

#ssiinsights

# Foundations for Belonging 2022

Insights on newly arrived refugees:  
Family separation and reunion during the pandemic

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## Appendices

WESTERN SYDNEY  
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# Appendix 1. Methods and Limitations

This study used methods that drew on the earlier *Foundations for Belonging* research in 2019 and 2020. Ethics approval for this study was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Western Sydney University (Approval number H14653).

## Sampling

### a. Telephone Surveys

A sample was generated from former participants in the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) which is delivered by SSI across many parts of NSW with funding from the Department of Home Affairs. Some of these participants received initial on-arrival support from a different settlement provider under a previous contract prior to being transferred to SSI. Criteria for participation included that participants were no longer being supported by the Program, were over 18 years of age and had lived in Australia for at least 38 months at the time of the survey. We also excluded any former participants who had been referred back for complex case support to a high-needs part of the Program.

This generated 1,706 records of individuals. The calculation to determine the highest representative sample returned a target of 304 respondents.<sup>1</sup>

A stratified sample was selected by place of residence (regional/metropolitan), gender, visa type and language spoken at home. For each of the groups, random participants were selected for the survey to reach the target number of participants. The records in the sample included a unique identifier called Client ID, selected demographics, names and contact details, all of which were only accessed by SSI researchers in this study as per the approved research protocol from Western Sydney University.

## Survey Design

The development of the original survey in 2019 was framed against four key domains of the Framework of Integration by the UK Home Office. The focus on social bonds, bridges, links and rights and responsibilities helped to generate insights into refugees' sense of welcome, participation and belonging. The reference materials for the Framework of Integration included a range of questions against each of these domains (UK Home Office 2019). However, for this study, survey questions against these domains were drawn, where possible, from existing validated Australian research instruments including: Building a New Life in Australia, a longitudinal study of refugees; Mapping Social Cohesion, an annual survey of the broader Australian population; and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. Where possible, the wording of the items from these sources was retained to ensure the validity of questions and to allow for comparisons of results with existing Australian datasets. The survey also included some items from the reference materials included in the UK Home Office's Framework of Integration Report and, in the 2021 survey, some items on family separation and COVID-19 difficulties from a longitudinal Refugee Adjustment Study (Liddell, O'Donnell et al. 2021).

The original 2019 survey was developed iteratively by the authors and piloted with SSI's Bilingual Guides<sup>2</sup> from the target communities and subsequently revised. That survey and the 2020 survey each had about 30 multiple-response questions and some open-ended questions (Culos, Rajwani et al. 2020, Culos, McMahon et al. 2021).

In the development of the 2021 survey we updated some questions in the digital inclusion section, by including a more detailed digital skills question adapted from BNLA. We removed some items from the 2020 survey which we identified as being redundant, amended some questions and included a

<sup>1</sup> The sample size was calculated with a Confidence level of 95% and Standard Error of 0.02551. Calculations generated from Australian Bureau of Statistics, sample size calculation: [www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Sample+Size+Calculator](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Sample+Size+Calculator)

<sup>2</sup> SSI employs Bilingual Guides who speak community languages. These Bilingual Guides were matched in terms of the languages to the sample to carry out the telephone survey.

new section on family reunion and family separation, mainly taken from HILDA and adapted from the RAS (Liddell, O'Donnell et al. 2021).

The final 2021 survey had 29 questions with 27 multiple-response questions and one open-ended question and is available at Appendix 2.

### Family Interviews

The survey was complemented by qualitative research in the form of family interviews with refugees. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 7 families who arrived in Australia on a Refugee visa in the last 3-4 years. The questions were focused on understanding their experiences of family reunion and/or separation, how these plans have been impacted by COVID-19 border closures (until late 2021), the broader impact of the pandemic on their families' lives and livelihoods, how they used technology to cope, any local social bridges that developed during this time, and whether lockdown and related restrictions had any bearing on their social links (e.g. trust in Australian institutions). These interviews took place in December 2021-January 2022 and were undertaken by trained Bilingual Research Assistants (RAs) supervised by Sukhmani Khorana and Emilie Baganz. In line with COVID-19 safety protocols, the interviews took place online, were recorded using Zoom software with participant's consent, translated by the Bilingual RAs into English, and transcribed for analysis. The qualitative data was analysed thematically in relation to the four integration indicators in this report, and detailed case studies have been provided in this report. The family interview guide is available at Appendix 3.

### Comparison Group: Building a New Life in Australia

Building a New life in Australia (BNLA) is the largest, and most comprehensive, survey of humanitarian entrants in Australia, involving individuals and families who were granted a permanent protection visa in the latter part of 2013 under Australia's Humanitarian Program.<sup>3</sup> Since that time, the longitudinal study has been tracking the settlement journeys of about 2,000 primary and secondary applicants across five waves of data collection through home visits or by telephone.

For the purpose of this phase of *Foundations for Belonging* research, we selected BNLA Wave 4 results as the comparison group for data collected

<sup>3</sup> National Centre for Longitudinal Data (2017), *Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants – Findings from the first three waves*.

in the 2021 survey as the length of residence in Australia was the best match to our sample in 2021 (from 40 - 48 months).<sup>4</sup> BNLA Wave 4 includes 3,148 respondents who were filtered by visa type (excluding onshore protection visa holders), enumerated persons and by age (excluding people under 18). The final sample size for the comparison group in our data analysis of BNLA questions was 1,688 respondents.

This BNLA comparison group is evenly distributed by gender (51% female, 49% male), with the majority in the 25–54 age group (66%) and living in the metropolitan areas (90%). The main countries of birth are Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, with interviews conducted mainly in Arabic, Farsi, English and Dari. The main difference in terms of these demographics with our study sample was the addition of Syria as one of the main countries of birth.

Under Australia's Humanitarian Program there are several visa types under which people outside of Australia, who are subject to persecution and meet health, character and security requirements, are granted permanent protection in Australia. The four most common visa types<sup>5</sup> are Refugee visa (subclass 200), In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201), Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204), and the Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) where applications must be supported by a proposer, usually a relative, who is an Australian citizen or permanent resident based in Australia.

The majority of respondents in the BNLA comparison group hold a Refugee visa (subclass 200) (81%), followed by Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) (15%) and Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) (4 %). The major difference between the BNLA comparison group and our study sample is in terms of the visa type: where there were far more Special Humanitarian Program (subclass 202) visa holders (73%) and fewer Refugee (subclass 200) visa holders (24%) and Woman at Risk (subclass 204) visa holders (3%).

<sup>4</sup> Access to the BNLA dataset is available, on request, from the Australian Government Department of Social Services: [www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/national-centre-for-longitudinal-data](http://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/national-centre-for-longitudinal-data)

<sup>5</sup> In greater detail, the four most common visa types are:

- Refugee visa (subclass 200) for people who the UNHCR has referred to Australia for resettlement;
- In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201) for people who are still living in their country and have been unable to leave;
- Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) for women who do not have the protection of a partner or a relative and are in danger of victimisation; and
- Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) for people subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights, and with a proposer in Australia.

## Survey Data Collection and Analysis

In order to enable survey respondents to participate in this research in their preferred language, we engaged SSI's Bilingual Guides to conduct telephone surveys. SSI's Bilingual Guides speak a range of community languages and these Bilingual Guides were matched in terms of languages to the sample and given laptops and mobiles to be able to work from home.

An online workshop was held to brief the Bilingual Guides on the research protocol and ensure that they were familiar with the purpose of the research, the survey questions and how to deliver and record the surveys in the online survey platform, QuestionPro.

The Research team was online and available during the survey sessions for any enquiry and issues that may have arisen.

After making contact, respondents were offered the opportunity to either complete the survey there and then over the telephone or to schedule it later. Telephone surveys were conducted in the preferred language of the participant and participant responses were recorded in QuestionPro. Almost all surveys were conducted in a language other than English between November and December 2021.

Only de-identified survey data from the telephone surveys was entered and stored in the online system. Demographic details from the Humanitarian Settlement Program were linked to survey responses by a unique and anonymous client ID for each respondent. Once the survey data collection was completed, data was exported from QuestionPro and cleaned to remove incomplete/invalid surveys.

The 2021 survey dataset was then analysed to highlight statistically significant differences in gender, visa type, location and age. Four different kinds of test were conducted: t-tests (to check for statistically significant differences in responses); correlation matrices (to identify significant relationships between variables in social bonds, bridges and links categories); and principal component analysis (to detect whether the variance in the 30-odd social bonds, bridges and links indicators could be reduced to a small set of latent 'components'). These inferential results were used to check and validate descriptive text and charts/tables.

## Response Rate

The total number of former clients of SSI selected to be contacted for the survey was 1,706. The Bilingual Guides contacted 1,396 individuals and completed 330 telephone surveys.

Of the total number of 330 completed surveys, after cleaning (the main exclusions were for incomplete client identifiers where we could not link demographic information), 314 were included in the data analysis.

Therefore, with 314 valid surveys from 1,396 people contacted, the overall response rate is 29% (compared to 53% in the 2020 survey and 49% in the 2019 survey).

Summary	
Total number of people identified for the survey	1,706
People contacted	1,075
People unable to be contacted (wrong number, dead number, unanswered after three attempts)	423
People who refused/undecided	128
Total surveys completed	330
Total valid surveys	314

## Limitations

Multiple steps were taken to ensure that the findings from this study are robust including through using, where possible, existing validated survey items, a stratified sampling strategy, and the inclusion of comparisons with other refugees (through the BNLA comparison group) and other Australian surveys of the general population (where possible) in the reporting of the findings.

A limitation of this research is that it is a sample of refugees from one jurisdiction and may not be representative of all refugees in Australia. The BNLA sample, and the comparison group that was used in this study, are more representative of refugees across Australia.

In addition, the study sample was drawn from the records of one settlement provider, SSI (though some respondents did receive on-arrival services from other settlement providers), and this may have introduced bias. Similarly, it is also possible that the use of SSI Bilingual Guides may have introduced a respondent bias in the survey.

While every effort was made to ensure that the BNLA comparison group matched the study sample, there was, nonetheless, a major difference in terms of the predominant visa types – Refugee visa (subclass

200) and Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) – between the comparison group and the study sample. This may have impacted on the reliability of comparisons between BNLA and this study.

Lastly, Bilingual Guides were encouraged to contact and only complete one survey for people in the same household, though it is likely that multiple members of the same household were surveyed. This may impact the results of the questions on family separation and digital inclusion that were based on the experiences of households and extended families.

## Appendix 2. Survey

Q1 Client ID

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Q2 What is your postcode and/or suburb name?

(Please record postcode or suburb name e.g. Liverpool or 2170)

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Q3 What is your marital status?

(Please mark one only)

- Married/De Facto
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never Married

Q4 Do you have any children, under the age of 18, living with you in Australia?

- Yes
- No

IF yes:

4.1 How many in total?

4.2 How many children in each category?

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Number of children
Not yet at school	
Primary School	
Secondary/high school	

The following questions are asking about your relationships with family members, people from your cultural background and your friends

**Q5 Do you feel that you have been given support/comfort in Australia from...?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Your national or ethnic community			
Your religious community			
Other community groups			

**Q6 On average how often do you...?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	More than once a week	About once a week	More than once a month	Less than once a month
Speak on the phone or video or audio call via the internet with family members				
Use social media to stay in touch with family members				
Exchange text messages or instant messages with family members				

**Q7 Now thinking about your friends, on average how often do you?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	More than once a week	About once a week	More than once a month	Less than once a month
Speak on the phone or video or audio call via the internet with friends				
Use social media to stay in touch with friends				
Exchange text messages or instant messages with friends				

**Q8 Would you say that your friends in Australia are ... ?**

(Please mark one only)

- Mostly from my ethnic/religious community
- Mostly from other ethnic/religious communities
- A mixture
- I do not have any friends in Australia yet

**Q9 My closest friends mostly live in:**

(Please mark one only)

- The neighbourhood where I live
- The city/town where I live (but not in my neighbourhood)
- Another place in Australia
- Overseas

The next set of questions are asking about your social connections with people from different backgrounds and your neighbourhood

**Q10 Since you came to Australia, how easy have you found it to...**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Very easy	Easy	Hard	Very hard
Make friends in Australia				
Understand Australian ways/culture				
Understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia				
Talk to your Australian neighbours				

**Q11 How much do you trust the following groups of people...?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	A lot	Some	A little	Not at all
People in your neighbourhood				
People in the wider Australian community				
The police				
People you work/study with				
The media				
The government				

**Q12 My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get along well together.**

(Please mark one only)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- (There are not enough immigrants in my neighbourhood to have an impact)



**Q13 Do you feel part of the Australian community?**

(Please mark one only)

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Hardly ever
- Never

**Q14 Overall has your experience of settling in Australia so far been ...**

(Please mark one only)

- Very Good
- Good
- Hard
- Very Hard

The next set of questions are about your engagement with essential services and other government services

**Q15 Now thinking about Government services (e.g. MyGov, Medicare, Centrelink, public housing, hospitals), have any of the options below, if any, made it difficult to get help from these services.**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Yes	No
I did not know where to get help		
Transport difficulties		
Language difficulties		
I was afraid that my information would not be kept private		
I had to wait a long time for an appointment		
I asked for help but did not get it		
I haven't used any Government services		
Difficulties finding or using mobile apps for the services you need (e.g. MyGov, Medicare)		

**Q16 Do you or any member of your household have access to the internet at home, whether through a computer, mobile phone or other device?**

(Please mark one only)

- Yes
- No (Skip to Question 19)
- Don't know (Skip to Question 19)

**16.1 If yes, how many people in the household use this internet connection?**

**16.2. If yes, does your household have enough data allowance to meet your needs?**

(Please mark one only)

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

**Q17 How many devices used by household to access the internet by type of device?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

Device	Number
Desktop or laptop computer	
Mobile or smart phone	
Tablet	
Internet connected TV	
Internet connected music or video player	
Internet connected games console (e.g. Nintendo, Xbox)	

**Q18 When you use the internet, how well are you able to...?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Very well	Fairly well	A little	Not at all
Browse information (e.g. searching for services or learn about services)				
Pay bills online				
Connect with family and friends back home				
Connect with family and friends in Australia				
Get news from home				
Access entertainment (listening to music, watching movies, playing games, reading books etc.)				
Do online shopping or sharing				
Learn and study English				
Undertake other study (e.g., TAFE) or to do homework online				
Access health services (e.g. telehealth with a doctor)				
Access welfare and social services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink, settlement services)				

The next set of questions are about your rights and responsibilities

**Q19 To what extent do you agree with the following statements.**

**As a refugee to Australia ...**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have equal access to government services compared to other Australians					
My rights are adequately protected					
In general, I am treated fairly when I try to access services and support					

**Q20 Have you experienced discrimination because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion over the last 12 months?**

(Please mark one only)

Yes

No

Unsure

**Q21 How often have you experienced discrimination because of your ethnic and religious community background in the following situations?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	Not applicable
In your workplace					
At school, university, or other educational institution					
When accessing services (e.g. renting or buying a house; accessing healthcare )					
In any dealings with the police or the court system					
In public spaces (e.g. on public transport, in shops or shopping malls, at sport or music events, or in the street)					
Online or in social media					

The final set of questions are about your immediate family and where they live and challenges due to COVID-19

**Q22 What is your current family status (regarding immediate family e.g. parents, children, siblings and spouse)**

(please mark one only)

- No immediate family in Australia
- Some immediate family in Australia
- All my immediate family is in Australia (Skip to Question 23)

**22.1 Who are you currently separated from?**

(please mark all that apply)

- Parent(s)
- Child
- Spouse
- Sibling

**Q23 Have you applied to be, or been, reunited with any of your family members from overseas since coming to Australia? (includes if application was successful or unsuccessful, or still underway)**

- Yes
- No (Skip to Question 24)

**23.1 Has COVID-19 impacted your visa application process for family reunification (e.g. delays)?**

(Please mark one only)

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**Q24 I will read a list of five difficulties that refugees who have arrived in Australia sometimes experience. In the past 12 months, have any of these difficulties been a problem for you? The difficulties you might be experiencing may or may not be related to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Was not a problem / Did not happen	A small problem	Moderately serious problem	A serious problem	A very serious problem	Not applicable
Separation from your family						
Worry about family back at home						
Being unable to return home in an emergency						
Difficulties with the family reunion process						
Worry about family members or friends in detention centres or offshore processing facilities						

**Q25 I will read a number of challenges that people might experience because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past 12 months, have any of these difficulties been a problem for you?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Was not a problem / Did not happen	A small problem	Moderately serious problem	A serious problem	A very serious problem	Not applicable
Difficulties because family and friends are not able to travel to or migrate to Australia because of COVID-19 travel restrictions						
Difficulties because I am unable to travel internationally or interstate in Australia because of COVID-19 travel restrictions						
Worry about family living overseas during the COVID-19 pandemic						

**Q26 Since January 2021, did any of the following happen to you because of a shortage of money?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

	Yes	No
Could not pay gas, electricity, or telephone bills on time		
Could not pay rent or mortgage payments on time		
Pawned or sold something		
Went without meals		
Were unable to heat or cool your home		
Asked for financial help from friends or family		
Asked for help from welfare/ community organisations		

**Q27 For each of the following options, tell us which is more important to you in relation to your hopes for the next 12 months?**

(Please mark one answer in each row)

My family and I are free from COVID-19	OR	Secure employment
Secure employment	OR	Getting support to recover from lockdowns impacts
Getting support to recover from lockdowns impacts	OR	Travel abroad to visit family and relatives
Travel abroad to visit family and relatives	OR	My family and I are free from COVID-19
Travel abroad to visit family and relatives		Secure employment
Getting support to recover from lockdowns impacts	OR	My family and I are free from COVID-19

**Q28 Finally, thinking about the future, what are the hopes and dreams for you and your family in Australia?**

(Please record key words and phrases)

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**Thank you for completing the Survey**

## Appendix 3. Family Interview Guide

### Introduction and Consent

Welcome to today's family interview and thank you so much for taking the time to come here today. My name is ... and I will be facilitating today's session (introduce any other person that might be present). With the family interviews we aim to better understand family separation and reunion during Covid-19 among refugees in Australia. The family interviews form part of a larger research project that explores the social integration of refugees in Australia and is conducted by Settlement Services International and Western Sydney University.

You have all received a participant information sheet that outlines what is expected of you today. Please let us know should you have any questions regarding your participation now.

Before we start the interview, I need to receive verbal consent from every participant confirming that you agree to

- Participating in this focus group
- Having your information transcribed and translated and used for research purposes

YES  NO

Also, can you please confirm that you are

- 18 years of age or older
- That you understand that you can withdraw from the study at any time

YES  NO

Please note down some basic details of each participant, such as: number of persons present at the interview, age (a rough estimate is fine), relationship to each other, gender.

### Interview Questions

(any information written in red should be added in interviews where participants have already been reunited with their family members)

1. Tell us about your family/household here in Australia. Who lives with you at the moment?
2. Tell us about your family/relatives who don't live with you/**or who you have been reunited with (in case of family reunion)**. Where do they live? Are they in Australia, overseas or interstate?
3. Since coming to Australia what have been the main difficulties in your daily life for your family being separated from other family/relatives overseas (e.g. lack of emotional support, financial difficulties, worry about them) – before you were reunited with members of your family? **(in case of family reunion)**.
4. What are some of the things that have helped reducing these difficulties for your family in Australia? (e.g. technology, being safe in Australia and able to offer support, travelling and visiting)

#### Impact of COVID border closures

5. How have the COVID border closures (both international and interstate) impacted your family, both here in Australia and elsewhere?
6. What are some of the main difficulties created by the border closures in your daily life for your family in Australia?
7. What are some of the things that have helped reducing these difficulties for your family in Australia? (e.g. technology, being safe in Australia and able to offer support, )
8. What kind of support do you exchange with family members who live apart from you? (e.g. financial, emotional, gifts, advice). Please elaborate on what this support looks like? Has this support changed since Covid?

9. Has COVID increased the worries and concerns you have for family members overseas? Please elaborate in what way and how this has impacted your daily life.
10. In what way has COVID impacted your plans of being reunited with your family?

### **Social Connections**

(Connections with people/groups from other cultural backgrounds)

11. Who did you turn to for support during COVID? (e.g. family, friends, neighbours, government).
12. How did you rely on friends and neighbours in Australia during this time (if at all)?
13. How did you rely on government during this time (if at all)?
14. Did technology facilitate greater connection locally (e.g. for getting updates on restrictions, case numbers, vaccine availability, access to other services)?

### **Family Reunion**

15. Since coming to Australia, have some family members been able to come to live in Australia?
16. If yes, what are the key differences this has made to family already in Australia?
17. Are you hoping or planning for any of your family members overseas to join you in Australia? Tell us more about those plans and any difficulties you have faced.
18. Does your family have any plans to visit family overseas when international travel restrictions are eased?
19. Beyond your own family, how do you think refugees in Australia in general have been impacted by COVID border closures and other restrictions? (in terms of employment, socialisation, accessing support and related realms)
20. Do (did) you trust the Australian government to support the reunion with your family? Who do (did) you trust or turn for help with regards to reunion with your family members?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

### **End of Interview**

### **Key Themes**

If the interview is more like a conversation, please make sure to cover the following key themes:

- Current living situation in Australia
- Experience with and impact of family separation/reunion
- Experience during COVID
- Social connections during COVID (Connections with people/groups from other cultural backgrounds)
- Impact of COVID on family separation
- Role of communication technologies (social media, video communication, messages etc.)