connect the survivor to support–an action that might have faced delays if the domestic violence had been disclosed to external survey administrators.

Staff-led data collection also mitigated a challenge encountered during intern-led data collection in R1; many households relied on a single shared phone, typically held by the primary wage earner. During survey outreach, interns frequently reached male heads of households and struggled to get other adult household members on the phone – and this limited demographic representation. Also, working with external hires for survey implementation required more oversight from WR than anticipated (on tasks such as logging time and coordinating interpreters).

Operational and Logistical Challenges

Across all positions–from case managers to interns to leadership–staff emphasized the heavy logistical workload required for data collection on top of existing case management duties. Coordinating with clients' work schedules, managing interpreter availability, and finding sufficient time for interviews were recurring barriers. Interns faced additional challenges due to limited interpreter lists and difficulty securing staff availability for scheduling. Local WR leadership confirmed the project was labor-intensive and poorly timed within competing priorities and externalities generated by unpredictable disruptions to the resettlement program, but ultimately concluded that "the results justified the effort."

The distribution of the resource list also presented challenges. The list was too lengthy to print and had to be shared digitally, which introduced barriers for clients whose digital literacy or access to devices was limited.

High-quality interpretation emerged repeatedly as a critical success factor. Interpreter no-shows undermined data quality and client trust, while interpreters who were well-prepared and engaged enabled richer, more accurate responses.

Data Use and Reflection

Staff reported that the digital data entry process itself was smooth and efficient. While this eliminated one lengthy data-processing step, data preparation and analysis were conducted by the study team, which limited opportunities for WR staff to review results and integrate findings into their work amid other competing priorities. A final data reflection session–well attended by WR leadership–was one of the few opportunities most staff had to interact with RISAP findings. Staff noted that regular and timely opportunities for data review are essential to support learning and evidence-informed practice and should be accounted for in the project timeline in the future.

Learnings & Recommendations

This pilot explored how an FDP-defined integration framework can support more responsive resource allocation, maintain an up-to-date understanding of FDP needs and provide a stronger evidence base for advocacy. The self-assessment also offered FDPs a meaningful opportunity to reflect on their integration journeys and self-identify areas where support is needed. The following section presents key learnings and recommendations from RISAP to inform the future, scaled use of this tool across the resettlement sector.

For Systems Innovators

Innovations that strengthen refugee resettlement can emerge across the resettlement ecosystem–from local refugee-serving agencies and ECBOs to national nonprofits, government actors, private donors, and the business sector. Any of these actors can draw lessons from this project to find ways of systematically incorporating refugee self-assessment into resettlement practice, while improving both efficiency and effectiveness. Here is a non-exhaustive list of ways the self-assessment tool could be improved and introduced at scale, as part of broader efforts at systems transformation.

- **Streamline the tool while preserving valuable integration metrics.** To better respect the time of respondents and survey administrators, future revisions should prioritize eliminating questions that do not yield meaningful analytical insights or actionable information for resettlement stakeholders. Repetitive question series (especially on housing and English language) can be consolidated, and new items–such as FDPs' suggestions to include questions on legal rights and citizenship, or WR staff suggestions to add digital/technology skills–should be incorporated selectively to avoid increasing overall tool length.
- **Enhance cultural and contextual relevance for FDPs.** Respondents noted that the survey felt overly general and not sufficiently tailored to different cultural or country-of-origin contexts. Adding culturally specific content, where appropriate, could improve accuracy of responses. Similarly, respondents saw RISAP as an opportunity to learn more about integration in the United States. Integrating brief educational content during survey administration could also function as a real-time cultural orientation resource – a domain of successful integration identified in the Integration Outcomes project, thereby increasing the assessment's utility to FDPs.

- **Improve utilization of findings through stronger digital data infrastructure.** Under-resourced FDP-serving organizations often lack the time needed to adequately analyze and use data findings. Investments in digital tools could significantly enhance usability and reduce administrative burden. Upgrading from the stand-alone survey software used during RISAP to integrated case-management software would enable survey administrators to view past responses when conducting subsequent survey rounds, allowing them to identify urgent changes in client needs in real time. Dynamic data dashboards that automatically ingest survey data could make the findings more quickly accessible to leadership and management.
- **Standardize training to improve consistency prior to scale-up.** Consistency in survey delivery is essential for ensuring data quality and accountability. Feedback from the pilot suggests that the tool should be accompanied by a training curriculum for survey administrators that includes both live and asynchronous (self-paced) options. These materials should guide staff (and interpreters) on question intent, troubleshooting common issues, and addressing client needs during the survey process.
- **Plan for ways to share back data to respondents.** FDPs expressed an interest in learning about the survey findings. Incorporating a simple feedback loop, such as a thank-you message, a brief summary of findings, or prompts encouraging reflection on their own integration progress, can strengthen trust between client and FDP-serving organization, reinforce engagement, and help respondents see the value of their contributions.
- **The business community should work with FDP-serving organizations to embrace their role in integration.** For example, survey participants identified the workplace as the primary place they learn English, which suggests employers can further support their FDP employees by providing on-site English classes.
- **Continue utilizing community volunteers as a resource to build integration program capacity.** Implementation of the self-assessment survey was made possible because of the relationships between World Relief Chicagoland and their clients. These relationships are made possible in part by volunteers who generously donated their time to help reinforce staff capacity to support newcomers.
- **Government partners should prioritize measuring integration based on domains defined by FDPs.** When multiple stakeholders adopt the same FDP-defined measures of integration, consistent and comparable data enable deeper, system-level insights. The Office of Refugee Resettlement should utilize the RISAP survey as a resource when undertaking the Annual Survey of Refugees to ensure alignment on meaningful measures of integration.
- **Integration program funders should recognize all FDP-identified metrics to integration,** including but not limited to employment and livelihoods. Economic self-sufficiency remains vital, but not at the expense of other foundations of integration.

For FDP-Serving Organizations

- **Integrate the survey as a programmatic tool to enhance service delivery and inform broader program improvements.** FDP-serving organizations can strengthen service delivery by embedding the survey into routine case management rather than treating it solely as a data collection activity, thereby increasing staff buy-in. Case managers noted that using the tool as an on-the-job aid can help identify needs in real time, facilitate timely referrals, and enhance client engagement. Aggregated data can inform broader program design and resource allocations, elevating the client voice through regular feedback loops. This approach can also increase staff buy-in by reducing the perception that the survey is a burdensome, externally driven requirement.
- **Investing in high-quality integration data collection is essential to strengthen program design and advocacy.** Reliable, meaningful data (especially in a panel survey) requires time, staffing, and strategic planning. Committing to these investments enables agencies to generate actionable findings that enhance service quality and deepen understanding of FDP integration experiences. Scaling the RISAP tool across cohorts can support stronger, unified advocacy efforts, better resource allocation, and clearer identification of emerging trends in client needs. In an environment of increasingly constrained resources, the long-term value of these insights may significantly outweigh upfront costs.
- **Ensure strong training, staffing, and organizational support.** Effective survey implementation requires sustained investment in staff capacity. Organizational policies should be developed to ensure that survey administration teams receive adequate training on the survey tool's purpose, the rationale behind questions, and how to flexibly adapt questions or provide nuanced explanations to aid comprehension.
- **FDP-serving organizations should strongly consider hiring dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) staff to strengthen survey planning, administration, data analysis, and reporting.** This added capacity would

ensure that case management staff are able to prioritize direct client support and address gaps identified in the survey data. The added capacity and role distinction would ensure data integrity and utilization are equally prioritized, thus improving programming built on participant feedback.

- **Special projects like RISAP require additional staff effort, and budgets should consider incentives or external research support.** Given the existing pressure on staff capacity across the sector, agencies may explore donor-funded opportunities for sabbatical or self-care support that invests in staff well-being to sustain quality service provision.
- **Invest in high-quality translation and shared linguistic resources. Consistent, accurate, culturally-relevant translation is essential to the tool's success.** Agencies planning to use the survey regularly should prepare high-quality translations in the primary languages of clients and train interpreters accordingly. If the tool is rolled out broadly, leveraging translations across agencies in a shared space such as RCUSA's website would reduce cost and allow for broader distribution, while maintaining the survey's linguistic integrity.
- **Strengthen follow-up and client engagement through prepared resources and protocols.** Focus groups revealed that many respondents were proactive in following up after the survey. Including a clear follow-up protocol at the conclusion of each survey session could help bridge this gap–for example, directing clients to relevant resources or outlining next steps based on their responses. A resource like the curated RCUSA online resource list could efficiently support meaningful follow-up particularly for digitally literate clients. At the same time, survey administrators should continue offering offline resource options for individuals with limited literacy or limited digital access.
- **Enhance participant understanding and buy-in through clear communication on the survey's purpose and how their feedback will be used.** Focus group facilitators observed that some FDP participants lacked understanding of the survey's purpose, which initially limited engagement. Once the purpose and value of the tool were explained, participation improved. This underscores the need for clear, upfront communication about the survey's goals, how the data will be used, and how it benefits clients and their communities.
- Recognizing the crucial role that RLOs and ECBOs have in integration, FDP-serving organizations, including but not limited to RAs, should utilize this tool as a means to **enhance integration service delivery.**
- Lack of family reunification continues to be a barrier to integration. **Collaboration with external partners, like the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN), could help ensure that refugees have the greatest possible access to family reunification opportunities and the additional integration support it entails.**[37] In addition, data from such collaboration and from refugees themselves would help to inform family reunification policy.

37 "What is the Global Family Reunification Network?" Global Family Reunification Network, accessed January 2025, https://familyreunificationnetwork.org/.

For Forcibly Displaced Persons

The following recommendations were drafted by RISAP steering committee members with lived experience of forced displacement on reflection of survey data and focus group conversations. These recommendations are intended to be shared as follow-up with respondents in future renditions of the survey.

- **Contributing to integration surveys helps pave the way for future refugees.** Surveys like RISAP take time, but they offer a rare chance to speak honestly about systemic challenges. When many FDPs share their experiences, patterns emerge that can drive real policy and program improvements.
- **Share what you learn. When you get resource information, pass it along to other refugees in your community.** Your networks are powerful, and participants who shared resources said it felt meaningful to help others.
- **The survey itself is a learning opportunity.** Many participants learned more about America and their own integration just by thinking through the questions. It's not just data collection; it can help you see what you know and what you still need to figure out.
- **Find time to volunteer and make new friends.** Be proactive in learning about other resources in your neighborhood, including associations that align with your passion and values. Ask your network of friends, family and case managers how you can get involved in the community or engage in free-time activities. These are key components of belonging and foundational for an FDPs integration journey.
- **Foster positive relationships with case managers;** they are foundational to your integration process. Recognize they carry a heavy workload and are working hard, with limited resources, to help FDPs.

- **Avoid comparing yourself to other FDPs,** because everyone has their own pathway. Find a mentor who went through the same process as you and can help you achieve your education and career goals.
- **Know your rights and responsibilities, and be your own advocate.** If something is not understood (navigating insurance, conversations with your landlord, immigration processes, disability accommodations) ask for help. Request skilled interpretation, particularly for legal and medical matters, and stay diligent about following up with FDP-serving organizations, including regarding follow-up you believe you should have received after the survey.
- **Be patient with the integration process.** Accept that reality may differ from expectations you had prior to arriving in the United States. Across many domains, integration takes time. The resettlement program provides a foundation, but progress builds gradually – with the help of family and friends, community groups, and service providers.

Conclusion: Putting Findings into Action

Amid shifts in the national political landscape, documenting how federal policy changes, the White House's anti-refugee rhetoric, and declining resettlement resources shape FDP integration has become increasingly important. This in turn underscores the need for ongoing measurement tools like RISAP. This survey tool offers unique value compared to other large-scale refugee integration surveys.[38] Most importantly, the integration domains and survey questions are grounded in co-designed, FDP-led research.

Furthermore, the survey produces both insightful evidence of aggregate integration trends – for advocacy and policy decisions – as well as actionable individual-level findings for case managers working on the frontlines of refugee resettlement. Localized survey and outcome data from a scaled version of this survey has the capacity to serve as a tool for capacity building on the state-level, especially as the field experiences shifts in the way resettlement services are delivered. And while the purpose of the project was to pilot the tool, real insights about the integration experiences of FDPs served by WR Chicagoland were also gained in the process.

Data derived from RISAP will directly inform RCUSA's work in reimagining humanitarian protection through spreading awareness on the impact of integration services through measurements defined by refugees themselves. RISAP continues a through-line of centering the experiential wisdom of FDPs in the work of all refugee-serving organizations. RCUSA's new Task Force on the Future of Refugee Resettlement will incorporate the insights of this pilot project in developing recommendations for a more responsive, sustainable, resilient, inclusive resettlement system.

Finally, RISAP's implementation across two vastly different presidential administrations demonstrates that FDP-defined integration measures are both enduring and adaptable. Through times of uncertainty, this project confirmed that centering those with lived experience of forced displacement remains an essential pillar of our work.

38 For example: Gary Lichtenstein, Jini E Puma, The Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE): Results from a Four-Year Longitudinal Study, Journal of Refugee Studies, Volume 32, Issue 3, September 2019, Pages 397–416, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey034.

Appendix: Final RISAP Survey Instrument