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CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Refugee Resettlement | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201
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June 2022 Survey of Afghans Resettled Under Operation Allies Welcome Summary of Findings

Overview

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) compiled and analyzed the findings from the Survey of Afghans Resettled Under Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) (Afghan Survey), which ORR designed and administered to better understand the resettlement of Afghan evacuees in the United States. The voluntary and anonymous Afghan Survey, distributed during the first half of June 2022, gathered information from evacuees about their well-being across critical resettlement domains, including housing, employment, education, and community integration. The findings offer the largest ORR compilation of feedback from Afghans served under OAW to date and complements other ORR OAW data collection. It is also one component of ORR's broad and ongoing effort to leverage data for evidence-based decision making. ORR anticipates issuing a second Afghan Survey in early 2023.

Key Findings

While the survey results are not generalizable to the entire resettled Afghan population (see methodology description below), there are several key findings from the Afghan Survey that provide helpful insight into Afghan resettlement and highlight some potential areas in need of further attention.

- ❖ **Immigration legal status adjustment ranked the most pressing need among survey respondents.** Respondents overwhelmingly cited immigration legal status adjustment as their most immediate need, followed by housing, employment, and medical assistance.
- ❖ **While over three-quarters of survey respondents spent some time in temporary housing, nearly all have transitioned to permanent housing.** 91% of respondents reported they were in permanent housing. 78% reported stays in temporary housing of varying duration after leaving a military base.
- ❖ **Most survey respondents reported feeling welcome in the United States.** 81% of respondents reported feeling somewhat or very welcome in the United States.
- ❖ **Most survey respondents are employed.** 65% reported they were employed or self-employed, and 76% reported that at least one adult in their household was working. Only two percent were unemployed and not seeking work.
- ❖ **Many respondents reported that their skills exceed what their job requires.** Over one-third of employed respondents indicated their skills are higher than what their current job requires, suggesting that career advancement support is a need for this population.
- ❖ **Less than half of survey respondents reported that their households can cover living expenses.** While 78% of respondents indicated someone in their household is employed, only 38% reported they can cover their household expenses. (Other ORR data collection has confirmed that high costs, especially for housing, has caused difficulty for recently arrived Afghans.)



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Other Notable Findings

- ❖ **English Language Level/Classes:** 71% of respondents reported speaking English well or very well. 8% reported they cannot speak English at all. 56% reported that at least one household member attends English language classes.
- ❖ **Education Level:** 58% of respondents reported having a university or advanced degree. 3% reported they have completed no formal education.
- ❖ **Household Size:** 27% of respondents reported living in a single-family member household, while 32% reported residing in a household of six or more family members.
- ❖ **States of Residence:** 41% of respondents reported living in California, Texas, and Virginia, reflecting national resettlement patterns.
- ❖ **Secondary Migration:** Among those who relocated to another state after their resettlement, the majority reported doing so to be closer to family.
- ❖ **School Attendance:** 29% of respondents with school-aged children indicated their children are not attending school; however, due to the timing of the survey, this may be due in part to students on summer break.
- ❖ **Recent Contact with a Resettlement Agency:** 38% of respondents reported no contact with a resettlement agency in the prior month. 17% reported at least weekly contact. Note: contact with a resettlement agency does vary with how long a client has been resettled. Typically, contact with a resettlement agency is more frequent during the first few months of resettlement to ensure new arrivals are connected to benefits and services. For clients who had been resettled for less than six months at the time of the survey, 69% had been in contact with a resettlement agency in the preceding month. For those who were resettled for more than six months, 57% had contact with a resettlement agency in the last month. All recipients of this survey were resettled before April 1, 2022, and most prior to February 1, 2022.

Survey Methodology

The survey, distributed from June 1 to June 15, 2022, via email, SMS, and WhatsApp in English, Dari, and Pashto, was sent to 16,893 Principal Applicants (PAs) for whom ORR had contact information. PAs, generally considered the “head of household,” were age 18 and older and resettled in the U.S. before April 1, 2022, as part of OAW. Through the survey, ORR reached approximately 60% of all adult OAW PAs.

The Afghan Survey contained 11 questions focused on household well-being and six questions about the individual respondent. It was specifically designed to solicit responses on household matters. Respondents could choose to respond or skip questions. Overall, ORR received responses from 3,111 individuals, with complete responses from 1,600 respondents (9.5%), exclusive of the last optional contact information question #18. The response rate was higher than normal for a survey.

However, while the survey sample represents a significant number of Afghan evacuee households, survey results are not generalizable to the resettled Afghan population. The sample was non-random with potential for selection bias and included some limitations. One of the most significant limitations is that women represented 14.7% of the unweighted survey respondents, reflecting their underrepresentation within the sample of PAs (17.9%). Men are overrepresented in



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the PA population (84%), as compared to the overall evacuee population (59%). This occurred since typically male Afghan evacuees are considered the head of household and assigned as PAs, with women serving as the PA in cases with no adult male head of household or where the male head of household is not able to represent the case. ORR will work to include non-PAs in future surveys of resettled Afghans. Also, due to the way the survey was implemented, there is no clear way to distinguish if a non-PA took the survey. The results should be viewed in light of limitations, but they were weighted to the demographics of the PA population to help mitigate potential bias.

It is important to note that highly educated Afghans are likely overrepresented in the survey due to non-response bias. This may play a role in some of the findings, particularly surrounding career expectations.

ORR Response

Despite some limitations of this survey, the results corroborate other ORR data collection and reporting and offer additional useful insights. ORR is already incorporating the findings into its program development and implementation, working hard to address service gaps.

For example, on the immigration legal status adjustment issue, ORR provided funding to states and resettlement agencies in March 2022. The funding awarded to states has since advanced through state procurement and has significantly expanded access to legal services in many states. ORR is exploring options to secure a contractor at the national level to provide additional immigration-related services for eligible Afghans and to address gaps in access to services.

On the employment front, ORR programs, such as Refugee Career Pathways, will help Afghans secure professional or skilled employment, drawing on their previously acquired knowledge, skills, and experience. ORR's new Employer Engagement Program will provide training, career counseling, and workplace-based training through local partnerships with employers. These and other programs help Afghans get jobs, move into higher paying ones, and align their previous experience with the best opportunities in the U.S. All of these initiatives help Afghans advance toward self-sufficiency and integration.

On education, ORR's Afghan Refugee School Impact and Support to Schools programs are making sure Afghan families know how to enroll their children in school and helping schools support these new students. Additional key supports include providing specialized services and support for children and youth; supporting families learning to navigate the U.S. education system; developing capacity for school staff and school systems; funding teachers and school-based counselors; renting or enhancing temporary school facilities, if other funding is not available; and developing and implementing parent engagement and orientation activities.

Related to housing, ORR issued funding to states and resettlement agencies to support the housing needs of Afghan arrivals. This funding provided emergency and short-term housing assistance, while also supporting the identification of and transition to long-term housing solutions. Additionally, the Individual Development Accounts Program will help Afghans save for various goals that help them attain self-sufficiency and integration, including the goals of homeownership and securing rental housing.

ORR provides oversight and monitoring for all programs and has conducted statewide assessments of Afghan resettlement in California, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia. In partnership with the Administration for Children and Families, and in solidarity with refugee families, ORR also stresses the importance of advancing equity in all of its programmatic and policy initiatives. Such initiatives include incorporating the lived experience of refugees served by ORR programs, including



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Afghan arrivals to inform ORR priorities, as well as encouraging grant recipients through policy to practice inclusion through purposeful collaboration and engagement with ethnic communities to inform local service design and delivery. As part of this effort, ORR has developed an Equity Action Plan that lays out the goals and anticipated outcomes to be achieved. One of the action items that has been implemented has been establishing listening sessions with ORR client populations to better understand the impacts of ORR programming. This will help ORR incorporate client-centered ideas into all of its programming. ORR is committed to furthering access to services for all client populations and to evaluate programming through a lens of advancing equity for populations and to make data-informed decisions based on such evaluation.

Conclusion

Afghans have demonstrated resilience as they start their new lives. While challenges remain, the overall trajectory is positive. The unprecedented nature of the Afghan resettlement required extraordinary efforts by government and civil society. ORR will continue to support eligible Afghans as they integrate into communities across the country.